

Sex in Contemporary Media: An Interdisciplinary Conference

4 – 6 October 2023 | Zoom & The University of Warwick

Paper Abstracts & Presenter Bios

Wednesday, 4th October

WEDNESDAY 4 OCTOBER, PANEL 1: DIGITAL NEGOTIATIONS AND SEXUAL SELF-CONSTRUCTION

“I Just Want to Sell My Titties Online”: Digital Gentrification and the Moral Order

Dr Rébecca S. Franco, University of Amsterdam, Holland

Research on sex and social media has shown that sex and sexual content is continuously deplatformed on mainstream social media, as regulated by platform terms and policies and enacted by algorithmic moderation (Tiidenberg 2021). Some scholars have pointed to the ‘digital’ gentrification of internet spaces, where sex and sex work is deplatformed (Stardust et al 2022; Lingel 2021). Given that adult content creators necessitate an online profile across ‘mainstream’ and adult platforms for a stable and sufficient income, this particularly affects them. In jurisdictions where pornography is legal, they may experience the impact of platform governance as akin or as proxy for state governance (Blunt & Stardust 2021; Blunt et al. 2020). Historians and socio-legal scholars have shown that regulation of public sex and sex work revolves around the construction and protection of a ‘moral order’ that goes beyond what is legislated in the ‘law in the books’ (Corbin 1990; Scouler 2010). Historically, the production of broadly defined regulatory categories such as ‘prostitution’ or ‘obscenity’ are based on whether and how they upset the moral order (Gilfoyle 1994). With the platformization of sex work, there is thus a necessity to investigate how platform governance, rather than state governance, categorizes and regulates sex, and what moral order this constructs and protects. Using a mixed methods approach, this paper analyzes platform terms, conditions and community guidelines together with legislative developments and pressure by moral actors, focusing on Tumblr, Instagram and Reddit as case studies. I show that platforms construct (new) and opaque categories as a basis for suppression of sexual content, thereby constructing and protecting a moral order that represses forms of legal sex work, as a form of digital gentrification and in the interest of corporate profitability.

Dr Rébecca S. Franco (she/her) is an interdisciplinary postdoctoral researcher in the project “The Platformization of the Sex Industry” at the Sociology Department of the University of Amsterdam. Her current research explores how commercial webcamming is regulated, by analysing the intertwinement of platform governance and moral politics. Previously, she completed a PhD dissertation at the VU University on the regulation of interracialized intimacies in the context of migration and decolonization in France. Her research focus more broadly revolves around the regulation of sex and intimacy.

Self-Pornographization, Glamorization and the Body Under Colonial Capitalism: Art Practices
AJ Bravo, University of Kent, UK

From sex workers to civilians, every day more and more people (especially those with any femme alignment) put their bodies on more or less constant display through social media. Whether it's through carefully curated photo and videography, quick bathroom selfies or other forms of self-portraiture, people are presenting their bodily image for mass-consumption in numbers that were never thought possible before. At the same time, civilians are borrowing and appropriating sex-working strategies at a rate never seen before while sex workers are seeing the space they occupy online limited by laws like FOSTA/SESTA, the Online Safety Bill (UK), the EARN IT Act and others. Additionally, purity culture and censorship are on the rise. How do we, as image creators/consumers, negotiate the boundaries of our bodies and desires online? How do we create/curate our image, or even, images? Is the presentation of our bodily desires through a series of avatars a fragmentation of our personality, or is it allowing us to explore desire in a new, exciting way? Do all gazes glamorise the realities of our bodies in order to make them desirable, or are there spaces to desire the ugliness and dullness that we contain? How does the pace at which we create and consume content affect these considerations? These are some of the questions that I aim to explore through my own pornographic and artistic practice as well as philosophical research, by contextualising some examples of my own work within the framework of the Philosophy of Aesthetics.

AJ Bravo is a PhD candidate at the University of Kent, and she is also part of the Aesthetics Research Centre at the School of Arts. Her PhD research revolves around pornography, censorship and the theory of art, which she approaches both from a philosophical as well as a practical research

methodology. With a BA in Multimedia, an MA in Illustration and a background in the sex industry, she is passionate about multidisciplinary research, cross-pollination across different academic disciplines, and sex workers' rights.

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Working the Pole?: An Exploration of Pole Dancers' Content Creation Practices on Social Media

Charlotte Curle, Lancaster University, UK

Pole dancing as a recreational practice has become increasingly popular over the last couple of decades - there are currently 121 pole dance studios listed in England. This popularity has also extended into digital spaces where transnational online communities of pole dance participants have formed - there are currently 12.1 million posts tagged with #poledance on the social media platform Instagram. Modern pole dance originates from strippers but this has not always been recognized by some recreational pole dancers who may try to distance themselves from the stigma associated with the practice. Strippers have critiqued recreational pole dancers who adopt this approach, deeming it cultural appropriation/erasure. The recent 'mainstreaming' of pole dance and the increased visibility of the practice in physical/digital spaces raises important questions surrounding the definitional boundaries of 'sex work'. Many pole dancers rely heavily on social media platforms like Instagram, TikTok and OnlyFans for their income. Some may teach in-person/online pole classes but use social media to build their brand and attract an online following that may later materialise into class participants. Others may develop partnerships with brands offering pole-related products, such as pole wear and grip aids, getting paid to post content on their social media channels. Some pole dancers may also create and sell sexual content generated from their pole dancing practice. All of these workers must navigate censorship mechanisms from social media platforms, like shadowbanning, post removal and account deletion for violating platform guidelines surrounding nudity and sex, which are often subjective. Examining how pole dance content creators are pushing the definitional boundaries of sex work in different ways whilst navigating increasingly complex censorship practices demonstrates how new digital medias and their users are facilitating and mediating new ways of experiencing and understanding bodies and stigma in relation to sexual/labour practices.

Charlotte Curle (she/her) is a first-year PhD student at Lancaster University. Her PhD thesis investigates the lived experiences of pole dance/fitness participants in physical and digital spaces,

exploring themes such as sex work, stigma, bodily experiences, sexuality and sexual expression, digital communities and digital economies. She aims to move beyond binary frameworks in both her theoretical and methodological approach, creating space for the complexities and subjectivities experienced by participants to emerge. Charlotte has lived experience of online sex work and is a recreational pole dance/fitness participant.

The Role of Instagram in Religious Women's Negotiations of Gender and Sexual Identity

Rachel Abreu, University of Stirling, Scotland

Social media play a key role in shaping conceptualisations of beauty and gender. While social media are perceived to be democratising and diversifying, representations of ideal beauty and femininity remain contentious and contribute to the continued othering of religious women. Instagram in particular persists in normative portrayals of beauty that prioritise Westernised, secular, and sexualised ideals that alienate those who fall outside these criteria.

Functioning as a subset of a larger research project, this paper uses the lens of beauty discourse on Instagram to explore how religious, minority ethnic women reconcile media-articulated ideals of sexuality with their own sexual identities and spirituality. Specifically, this paper problematises the conflation of sexuality and beauty on Instagram and investigates how this relationship subsequently guides religious women's self-expression and negotiations of ideal femininity and sexuality online. The study employs a feminist, exploratory, and interdisciplinary framework that seeks to challenge persisting depictions of religious women as a backwards, ugly, and homogenous group. Through in-depth focus groups and individual interviews with Muslim, Jewish, and Christian women located globally, this study emphasises an intersectional approach to experiences of beauty, gender, and sexuality and seeks to better understand the implications of social media on oft-marginalised groups.

The findings reveal that, on Instagram, beauty discourse upholds a virgin/whore dichotomy that relegates religious women into distinct categories guided by Eurocentric ideals. On one hand, religious women are portrayed as sexually repressed; fetishised; and culturally appropriated or commodified. On the other hand, modesty is perceived as a sign of oppression that renders religious women invisible in both representations of beauty and discussions of sexuality. However, the research also establishes the avenues religious women create to articulate sexuality on their own

terms, and highlights how adopting choice narratives and alternative feminisms allow for more nuanced representations of religious and sexual identity.

Rachel Abreu is a PhD Researcher in the Department of Communications, Media, and Culture at the University of Stirling. She also holds an MA(Hons) in English Literature from the University of St Andrews and an MSc in Media Management at the University of Stirling, for which she received the Dee Amy-Chinn prize (2020) in recognition of her contribution to gender research. Rachel's doctoral research centres on the role of religious identity in ethnic minority women's conceptualisations of beauty on Instagram. She is guided by a postcolonial, feminist framework and seeks to highlight the voices of marginalised groups.

WEDNESDAY 4 OCTOBER, PANEL 2: PLATFORMING SEX WORK

Unveiling Narratives: From Public Health Crisis and Media Bias to the Destigmatization of Sex Work

Ola Miedzynska, Erobella, Germany

Dr Valerie Webber, Dalhousie University, Canada

This thought-provoking panel explores the media's vital role in shaping public perceptions of sex work and how it might instead be used to destigmatize it. From mainstream media outlets to independent and commercial platforms, various narratives and representations surrounding sex work can significantly impact society's understanding and attitudes. Using two case studies -- the portrayal of porn as a "public health crisis" and the research on the sex work escorting market conditions (Germany 2023) we delve into the complexities, ethical considerations, and opportunities for media and popular culture to contribute positively to the destigmatization movement, ultimately paving the way for a more inclusive and compassionate society.

Ola Miedzynska is a sex technology and adult tech entrepreneur, business consultant, sex tech hackathon advisor, sex work advocate and feminist. Ola's career has centered around the technology industry for over a decade, from early-stage startup development to corporate consulting. From augmented reality to wearables, she worked with over 180 global sex tech brands. Ola launched the first German Sex Tech Hackathon (2019) to elevate the innovations and ideas of women and marginalized folks. Given the hackathon's success, Ola became the founder and CEO of Sxtech EU -

the only global sex tech platform and annual conference dedicated to the innovation of technology inside the sex tech and adult tech industry. Sx Tech EU strives to promote business and technical innovation in the Sex Tech industry by presenting and discussing the latest trends and future possibilities and developing a community of professionals changing the industry landscape. Since 2019, Sxtech EU's agenda has been represented by 75% of the female entrepreneurs and professionals from the sex tech and fem tech industries. Through her significant contributions, Ola actively supports technological transformation in building a global ecosystem around two bridging industries - sex tech and adult tech. As co-founder of Eroeblla.com she advocates for sex workers' rights by bridging the gap between sex technology and destigmatization of sex work.

Dr. Valerie Webber [they/them] is a community health and sexuality researcher whose work examines the relationship between ideas of health, risk, and community, with a special focus on occupational health in porn production and the need for policy development to be led by porn workers. Dr. Webber is currently a Postdoctoral Fellow at the Sexual Health and Gender (SHaG) Lab at Dalhousie University in Nova Scotia, Canada; Board Chair of PASS, a non-profit dedicated to the health and safety of adult industry workers; and an advisor to Ethical Capital Partners, the equity firm that recently acquired MindGeek. Having worked in the adult industry in various capacities for 15+ years, they have long been involved in queer, sexual health, and sex worker advocacy. Their scholarly work appears in journals such as Porn Studies; Culture, Health & Sexuality; Critical Public Health; Sexual Medicine; Sexuality & Culture; Sexualities; Synoptique; and Forum: Qualitative Social Research. You can find links to all their work at www.valeriewebber.com and bug them on Twitter @publicpubics.

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Sex Workers, Influencers, Gig Workers or All of the Above: The Experiences of Sex Workers on OnlyFans in Turkey

Ece Alparslan, Galatasaray University, Turkey

Duru Su Kadioğlu, Galatasaray University, Turkey

This study aims to gain insight into the experiences of Turkish sex workers on OnlyFans through 7 in-depth interviews conducted with digital sex workers from various genders. It is concerned with both the exploitation mechanisms and the opportunities that are presented to digital sex workers by OnlyFans, workers' experiences online and offline, and their perceptions of the work they perform.

By combining the perspective of political economy with an ethnographic approach, and focusing on the local context, the study aspires to present a nuanced picture of digital sex workers in Turkey. Turkish OnlyFans content creators' experiences would provide important insights, as in a country where the economy is collapsing, and patriarchy is strengthened through the hands of the state, sex workers constitute one of the most vulnerable groups. The findings highlight that most OnlyFans users in Turkey do not see themselves as "sex workers", instead, they refer to themselves as "influencers", masking the exploitation mechanisms of the platform. The country's recent economic decay seems to be a prominent motivation to use OnlyFans, e since the platform gives one the opportunity to earn dollars. While the platform brings a certain degree of economic relief, the women participants also expressed that they receive negative reactions from their families and friends, and some fear being "discovered" by their coworkers. Another important finding underlined the solidarity mechanisms that took place in digital sex work: workers said they retweet, promote and collaborate with other smaller accounts in order to improve both their visibility. However, it seems they are not organized in order to improve their working conditions, as the workers do not expect much from OnlyFans itself. OnlyFans' inability to prevent piracy of their content is seen as "inevitable" and part of the job. In terms of state-sanctioned patriarchy, OnlyFans workers viewed their work as emancipatory, or as a way to resist and/or take advantage of such oppressive systems.

Ece Alparslan is a Ph.D student in Media and Communication Studies at Galatasaray University. She earned both her bachelor's and master's degrees from Hacettepe University. She has previously published on resistance in everyday life and the political economy of music.

Duru Su Kadiođlu is a Ph.D. student in Media and Communication Studies at Galatasaray University. She earned her bachelor's degree from Bahçeşehir University, and her master's degree from Galatasaray University. She has previously published on the political economy of media, social movements, right-wing organizations and social media.

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Intimacy Beyond Sex - Building Customer Loyalty in Digital Media Post-FOSTA SESTA

Cristiane de Melo, Federal University of São Carlos, Brazil

This proposal is grounded in the ongoing Ph.D. research being conducted in Brazil on the platformization of sex work. The research focuses on two main dimensions, the first being work, and

the second being the mobilization of the subjective dimension of intimacy. The former dimension examines the changes that have occurred in the nature of sex work in Brazil due to the adoption of digital platforms for its performance. This is particularly relevant since sex work in Brazil is unregulated. The latter dimension, which is the focus of this proposal, explores the ways in which Brazilian digital sex workers mobilize the intimacy/privacy perspective to retain their clients' loyalty and keep their accounts active on social networks.

Through conducting in-depth interviews with sex workers, I analyzed the loyalty strategies that these professionals employ to build closer relationships with their clients. I found that these professionals go beyond producing adult content and instead mobilize the perception of intimacy beyond sex to build customer loyalty. They achieve this by sharing common moments of their daily lives with their clients/users, fostering a sense of closeness.

In a manner similar to digital influencers, these women share their private lives on their social network profiles, intending to build customer loyalty by taking into account the primacy of their permanence. Moreover, they aim to maintain a base of followers through "non-sexual" content, which becomes a strategy to circumvent the algorithms and terms of use post-FOSTA SESTA. This approach is anchored in the notion of intimacy that extends beyond sexual desire, guiding the desire to be seen and to be part of going beyond the platforms aimed exclusively at sex work. Ultimately, this strategy is aimed at building a loyal customer base that values the intimacy and closeness fostered by these digital sex workers.

Cristiane de Melo (she/her) is a Ph.D. Candidate for the Graduate Program in Sociology at the Federal University of São Carlos/Brazil (PPGS/UFSCar), with a period as a visiting fellow at the Institute of Cultural Anthropology and Development Sociology at Leiden University. Her research, which is granted by The São Paulo Research Foundation (FAPESP), is focused on the platformization of sex work, supported by studies in gender and sexualities, queer studies, digital media, and representations and visibilities.

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WEDNESDAY 4 OCTOBER, KEYNOTE: LUCA STEVENSON

Recent Advances and Setbacks of the Sex Workers' Rights Movement

The last 40 years have seen an incredible development and expansion of the sex workers' rights movement. From the occupation of the Church of St. Nizier by 100s of sex workers in France in 1975 to protests by 25,000 sex workers in India in 2001 or recent campaigns against Mastercard's financial discrimination of sex workers in the US, sex workers across the globe have used myriads forms of actions to fight for their labour and human rights and get sex work recognised as work.

Political activism and advocacy, in particular against the criminalisation of sex work, police violence and for better living and working conditions, have taken the form of direct actions, protests, trade unionism, strikes, legal challenges, as well as activism and self-representation through various art forms: literature, performance art or visual art amongst others.

The presentation will explore recent advances and setbacks of the sex workers' rights movement based on a few key examples from the movement. It will assess how popular cultural representations, including representations by sex workers, have mirrored the progress of the sex workers' rights movements.

Luca Stevenson is a male sex worker and Operations Officer at the European Sex Workers' Rights Alliance, a network of more than 100 organisations providing services and supporting for sex workers' rights in Europe and Central Asia. Luca is part of a multi-disciplinary team which advocates for the rights of sex workers in diverse policy fields such as access to health, justice, digital rights and social inclusion. Luca has worked extensively across Europe with sex workers from various backgrounds including migrant and LGBT sex workers. He is also currently Responsable de Mission for 'Jasmine', a project of Medecins du Monde France which aims to address and reduce violence against sex workers and sits on the Board of Directors of the Global Network of Sex Work Projects.

WEDNESDAY 4 OCTOBER, PANEL 3: SEXUAL VIOLENCE AND FEMALE SEXUALITIES

The Shift in the Representations of Rape in Female-directed Horror Films

Bruna Foletto Lucas, Kingston University London, UK

Despite its constant presence in horror (and non-horror) cinema, rape-revenge films maintain their ambivalence regarding sexual assault. Critics and theorists alike fail to find a consensus regarding the gender politics at play in rape-revenge films. Likewise, filmmakers and audience members find it difficult to form an opinion when it comes to the horrors portrayed in rape-revenge films.

Nevertheless, rape-revenge narratives have a long history in film, and they have notoriously been used, primarily, by male filmmakers as a way to talk about broader issues while neglecting the

particular experiences of sexual assault survivors – for example, Ingmar Bergman’s *The Virgin Spring* shifts the focus from the sexual assault victim to foreground her father’s religious inner conflict. What this paper aims to bring to the fore is the progression and revolution of rape-revenge narratives, which has been more visible since the #MeToo movement, that have been either written and/or directed by women that are doing the work of updating rape-revenge tropes. The paper will therefore present a comparative analysis of older films directed by men and newer films directed by women to investigate how recent films are updating and rewriting rape-revenge long-standing sexist tropes by prioritising the characters’ post-rape trauma and exposing the diegetic and extra-diegetic systemic sexism that allows for rape culture to manifest itself.

Bruna Foletto Lucas (she/her/hers) is a PhD student at Kingston University London, where she is expanding her previous research on women-directed horror films. Bruna has presented her work at a range of events, including the Miskatonic Institute of Horror Studies in London, Final Girls Berlin Film Festival, BAFTSS Horror Studies and several conferences. She is currently working on a video essay on Brazilian filmmaker Juliana Rojas for MAI: Doing Women’s Global Horror History under the AHRC Fellowship Grant, which will be published later in 2023.

“Est-ce que tu aimes le sexe?”: Sexual Encounters and Sexual Trauma for Black Girls in Contemporary French Film and Literature

Tiffany Bailey, University of Boston, US

Within Black Girlhood Studies, Black girls’ encounters with sex and sexuality range from exploratory to revelatory to traumatic. In “Black Girlhood, Interrupted,” author Tressie McMillan Cottom identifies a shared experience for Black girls, writing, “The thing I remember most about reading for black girlhood was that the easiest way to locate the girl in a story about a woman was to search for the sexual trauma.” Is this to say that all Black girls and women have traumatic experiences with sex? There are notable examples in Anglophone American literature that support this viewpoint such as *The Bluest Eye* by Toni Morrison, *The Color Purple* by Alice Walker, and others. This paper will explore different representations of sex and sexuality for Black girls in Francophone film and literature. Trauma is indeed investigated in the book, *Le Roman de Pauline*, by Calixthe Beyala, for example, but there is also consensual exploration and experimentation in the film, *Bande de filles*, by Céline Sciamma. Because of social media, the film, *Mignonnes*, by Maimouna Doucouré enraged American audiences and began a debate around the (hyper)sexualization of young girls and

age-appropriateness of sexualized dance styles. Through Feminist and Post-Feminist readings of these key Francophone works centering Black girls, this paper will interrogate purity culture and the ways Black girls encounter sex and sexuality in media. This paper will also consider sexual trauma experienced by Black girls and question if there is a universal aspect to sex in the Black girlhood experience in France as represented in contemporary literature and film. Sex can be seen as a taboo topic, especially for girls and women, but these stories should increase visibility for issues that Black girls face and force society to face them as well.

Originally from Birmingham, Alabama, U.S.A., Tiffany Bailey is currently a PhD candidate in French Language & Literature at Boston University. She received her BA in French & History and her MA in French & Applied Linguistics from the University of Alabama. She has taught French-language and film courses and has studied in Paris, Tours, and Avignon, France. Her research interests include contemporary literature and film, Black girlhood, popular culture, and women and youth narratives. She is working on her dissertation titled “Girl Gang: Black Girlhood in France Represented Through Contemporary Literature and Film.” Her pronouns are she/her/hers.

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Pleasures in Transgression: Excess and Grotesquerie in Chewing Gum

Jacqueline Johnson, University of Southern California, US

Almost three decades ago, Evelynn Hammonds argued that Black feminist theory had a problem. While many scholars foundational to the field had identified the ways Black women’s sexuality had been derided by and through racist, sexist regimes of power, Hammonds argued “pleasure, exploration, and agency have gone under-analyzed” (1994, 134). This presentation takes up Hammonds’ charge through examining the sitcom *Chewing Gum* (E4, 2015-2017). Building from recent work in Black feminist theories of pleasure, I engage how the series’ articulation of Black women’s sexuality demonstrates how “naming injury and enacting pleasure can mutually animate” (Ohman 2020, 7). I use the analytical frames of “the grotesque” and “excess” to illustrate how *Chewing Gum* acknowledges the colonial grammars that have circumscribed protagonist Tracey’s erotic agency, while still prioritizing her quest for pleasure and autonomous sexual expression. The series deploys the grotesque to rupture hegemonic discourses of Black women’s sexual deviance by dislocating the grotesque from its historical attachment to Black women’s bodies and sexuality and instead identifying it as a distinct feature of the white body and sexual psyche. Further, the show

mines humor from the grotesque body in ways distinct from the white, “unruly” comic woman (Rowe 1995; Fraiman 2022). Additionally, the series’ uses of excess—through direct address, comic performance, and narrative— distinctly highlights the pleasures of transgression, offering a representation of Black women’s sexual expression beyond respectability. Through the deployment of excess and the grotesque, *Chewing Gum* constructs new paradigms of racialized sexuality and reanimates key debates in Black sexuality studies and feminist television studies.

Jacqueline Johnson (she/her) is a PhD candidate in the Division of Cinema and Media Studies at the University of Southern California. Her current dissertation project examines Black women as both the producers and subjects of romance narratives in television, podcasts, and novels in The U.S. and The U.K.. Her work is published or forthcoming in *Sartorial Fandom: Fashion, Beauty Culture, and Identity*, *Watching While Black Rebooted: The Television and Digitality of Black Audiences*, and *Rolling: Blackness and Mediated Comedy*. She spends her free time reading celebrity gossip, romance novels, and viral tweets.

Thursday, 5th October

THURSDAY 5 OCTOBER, PANEL 1: SEXUAL PEDAGOGIES AND AUTHENTICITY

Disturbing Encounters: Teens and Tweens Watching Mature Content in Fiction Films

Adrienne Boutang, University of Franche-Comté, France

In this paper I intend to focus on three films featuring sequences showing the encounter between teenagers – or tweens – and “mature content” on television or on the Internet: *The French Kissers* (Riad Sattouf, 2009), *Eight Grade* (Bo Burnham, 2018) and *Good Boys* (Gene Stupnitsky, 2019). The discovery of sexuality has been a staple of many trends of the *teen pic*, from the sex quest to the slasher. However, the films under study tap more specifically into one of contemporary’s society main concerns: teenagers’ exposure to mature content, in a context of “[evident] circulation of sex in the public sphere, from the mainstream to the fringe.” While contemporary Western society has come to terms with the public presence of explicit contents, concerns over the exposure of youngsters to

these contents have increased, contributing to the upholding of regulatory /censorship systems across countries, from the American MPAA to the French CNC.

The three works under study not only question contemporary anxieties, but also open up possibilities for debates and discussions which move past the mere question of censorship to question more active strategies on the part of actual teenagers to negotiate with these representations – showing how their protagonists may “opt in and out of childhood, rather than experiencing it as a state from which they cannot escape.” They also raise questions pertaining to the representation of sexuality: contrary to more frontally explicit works such as Larry Clark’s films, or television show *Euphoria*, none of these films feature actual explicit contents, instead finding creative ways to suggest mature contents without showing it. Avoiding hints of sensationalism or exploitation, they display a certain liminality, playing both on meta-porn and suggestion.

Adrienne Boutang (she/her) is a lecturer in film and audiovisual studies at the University of Franche-Comté (Besançon). Her research focuses on censorship, representations of sexuality and violence, the question of adolescence in cinema and television, and youth culture in a transmedia perspective. She has published a monograph on teen movies, numerous articles on the question of sexuality and transgression, a film analysis book around gender studies and cultural studies, and directed several collective publications on the question of media, genre cinema and visual arts. She is currently putting together an publication devoted to “Ages of life, ages on screen: Passages, thresholds, transitions and gendered evolutions”.

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Emerging Indian Asexualities: Challenging the Sexual Normativity through Asexual Archives

Malavika, IIT Tirupati, India

Asexuality is challenging for many to envision; it ruptures the normative societal standard of compulsory sexuality and heteronormativity. It also explores how the spectrum of asexuality remains illegible in the broad array of Indian discourse that prizes sexual normativity because it is primarily understood as a deviancy or lack (of sexual attraction, desire, instinct, and libido) (Cerankowski 2016). Asexuality, posited in the non-western framework, presents itself in assorted manifestations such as celibacy, disability/disorder, abstinence, prudishness/moral policing, ageist narratives, and spinster/bachelorhood-motherhood-widowhood tropes. This paper explores the emergence and construction of Indian asexualities encompassing the Indian asexual lived experiences that transcend

beyond the theoretical definitions. Following Przybylo and Cooper's creation of truth and vernacular asexual archive through queer asexual reading practices (2014), this paper attempts to locate the lived experiences of Indian asexuals, creating an Indian vernacular asexual archive, thus alternate sexual discourse that defies compulsory sexualisation and amatonormative standards. Since the 2000s, the Indian asexual community has been gaining momentum, and Indian asexual dating apps like *Ace App* and *PLatonicity* have made a significant impact in building networks and relationships amidst the Indian asexual community. The non-western framework actively seeks to disrupt the white, male, ableist asexual narratives and bridges the lacuna by bringing to the forefront the Indian asexual experiences, thus broadening the queer horizon. Using a semi-structured framework with open-ended questions in the format of in-depth interviews, this paper attempts to encapsulate the lived Indian asexual experiences. Data is also collected through digital asexual archives, digital platforms, dating sites and social media platforms which actively talk about Indian asexual experiences, desire, and intimacy. The language of desire, intimacy and queerness has been in a constant state of flux; by analysing the emerging Indian asexualities, one can see how Indian sexuality has freed itself from colonial, western influences and how it constitutes novice ethos for Indian sexual practices.

Malavika is a doctoral candidate pursuing research from the Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, IIT Tirupati. She has been actively working in the emerging field of Asexuality Studies for the past three years and is an active presence on social media platforms. Focusing on the sexual identity and orientation of asexuality, she works on increasing the visibility of asexual communities in Indian visual narratives and lived experiences of Indian asexuals. She enjoys curating playlists and can be found browsing through 90's Bengali and Wong Kar Wai movies on Mubi in her free time.

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Love Bytes: Navigating Entanglements of Sex and Romantic Love through FLINT* Individuals' Use of the Hinge Dating Application

Erinne Paisley, University of Amsterdam, Holland

Location based dating (LBD) applications have changed how we meet, find temporary or long-term partners, and experience sex, love, and intimacy (Hobbs et al. 2017; Duguay, 2017). Existing research on LBD applications have tended to focus on these platform's gamified affordances (David and Cambre 2016) and the interface's "hookup" discourse (Gabbatt 2015). When it comes to an

association between this dating application “hook-up culture” and young FLINT* individuals (female, lesbian, intersex, non-binary, trans* ages 18 – 21), narratives of sexual autonomy (Butler 1956; Warner 1958) are often equated to temporary and fleeting interactions (Hobbs et al. 2017) or “situationships” that express a post-MeToo “freedom” of sexuality (Angel 2021; Emba 2022; Srinivasan 2021).

In this modern zeitgeist, the Hinge dating application positions itself in a contradictory manner to this understanding of LBD’s. Hinge appears to contradict the gamification of Tinder’s ‘swipe logic’ (David and Cambre, 2016), claiming itself as the application ‘designed to be deleted’ to offer an ephemeral online matching experience whose only function is to lead to a permanent offline romance. This entry point will allow for a further inquiry into the entanglements between sex and romantic love for FLINT* individuals.

When it comes to connecting media studies to the affective experience of love, media has been seen as a facilitator but not necessarily a way to understand and further a theory of love itself. Only recently has media studies looked at embodiment and emotions to understand media itself, largely because of love being traditionally associated within the realm of the female, the non-political, and private. To connect these theoretical inquiries to the application, a combination of feminist discourse analysis, cyberethnography, and interview-based ethnography will be used. A trial study has been conducted during the Global Digital Cultures (GDC) seed-funded project ‘Digitized Love and Intimacy on Hinge’.

Erinne Paisley (she/her) is a lecturer at the University of Amsterdam, Media Studies Department. She is a primary researcher on the GDC project ‘Digitized Love and Intimacy on Hinge’, investigating the experiences of online dating for FLINT* globally. She has published academically on feminist data studies and fake news, as well as authoring an internationally published three-part series on activism for young adults. Her ongoing research interests include intersectional feminist theories, online dating, and digitally mediated sexual activities.

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Losing Touch: (De)Materialising Eros in Contemporary Popular Fiction

Dr Mary Harrod, University of Warwick, UK

Amid widespread perceptions of a crisis of meaningful interpersonal communication in the post-digital, late capitalist era, this paper will focus on attendant changes in contemporary attitudes

towards sexuality indexed by a popular cultural forms. As various studies show that sexual activity is dwindling in younger generations in (e.g. Herbenick et al 2021, focused on the USA), it is emerging as a cultural obsession. This paper will first give an overview of recent factors contributing to this state of affairs as manifested in the media-sphere, including the rise of online pornography and other digital distractions in today's 'attention economy'; the hyper-rationalising tendencies of neoliberalism more generally; the #MeToo movement; and the COVID-19 pandemic. To probe the cultural impact of such developments, the main body of the paper homes in on an emergent trend that sees depictions of physical intimacy as either irrevocably embedded in 'soulless' economies of exchange or else, more interestingly, a potential forum for radical transcendence of these dynamics. Drawing on films including *Don Jon* (2013) and *Lady Chatterley* (2022), television series from *Normal People* (2020) to *It's a Sin* (2021) and bestselling novels from *Fleishman is in Trouble* (2019) to *Fake Accounts* (2021), the paper considers the implications of the twinned impetuses for cultural forms both to articulate fear of sex and to place it on a pedestal – in other words, the new status of 'primitive' sexual congress itself a site of authenticity to be desired but only rarely and fleetingly attained.

Mary Harrod is Associate Professor in French Studies at the University of Warwick. She is the author of *From France with Love: Gender and Identity in French Romantic Comedy* (I.B. Tauris, 2015), *Heightened Genre and Women's Filmmaking in Hollywood* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2021) and the following co-edited collections: *The Europeanness of European Cinema* (I.B. Tauris, 2015, with Mariana Liz and Alissa Timoshkina); *Women Do Genre in Film and Television* (Routledge, 2017, with Katarzyna Paszkiewicz; BAFTSS Best Edited Collection, 2019); and *Imagining 'We' in the Age of 'I': Romance and Social Bonding in Contemporary Culture* (Routledge, 2021, with Diane Negra and Suzanne Leonard; MeCCSA Edited Collection of the Year, 2022). She is co-Chief General Editor of *French Screen Studies*, with Ginette Vincendeau.

THURSDAY 5 OCTOBER, PANEL 2: TRANSGRESSIVE PLEASURES AND FUTURES

The Sex that I Love is Killing Me: Disease, Discrimination, and the Limits of Immuno-Politics in Russell T. Davies'; British Television Drama It's a Sin

Arindam Nandi, Indian Institute of Technology Madras, India

This article engages with Russell T. Davies' British television drama *It's a Sin* (2001) along the intersection of sex, disease, discrimination, and contemporary immuno-politics. Drawing on the works of medical humanist thinkers such as Susan Sontag, Mary Douglas, Laura Otis, Margrit Shildrick

and biopolitical theorists Roberto Esposito, Ed Cohen, and Erving Goffman, this article articulates a politics of community, solidarity, and mutual intimacy based on the healthy self's active engagement with pathological and precarious others. The show, which closely follows the lives of three homosexual teenagers Ritchie, Colin, and Roscoe, portrays Britain's socio-political response to the HIV/AIDS epidemic throughout the 1980s. Whereas the outbreak is initially disregarded by the major characters of the drama and even rebuked by some as a political strategy of the conservatives to curtail the increase in homosexual activities in urban Britain. Nonetheless, as the cases continue to surge, they become gruesomely aware of the tragic prognosis of the disease and the scarcity of effective treatment for the virus. Subsequently, the testing of "bodies at risk" slowly transforms the medically constituted asymmetry between the healthy and the sick into a socially pervasive matrix of stigmatization through the deployment of a segregational immuno-politics. Borrowing from writings on political (auto)immunity in the works of Warwick Anderson, Alfred Tauber, and Donna Haraway this article delineates how a politics of immunity based on self-isolation and "barriers of separation" remains inadequate while navigating a viral plague. It further deliberates that the portrayal of the HIV/AIDS epidemic in *It's a Sin* does not simply represent a blatant critique of open and subversive sexual relations. Rather, as a sexually transmitted autoimmune disease AIDS operates as a biopolitical metaphor in Davies' drama that highlights the very necessity of community in times of crisis on the one hand, and the pro-immunizing maneuvers of the body politic to restrict community at the expense of companionship and sexual engagement on the other.

Arindam Nandi (he/him/his) is a doctoral research scholar and a part-time research assistant in the Department of Humanities and Social Sciences at Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) Madras specializing in English Studies. He has previously completed his Masters and MPhil in English from the University of Calcutta, India. While his MPhil work had concerned an exploration of Michel Foucault's anti-establishment politics in the works of Franco-Czech novelist Milan Kundera, his current PhD research engages with metaphors of disease, contagion, and immunology in post-eighteenth century literary and cultural works.

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Fifty Shades of the Ripper: The Romanticisation of a Nineteenth-Century Serial Killer in Modern Culture

Katrina Jan, University of Birmingham, UK

The serial-killer Jack the Ripper was a nineteenth-century media sensation. From sensationalised news reports to Gothic literature, the Ripper became a part of popular culture that has endured to the present day. Twenty-first-century novels have portrayed the Ripper as an alluring sexual predator, with some even describing him as 'sexy' or 'romantic'. The emergence of several such narratives indicates demand in the literary market for Ripper erotica. This subject matter attracts readers by – supposedly – tapping into their dark, sexual fantasies, which increases sales figures, and produces more texts alike. This is what I term the '*Fifty Shades of Grey* effect', describing how appetites for dark, erotic fiction and film have become mainstream. More importantly, with sexual violence towards women in the spotlight today, as seen by the Reclaim the Night protest in London in 2021, and statistics showing that sexual attacks on women have been on the rise, I explore how the Ripper, a man who butchered and mutilated women, can be reimagined as 'sexy' in the twenty-first century. I provide insight into sex culture today, including the increasing popularity of BDSM, mommy porn and sex toys. This paper will also look at the Ripper's glorification in dark tourism, on streaming platforms such as TikTok, alongside modern Ripper romance novels, and how, despite being in an era of #MeToo, a serial killer can become part of one's sexual fantasy.

Katrina is undertaking a PhD in English Literature at University of Birmingham exploring the 'Sexualisation of Jack the Ripper in Literature and Culture from the Nineteenth Century to the Present'. Her doctoral research examines the sustained surge of sexualised Ripper fiction against the increased advocacy for women's rights in the mainstream media, including twenty-first-century feminism and the #MeToo movement. Katrina also co-founded Gothica, Birmingham's online postgraduate-led reading group. The group meets monthly to explore the Gothic genre in fantasy, horror, and science fiction, often hosting guest speakers from staff, and students, to writers and independent researchers across the globe.

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Technologically Mediated Sexual Exploration in Videogames and "The Playful Child": From Sexual Surveillance to Queer Futurism

Jean Ketterling, Carleton University, Canada

In this presentation, I consider two videogames—*You Must be 18+ to Enter* (Seemingly Pointless, 2017) and *How Do You Do It* (Freeman et al, 2014)—that allow player to nostalgically relive the

experience of exploring sex and sexuality as an adolescent or teen. I ask: What affects do these videogames produce and what political potential do these affects hold?

I begin by offering a brief review of the intersecting ways that surveillance and discipline have shaped videogames, technologically mediated sexual expression, and young people's sexual exploration. I then examine how surveillance constrains and controls videogame players more broadly. In line with this, I show that certain players orient themselves towards the videogames as 'overseers', condemning the game and its players as perverse or even pedophilic. This illustrates how normative conceptualizations of sexual risk emerge through a circuit of surveillance practices.

However, we can also read the surveillance in the videogames as increasing players' sexual feelings and excitement. In other words, by 'flirting' with surveillance (Bell, 2009) the videogames amplify sexual affect and pleasure. Therefore, I argue that *You Must be 18+ to Enter* and *How Do You Do It* reveal not only the perils of surveillance and nostalgia, but also the radical potential of play and the subversive pleasures of surveillance. These two videogames animate queer time by drawing on the past to critique the present and imagine new futures. Drawing on Muñoz, I propose the figure of the playful child as a potentially useful way of theorizing how play can be used to resist surveillance and (hetero)normative temporality and argue that playing these games queers time and opens the possibility for a transformative queer politics to take root.

Jean Ketterling (she/her) is a PhD candidate and Vanier Scholar in the Department of Law and Legal Studies at Carleton University in Ottawa, on the traditional, unceded territories of the Algonquin nation. Her interdisciplinary work on video games is rooted in legal studies, game studies, pornography and sexuality studies, and feminist and queer theories of affect and emotion. Her dissertation research is focused on sexual video games: how they make sexual meaning, their capacity to make space for experimental sexual play, and how sexual content in video games is controlled, disciplined and regulated by platforms. Most recently, her work has appeared in *Feminist Media Studies*.

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Perverse Lesbianism: BDSM, Rape, and Incest in Cyber Chinese Girls' Love (GL) Fiction

Dr Jamie J. Zhao, City University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong

Along with the popularization of Internet use in China since 2001, writings about gender and sexual minorities by women and for women have flourished in Chinese cyberspace. The articulation of

previously “unrepresentable” voices and desires of Chinese women in the print media age has been largely enabled and encouraged through producing, circulating, consuming, and rewriting online fiction featuring unconventionally gendered and sexualized stories. In the past two decades, a growing amount of academic attention has been given to one of the most prominent forms of such cyber-Chinese literature—boys’ love (BL; also known as *danmei*), a literary subgenre of male same-sex romance and eroticism. Yet, the complexities of the rising online Chinese girls’ love (GL) literature that focuses on female same-sex romance and (sexual) practices remain largely underexplored, if not intentionally dismissed. To fill this gap, this research pays particular attention to plots of BDSM, rape, and incest that are prevalent in several sensational GL works in post-2000 Chinese cyberspace.

Presenting a queer-feminist analysis of the torture, rape, and incestuous sequences in some popular online Chinese GL novels, I discuss the sex roles, gendered subjectivities, and power dynamics during the narrated unconventional lesbian sexual encounters. While these tropes resist the alleged legitimacy and centrality of heterosexual sexual patterns in mainstream Chinese culture, they have also been heavily and persistently negotiating with multivalent constructions of lesbianism, including dominant hetero-patriarchal cultural imaginaries of female sex, gender, sexuality, desire, and pleasure. My analysis also contextualizes the emergence of GL in related discourses on media censorship of lesbian and pornographic content, the social struggles and pressure faced by Chinese queer women, gender-nonnormative representations and celebrity images in contemporary Chinese entertainment industries, and the recent boom of online queer female fandom in China. The graphic depictions of women’s radical sex and/or non-consensual sexual relationships in the fiction, in this sense, can be understood as sophisticated writing tactics through which the writers discursively create, legitimize, and even dramatize lesbian stories set in a still largely heteronormative Chinese sociocultural environment.

Dr. Jamie J. Zhao (she/her) is Assistant Professor in Media and Cultural Studies in the School of Creative Media at City University of Hong Kong. She holds a PhD in Gender Studies from Chinese University of Hong Kong and received another PhD in Film and TV Studies from the University of Warwick. Her research explores East Asian media and public discourses on female gender and sexuality in a globalist age. She is the editor of *Queer TV China* (HKUP, 2023), and coedited *Boys’ Love, Cosplay, and Androgynous Idols* (HKUP, 2017), *Contemporary Queer Chinese Art* (Bloomsbury, 2023), and the *Routledge Handbook of Chinese Gender and Sexuality* (Routledge, 2023). She is the founding coeditor of Bloomsbury’s “Queering China” book series and Routledge’s “Transdisciplinary Souths” book series.

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THURSDAY 5 OCTOBER, KEYNOTE: PROFESSOR SUSANNA PAASONEN

In a Sea of Dicks: On the Limits of Porn

Using dick pics as a point of departure, this chapter inquires after the limits of pornography as a genre marker in the context of contemporary networked sexual exchanges. Drawing on interviews with the users of a Finnish “all-purpose” sexual platform Alaston Suomi (“Naked Finland”) used for naked self-expression, display, and sexual communication where dick pics abound, it further asks how the denominator of pornography is deployed when discussing distinctions within online sexual content. My discussion of the limits and affordances of the notion of porn is situated in a context of network cultures defined equally by the range and volume of sexual media and its concurrent, extensive weeding out.

Susanna Paasonen is professor of Media Studies. After finishing her PhD in Media Studies in Turku in 2002 she acted as lecturer in Media Culture at University of Tampere (2003), as an Academy of Finland postdoctoral researcher at the Centre for Women's Studies in Turku (2004-5), as senior research associate in Digital Culture at University of Jyväskylä (2005-7), as researcher at the Collegium for Advanced Studies at University of Helsinki (2007-10) and as professor of Digital Culture at Jyväskylä (2010-11) before starting in her current post in August 2011. Paasonen was appointed docent in Media Culture at University of Tampere in 2004 and as docent in Feminist Media Studies in Turku in 2006. She was the first recipient of the Finnish Academy of Science and Letters' Jutikkala Award in Humanities in 2011 and the Association of Internet Researchers' Nancy Baym Annual Book Award in 2020. She spent part of her sabbatical research leave in 2016 as visiting scholar at MIT's department of Comparative Media Studies and at Microsoft Research New England's Social Media Collective and was briefly visiting professor at University of Florence during the covid-19 spring of 2020, as well as a Hunt-Simes Visiting Chair in Sexuality Studies at University of Sydney in 2022.

THURSDAY 5 OCTOBER, PANEL 3: PORNOGRAPHIES

Terms of Service: Audacity, Imagination and Archiving Black Sexual Pleasure

Dr Alexandria C. Cunningham, Independent Scholar, US

Historic and contemporary Black feminist debates tend to project a hierarchy towards cultural production that is either aligned with Audre Lorde's Erotic (sensual) or it is deemed as contestable, non-normative forms of self-exploration and labor (the pornographic). In the midst of FOSTA-SESTA and a bevy of sex-negative policy, such polarities halt not only organizing, but healing. As Jennifer Nash (2014) argues, racial iconography has implications for the Black sex archive. Namely, how do we make sense of Black women's relative absence from some parts of racialized pornography and our high saturation in other areas? When we account for social media, federal laws and the *literal* terms of service that shape our pleasure practices, sexual economy, identities and relation, what can it mean to audaciously imagine and archive Black sexual pleasure? "Terms of Service" is Black feminist reading of the pornographic scene, "Foreplay," and the sensual project, "Pleasure Portraits," from Black-owned-and-operated erotica company, BlkTouch. My attention to BlkTouch embodies the platform's sexual ethics, liberation, freak nasty magic and sensual playgrounds I wish for all Black people. Briefly, I contextualize digital erotic cultural production as a space where violence and pleasure animate the choreographies of Black erotic cultural producers. I center Angela Jones's (2022) notion of sex-positivity as a Black feminist gift to underscore how Black women draw on audacity and imagination as critical resources within their erotic cultural production. A key takeaway is that ethical and independent pornography's representations of pleasure hold value to Black pleasure discourse and approaches to the Black sex archive, particularly to what is possible when our imaginations are able to play and witness affirming permissions of our sexual desires, fantasies and sensual experiences. Ultimately, this paper demonstrates the importance of Black people's articulations, imagination and creation of other worlds for our play and freedom.

Alexandria C. Cunningham (she/her) is a writer, dancer, sexuality educator and independent scholar based in Chicago, Illinois, United States. She holds a Ph.D. in African and African Diaspora Studies with a portfolio in Women's and Gender Studies from The University of Texas at Austin. Broadly, her lifework reimagines our understandings of sexual pleasure and liberation. She explores how Black women articulate and move pleasure in their lives through sensual, quotidian desire in the midst of global forces, material and digital, that seek to negate them. Some of her work is published in *The Journal of Black Sexuality and Relationships* (JBSR).

Blacked out of Vanilla: Redressing Authenticity of Male Blackness through Satire in Interracial Porn

Kellen Sharp, University of Texas, US

In the United States, Black men remain fraught as a vulnerable and unprotected class of people. Historically, unable to have agency over their image, they have been positioned as long since exploited by the camera through a lens of fear-mongering and fetishization of the black phallic. Phrenological lines of dehumanization remediated themselves in early cinematic history in perhaps one of the most influential films ever-- D.W. Griffith's *Birth of a Nation* (1915). This film lays bare the racial fear of contamination by penetration of the black phallic on the inconspicuous and "subordinate" white female body – displaying a jeopardization of the means of "white" reproduction. This sentiment of black male threat and sexual prowess carried over in early pornography accumulating into the depiction of the *Mandingo* caricature, which through his sexual voracity, balances historical racial tensions interwoven with pleasure. The sustained popularity of the porn category, BBC (big black cock), is a testament to this social enamoration with the black phallic. In this paper, I take a post-feminist lens and update historical notions of black male exploitation in pornography through my examination of the *Blacked* brand. This interracial porn banner boasts top ratings across the internet and differentiates itself from other portfolios with its high production quality. I posit that modern black performers for *Blacked* embody a post-feminist sentiment and reclaim their sexual agency through brand development and further rewrite dastardly narratives with their subversive depictions of a *softer* blackness enveloped in respectability politics, consent, and engagement with foreplay and cunnilingus, all the while still juggling racial stereotypes and essentialist themes of black masculinity, albeit in a satirical manner.

Kellen Sharp (he/him) is an MA student in Media Studies at the University of Texas at Austin. His research investigates “toxic” technocultures, particularly exploring these communities as they intersect at the race, gender, sexuality, and class axes. He utilizes fan audience research and digital ethnography to explore how people form radical communities and identities online.

Feminist Pornography as Radical Flank: A Consideration of Historical Rupture

Rachael Liberman, University of Denver, US

At its height of cultural visibility, feminist pornography was explored in magazine articles, academic journals, had its own annual awards event, and was featured in a stand-alone edited volume from The Feminist Press (*The Feminist Porn Book*, 2013). While the genre of “feminist porn” has not commercially expanded as a discrete practice, this paper argues that it served a disruptive function within the pornography industry; in particular, in the ways that it offered a “positive radical flank” within the production of “porn for women.” From an historical, media studies, and social movement perspective, it can be argued that the production of feminist (and feminist/queer pornography) has contributed to the mainstreaming of “ethical” practices and has contributed to the emergence of “ethical” and “indie” tags in online platforms.

As a movement of praxis, feminist pornography centers ethical production practices from a feminist lens(es), yet these production ethics – communication, intersectionality, agency, collaboration, consent, safety, payment – are no longer identified as “feminist,” and are signaled to the public under different descriptors. Offerings such as Sssh.com, CHEEX, AORTA Films, Dreams of Spanking and I Feel Myself are all examples of contemporary productions that signal the discursive shift to “ethical” and “indie,” as opposed to “feminist.” Even Erika Lust, who has frequently identified as a “feminist porn director,” now brands her work as “sex positive, indie adult cinema” (ericalust.com). In conclusion, this paper attempts to situate the contributions of feminist pornography as an historical rupture and positive radical flank that has offered a lasting impact on production practices of pleasure activism.

Rachael Liberman (she/her) is a Teaching Associate Professor of Media Studies at the University of Denver. Her scholarship centers on the critical exploration of sexuality and digital media culture; more specifically, issues related to sexual subjectivity, the pornography industry, and contemporary iterations of feminist movement. Since then, my research has shifted to a broader inquiry into pornography literacy, as well as questions about commodity feminism and other developments within feminist media studies.

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Be(ing) Quiet with Silence: An Undisciplined Analysis of Silence(s) Surrounding Black Male Homoerotic Desire and Being in Moonlight
Tirrezz Hudson, University of California, US

This paper aims to explore and attend to the silences surrounding, and the silencing of, Black male homoerotic desire and queer Black boyhood in Barry Jenkins' critically acclaimed *Moonlight* (2016). Calling together queer theory, Black feminist theory, Black studies, and ethnic studies, I argue that there is a legible pain and harm incurred in the silences and silencing regarding Black male queer desire. Simultaneously, this work argues that there is a persistent and met longing for Black male homoerotic desires and Black queer boyhood and possibilities, in the midst of the silences. This essay focuses primarily on the main character (Chiron) during his childhood, where he is referred to as "Little." Throughout the main character's life, whether referred to as "Little" as a child, "Chiron" as a teenager, or "Black" as a grown man, he talks very little. It is in the absence of his speech, the central focus of my analysis, that much is felt and conveyed through his silences, gestures, gazes, and movements. Drawing on Roderick Ferguson's (2003) queer of color critique and Simone C. Drake's (2020) framework of quietude, I argue that while the attempts to silence, quiet, and mute his Black queerness are created in the day-to-day interactions between the main character and others, his silences also serve as a site of resistance, agency, pleasure, and joy. It is at the interconnected complexities of both, that this work takes place.

Tirrezz Hudson (she/they) is a second-year doctoral student in the Ethnic Studies Department, at the University of California, San Diego. Her interdisciplinary work concerns religious and spirituality studies, Black studies, queer theory, ethnic studies, and ethnomusicology. Tirrezz's research examines the tradition of silences of Black male homoeroticism in the wake of transatlantic slavery, as well as the influence of this history on the lives of Black queer men previously or currently involved in Black Churches.

Friday, 6th October

FRIDAY 6 OCTOBER, PANEL 1: MEDIATING BODIES

Queer Sex, Trans Sexuality, and Haptic Visuality in Ester Martin Bergsmark's Something Must Break (2014)

Mingyuan Wan, University of Cambridge, UK

This paper examines the connections between representations of queer sex, sexualities of trans characters, and haptic visuality in Ester Martin Bergsmark's trans film *Something Must Break/Nånting måste gå sönder* (2014). While prevalent frameworks in conceptualizing sexuality in cinema focus on representations of either heterosexual or homosexual relationships between characters, trans cinema offers a unique lens to explore sexuality that emphasizes the body and sensuality regardless of genders. I argue that *Something Must Break*, a film that features the protagonist's queer sexual behaviour during their gender transition, highlights the relationship between the trans body and sex, constructing what I term trans sexuality. The conceptualisation of trans sexuality effectively challenges heteronormative discourses and categorisations of body, sex, and sexuality, while developing new theoretical languages to describe the sexuality of trans individuals. Additionally, I analyse the film's experimental depiction and presentation of anal and oral sex, exhibitionism, threesomes, and urolagnia between queer and trans characters through the lens of haptic visuality, a framework developed by Laura Marks that privileges embodied viewing experiences. I argue that the trans sexualities constructed in *Something Must Break* can be intimately felt by the viewer through the effect of haptic visuality created by the sensuality of queer sex scenes portrayed in the film. Therefore, trans sexualities defy simple categorisations as heterosexual, homosexual, or bisexual, and, as exemplified in the film, encompass a queer bodily sensation that is meant to be felt.

Mingyuan Wan (he/him) is a PhD candidate at the Centre for Film and Screen Studies, University of Cambridge. His current research focuses on the aesthetics and politics of representation in queer cinema of migration, examining how the media of cinema constructs the lived experiences of queer immigrants and refugees on a global scale. His other research interests include trans cinema, queer theories, film theories, and German cinema.

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Beyond the 'Happy Hooker': Politics of Refusal and Ambivalence in the English Collective of Prostitutes Archive (1975-2019), Bishopsgate Institute

Emily Pickthall, University of Warwick, UK

Popular media representations of sex workers tend to hinge on oppositional tropes of 1) the 'passive victim', or 2) the 'happy hooker': the entrepreneurial, sex-positive worker empowered by sex work as a career, often in addition to possessing racial, class and educational privilege, etc. These tropes frequently occur in mainstream debates around sex work, typically structured by two competing discourses: that of sex industry (neo-)abolitionism and that of the sex workers' rights movement. The

argument of this presentation is that discourses of the contemporary sex workers' rights movement — and discursive formations of a rights-bearing 'sex working subject' — are more complex and heterogeneous than often portrayed. Historical strands of the movement have been underpinned by radical strategies of *refusal* and *ambivalence* in their politics, as opposed to liberal positions of respectability and 'pro-sex industry' mainstreaming of commercial sexual services. This presentation draws on a visual and Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) study of the English Collective of Prostitutes' (ECP) Archive (1975-2019) housed at the Bishopsgate Institute, London, supported by ten semi-structured oral history interviews conducted with active members. Incorporating the ECP's shared socio-historical lineage with the International Wages for Housework movement (WfH) movement, I examine how the ECP has discursively — and *recursively* — formed the deliberately ambiguous subject of the 'sex work(er-)activist' and 2) how notions of refusal (particularly the "refusal of poverty in all its forms") has shaped the ECP's discourse. I also discuss methodological issues in conducting an archival/oral history study of an active organisation in the contemporary sex workers' rights movement, including challenges in taking a CDA approach to the micro-politics of social movements and sex work studies more broadly. Finally, I consider potential benefits and limitations of incorporating strategies of refusal and ambivalence into contemporary media debates around the sex industries, particularly from a historical-materialist perspective.

Emily Pickthall (she/her) is an ESRC-funded postdoctoral researcher at the University of Warwick, Department of Sociology. Her thesis is titled 'What kind of work is sex work?: Examining sex work on a continuum of everyday labour practice and lived experience', utilising live sociological and creative research methods to explore sex workers' experiences of time, space and place. She is driven by questions of why/how individuals enter the sex industry in relation to contemporary constructions of sex/uality and desire, as well as broader structural and socio-economic inequalities. Emily has previously been involved in UK sex worker rights activism (the ECP, Decrim Now).

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Filling the Literary Line-Break: The Politics of Blank Space in Writing Sex

Melissa Wan, University of Leeds, UK

Historically, as today, bodily details of sexual experience often fall within the realm of the 'anti-narratable' – things which should not be told because of either social or literary

convention (Warhol 1994). Comparable to the difficulties narrating sex, disability often goes unrecognised in texts beyond its use as ‘narrative prosthesis’ – as metaphorical signifiers that avoid the social or political dimensions of living with disability (Mitchell and Snyder 2001). This lack of representation is only multiplied when considering sex and disability together, as ‘rarely are disabled people seen as desiring subjects or objects of desire’ (McRuer and Mollow 2012).

This paper explores these absences in language and literature, and asks how writers might use gaps – such as the literary line- or paragraph-break which stands in for sex and mirrors the cinematic convention of panning away from the couple in bed – as creative provocations, writing in what was rendered absent as though it was always there and thereby rebalancing available narratives. It attempts to demonstrate the role of storytelling in resisting what Robert McRuer calls ‘the contemporary spectacle of able-bodied heteronormativity’, and will be presented in two parts: the first on my practice-led research, and the final section for a reading of a story developed from this research (McRuer 2006).

Melissa Wan (she/her) is a writer and first-year doctoral student in the School of English at the University of Leeds. Her practice-led PhD explores narrative absence in relation to the writing of sex and to disabled bodies in fiction and is funded by the AHRC through the White Rose College of the Arts & Humanities. You can listen to her reading her most recent published story, *Ghost Story*, here: <https://open.spotify.com/episode/6ThclU8jx1AjP95AodaTuw>

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Censorship and the Role of the Media in the Perceptions of Sex and Disabled Individuals

Cavyn Mitchell, London, UK

The media has historically been used as a source of social control, creating, and policing social parameters. Using theories of power and stigma, this paper aims to discuss the perceptions of sex and the erroneous terminology which is often used to shield disabled individuals from accessing certain types of media. In doing so, a content analysis of the audio description (AD) within the television shows *Naked Attraction*, *Have I got News for you* and *QI* will be undertaken to compare disability access.

An additional aim is to explore how these expectations are perpetuated through representation (or lack thereof) within television to create power relationships and the impact this has on disabled

individuals both within and outside of the public eye. The shielding or censorship of correct terminology and accurate descriptions of genitalia from disabled individuals can be seen during the audio description on television shows such as *Naked Attraction*. The lack of thought for the access needs of disabled panelists in shows such as *Have I got news for you* and *QI* shows the power dynamic at play when disabled individuals enter or access television as a form of media. This additional layer of compounding power comes from the choices of what is described in television shows and more interestingly what is not. In audio descriptions, meanings can be lost when judgements about access are made primarily by individuals with no lived experience of those needs. This paper shows how ableism runs through society perpetuated by the media and the effects this has on the disabled community.

Cavyn Mitchell (He/They) is a London based doctoral researcher and community development coordinator. His research takes a feminist methodological framework to study intersecting transgender identity and disability issues within wider society. A further focus within his research is upon stigma and social experience. Research as a form of activism has been a theme throughout his academic career with his current thesis including autoethnographic material placed throughout. Cavyn is also an exec committee member for the Feminist Studies Association and works part time as a community development coordinator for Spectra's trans empowerment programme.

FRIDAY 6 OCTOBER, PANEL 2: PERFORMING (DIS)INTIMACIES

The Frenzy of the Intelligible: AI Sex in Her and Blade Runner 2049

Dr Laurence Kent, University of Bristol, UK

Her (Jonze, 2013) and *Blade Runner 2049* (Villeneuve, 2017) both feature sex scenes with AI. In *Her*, this is presented through a bodiless black screen, breath and moans of audio intercourse imitating a phone-sex session. In *BR2049*, an impossibility of touch between two non-human participants is compensated by a third body seamlessly syncing with a holographic AI. My paper explores how these scenes reveal new dimensions of what Linda Williams called the "frenzy of the visible." Cinema's invention sparked the rush to *see more* of bodies and desire, but central to this is a "blindness": the "inability to make the invisible pleasure of woman manifestly visible and quantifiable." This

contradiction is also found in the modes of expanding *intelligibility* staged in the aforementioned AI sex scenes. Whilst productive in developing futuristic models of relationships and sex, these forms of interaction are caught in a process of being subsumed back within a reactive mode of normative intelligibility. This involves a form of “blindness” to aspects of AI desire that escape the logic of the films. Opening up a space for expanding the realm of the intelligible thus involves moments where an excessiveness is bypassed, when these films reign in the concerns and thoughts of the AI by making them merely a foil for human endeavours, blips and signposts in masculine development. In this paper, reading for these excesses is the chosen method for understanding the aspects of the films that might gesture towards more radical forms of intelligibility, often outside of their own sense of narrative and purpose. The *frenzy of the intelligible* found in *BR2049* and *Her* can help us critique the logics of intelligibility that currently operate, their gendered and normative imperatives, as well as guiding an expansion of desire and care beyond conservative forms of kinship.

Laurence Kent is Lecturer of Digital Film and Television at the University of Bristol. In 2020, he completed his PhD in the Film Studies department of King's College London, exploring the metaphysics of Gilles Deleuze's cinematic philosophy. He has had articles published in *Film-Philosophy*, *Pli: The Warwick Journal of Philosophy*, *Frames Cinema Journal*, and *Cinema: Journal of Philosophy and the Moving Image*, amongst others. His current research is on the representation of sapient intelligence in contemporary popular film and the technics of cinema's own form of alien intelligence that makes this possible.

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Between Bodies: Coordinating Consensual Intimacies

Heath Pennington, University of California Santa Barbara, US; Queen Mary University, UK

To mediate: to intervene between people. How does the media mediate? How does mediatized sex mediate between bodies? In this paper, I look at the work of intimacy coordinators, who support consensual portrayals of intimacy and nudity on stage and screen. Emerging in the wake of the #MeToo movement, this new role in film, television, and theatre offers a developing and understudied framework for scholarly research. But while the praxis is vital, its insistence on negotiation and body autonomy may paradoxically also enact a politics of policing around bodies, consent, and so-called ‘adult’ entertainment.

As an interdisciplinary researcher working at the intersections of performance and gender studies, affect and queer theories, scholarship and practice, I draw on my ongoing research on consent within BDSM to illuminate sex in mediatized performances. My kink-informed methodology takes seriously the questions: what is consent, how do we do it, and how do our frameworks for consent simultaneously empower and constrain us? Meanwhile, my training, certification, and experience as an intimacy coordinator suffuse my desire to ask: how do intimacy professionals and their work impact mainstream and adult media, and what efficacy does that work have? How do we do sex on screen, and in what ways can this help us do intimacy better, both in performance and in everyday life? My work remains provisional, part of a larger project in which I argue that kinky and consensual intimacies in contemporary North American and Western European theater and performance display and disrupt hierarchical systems of identity and otherness.

Heath Pennington (they/them) is a doctoral candidate and Chancellor's Fellow at the University of California Santa Barbara, and a Visiting Postgraduate Research Associate at Queen Mary University of London. They hold MAs in Gender Studies from Central European University and in Performance and Culture from Goldsmiths University. Focusing on how consent works in kink and BDSM as well as intimacy choreography, their interdisciplinary research interests also include affect and queer theories, gender and performance studies, and embodiment. Heath is a certified intimacy professional, sex educator, creator, performer, and teacher, with publications in *Performance Research*, *Corpo-grafías*, and *Performance of the Real*.

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She Said, She Said: Silence Breaking, Performance Activism and Screening Women's Stories of Sexual Harassment

Dr Donna Peberdy, Solent University Southampton, UK

In a 5 October 2017 article for *The New York Times* based on interviews with eight women, investigative journalists Jodi Kantor and Megan Twohey broke the Harvey Weinstein story and fuelled the #MeToo movement. The article exposed decades of harassment, abuse and violence the now incarcerated Hollywood producer subjected female employees to, silencing assistants, executives and actresses with non-disclosure agreements and confidentiality clauses. Only two of the seven women named by the journalists agreed to be on record for the article; the rest 'declined to comment'. In 2019, prior to Weinstein's criminal trial, Kantor and Twohey published *She Said*, a memoir expanding

on the *NYT* article, where Jodi and Megan, writing about themselves in the third person, became the protagonists in the story. By the time the book was published, more than 80 women had come forward about Weinstein. Extending far beyond the individual perpetrator, *She Said* reveals the 'surround-sound complicity machine' (Faludi 2019) that implicates the institutional infrastructure of Hollywood. This complicity in crafting and enabling male abusers and the normalised and normative practices of exploitation in casting couch culture is being considered in reflective and reflexive ways in film and television texts that seek to make sense of the complexity of debates around #MeToo (Peberdy 2022). Drawing examples from *She Said* (Maria Schrader 2022 US), a drama adaptation of Kantor and Twohey's memoir, *Untouchable: The Rise and Fall of Harvey Weinstein* (Ursula Macfarlane 2019 UK), a documentary featuring interviews with Weinstein accusers, and *Women Talking* (Sarah Polley 2022 US), a drama adaptation of Miriam Toew's 'imagined response to real events', I explore here representations of silence breaking in relation to the concept of 'performance activism' and consider to what extent they can be read alongside examples of post-#MeToo performance art and protest, particularly those involving an interplay between silence and speaking out.

Dr Donna Peberdy (she/her) is Associate Professor of Performance, Sex and Gender at Solent University Southampton, UK. Her publications include *Masculinity and Film Performance: Male Angst in Contemporary American Cinema* (2011) and *Tainted Love: Screening Sexual Perversion* (2017). She is co-director of Screening Sex (screeningsex.com), co-series editor of Edinburgh University Press's *Screening Sex* book series and is currently editing a two-volume collection on *The Sex Scene* (forthcoming 2024). Donna was recently awarded a British Academy Mid-Career Fellowship for her project 'Screening Sexual Violence', which will examine film and television representations in the #MeToo era.

FRIDAY 6 OCTOBER, KEYNOTE: PROFESSOR CLARISSA SMITH

Humour, Pathos, and Provocation: Deconstructing Adult Material and Its Contradictions

In Channel 4's BAFTA nominated *Adult Material* (2020), Hayley Burrows has seemingly navigated the norms and expectations of motherhood and femininity while forging a successful career in porn as Jolene Dollar: that is, until she steps in to protect an industry newbie. As she calls out exploitation and lack of consent in the industry, Jolene sees all her relationships and her life implode. Set in the contemporary moment, *Adult Material's* mixture of humour and pathos owes much to the knowing titillations of 1970s sex comedies and to the nostalgia of prudish Britishness in dramas such as the

BBC's *A Very English Scandal* (2018) and *A Very British Scandal* (2021). Written by Lucy Kirkwood from an explicitly feminine perspective, *Adult Material* garnered considerable praise from television critics and industry insiders, nevertheless, some audiences rejected its hybrid approach; commentators complained of being misled by the promotional material which had emphasised the narrative's comic address. This presentation will explore the ways in which the series' mix of comedy, narrative and dialogue work to dramatise the tensions of contemporary debates about women's lives - *Adult Material* explicitly (though not always successfully) questions 'feminist' perspectives on sex work, while also exploring intersections of class and dynamics of agency and consent in the #MeToo era.

My research centres on sexual media and representations. I am interested in the textual formations of pornography and how those play out across different technologies; in how people access and engage with pornographic materials and with other forms of sexualized products. I'm also fascinated by seemingly constant demands for increasing regulation and censorship. I have written about the problems of attempts to legislate against pornography and have been active in opposing measures which seek to criminalise the imagination. Alongside this work, I have explored porn-star performances, the meanings of masochism in sexual storytelling, the idea of 'authenticity' in pornography, and how audiences speak about the sexual content they like. I am a founding co-editor of the Routledge journal *Porn Studies*, a member of the editorial boards of the *Journal of Gender Studies*, of *Sexualities*, of *Cine-Excess* and of *Participations*.

FRIDAY 6 OCTOBER, PANEL 3: HORNINESS AND SEXUAL AFFECTS

'Daddy is a State of Mind': Horniness, Stardom, and Pedro Pascal

Dr Julie Lobalzo Wright, University of Warwick, UK

There is a tendency to discuss stars in virtuous ways: stars are gods and goddesses; they are glamorous; and stars are representative of societal and cultural types in relation to gender, race, sexuality, etc. People desire stars and 'desire' has been utilised in many defining star studies texts, including *Stardom: Industry of Desire* (ed. Gledhill) and *Journey's of Desire: European Actors in Hollywood* (eds. Phillips and Vincendeau). However, this emerging work suggests that while stars have been conceptualised with an emphasis on their representativeness and passivity, they are much less frequently examined in relation to their active sexual appeal.

Horniness differs from desire in that wish fulfilment is central to desire, whereas horniness can be purely concerned with arousal, pleasure, and excitement. The relationship between the horny occurrence and stars/celebrities is the focus of paper through the case study of Chilean American actor, Pedro Pascal.

Pascal has been referred to as the 'Internet Daddy' because of his numerous parental roles (*The Mandalorian*; *The Last of Us*), but also his sex appeal that is promoted online by fans and traditional media outlets. Key to the bond between horniness and Pascal is the social media platform, TikTok, where content is predicted based on past views, especially on the 'FYP' ('For You Page'). While these short videos are consumed and recognised by a select audience, there is an apparent crossover to more mainstream media exhibited in various promotional interviews with Pascal, articles that discuss his sudden stardom (examples include *GQ*, *Forbes*, and *The New Yorker*), and his hosting role on *Saturday Night Live* (NBC) in February that included a skit about his TikTok fandom. It is my contention that Pascal is an example of a star who has embraced this contemporary horny era, representing a new type of stardom within celebrity culture.

Julie Lobalzo Wright is an Assistant Professor in Film and Television Studies at the University of Warwick. She is the author of *Crossover Stardom: Popular Male Music Stars in American Cinema* (2018), co-editor of *Lasting Screen Stars: Images that Fade and Personas that Endure* (2016) and *Musicals at the Margins: Genre, Boundaries, Canons* (2021). Her forthcoming work includes a chapter on Diane Keaton and the 'Annie Hall' character (2023), a chapter on Christopher Lee in *The Man With the Golden Gun* (2024), and a journal article about Goldie Hawn as a star-producer (tbd).

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"That Goes in the Butt Bank": Tina Belcher and The Horny Teen in a Queer Time and Place

Dr Matt Denny, University of Warwick, UK

This paper seeks to explore the representation of the ever present but under-theorised figure of the horny teen, with particular attention on the character of Tina Belcher (Dan Mintz) in the animated sitcom *Bob's Burgers* (2001 –). This paper frames "horniness" as distinct from related categories such as "desire" and "longing". Where desire and longing are structured according to a logic of absence and deferred fulfilment, horniness is characterised by immanence and an emphasis on immediate gratification.

Taking up J Halberstam's work on queer temporality, I will argue that horniness exists within a queer temporality outside of the logic of 'reproductive temporality' (2005: 17). Building on Kathryn Bond Stockton's work on the queer child (2009:2) and Halberstam's linking of queerness with childishness and adolescence (2011, 2005), I will suggest that representations of the horny teen can fruitfully be read as queer subjects existing outside of reproductive heteronormativity, while acknowledging the ways in which such figures might reinforce rather than oppose those structures.

Through a close reading of Tina Belcher, I will demonstrate how the depiction of her polymorphously perverse desires through self-authored erotic fiction, fantasies, and expressed desires represent horniness not as lack but as fulfilling in and of itself.

Matt Denny (he/him/his) is a Teaching Fellow in Film and Television Studies at the University of Warwick. Matt has written on the representation of the woman vampire in *Gender and Contemporary Horror in Film* (2019) and is co-author of the queer theory chapter in *The Oxford Handbook of New Science Fiction Cinemas* (2023).

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Horny Furniture and Renting by the Hour: The Motel as a Place of Sexual Permission and Play in American Cinema

Danielle Rae Childs, University of Warwick, UK

From its very early days on film, the motel has been depicted as a place operating outside the usual confines of polite, respectable, and moral American society. In an article for the 1940 issue of *American Magazine* entitled "Camps of Crime", FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover contends that tourist camps (an early name for motels) are "a new home of crime in America." Operating in near proximity to "Dine-and-Dance" roadhouses and nightclubs, Hoover argues that tourist camps are poised as invitations to sin for local "boys and girls, often from reputable families" who have gone out "for a night of thrills." While Hoover's article was a clear attempt to incite moral panic, Hollywood filmmakers nevertheless ran with the idea of the motel as a place of overdetermined sexual excitement and have spent the last eighty odd years rendering such "thrills" on screen.

It is therefore the primary aim of this paper to illuminate how sexual excitement, desire, and horniness are treated in the space of the motel. Though Hitchcock's *Psycho* (1960) and Kubrick's *Lolita* (1962) can be said to have initiated an indelible legacy of menacing sexual arousal within the motel, this paper identifies the underexplored perspective on the architecture as a place of sexual

permission and play as its starting point for inquiry (Backman Rogers 2020; Smith 2018). My investigation will be three-fold, including: 1.) an overview of American sex comedies that centre the motel (*Motel Confidential*, 1969; *Pink Motel*, 1982; *Paradise Motel*, 1985 *Motel Cactus*, 1997), 2.) a taxonomy of “horny” architecture in the motel such as vibrating beds, mirror-clad ceilings, “do not disturb” signs, ect., and 3.) an analysis of film tropes pertaining to motel sex, ie. illicit affairs, lovers’ trysts, prom night unions, and so on.

Danielle Rae Childs is a second-year PhD Candidate in Film and Television Studies at the University of Warwick. Continuing the research she began at the University of Oxford while completing a Master of Studies in Film Aesthetics, her doctoral project investigates the aesthetic value and cultural significance of the motel in American cinema. Grounded in the historical development of the motel within U.S culture, her research accounts for the setting’s enduring prominence, functions, and shifting meanings within the American film landscape, while also participating in film studies’ broader turn towards the relationship between cinema and architecture.