

# LGBTQ History Month - October 2020

October is LGBTQ+ History month, and the Committee on LGBTQ+ [Z] Issues in Linguistics (COZIL) is honored to present some programming this year to feature research on language and queer history in addition to a featured speaker event to link our linguistic understandings of gender and sexuality to historical events.

This year, we will feature a handful of blog posts, similar to what we did in June for Pride Month, with topics such as Coming Out (in honor of National Coming Out day on October 11), Language Before Stonewall, and issues of past moral panics around gay and lesbian citizens, among others.

To help get us started for the month, we wanted to remind everyone of Professor Bill Leap's 2019 pride blog post for the LSA about the linguistic history of Lavender Languages. This is in preparation for a talk Dr. Leap will be giving this month on Language Before Stonewall that ties into his [book of the same name](#), released in February of this year. This remotely accessible talk, coinciding with a Queer Studies class at Boise State University, will be Wednesday, October 14, from 4:30-5:45pm MT (3:30 PT, 6:30 ET). This talk will be a mix of Dr. Leap sharing his expertise on lavender language usage prior to Stonewall and a moderated discussion with Dr. Chris VanderStouwe, course instructor for the class at Boise State. It is free to attend, but requires registration at the link shared above.

Near the end of the month, COZIL is co-sponsoring a webinar on Queer and Trans Sociophonetics with the Culture, Language, and Social Practice [CLASP] Program at University of Colorado. This Webinar will be Saturday October 24th, from 3-5pm ET (12 PT, 1 MT). This webinar will include talks on sociophonetic research with understudied and marginalized queer identities— including transgender, non-binary, and non-White identities, and that explore the consequences of the ways that dominant theories and methodologies in sociolinguistics don't account for the full range of queer experiences.

For the rest of the month, look out for blog posts from some of the members of COZIL who will be sharing their own research relating to LGBTQ+ issues and history. We hope you can attend our co-sponsored speaker event and follow along with the blog posts we've curated for the month as we celebrate LGBTQ+ History month and recognize not only the amazing strides the queer community has made in the last several decades and those who paved the way for where we are today, but also be active collaborators in the continued struggle for rights and equality among members of the queer community, especially queer and trans BIPOC who still face rampant discrimination and inequalities.

Thank you for being a part of our LGBTQ+ History month programming. We're glad you're here.

Chris VanderStouwe, Boise State University, COZIL Member and LGBTQ+ History Month Editor

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## Trans/figuring the witch: On J.K. Rowling and the TERF mystique

*J. Inscoc*

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"This witch doesn't burn." On September 22, the now-infamous Harry Potter author Joanne K. Rowling tweeted a link to the Wild Womyn Workshop's transphobic storefront. It certainly wasn't the first time I'd seen or heard "witch" used in feminist circles. But for Rowling, the "witch" served as a unique misogynistic symbol: as "Feminazi," as "bitch," and as "TERF."

The specific application of "witch" to anti-trans activists in the UK—circulated by a transphobic author known for her wildly popular writings on witches and wizards—rings strange to my ear. This usage shifts the term's gendered meanings from one of a patriarchal power dynamic to one of biological essentialism mobilized to persecute trans folk. It is a shift exemplified in Rowling's gender distinction between the "witch" (the magical cis-woman) and the "wizard" (the magical cis-man)—a binary that simply doesn't reflect the history of persecution against witches of various gender and sexual identities.

For those apologists who see Rowling as the subject of her own personal witch hunt, know that Rowling's rhetoric has [consequences](#), and clearly she has become a contemporary voice in the minds of transphobic activists. Columnist Alyssa Rosenberg of *The Washington Post* for instance asserted "[There has never been a better time to read J.K. Rowling's books.](#)" Despite backlash from the trans community, as evidenced in one *Guardian* [article](#), "Troubled Blood has hit the No 1 spot in the UK's book charts, selling 64,633 copies in the five days to 19 September." Much of that stems from the popularity of TERF activism in the UK, but we can't ignore the immensity of Rowling's own platform.

I find the witch—and in general, the representations of the magical or demonic—rather queer. Take for instance the sea-witch [Ursula](#) (Pat Carroll) of Disney's *The Little Mermaid* (1989) who according to directing animator Ruben Acquine was modeled on drag queen Divine and acted as, writer Laura Sells' argued, "a composite of so many drag queens and camp icons—Joan

Collins, Tallulah Bankhead, [and] Norman Desmond.” See also the devilish [HIM](#) (Tom Kane) of *Powerpuff Girls* (1998–2005) fame, whose curled goatee, thigh-high boots, and wavering, high-pitched voice immediately signal the villain as gender (and narrative) trouble. These representations have a long, queer history which have been co-opted or erased in modern-day essentialist feminist rhetoric.

“Witch,” of course, has long held gendered connotations, drawing from the oppression of women in various patriarchal, religious contexts. Readers may be familiar with the phrase attributed to Tish Thawer’s *The Witches of BlackBrook* (2015): “We are the granddaughters of the witches you weren’t able to burn.” [Justyna Sympruch](#) called the witch a feminist “fantasmic Other.” Kristen J. Sollée’s *Witches, Sluts, Feminists: Conjuring the Sex Positive* (2017) is perhaps the most comprehensive modern work linking feminism to the witch, finding between the two a history of gendered oppression at the hands of patriarchal society. One [Guardian article](#) on the text even asked, “Are witches the ultimate feminists?”

Yet reading work on the witch, one interprets them as essentially female. On the de-gendered use of “witch hunt,” [political scholar Erin Cassese](#) sees in the 1950s a political turn away from the gendered “witch hunt”—that is, Sen. Joseph McCarthy’s (R-WI) “witch hunt” against suspected communists during the second Red Scare. What Cassese and others gloss over in the second Red Scare is its overlap with the Lavender Scare, persecution of suspected gay men in government positions. According to writer Matthew Mills, FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover’s Lavender Scare was severe enough that rumors of cross-dressing circulated late in his career: in Mills’ words, the [“witch-hunter became the hunted.”](#) Filmmakers have often encoded the witch-hunt against queer practice as an unspoken Otherness in their work. In television series like *Bewitched* (1964–72), enacted by queer actors like Agnes Robertson Moorehead (Endora) and Dick Sargent (Darrin Stephens), that sense of “something wrong” lingered in the representations of domestic space.

I am not the first to problematize the feminist witch. Rhiannon Mehan of *qcommunicate* cites the peculiar use of the witch imagery to affirm a white feminism in the West—as in TV series such as Netflix’s *The Chilling Adventures of Sabrina* (2018–20)—at the same time [people of color are accused of \(and tortured, murdered for\) witchcraft](#). Some modern Wiccan circles in the West still engage in gender essentialism, as in the controversy of the anti-transgender [Pussy Church of Modern Witchcraft \(PCMW\)](#).

Yet when I think of the religious persecution of folk based on accusation of the supernatural, I think about the particular ease with which the language of the witch fits the experiences of transgender, nonbinary, and other gender non-conforming individuals. The work on “witch-as-feminist” today elides the history of the cross-dressing witch with one of “natural-born” women resisting patriarchal stricture or utilizing masculine fashion to mask (or masc) their “real,” “natural” gender. It glosses the gender trouble of the witch as a “phallic woman.” It evades the queer sounds of the witch’s cackle and the possessed body. It ignores the work that transgender, non-binary, and gender non-conforming *must* do to negotiate their abject status.

## Conjuring Queer

The late-20th Century psychoanalytic approach to representation understood the witch as one instance of the phallic woman. As Noa Azulai writes in her aptly named “Dicks in a Box: The Enduring Fear of Penis-Snatching Witches” (2019), “Cultural anxiety about maintaining traditional masculinity continues to identify ‘penis-stealers,’ only now they are not only witches but sexual-assault survivors, transgender activists, or simply a society that is ‘feminizing’ and ‘weakening’ America’s men.” The castration anxiety seems oddly familiar to the gender essentialist’s fear of modern-day “phallic women” who appropriate femininity in transgressive, murderous fashion. Stories of [skin-stealing](#), cross-dressing, cis-women-murdering, trans-esque serial killers abound—in fact, one can look to Rowling’s new book, *Troubled Blood* (2020), as a modern example of this trope. Except the crossdresser encodes an alternate fear (on the part of cis-female TERFs), one of “masculinizing” UK women.

Azulai of course refers to the *Malleus Maleficarum*, the seminal text on the witch’s transgressions, though I find in this magical castration something particularly trans-feminine. According to the *Malleus Maleficarum*, the witch might invoke the devil to impose on presumably cis-gendered male individuals a “smoothly fashioned body... with its surface interrupted by no genital organ” (See Part I, Question IX). The text frames this feminization of man—again, juxtaposed against a fab crossdressing—as transgression, just as feminist writers revel in this feminization as a symbol of feminine power. It escapes the imagination to think those assigned male at birth could possibly desire that fate.

If we are to talk about the “monstrous-feminine,” to use horror scholar Barbara Creed’s terms, we should also talk about the “monstrous-trans,” the ways in which monsters have acted as contested allegories for trans, nonbinary, and gender non-conforming folk. According to scholar Anson Koch-Rein’s (2019), the monster acts as an apt trans metaphor: the “wrong-body” of Frankenstein’s monster, the skin-suits of *The Skin I Live In* and *The Silence of the Lambs*. The trans feminine monster is the abject Other of work like *Psycho* (1960) or *Sleepaway Camp* (1983–2008), whose horror relies on the violence of gender. Hear Buffalo Bill’s baritone (“Would you fuck me? I’d fuck me.”) and the bestial hiss and snarl emanating from Angela Baker’s face—a mask replica of actress Felicia Rose’s face—imposed on the nude masculine body.

As a student of language and voice—and as a product of a Christian, Southern United States family—I am fascinated by the intersections between linguistics, gender, sexuality, and religion/the supernatural. In his 2013 *The Devil Within*, Brian Levack details the reported effects of demonic possession on the “demoniac’s” voice, including an alteration of the speakers’ vocal aesthetics. The possessed feminine body emanated a masculine voice, “deeper and gruffer than the normal voice... [spoken] from their bellies or from very deep in their throats.” (It reminds me of discourses on transgender identity as [possession](#) or gender dysphoria as [psychic epidemic](#): the abject queer.)

I find this same in-between-ness, this abject and unnatural voice, in what singers may recognize as the *voce di strega*, or the “witch’s voice.” The *voce di strega* refers to, in [Anthony Frisell’s words](#), “[o]ne of the unusual, transitory phases which the *falsestto voice* goes through, on its way to becoming the *mixed voice*... so named because of its harsh, strident, unmusical sounds,” otherwise known as a “witch’s cackle.” On its way to the *soprano voice*, the “raw sounds [of the witch’s voice] gradually mellow and become totally transformed from ‘ugly and undesirable,’ into tones of superior quality and beauty.” To butcher the specific vocal range of the *voce di strega*,

that linguistic in-between-ness rings familiar for those of us fighting the acoustic limits of our bodies.

We are the witch's cackle. We are the "phallic woman," the enchanted "man." We are the gender monsters. To folk like Rowling and the broader community of trans-exclusive radical feminists, gender is inextricably linked to an immutable, *natural* sex. But if gender is inherently natural, inherently normal, then queer-folk like us? We're *paranormal*. *Supematural*.

## Trans/figuration

"Witch" doesn't just symbolize feminine resistance to patriarchal structures, but rather signifies a variety of meanings salient to those discomforted by their assigned gender: transformation, sexual freedom, and the mere possibility of a magical (monstrous) life. "Witch" represents, as *Spectrum South's* Kelly M. Marshall asserted, "a reclamation of power" for marginalized gender diverse peoples. As writer [Lewis Wallace](#) noted in 2017, the past decade has witnessed an increasing identification of trans, nonbinary, and intersex individuals with witch subculture and neo-paganism, particularly in the South. Williams writes, "queer and trans people are often pushed out of our communities of origin, and even the more progressive wings of Christianity are only barely starting to engage with trans issues. Magic and witchery are easy to claim, and they are also associated with a resistance to Christian hegemony." Especially for those of us in the South, the symbol of the witch offers a chance to break from deeply entrenched cultural restraints. In the words of journalist [Moira Donovan](#): "What is being a witch if not owning the right to be yourself?"

As a trans person, I feel that I, to use the title of Sonny Nordmarken's (2013) autoethnography, am "[Becoming Ever More Monstrous](#)." I see it as my body shifts in ways affirming and alien; I hear it as I transfigure this raw voice into magical practice. Increasingly, [trans folk reclaim the monster metaphor](#), with gender diverse individuals expanding the vocabulary of the monster as a powerful, abject figure resonant with their identities. (Shoutout to those *concubi*—a neologism for a vers or gender-nonconforming succubi/incubi meaning "to lie with"—who helped inspire my writing here.)

For queer folk haunting the boundaries of gender today, it's the season of the witch. See, for instance, *Ru Paul's Drag Race's* "[Monster Ball](#)." (This writer is personally still possessed by the chilling Yvie Oddly). In literature, especially the graphic novel, see Molly Ostertag's *The Witch Boy* (2017), Ariel Slamet Ries' *Witchy* (2014), Joamette Gil's anthology series *Power & Magic: The Queer Witch Comics Anthology* (2016), as well as Niki Smith's *The Deep & Dark Blue* (2020).

For those of us who see in gender trouble a spectre of the monstrous—some, as jaded childhood *Harry Potter* fans—She-Who-Will-Be-Named's transphobic views and gender-essentialist notions of the witch are deeply troubling. Because of the essentialist usage of "witch," the act of "burning the witch" becomes deeply linked with the recent outcries against a cancel culture. Rowling certainly subscribes to it, as evidenced by her signature on the *Harper's letter* this July. But of course, any trans, nonbinary, or gender non-conforming person can tell you that the "open debate" on our rights is moreso [open season](#).

# “The Boys of Boise” Scandal: History, Language, and Legacies of Moral Panic

*Dr. Chris VanderStowe, Boise State University*

When thinking of LGBTQ+ History, the most readily available moment in our collective memories is typically the Stonewall Riots, long seen as the catalyst for the gay liberation movement, and the beginning of pride celebrations throughout the United States and the world. However, much of what made Stonewall possible happened in the decades leading up to the infamous raid on the Stonewall Inn in 1969.

The 1950s and 1960s saw many examples of police raids, arrests of members of the gay community, and enforcement of draconian “Crimes Against Nature” laws, often leading to the arrests of hundreds of queer individuals in cities throughout the country. One of the earliest moments of widespread scandal and moral panic around homosexuality, however, is often less known outside of its home region. Now known as “The Boys of Boise” scandal, dubbed so by John Gerassi’s 1965 [book of the same name](#), what started as the arrest of three men accused of sexual acts with underage boys became what has been called a “witch-hunt” that lasted over a year. [In the end](#), dozens were arrested, charged, and convicted amid interviews with over 1,500 homosexual men in the area, the exodus of dozens of others, and a city councilman’s son being removed from West Point, eventually leading to his suicide. Occurring during a post-war period of McCarthyism that featured many “moral panic” moments, especially around sodomy and other sexual activities, the arrests and subsequent “witch-hunt” led to calls from the Idaho Stateman’s editorial board to [“crush the monster”](#), and became a widely publicized moment of gay panic and hysteria. In fact, legacies of this scandal still exist today, as the crimes against nature laws that created the 1955 uproar are still on the books in Idaho despite 2003’s [Lawrence v. Texas](#) ruling that such statutes are unlawful. Just last month, the ACLU [filed a lawsuit against Idaho](#) for its enforcement of these sodomy laws in requiring a plaintiff to register as a sex offender for an out-of-state conviction from more than 20 years ago. And in the past year, the Idaho State Legislature has continued Idaho’s legacy of anti-LGBT sentiment, prosecution, and legislation through the passage of [several anti-trans bills](#), most of which have been challenged in courts and are [currently unable to be enforced](#).

As a young-ish queer academic moving from coastal California to Boise in late 2015 to begin my position at Boise State, I was unaware at the time of the history surrounding this scandal, or that it had even taken place, despite having been engaged in queer linguistics and queer studies for several years. Now, however, it is a cornerstone to my courses that involve historical understandings of queer life, and it remains a historical event that many Idahoans are familiar with. It has also been referred to as an event that “a generation of gay men grew up haunted by” (Randal & Virta 2007) due to its widespread publicity and the long-running nature of the witch-hunt that took place.



The language that surrounded the events of 1955 was stark and foreboding, with claims of a pervasive “homosexual menace” and an “underworld” of hundreds of boys affected. While now described frequently as a “witch-hunt” due to the fact that the majority of those arrested and convicted were guilty only under the statutes that made gay sex illegal, at the time the initial reports greatly exaggerated the reality of the situation. Only later was it made clear that the majority of acts involved legal adults and involved only a few individuals (Schneider 2008). However, using language and tactics that frequently paralleled other post-war panics such as the red scare, what was a relatively benign and small-scale situation involving only a few young men became a national story that drew a 14-month investigation and framed gay men and any non-normative sexual expressions as deviations that must be crushed. Much of the rhetoric still heard in conservative circles today to uphold a heteronormative family structure, including fear-stoking claims that gay men are all “child molesters”, can be linked back to the moral panic that was created during this time. These ideologies and the perpetuation of cold war-era rhetoric and [panic defenses](#) is perhaps one of the most insidious legacies of the scandal that continues today.

A few decades after the Boys of Boise scandal, another less widely known series of events took place in Boise surrounding seven police officers removed from their positions on “[suspicions of lesbianism](#)” in the Boise Police Department. While the women sued in Federal court and eventually won, they were not reinstated and had endured a lengthy period of intense scrutiny and investigation. During this time, a local gay bar had opened, and even though this was years after Stonewall, local officers would still enter the bar to check IDs and intimidate patrons; even today, many who were part of this second period of “panic” in Boise fear that there continues a maintained sense of homophobia and moral fear underlying the seemingly more liberal nature of Boise compared to the rest of the state today. (Scott, p.c.) Despite the media attention and panic created at the time of this second series of events, much of this story has been kept from widespread awareness until recently, in part because of a gag order still in place on details of the federal case. However, members of what are now called “The Forgotten Boise 7” are working on [creating a documentary](#) (slated for a 2021 release) on the events surrounding this iteration of “moral panic” that has largely been erased from our local history.

Over the years, the details surrounding the events from 1955 have been brought back up in local and national news despite views by some surviving family members of those affected and other local citizens claiming it tarnishes the reputation of the city. (Schneider 2008) (It should be mentioned here that Boise is notorious for having an atmosphere of being what is called “Boise Nice”, where surface-level kindness and respectability politics are expected to prevail over any sort of acknowledgement of our region and state’s history of white supremacy and violence against minorities – diving into the details of this could be an entirely separate post for another day). Most notably in recent history, the details of the Boys of Boise panic were revived during the 2007 scandal involving Idaho senator Larry Craig, who was arrested “for conduct which the arresting officer believed was intended to convey a desire to engage in sodomy in an airport bathroom.” (Chazan 2008) In particular, an [op-ed](#) in the New York Times by Seth Randal and Alan Virda reminded readers nationwide of the 1955 scandal, linking Craig’s actions to these past events.

In the local media, the events from 1955 resurface every several years as other events harken back to the panic that was induced from the original scandal in their own ways. These include

the scandal surrounding Larry Craig (2007), the ongoing fight to “Add the Words” gender identity and sexual orientation to our state’s human rights declaration (ongoing since 2010), unsuccessful calls by far-right state legislatures to remove any and all diversity programming at Boise State or risk losing state funding (2018-2019), this year’s passage of several anti-trans bills through the state legislature now being challenged in the courts, and even last month’s previously mentioned use of the same crimes against nature laws used in the past to force someone to register as a sex offender for a consensual sex act from a time before *Lawrence v. Texas*. What may seem like distant history to some continues to rear its discriminatory and inflammatory face to others, especially in an ultra-conservative state like Idaho.

For all of the history that can be told, all of the language surrounding such scandals and “moral panics” of the era leading up to Stonewall, all of hidden forms of language and signs used during these decades in the name of safety and preservation, and all of the progress made since the first brick at Stonewall was thrown, we are still reminded constantly in today’s world of the dangers that persist. We can see and hear the use of rhetoric similar to that found in the 1950s, the use of similar argumentation to the panics of the 1950s and 1960s in current iterations of anti-LGBT (and especially anti-trans) bills at the state level, and more.

I like to think of Queer History month as a time not only for reflection and remembrance, but also for reminders of how far we have yet to come, and how important it is to stand up for those within the queer community at the highest risk for continued persecution and marginalization. As some aspects of the queer experience become normalized, it is easy to forget the dangers that still exist for many within the queer community and the reality that many of the legal battles that have been won for the LGBT community thus far primarily benefit white, cisgender, and able-bodied gay men and lesbian women. We should use our history as a reminder of the importance of intersectional approaches to liberation and justice, and we should continue to fight for those within our community at the highest risk. After all, as poet Emma Lazarus - author of the sonnet featured on the Statue of Liberty - wrote, “Until all of us are free, we are none of us free,” words from long ago that ring truer than ever today.

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# I'm a 'cut-sleeve': Coming out from a POC perspective

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What is coming out? I begin every interview with this question in my research project, 'positioning in gay immigrants' coming-out narratives.' Raising this question in the discussion about coming out for people of color (POC) in the US and abroad is an important step. That's because we might have a general idea of what it means, but its varied definitions show how coming out can be nuanced, yet sometimes taken for granted. When Sedgwick calls the closet "the defining structure for gay oppression in this century," she's not only referring to the marginal(ized) position of sexual minorities but critiquing the binarism it's built upon.[1] Problematizing coming out doesn't dismiss its purposes; instead, it illuminates what it does, how it works, and why it matters, especially for underrepresented populations. While the expression of same-sex desire can be found worldwide in various forms, describing its disclosure as 'coming out' or disclosing it at all may not be so universal. Indeed, in the US, coming out as an activist strategy has its unique historical background. It has been imbricated with the US identity politics in the post-Stonewall movements to increase the visibility of sexual minorities in public. [2][3] With some scholars examining coming out outside of the English-speaking regions, the US-based model and its associated Western identity categories are being reevaluated (hence the scare quoted 'gay').[4][5]

When ethnicity and geography are factored in, coming out (narratives) can be structurally different. In language and sexuality studies, Liang compares 'gay' college students' coming-out narratives and observes an ethnically correlated distinction: while European Americans tend to dwell on the inner conflict with their 'gay' feelings, Asian Americans downplay this inward-looking component and focus on disclosing their same-sex desire to others. She attributes this finding to cultural differences: the former may have internalized homophobic values before they become aware of their same-sex attraction, which leads to an internal struggle for reconciliation, as opposed to the latter, who emphasize harmonious social relations.[6] Investigating tongzhi as a label for sexual minorities in Hong Kong, Wong notes that the interviewees' coming-out narratives are characterized by the code of silence, such as ellipsis and dietic expressions.[7] This runs contrary to the Western notion of celebrating one's same-sex desire as coming-out narrative develops into a genre. These findings call into question how effective and resonant the

contemporary activism around coming out and identity is when it comes to individuals of different ethnic and cultural backgrounds. Of course, the two examples do not endorse the dualistic view that the East and the West are opposite each other; it should be understood that, when intersected with ethnicity and geography, desires are hierarchized differently and, coming out accordingly gains varying significance and takes on diverse forms.

In this respect, coming out holds a marginal positionality for its ambivalence (e.g., pride/shame). [8] Therefore, positioning, the process of discursively locating the self in certain story lines by performing speech acts, can shed new light on the way we conceptualize coming out and the telling of it. Despite its oft-claimed empowering role in the West, coming out doesn't always carry the same connotations or produce the same results (forces of speech acts) when different cultural scripts (story lines) are involved. Coming from Taiwan, where coming out isn't encouraged in the media, I found foreign the 'out and proud' advocacy in the US that positively promoted it. This sparked my interest in how other same-sex desiring men who came to the US later in their lives experience coming out. As I continued my research, I learned that although many participants had been cognizant of their own same-sex desire before migration, they acquired new sets of vocabularies for expression only afterward. When the Indian participants say, 'there was no concept of coming out back in India,' it implies that the US-based model affords them a new story line to (re)formulate and (re)articulate their desire. For them, coming out as a speech act reconfigures their positioning in terms of sexuality as well as ethnicity and culture. Hence, they don't simply come out as 'gay' but as 'gay Indians.' Their accounts offer a new perspective on being 'gay' and coming out in the US.[9]

Rather than Western identity categories, coming out may also be achieved through other culturally specific terms that reference historical accounts or literature. In one narrative, an Indian interviewee was confronted with the inquiry about marriage by his Taiwanese lab mate, to which he replied, "I'm a cut-sleeve." [10] He assumed that this would be an intelligible referent for the interlocutor, and he was right when his lab mate in turn came out to him. The Chinese idiom, '斷袖之癖' /tuan ciou tɕɿ p'i/ (the predilection of the cut sleeve), comes from a historical account wherein an emperor's male lover fell asleep against his sleeve, so the emperor cut it off lest he disturb him. The idiom has then bore the signification of homosexuality. However, traditionally, this was never a source of identification for ancient Chinese men who engaged in homosexual behaviors. Thus, the interviewee's appropriation of the idiom is twofold: first, the Chinese index of homosexuality is approximated to the status of an identity label, which then fits into the intransitive 'I am' construction for his coming out speech act to be acknowledged in the US context. In this sense, the expression is not just a literal translation but a transformation of how one understands homosexuality from 'what one does' to 'what one is.'

This is the reality that many non-heterosexual POC, immigrants or not, deal with. For example, Human Rights Campaign (HRC) provides resources for 'LGBTQ' Asian and Pacific Islander Americans.[11] Still, the above issue remains in HRC's portrayal of coming out: the identity-centered approach to coming out and understanding sexuality has its roots in the US-based social movements, which requires translation of both the language and the concept. In addition, the proliferation of coming-out narratives gives rise to the prototype that treats 'gayness' as an absolute variable in storytelling and 'outness' as an ultimate outcome in these narratives. This brings us back to the problematization of coming out: to what extent is the current activism and research informed by this cautionary scrutiny for the former to be relatable to individuals outside

of the prototype and for the latter to be mindful of the nuances?

In the conventional equation, coming out leads to a 'positive gay experience.' [12] When this practice is laden with moral values against the backdrop of identity politics, being 'out' is considered responsible to the community and honest to oneself, whereas staying 'closeted' is a sign of shame, a phenomenon that Rasmussen terms 'the coming out imperative.' [13] Yet, Decena explains the sexuality of 'gay' Dominican immigrants in New York City with the 'sujeto tácito' (tacit subject) in Spanish grammar. [14] Homosexuality is tacitly understood and assumed by their family with their displays of same-sex affection instead of explicit categorization through verbal disclosure. Such dynamics blurs the manifestation of a 'gay' subjectivity in the speech act of coming out within its own story line for positioning. In fact, this is reminiscent of what society is said to be like for 'cut-sleeves' in ancient China. For some same-sex desiring men, they would get married and have children to fulfill their duties, and their family would look past their affairs with other men. Again, this shouldn't be interpreted in a dualistic way that paints the East as more tolerant. Apparently, heterosexuality was still privileged, but coming out wouldn't be necessary when homosexuality found a space for existence in this hierarchy.

Decena's study is another example that the US-based model of coming out is but one means of organizing (homo)sexuality. At a time when most language and sexuality research designates coming out as a process of sexual identity construction, [15] it begs the question: is it possible to decenter the identity-centered theorization of coming out so that the studies cited herein are presented as variations rather than deviations from the norm? For many POC, they do not necessarily reside in the story line where coming out is imbued with legitimacy, but that doesn't mean their sexualities, albeit irreducible to normative identity labels, are less valid. I hope that, by proposing positioning theory as a heuristic, this article has indicated some directions for answering the question of what coming out is from a non-heterosexual POC perspective.

To conclude, a film analogy that juxtaposes *Love, Simon* (2018) with *Moonlight* (2016) should illustrate the main point here. The protagonists in both films are shown to express same-sex desire. However, they have rather different ideas about identity and coming out. Simon identifies with the label 'gay' from the outset, and the eventual coming out affirms his identification. Conversely, Chiron in *Moonlight* navigates the derogation of homosexuality, in which coming out is neither ideal nor practical. How does activism reach them respectively, and how would research handle these contrasting positions? I have started to lay the groundwork for addressing this issue in this blog post, which begins with understanding how desires are hierarchized in certain sociohistorical context to create sexualities that may or may not necessitate coming out.

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