

THE McGill Daily

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Queer History Month special



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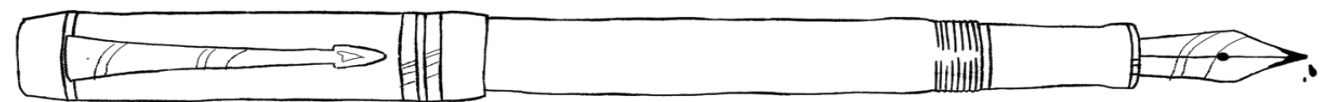
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Queer Issues Are Human Issues

Content warnings: sexual assault, genocide, suicide

Queer issues go beyond the question of identities and labels. Attacks on queerness are attacks on humanity as a whole. Our activism, therefore, must consider how some identities overlap between marginalized groups. In particular, queer identities are often impacted within social and political conflicts arising from prevailing attitudes toward other ethnic and racial groups. This Queer History Month, we must remember that the oppression of these other communities ultimately affects queer issues too.

When we consider the genocide in Gaza, the rise in global fascism, or the mounting housing insecurity closer to home, queer issues are never as far away as we think. On October 18, seven million people mobilized across the United States in “No Kings” protests against the loss of human rights resulting from U.S. President Donald Trump’s authoritarian policies. Amidst the signs condemning media censorship and government corruption, protesters raised manifestos against the expansion of Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) operations. ICE has been under fire for their rampant mistreatment of queer and trans immigrants in the agency’s detention facilities. Queer detainees in the Southern Louisiana ICE processing centre have shared accounts of sexual harassment and assault, including being forced by officers to perform oral sex, being stripped naked, and mocked, and being touched inappropriately while performing labour tasks. The abuse endured by queer immigrants in ICE facilities is the result of their intersectional identities as members of both marginalized groups. The ongoing activism protesting ICE’s abuses of power does not address the whole of the issue as long as we fail to mention the systematic abuse of queer people in processing centres across the U.S. With Queer History Month and No Kings Day taking place simultaneously, it becomes evident that the fight against anti-democratic governmental backsliding and the struggle against the oppression of queer immigrants are deeply entangled.

Here in Montreal, queer individuals have raised many concerns about the need for a more nuanced approach to local activism efforts, especially as pertains to Palestine. Israel’s “pinkwashing” strategy, which seeks to “conceal the continuing violations of Palestinians’ human rights behind an image of modernity signified by Israeli gay life,” has given queer activists around the world the additional challenge of preventing their causes from being used to justify the genocide in Gaza. In May 2024, Helem Montréal, a 2SLGBTQ+ organization made of members of SWANA communities (Southwest Asia and North Africa), publicly cut ties with Montreal Pride, stating that the organization had failed to address the issue of Pride events potentially being co-opted to vehiculate the ongoing oppression of Palestinian rights.

Meanwhile, membership to the organization Queers for Palestine has been increasing across Canada, specifically in major cities like Toronto, Montreal, and Ottawa. Members aim to stand in solidarity with the Palestinian people’s struggles for liberation, and with the plight of queer Palestinians in particular. As the Queers for Palestine Ottawa website states: “We aim to centre and amplify the voices of Palestinians, in Palestine and in diaspora, who are and have been leading the calls to liberate their people.” However, this

stance has been ill-received by many others concerned for queer rights, with critics often raising the issue of the abysmal treatment of queer people under regimes across the Middle East and North Africa (MENA.) In a 2023 article, journalist Armin Navabi writes that support for Palestinian liberation goes hand-in-hand with support for the Islamist resistance group Hamas, positing that “the deep-seated radical Islamist ethos driving the organization...if unbridled, would jeopardize the very freedoms cherished by LGBT people across the developed world.” But this discourse fails to acknowledge that the state of Israel has never actually attempted to address the criminalization of homosexuality in the MENA region, and has instead been using such rhetoric as a smokescreen to justify the ongoing genocide.

For Canadians, rising socioeconomic concerns – including job and housing security – also disproportionately affects those in the queer communities. 2SLGBTQ+ Canadians are more than twice as likely to experience visible homelessness than their straight, cisgender counterparts, with queer women in particular being four times as likely. Trans Canadians are twice as likely as the general public to experience extreme poverty and homelessness, and more than half of the trans population has difficulty meeting the financial demands to retain housing. This issue is especially pertinent to queer youth, as approximately one out of every three homeless young Canadians identifies as 2SLGBTQ+.

Many Montrealers have been subject to the struggle of remaining housed, and the city has seen a dramatic increase in visible homelessness within the past seven years. Queer people, specifically Black, Indigenous, People of Color (BIPOC) who also identify as 2SLGBTQ+, face increased struggles in finding secure housing. Those left with nowhere to go are often forced into “hidden homelessness,” leaving them to resort to unstable and often dangerous strategies for short-term habitation. As well as facing higher risks and more barriers associated with housing access, queer unhoused people have a unique set of needs. Many 2SLGBTQ+ youth specifically struggle with dramatically higher rates of mental health issues or suicide, and being unhoused makes it increasingly difficult for them to access essential mental, physical, and sexual health services. Not having a safe space solely for members of the queer community who are struggling with housing insecurity leaves an already vulnerable population susceptible to additional violence and discrimination on the streets or in shelters. Despite the many shelters and resource systems available to unhoused people in Montreal, there are currently no shelters in Quebec offering emergency services exclusively catered to the needs of 2SLGBTQ+ people. Though there are plans for such shelters being discussed, notably the Lambda House Project, there is still a long way to go in ensuring that the needs of 2SLGBTQ+ unhoused people are adequately met.

All queer issues are human issues. When we think about confronting oppression across the country and across the world, we must consider the queer people who are marginalized in other ways. Fighting oppression is our collective responsibility, and this Queer History Month it is essential to consider the intersectionality of queer identity in our activism. When we have these conversations, we need to do so with nuance in order to facilitate the wider discussion that so many queer voices are a part of.

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4 The Daily's (Last-Minute) Guide to

A dive into the top five mayoral candidates to



Luc Rabouin

Coming from incumbent Valérie Plante's party, Luc Rabouin came out in the lead in Projet Montréal's leadership race this past March to become the new party leader. He has held political office for five years, which began after his victory as the elected borough mayor of Plateau-Mont-Royal in 2019.

Rabouin's push to run his campaign on the homelessness crisis and affordable housing in the city is what ultimately led to his victory in becoming party leader for Projet Montréal this year. He claims to be driven by a wide array of issues including environmental policy, urban planning, and participatory democracy.

Cost of Living

When it comes to affordable housing and the cost of living, many Montrealers feel skeptical of the possibility for change under another Projet Montréal term. Since 2018, housing has become increasingly inaccessible, with the average cost of rent almost 120 per cent higher than when Plante took office in 2018. In that same time period, the number of unhoused people has also increased by 10 per cent each year.

Rabouin claims that his office will bring affordability back to Montreal. He intends to launch a \$100 million fund that would support nonprofits in building out socialized housing which would replace Plante's 20-20-20 affordable housing bylaw that mandated all new



Soraya Martinez Ferrada

Soraya Martinez Ferrada is a former Liberal Member of Parliament for Hochelaga and former Minister responsible for the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec, ending her tenure in early 2025 to lead Ensemble Montréal. Having begun her political career in 2005 as a Montreal City Councillor for Saint-Michel, she has twenty years of experience within the Quebec political scene.

Martinez Ferrada is currently polling ahead of the other mayoral candidates for Montrealers' top pick, according to a Segma Research for Radio-Canada poll conducted on Thursday, October 16. She is currently the candidate with the most voter support at 26 per cent, compared to Rabouin who is at 18 per cent. Although her platform is largely centered on housing-related issues, giving herself the title la mairesse du logement, or "the mayor of housing," her reputation among

Montrealers took a hit this May after having violated Quebec law by illegally collecting a security deposit from one of her renting tenants.

Cost of Living

In order to tackle the lack of affordable housing and the rising cost of living, Martinez Ferrada claims she will invest \$1 million in community organization and housing initiatives, such as La Maison du Père, a rent assistance bank in Montreal. She has also pushed forward a housing bank initiative that would reserve affordable housing units on the market with the intention of transferring the leases to those without housing on July 1, which is when most leases in Montreal begin. In tension with her history as a



Craig Sauvé

Transition Montréal's mission is vastly different from both Ensemble Montréal and Projet Montréal. Led and founded by Craig Sauvé, former city councillor for Projet Montréal and now vice-chair of the STM's Board of Directors, this party is attempting "to offer [Montrealers] a new voice: a constructive voice, a voice that focuses on collaboration and good ideas."

The party is strongly rooted in its progressive vision, proposing a divestment plan from the genocide in Palestine and the war in Ukraine. Sauvé's platform is ambitious in reenvisioning transit for Montrealers, implementing municipal electoral reforms, establishing safer school environments, offering social transit fares for low-income residents, and imposing higher property taxes on Montreal's ultra-wealthy landowners.

Sauvé has caught the attention of many young progressives in the city with his radical approach to public transportation, even denouncing Quebec's ban on gender-neutral language in provincial communications, which other candidates have yet to do. Major concerns about Transition Montréal surround the party's ability to follow through with the strong claims they have campaigned on.

Cost of Living

Sauvé has campaigned on a progressive housing policy that is geared towards improving tenant conditions within the city. Transition Montréal is looking to establish Bâtir Montréal, a paramunicipal body that will oversee the construction of public and community housing alongside local non-profit



Gilbert Thibodeau

Gilbert Thibodeau, the founder of his party Action Montréal, is running again in this year's municipal elections after having received less than 1 per cent of the vote during the 2021 election cycle. Thibodeau's platform leans center-right, with his proposed agenda aiming to reduce the number of elected officials in Montreal, increase surveillance efforts among Montreal police, and eliminate a number of bike paths and Bixi stations to clear up street spaces.

Cost of Living

To address the increased cost of living, Action Montréal aims to support social economy organizations such as the *Unité de travail pour l'implantation de logement étudiant*, the *Fédération des coopératives de Montréal*, and the *Société de développement Angus* in providing affordable housing. The party has claimed they are opposed to rent registries, and intend to respond to the housing crisis through strengthening rent transparency, protecting tenants against renovations, encouraging tenant autonomy, and facilitating cooperating and non-profit initiatives.



Jean-François Kacou

Futur Montréal is the newest centrist party in the running, founded just this year, with the goal of "doing politics differently, with bold ideas, pragmatic solutions and leadership rooted in fairness, accountability and inclusion." Jean-François Kacou has an extensive political background, having served as the executive director of Ensemble Montréal and as an elected member of the Canadian Commission for UNESCO. Futur Montréal unveiled its party platform on October 23, with key policy areas including tackling the unhoused crisis, securing public transportation, and bringing affordable housing to Montrealers.

Cost of Living

Futur Montreal is looking to levy on luxury housing, moving subsequent tax revenue into a transparent fund dedicated for building social housing. The party have been strongly opposed to the current 20-20-20 bylaw and instead wants to focus on converting underused spaces into rent-controlled student housing zones.

o Montreal's Municipal Elections

appear on the ballot this upcoming election day

residential developments to designate at least 20 per cent of units as social housing, 20 per cent as affordable housing, and 20 per cent as family housing. This bylaw, which was adopted in 2021, was unable to fulfill its goal of creating more affordable housing due to its lack of enforcement, and had also eased some of its requirements for new development projects. Rabouin's focus has been on incentivizing property owners to allocate more of their lands into housing, as well as forcing landlords to keep their properties on the market through a tax on unoccupied housing. For low-income homeowners and elderly residents, his plan will also include a property-tax deferral program.

Unhoused Crisis

The homelessness crisis was presented as one of Projet Montréal key agendas, as revealed in the party's electoral platform released earlier this month. Rabouin pledges to eliminate homelessness in Montreal by 2030 by doubling the funding granted to organizations that work with unhoused populations. He also proposed to add 1,000 total social and transitional housing units, 500 of which would be modular units, which are smaller scale forms of transitional housing that are quicker and cheaper to construct.

Public Transit

Furthermore, as the Société de transport de Montréal (STM) prepares for another strike to be held next month, public transit has risen as another key area of concern for Montrealers. Rabouin has announced his plans for an "efficient bus network" system called the Réseau express bus that would implement a reserved bus lane and operate 24/7. Additionally, his campaign supports the construction of three new tram lines that are already under development, including the east-end tramway project, increasing the frequency of the Metro during rush hour, and making all Metro stations universally accessible.

landlord, as well as her connections with the landlord lobbyist group CORPIQ, she states that her party is committed to protecting renters' rights and aims to establish a municipal rental registry. In addition to these larger projects, her campaign is also running on assisting first-time homeowners with buying property by granting them tax breaks as well as loans.

Unhoused Crisis

Under the wing of Martinez Ferrada, Ensemble Montréal seeks to establish a Tactical Homelessness Intervention Group that will approach the unhoused crisis in the city as a long-term goal. The party looks to work with the Montreal municipal police, Service de police de la Ville de Montréal, to create public safety committees alongside citizens, community organizers, and borough representatives.

Within her first 100 days, Martinez Ferrada announced plans for a protocol to manage homeless encampments that would be developed with community organizations, with the promise of ending encampments in the city within the next four years. She also intends to increase the city's annual budget that addresses homelessness to \$30 million, with a \$10 million matching fund in the private sector to attract contributions that would fund homelessness initiatives.

Public Transit

One of Ensemble Montréal's key policy platforms is to promote safe and efficient transportation. They have focused their energy on making the Metro system more efficient, specifically transways on the eastern side of Montreal. The party has stated that it plans to increase the

frequency of Metro services as well as "improve the comfort, speed, and safety of users," which local transportation planning experts have found to be a large undertaking. In addition, Martinez Ferrada claims she wants to reduce the STM's "unnecessary spending."

With regards to active transit, Martinez Ferrada had been headstrong on the biking front, committing to launch an audit of Montreal's bike path network in her first 100 days. She is looking to secure safe bike paths by allocating funds to bring most routes "up to standard," while eliminating ones that are found to be potentially dangerous.

to develop a \$10 million rental assistance bank with a public rent registry. He aims to make the process of receiving assistance more efficient by creating a "one-stop housing portal" to centralize permitting applications, as well as simplify the permits co-operates and non-profits apply for. Additionally, Sauvé intends on taxing the city's ultra-wealthy by subjecting single-family properties valued at over \$3.5 million to 1.25 times the standard tax rate.

Unhoused Crisis

At a debate on October 9, Sauvé announced that he would declare a state of emergency to allow unhoused people to move into vacant buildings and hotels as sources

of temporary shelter. With regards to homeless encampments, he noted explicitly his plans to ban police interventions on encampments and replace them with community initiatives led by a team of social workers and outreach staff. Longer-term efforts consist in establishing a detailed plan for how to approach encampments with more than 10 tents, consulting with local and unhoused populations on decisions regarding those encampments. Transition Montréal estimates allocating a total of \$20 million annually to combat homelessness.

Public Transit

Public transportation is one of Transition Montréal's key priorities. The party proposes extending the orange and green Metro lines to the Bois-Franc REM station and to

LaSalle and Lachine, respectively. This is a part of Sauvé's vision to restructure the Grand Sud-Ouest. They have also proposed the "social fare system" that would make public transit more affordable for low-income residents, giving those with an adjusted annual income of under \$47,500 the reduced monthly fare of \$62.75. For transit infrastructure, Transition Montréal is looking to invest in rapid bus corridors and create reserved lanes on routes where light-rail network rails are planned to be built. Furthermore, they hope to establish a kilometre-based tax on vehicles, with tax revenue going towards maintaining roads and developing more extensive public transit systems.

Unhoused Crisis

Action Montréal recognizes the severity of the unhoused crisis and aims to utilize civil society organizations, such as churches and mosques, to provide these populations with temporary housing. To address the current crisis, Action Montréal's platform states that the party will introduce "transitional centres" in the next two years. These are described as secure hubs located in 80 vacant Office municipal d'habitation de Montréal buildings that would provide key health and sanitary services for "three profiles: people facing economic hardship, those with addictions, or those with mental health challenges." With the help of social workers, the party additionally states

that they will offer personalized rehabilitation programs for individuals belonging to these profiles. In terms of mitigation efforts, Action Montréal plans to provide rent assistance and at-risk youth programs.

Public Transit

Thibodeau has been vocal about reducing the number of bike lanes in the city in order to promote and protect drivers. In order to achieve this, he has proposed the removal of Bixi rental stations between December 1 and March 15. Action Montréal also plans to make car parking more accessible through the implementation of price caps on parking meters at \$2 per hour, with free marking meters from Fridays at 9:00 AM to Mondays at 9:00 AM.

Unhoused Crisis

Futur Montréal's platform outlines plans to create a Social Intervention Service (SIS) which would unite over 60 organizations already active in addressing the unhoused crisis. The SIS's projects would include a pilot project that would convert vacant industrial buildings that would temporarily provide immediate shelter for the city's unhoused population. It would additionally provide relocation assistance and transportation for unhoused populations.

Public Transit

Jean-François Kacou has placed a heavy emphasis on the increased accessibility of bus networks. In an interview with CBC, the Futur Montréal leader stated that he "wants Montreal to have the best bus network in the world." Acknowledging the cost efficient price of public transport in Montreal, the Futur Montréal platform states that the party aims to introduce a four year public transit fare freeze and increase the efficiency of the city's bus network with a proposed frequency of buses every 15 minutes, seven days a week. In relation to cycling networks, Futur Montréal plans on suspending the construction of new bike lanes along commercial arteries,

residential streets, and parks to improve safety. The party has made it their objective to improve the security of existing bike lanes and to implement a safe and monitored overnight bicycle storage.

*The Green Update***Examining AI's Environmental Impact**

Expansion of AI use raises questions about its benefits and harms on the environment

Aurelien Lechantre
Staff Writer

The Green Update is a bi-monthly/monthly column focusing on recent info related to climate change and the environment. Innovations, policy decisions, green models to follow, anything that can shape our future environment can be discussed here!

Artificial intelligence (AI) is not a recent phenomenon. In 1956, the term artificial intelligence was introduced at the Dartmouth Summer Research Project on Artificial Intelligence, to describe computing systems that performed tasks which usually required human intelligence. While data centers — buildings that house servers, data storage drives, and network equipment in temperature-controlled environments — have existed since the 1940s, the rate at which these facilities are being built has dramatically increased in the past few years. With the rise of language-learning models like ChatGPT, Google's PaLM, or OpenAI, our lives have been transformed. In considering the amount of energy required to not only fuel, but also cool down these data centers, AI's environmental impact has risen to the forefront of environmental discussion.

Interestingly, AI has proven itself useful in various ways to combat the climate crisis. For example, some have suggested the automatic adjustment of lighting, heating or ventilation in buildings using weather data could contribute to offsetting human energy and water consumption. Energy consumption in homes and buildings is responsible for a third of the US's greenhouse gas pollution, with experts attributing the use of AI to a 30 per cent reduction in such consumption. Similarly, AI's huge databases offer new possibilities in research and model-building. These insights can, for example, be applied to streamlining city traffic, as tested in Québec City. AI systems have also been useful in predicting extreme weather and preparing communities to adapt to rapidly changing climate conditions.

However, how helpful has AI really been in solving the climate crisis? Do these benefits outweigh the pollution it creates? How might we change our approach to strike a healthy balance?

Though there are some positive outcomes regarding the utilization of AI to solve environmental issues, widespread AI usage through generative models, with its heavy environmental burden, brings more

harm than good. The onset of accessible AI models has caused an explosion in the number and size of data centers worldwide. This level of infrastructure comes with a large environmental toll: data centers need large amounts of electricity constantly, leading them to mostly use dirty electricity as renewable sources of energy have a fluctuating output. Furthermore, the water withdrawal and consumption in data centers needed to maintain a consistent hardware temperature, which reaches high temperatures because of the number of calculations done in mere milliseconds, is astronomical. By 2027, AI is projected to cause between 4.2 and 6.6 billion cubic meters of water withdrawal worldwide, meaning the amount of water withdrawn would be between four to six times the amount of Denmark's annual withdrawal. Moreover, the data centers' water consumption used during the systems' cooling process, which is not discharged back to the environment but either evaporated or too polluted to be released, is also absurdly high.

AI models' high demand for energy has become a significant element in global electricity consumption. As seen with data centers, AI consumes a lot of dirty electricity, emitting large amounts of greenhouse gases. Even after training AI models, energy is required each time a model is used. ChatGPT, for example, requires ten times more energy than a Google search. On average, a single medium-length response from ChatGPT's GPT-3 series consumes 500ml of water — about the volume of one plastic water bottle. OpenAI's CEO Sam Altman even said that saying "please" and "thank you" to the model added millions in computing costs because of additional energy usage.

Overall, the expansion of AI models and its incorporation in our daily lives makes AI highly unsustainable. AI's small dent in fighting climate change cannot balance out the environmental impacts of the whole industry, which encompasses over 100 million users for OpenAI alone. Yet the AI industry today doesn't appear to be moving in a more sustainable direction. Golestan (Sally) Radwan, the Chief Digital Officer of the United Nations Environment Programme says that the few regulations in place in Europe and the US have no real "environmental guardrail". We need to re-think our use of AI as a tool to fight the climate crisis rather than a technology designed to set us back in terms of pollution and unsustainable consumption.

*Good People***Reimagining Period Equity: Speaking with Momoka Takami on SSMU's Menstrual Health Project**

McGill student-led organization provides free, sustainable menstrual health products to undergraduate students

Enid Kohler
Staff Writer

Good People is a bi-monthly column highlighting McGill students doing community-oriented work on and around campus. Because it's important to celebrate good people doing good things.

Menstrual health products should be accessible to everyone who needs them. Period.

Since 2017, the SSMU Menstrual Health Project has been working towards this very mission of accessibility by supplying over 160 washrooms on McGill campus with free menstrual health products. SSMU members pay \$2.40 in fees each semester to fund the service, which aims to promote sustainability menstrual equity, and reduce period stigma. Notably, the SSMU Menstrual Health Project does not use gendered language when describing periods in its aim to foster a comprehensive understanding of menstruation that includes trans, non-binary and/or 2SLGBTQ+ students.

The *Daily* spoke with Momoka Takami, U3 McGill student majoring in International Development Studies and Commissioner of the Menstrual Health Project. We talked about menstrual equity, sustainable hygiene products, and making invisible work visible.

This interview has been edited for clarity and conciseness.

Enid for the McGill Daily (MD): How did you get involved in the Menstrual Health Project?

Momoka Takami (MT): I had an eye on the Menstrual Health Project since I started McGill in 2023, but then I knew it was a demanding job because it has a time commitment of 10 hours per week. I knew I had to commit to this role if I were to do it. So in January, I saw there was an opening for Menstrual Health Product Coordinator and I thought I was ready so I decided to give it a try.

MD: Can you tell me about your current role as Commissioner? What kind of work do you do on a daily basis?

MT: The role of commissioner really varies. Unlike other student-run clubs, we are a SSMU service, which means there's one commissioner and multiple coordinators. Since the coordinator's primary job is to restock bathrooms and they're pretty occupied with it, I am responsible for everything else. In short: HR, social media, inventory management, and event planning or monthly pickups as well. So yeah, the role is really everything you can think of. For other clubs, they have VP Media, VP Internal, VP External, but I'm just Commissioner, so my role consists of everything combined.

MD: How would you describe the SSMU Menstrual Health Project in a few sentences?

MT: We are part of the student society, so every undergraduate student member pays \$2.40 for our service fee, along with other student services fees and tuition. We combine all the \$2.40s from each person to buy disposable and reusable menstrual health products to be placed on campus. There are 160 bathrooms on campus, including residences, that we restock. The project is run by five Coordinators, so it is a physically demanding job, but we go to every single bathroom. As for reusable products, we have an event called "monthly pick-up," which involves us showing up on campus and talking with students and providing products to them. We have reusable underwear, period underwear, reusable pads, and

reusable cups, according to students' needs.

MD: If a student feels skeptical about your organization, perhaps they don't use menstrual health products themselves, how would you argue that your work is important?

MT: That's an interesting question. We have many students who come to our pick-up because there was a line or they heard about us somewhere on campus. And they say, 'I don't really use it.' So we usually say, "Oh, if you get a product from us, it's free because you already paid for it. So you might as well take advantage of the service. The underwear or any reusable products usually cost more than \$40 to \$50 if you buy it personally, but if you try one from us, it's free." So it reduces the barrier to try a new product.

We usually don't have that much time to convince people at the pick-up. But another approach could be that it's a sustainable product because it's reusable, and each unit of underwear should last between five to ten years. So that's an approach that we can incorporate.

MD: Do you have a specific memory of a moment when you realized the impact of the work you're doing?

MT: At monthly pick-ups, some students tell us how much they love the project, and how they support us, which is very huge inspiration to continue doing our work. Another one was during the fee renewal that we did in Winter 2025. It was a very tough one to pass, because the SSMU renewal fee campaign in general had a very low vote average — it wasn't really reaching students. We had to physically table on campus and give out flyers to students to let them know that there was a fee renewal going on. While doing that, I met many students who just passed by, and said 'oh, no, thank you,' because they didn't want to get involved in it. But there were also many students who said, 'oh, I love you guys, I'll vote, I hope it passes.' So that experience really communicated to me that there are students who are constantly supporting us.

MD: The theme of this column is "good people doing good things." In the context of your work with the Menstrual Health Project, what does being a "good person" mean to you?

MT: Wow. Good person... well, I'm always someone who wants to help people. That was my goal since I was a kid. As an extracurricular or volunteer community involvement activity on campus, being part of SSMU Menstrual Health enables me to support students with free menstrual products. When we did a survey to students, there were about 180 responses, and many of them said if it weren't for the Menstrual Health Project, they wouldn't have thought about using reusable products. Once they figured out about us and they got products from us, it just, like, changed everything. They love the reusable products. So, whenever I see those comments or even interact with students, I know that through my role I'm helping students on campus.

I don't think our work is as visible as it should be., but I think we are a group of students who have similar mindsets about, like, staying behind the scenes but doing small things on campus, small things to help people. So, yeah, for us, being a good person is not necessarily being someone in the front seat, but someone who just secretly supports you to make your day better.

The SSMU Menstrual Health Project's next pick-up will take place on November 12 between 1:30 and 4:30 PM at the Redpath-McLennan library. Students can follow @ssmumenstrualhealth on Instagram for more information.

The Power in the Unnamed

A reflection on the value of James Baldwin's fiction

Ingara Maidou
Commentary Editor

Content warnings: racism, sexual assault

It's admittedly no easy task to provide a unique lens on James Baldwin's life and work. Born in 1924 in Harlem, New York, the author's rise to fame and active role in the civil rights movement have been meticulously documented by critics, the FBI, and even Baldwin himself. Providing a unique lens on Baldwin's work is especially difficult today, as the reintroduction of critical race theory in public discourse sparked a Baldwin renaissance, with the author once again inundating the literary world.

James Baldwin crafted a literary career that spanned 30 years, and his popularity can largely be attributed to his style. Trained as a preacher, his words were devoid of lukewarm prose. His speeches came off as sermons, yet their subject matters always captured diverse audiences, whether they agreed with his views or not. His essays bled passion, accompanied by wit and a sharp analytical eye that solidified him as a master in his craft. Still, there has historically been less appreciation for Baldwin's

strength as a novelist, with Louis Menand's recent profile on Baldwin articulating that the writer's novels are "not books you are eager to get back to" and "less formally adventurous and far less entertaining..." than other texts of the time.

As I slowly work through his fiction backlist, I've grown more in disagreement with the negligence of Baldwin's contributions to the literary world, with Menand's opinion in particular being one of my least favourites. I've always found that the cultural fascination with the subversive style and content in Baldwin's non-fiction is equally present in his novels. Similar to his essays and speeches, Baldwin's fiction is deeply personal, political, and philosophical, acting as an extension of himself and his surroundings. His semi-autobiographical fiction debut, *Go Tell It to the Mountain*, utilizes religious themes to narrate his family's complicated history. Other novels, such as *Giovanni's Room*, and, in my humble opinion, his magnum opus, *Another Country*, also reflect elements of Baldwin's life through their brutal examinations of queerness, masculinity, and race in Paris and New York, cities Baldwin spent significant portions of his life in. The author's characters are often

manifestations of hyper-masculine societies that have forced queer men to suppress desire, and while deeply harrowing and sometimes difficult to read, his fiction demands that we directly confront the darkest parts of humanity and observe how systems of power can aggravate individual pain and suffering.

One subtle, but nevertheless present, aspect of Baldwin's personal life that permeates his novels is his distaste for naming. Like Menand discusses in his piece, Baldwin was not enthusiastic about labeling himself as gay. His discomfort with labels was not just limited to his sexuality. The police in *If Beale Street Could Talk* are not overtly called racist in the same way that Rufus in *Another Country* is never called a rapist. James Baldwin was not as interested in constative language as he was in experiences and their associated feelings, as he told Jordan Elgraby in a stellar 1984 Paris Review interview, "I don't know what technique is. All I know is that you have to make the reader see it." Baldwin understood that the strange prickling feeling all over your body, warning you that something is wrong, that you're in some kind of danger, or that you've committed a social transgression,



Allan Warren, CC BY-SA 3.0

would tell you more about racism or homophobia in 1960s America than any textbook could. His fiction provides a balanced and thorough lens on the micro and macro structures that produce systems of violence, and his lack of descriptive language when examining such brutality forces his readers to do their own work in determining where to place the blame.

Critics have sometimes described Baldwin as bitter, seemingly harbouring immense

hate for white America and its future. Yet, Baldwin's anger bred action. His rage was not unique or isolated but instead stemmed from his desire for a more loving society as he wrote in his "Autobiographical Notes," "I love America more than any other country in the world, and, exactly for this reason, I insist on the right to criticize her perpetually." Love was always one of Baldwin's main concerns — a fact that shines clear as day in his novels.

But I'm a Cheerleader

But I'm a Cheerleader is a cult classic in the Queer community — why is this?

Lucy Fradin
Culture Contributor

When Jamie Babbit's *But I'm a Cheerleader* was released in 1999, it received a less-than-pleasant reaction from the general public. Even now, the film sits at a 43 per cent rating on Rotten Tomatoes among film critics. Despite this, the film was and still is hailed in the queer community as a cult classic, watched and talked about 25 years later. Why is this? And why was Variety wrong to deem it "only mildly entertaining" at the time?

The film opens in a classic picture-perfect American high school setting. The protagonist Megan (played by Natasha Lyonne,) is a star cheerleader with a jock boyfriend. All is well until alarm bells begin to ring: A strong fascination with her fellow cheerleaders' dancing, a repulsion towards kissing her boyfriend, enjoyment for Melissa Etheridge's music, and worst of all — she's become vegetarian. This is all

the evidence of lesbianism that her parents need to perform an intervention, shipping her off to True Directions, a conversion camp.

What ensues next at True Directions is a satiric, hilarious masterpiece. The camp is run by Mary Brown (Cathy Moriarty) and Mike (RuPaul), both entirely unconvincing "straight" leaders. The members embark on a journey aimed at leading them back to the "true" path of straightness. The boys learn how to fix cars, while the girls learn to clean and cook — the satirical performance being a clear critique of the artificiality of traditional gender norms. Meanwhile, Megan meets Graham (Clea DuVall), her roommate and surly polar opposite, who it is clear she will fall for.

At the turn of the century, queer films, let alone lesbian films, were pretty rare. But, for director Babbit, the film was aimed to be "a gay *Clueless*," serving as a light-hearted comedy amidst the AIDS crisis. "Comedy was important because if you don't laugh, you're crying," said Babbit in an interview with BBC, with queer films at the time often

being arthouse and bleak. Despite its campy, comedic elements, *But I'm a Cheerleader* still tackles very real issues pertinent to the queer community: conversion therapy, rejection by parents, identity struggle, and self-acceptance. The film is a classic not only because it's a comedy, but also because it stands for so much more?

In the cinematic climate of *Fight Club*, *The Matrix*, and *American Psycho*, *But I'm a Cheerleader* was an obvious outlier. Despite a lack of overtly sexual scenes or vile language, the film was originally rated at NC-17 (for adults only), forcing Babbit to cut scenes to make it more appropriate — unsurprising at a time when gay marriage was yet to be legalized. The film easily could have faded to the background, in a culture dominated by thriller, macho films. However, it has only grown in popularity.

It's relatable, it's funny, and it's truly ridiculous. The characters have stand-out pink and blue costumes, alongside a great soundtrack, truly encapsulating what "camp" is. Heteronormative society and gender

stereotypes are playfully questioned, interrogating what is considered normal. Ultimately, Babbit shows us that normal is whatever you want it to be — a message that continues to resonate today, within and beyond queer communities.

While *But I'm a Cheerleader* isn't a critically-acclaimed cinematic sensation, it captures the hearts of the queer community. *But I'm a Cheerleader* makes you feel part of something bigger than you, and is the perfect watch as Queer History Month draws to a close. The film easily could have faded to the background, in a culture dominated by thriller, macho films. However, it has only grown in popularity.

It's relatable, it's funny, and it's truly ridiculous. The characters have stand-out pink and blue costumes, alongside a great soundtrack, truly encapsulating what "camp" is. Heteronormative society and gender stereotypes are playfully questioned, interrogating what is considered normal. Ultimately, Babbit shows us that normal is

whatever you want it to be — a message that continues to resonate today, within and beyond queer communities.



Nikhila Shanker
Visuals Editor

The Changing Landscape of the Gay Village

When queer communities begin shifting away from the Village

Sonia Berman
Culture Contributor

On October 20, 2020, the Gay Village of Montreal shortened its name to The Village.

While the Village has been the epicenter of the 2SLGBTQIA+ community since its establishment in the 1970s, in recent decades, queer culture has undoubtedly shifted due to the gentrification, commercialization, tourism, and “degayification” of the Village.

Gabrielle Rondy, the executive director of *La Société du développement commercial du Village* (SDC,) told the *Daily* via email that “The Village remains a historic, symbolic, and still very active heart of Montréal’s 2SLGBTQIA+ community. Over the decades, it has constantly evolved, much like the communities it represents. We don’t see the emergence of queer spaces in Mile End, Hochelaga or elsewhere as a shift away from the Village, but rather as a diversification of queer geographies across the city. This is a positive reflection of Montréal’s broader openness and inclusion.”

According to the research on LGBTQ+ Urbanism conducted by Dr. Julie A. Podmore — an affiliate assistant professor of geography, planning, and environment at

Concordia University — the Mile End has been the center of Montreal’s “emerging queer subculture” since the early 2010s. This inner-city region’s alternative queer culture is disparate from that of the more mainstream Village.

A variety of factors have contributed to the migration of the 2SLGBTQIA+ community away from the Village, including the gentrification, commercialization, and expansion of tourism. These changes have also caused the disidentification of 2SLGBTQIA+ individuals with the neighborhood as more straight people move in and historically queer businesses close down.

Rondy acknowledges that gentrification and tourism have impacted the Village, but asserts that “it remains rooted in community life and local engagement, animated by hundreds of small businesses, non-profits, and cultural initiatives that make the neighbourhood vibrant and inclusive.”

While these developments have pushed the queer community away from the Village, Montreal’s increasing “openness” to queer visibility has also reduced the need for a distinct 2SLGBTQIA+ gathering place and safe haven. This openness has “allowed queer expression to flourish city-wide, but it also challenges the Village to

renew itself as a space of belonging,” says Rondy.

The gentrification, commercialization, and tourism in the Village has led to rent increases, causing established local businesses, especially lesbian bars, such as Le Drugstore, to close. According to Podmore, these factors, as well as the increasing police surveillance and the predominance of the white population, have decreased diversity in the Village.

The Village has additionally become victim to homonormativity, with participants of Podmore’s study feeling that the Village is no longer inclusive to the queer community as a whole but is rather now suited for those who identify strictly as gay or lesbian, with the largest demographic being cisgender gay white men. While the Village was made by cis men, explains Podmore, it became more diverse in the 1990s. However, as the Village has become more mainstream, this trend has been reversed.

Beyond homonormativity, the 2SLGBTQIA+ community’s shift away from the Village resulted in a “straightening” or “degayification” of the neighborhood, with those who do not identify as cisgender gay white men, otherwise known as the “queer subculture” Podmore refers to, moving away from the area.

“We recognize that the Village has sometimes been perceived as primarily catering to cisgender gay men. This critique is valuable, and has shaped much of our recent work. Over the past few years, we’ve intentionally broadened our programming and partnerships to reflect a more intersectional, diverse queer reality,” says Rondy.

Such programming, as described by Rondy, includes: *Village Mon Amour*, “a storytelling project created with Queering the Map, highlighting love, friendship, and identity across generations;” *L’Effet Papillon*, “an inclusion campaign designed with the *Aide aux trans du Québec*;” *Les Allié.e.s du Village*, “a social reintegration group; the upcoming 20th anniversary of the Gala Les Étoiles du Village” that celebrates “many people, business owners, artists, organizations;” the activations of Studio ZX to re-engage diverse queer youth through festivals and workshops; and the forthcoming opening of Espace LGBTQ+, a temporary exhibit of photographs, posters, and items that depict queer stories.

The traditionally vibrant queer landscape of Sainte-Catherine Street East and Atateken Street has become populated by straight people, both those moving in and those who are just visiting.

Therefore, it may no longer be accurate to describe the Village’s historically queer bars and clubs as hubs of the 2SLGBTQIA+ community.

Rondy states, “It’s true that certain creative or nightlife subcultures have developed in Mile End or other districts. However, the Village remains the main gathering place for community organizations, political advocacy, major events, and collective visibility.” She continues to defend the Village’s importance, adding that “The Village continues to be the only neighbourhood officially recognized, both legally and symbolically, as a 2SLGBTQIA+ district.”

The future of queer neighborhoods in Montreal remains ambiguous as now lively enclaves of the 2SLGBTQIA+ community exist in places with no legal designation as a 2SLGBTQIA+ district. As a result, one may wonder whether these legal formalities remain necessary.

As Rondy puts it, “Since its emergence in the 1970s and 1980s, the Village has transitioned from a marginalized enclave to an internationally recognized symbol of queer life. Today, it stands at a crossroads: one that balances heritage and renewal... The Village is not static; it’s a living, evolving ecosystem continually reimagined by those who inhabit it.”

Hidden Lives, Loud Truths: *Joyland* (2022)

Pakistani film brings South Asian queer voices to the forefront of Cannes

Leyla Rousseau
Culture Contributor

Rarely does a Pakistani film grace the international big screen, especially a film that dares to confront the intricate realities of gender identity and sexuality. Yet *Joyland* (2022,) directed by Saim Sadiq, broke new ground as the first Pakistani film ever selected for Cannes, earning the prestigious Queer Palm Award that same year. With all the buzz around this film, I couldn’t help but be intrigued. Amidst a busy schedule, I finally took the time to watch it, and here’s my honest review.

Set in Lahore, *Joyland* follows Haider Ranas, a Pakistani man who lives with his wife Mumtaz, his strict father Amanullah, and his older brother Saleem. While Mumtaz works at a salon, Haider, unemployed and often aimless, stays home to help his sister-in-law Nucchi take care of his nieces. Life in the Ranas household revolves around traditional family expectations, especially Amanullah’s

obsession with having a grandson who can continue the family line. Amanullah puts a lot of pressure on Haider to live up to stereotypical Pakistani ideas of masculinity, where men are expected to support the family and have children, be strong and fearless, and even kill animals without reluctance. However, these expectations conflict with Haider’s own desires for freedom, tenderness, and domesticity.

When Haider eventually secures a position as a backup dancer at an erotic theater, things take a surprising turn. He encounters Biba, a self-assured and alluring transgender performer who serves as one of the cabaret’s primary draws. As he gets closer to her, Haider begins to question the strict gender norms and expectations that his family had placed upon him. In the meantime, a pregnant Mumtaz discreetly battles against her own diminishing freedom and increasing sense of imprisonment in a relationship that doesn’t suit her ideal.

Joyland is a contemplative, slow-paced film, and while that’s not

usually my preference, Saim Sadiq’s directional choices feel intentional and meaningful. The unhurried aspect of the film reflects the characters’ stagnation and quiet frustration with their lives. The actors’ long silences and still moments allow us to feel the weight of their routines and unspoken emotions. The movie provides a genuine portrayal of homophobia, transphobia, and the realities of sexual and gender minorities in South Asian countries.

We certainly sense the guilt, humiliation, and social pressure these characters bear — particularly Haider, who is caught between desire and social expectations, living in perpetual secrecy. As this distinct exploration of gender is not something we typically see in traditional tales, I found the convergence of the LGBTQ+ community and Pakistan’s structural pressures to be incredibly transgressive and heartwarming.

I initially assumed that *Joyland* would present more pronounced depictions of violence, but it does not. Rather than a clear antagonist

demonstrating overt hostility towards the LGBTQ+ community, the oppression of sexual and gender minorities is more subtle, systematic, and cultural, which I found to be more realistic than typical portrayals of queer discrimination. The movie does not contain incidents of physical assault or verbal harassment. Instead, Sadiq includes a few instances of characters expressing obvious discomfort over Biba’s transgender identity behind her back, though they do not do so to her face. At some point in the movie, Haider’s dance crew plays a prank on him by putting a wig on his head and dressing him up as a girl laughing and joking as they take pictures of him. However, the moment Biba walks into the room, their laughter immediately stops and everyone falls silent, their faces suddenly serious.

Additionally, I really appreciated how Sadiq gave the spotlight to a transgender actress, Alina Khan, without typecasting her as a victim of queer suffering as many other films do. By portraying sexual and

gender identity with such authenticity, the film inspires hope for richer films about queer experiences in South Asia. The Pakistani context is a distinct and a key part of the movie’s themes which develops our understanding of the hardships and experiences that are frequently overlooked in popular media.

As queer stories become more salient, they have grown increasingly multi-faceted. While I’ve always found solace in North American queer classics such as *C.R.A.Z.Y.* (2005) or *Brokeback Mountain* (2005), it is refreshing to come across contemporary stories of queer identity, such as *Joyland*, which hails from a totally different cultural context. Films like this underscore the need for more diverse LGBTQ+ voices in film. In addition to telling a tale of love and identity, *Joyland* expands the possibilities for genuine representation in international cinema, making it a potent step in that direction.

Pride on the Canadian Pitch

Are Canadian sports as inclusive as we think they are?

Emilie Behrens

Commentary Contributor

Queer pride in professional sports has never been as prominent as it is today. Several campaigns have been established across multiple professional sports leagues rallying against the discrimination of LGBTQ+ athletes, including the Olympic Games and the FIFA World Cup: two of the most watched sporting events in the world. In 2024, 193 openly queer athletes participated in the Paris Olympics: a record for the global sports competition. Notably, Canada, compared to the rest of the world, has demonstrated increased queer inclusivity. Looking at the big picture, it may seem as though Canada is more open-minded and tolerant towards queer communities than other parts of the world, as it was among the five countries that accounted for the majority of openly queer athletes at the Olympics. However, can such a simple comparison mean that Canada is actually an inclusive country for queer people? In recent decades, the way athletes are treated based on their sexual orientation has seen a positive shift in Canada, but this does not mean that they are totally free from the ongoing challenge of discrimination.

Canadian Queer Evolution in Sports

Mark Tewksbury came out as the first openly gay Canadian Olympian in 1998. While this may have seemed like a sign of progress in queer inclusion, coming out affected the swimmer's career, as seen in how Tewksbury lost a six-figure motivational speaking contract for a financial institution as he was considered "too openly gay."

One could say that times have changed. In the 2024 Paris Olympics, Team Canada consisted of 11 Canadian athletes who were publicly out, a record number for Canadian sports. However, of these 11 athletes, Justin Lui, a gay Canadian volleyball player, was the only one who participated in a male-division sport. This shows that there is indeed a potential lack of inclusivity in male-division

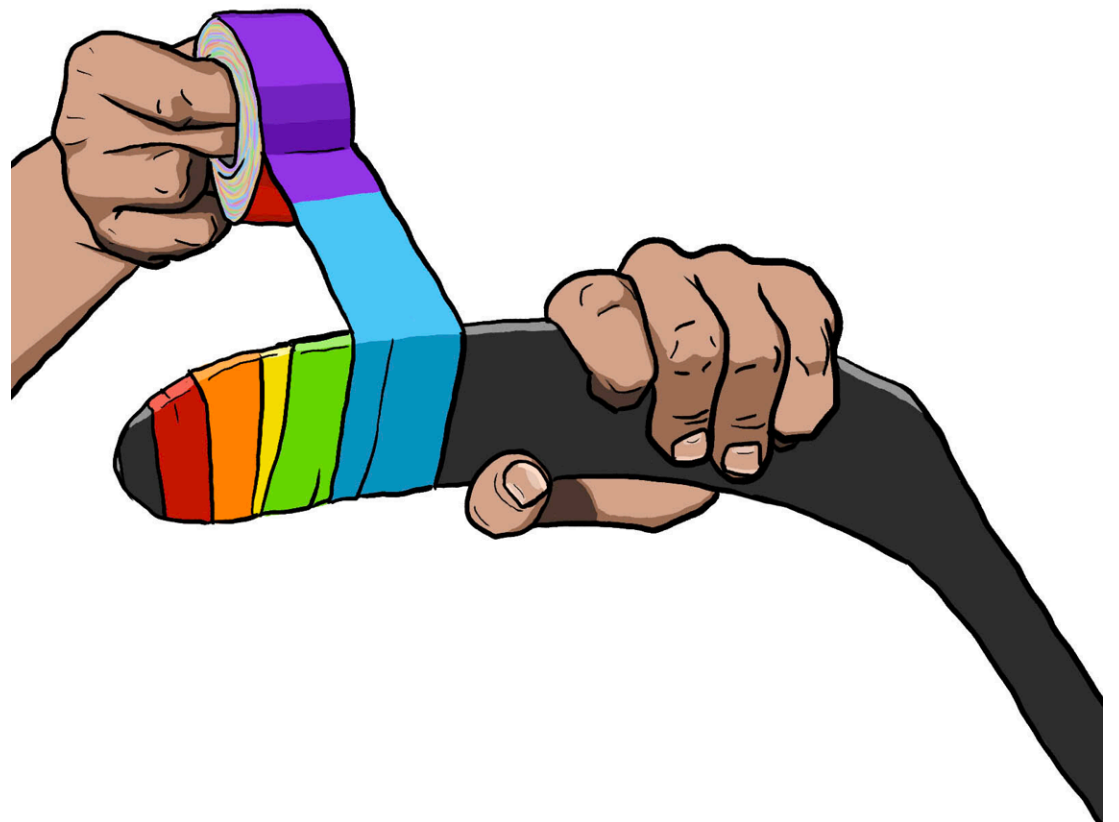
sports due to entrenched gender norms. Although Lui shared his positive experience coming out in 2020 before participating in the Paris Olympics, he also discussed the environment of "toxic masculinity" that occurs within male sports. Toxic masculinity, by definition, refers to a set of cultural norms that pressure a man to act in certain ways, including dominating others and suppressing their emotions. If a male athlete were to cry during a game for example, a news story would be made out of it. This is a direct result of patriarchal norms.

Additionally, Quinn, a soccer player in the Canadian women's team, became the first openly transgender and non-binary Olympic gold medalist in 2020, and the first transgender person to participate in the FIFA World Cup in 2023. They are an avid promoter of queer rights and representation in sports, and they constantly discuss the importance of these issues on their social media platforms.

These athletes' coming-out stories are individual and independent of each other, however they are similar in that there is still fear about whether sexual orientation and gender identity will affect an athlete's career. Notably, one cannot help noticing that there is a minority of queer men in Canadian sport. This demands the question: What stops male athletes from being comfortable enough to come out?

Environments of toxic masculinity tend to discourage male athletes from coming out in the first place, as they would be deemed vulnerable by others and hence different from the patriarchal view of what a male athlete should be. It might also cause them to be discriminated against based on their minority status, and in sports, where everyone is expected to have similar physiques and mental capabilities, sexual orientation becomes one of the few points where an athlete can be different.

Researchers such as Professor Cheryl Cooky from Purdue University argue that female athletes have an easier time coming out, as they are already challenging traditional gender norms by participating in sports and are therefore more



Auden Akinc | Staff Illustrator

comfortable with breaking down additional barriers, including those surrounding gender identity and sexual orientation. This is the case for Stephanie Labbé, the Canadian women's soccer team goalkeeper who is now married to Olympic cycling medalist Georgia Simmerling. Unfortunately, this argument only reinforces the toxic masculinity within sports that has persisted through time, going to show how deeply gender norms are engraved in sports.

Is Canada actually inclusive?

Toxic masculinity can be rooted in the ground rules of sport themselves. In 2023, the NHL banned specialty warm-up jerseys, including the Pride jerseys that athletes would wear. This was done after they organized several Pride nights and provided funding to many Pride organizations. The NHL expressed that these jerseys were taking attention away from the hockey game, as players who chose not to wear Pride jerseys would receive backlash online. They also stated that the sport was becoming "too political". A ban like this not only highlighted the homophobia embedded within the system and some of the players, but also led the public to question the sincerity behind the queer inclusivity efforts of the NHL, with this instance insinuating that the League may not actually believe in the standards they are promoting. Although this ban has since been reversed, it still reveals the holes in queer inclusivity in sports, such as hockey.

Instances such as these create a hostile, fear-ridden environment for queer athletes — especially for those who are closeted and whose coming out could negatively affect their career, just as it did for Tewksbury. Nevertheless, there are still other Canadian organizations that persist in their efforts to create an inclusive space for queer athletes. Egale Canada and Équipe Montréal have rallied

for transgender athletes. However, on the other hand, the queer community and other athletic figures have expressed that inclusion is key, and that transgender athletes should not be denied their talents just because of their gender. The Olympic committee forces athletes to participate as the sex they were assigned to at birth. This may seem fair to some but can lead to

The Olympic committee forces athletes to participate as the sex they were assigned at birth. This may seem fair to some but can lead to dysphoria for transgender athletes, preventing them from participating in sports.

for and produced safe environments for queer athletes to participate in mixed sports and share their experiences. They do so by providing resources and support for queer athletes who are facing discrimination, while also creating LGBTQ+-specific sports teams.

Other associations such as Athletics Canada have made it their mission to promote the inclusion of the transgender community in professional sports, which remains a serious debate today. On one hand, it is argued by major sports committees and some cisgender athletes that biological factors may act as an unfair advantage or disadvantage

dysphoria for transgender athletes, preventing them from participating in sports. This is an ongoing debate to which there still is no concrete consensus, but thanks to the activism of important athletes such as Quinn, it has become an important topic of conversation within Canadian professional sporting committees.

Canada remains one of the top five most accepting countries in the world, and will continue to pursue inclusion and equality as one of the hosts for the 2026 FIFA World Cup. Still, sports in general must evolve with time, as many of its core aspects still reflect deep-rooted patriarchal expectations, stereotypes and gender norms.

Environments of toxic masculinity tend to discourage male athletes from coming out...in sports, where everyone is expected to have similar physiques and mental capabilities, sexual orientation

Unqueering Queerness

When radical movements go mainstream

Miranda Forster
Staff Writer

“Queer.” Throughout history, the word has had many uses. It first entered the English language in the 16th century, used to describe things that were “peculiar” or “eccentric.” In the 19th century, it became a derogatory term for men attracted to the same sex. Today, it has been reclaimed by 2SLGBTQ+ folk as a signifier. To understand the essence of queer culture, a lesser-known usage of the word — “queer” as a verb — is especially instructive. As defined by sexuality expert Charlie Glickman, to “queer” something is to “explore its limits, its biases, and its boundaries,” to “look for places where there’s elasticity” and to “discover ways we can transform it into something new.” As reflected by the word’s original meaning, queer people are forever “peculiar” to our society, forever “eccentric.” Hence, queerness is inherently radical, and it is thus no wonder that queer subcultures have always driven broader cultural innovation.

That being said, we can’t ignore the significance of “queer” as a pejorative. Western capitalist society, which in many ways is inherently conservative, tends to revile and ridicule strange things — unless they can generate profit. From pop culture’s appropriation of the ballroom scene, to the annual inundations of gay-coded products every Pride Month, the cultural expressions of queer communities have been pillaged for profit countless times throughout history. Even today’s apparent progress in global queer acceptance has been coupled with an aestheticization, commodification, and “unqueering” of queerness which poses a profound threat to queer life. Indeed, when acceptance is predicated on a group of people being palatable, de-radicalized, and profit-yielding, it is poor acceptance indeed.

To examine the commodification of queer culture, we must begin with the commodification of Black queer culture. The ballroom scene is one prominent site of such commodification. Ball culture began in the 19th century at the Hamilton Lodge, a Black fraternal organization in Harlem. The balls were originally intended for heterosexual men, but became a place for queer men to experiment with gender expression through cross-dressing and drag. From their inception, drag balls were exploited for mainstream entertainment. The balls were illegal, but drew a wide, culturally

diverse audience. This audience included white heterosexual elites who could enjoy the pageantry of the balls without risking legal persecution (unlike the queer Black participants providing the entertainment). Ball culture was initially racially integrated, but in the 1970s, Black drag queen Crystal LaBeija spearheaded ballroom’s evolution into an explicitly Black and Latine space in response to racist biases in competition judgment. Nevertheless, the straight, white appropriation of ball culture abounded, as exemplified by Madonna’s hit single “Vogue”, which was based on the ballroom act of voguing and which has reached triple-platinum status as her most successful record. This appropriation can also be seen in the controversial documentary *Paris Is Burning*. The documentary is an exploration of ball culture directed by an (albeit queer) white woman, and was panned by bell hooks as an exploitative presentation of the “exotic” world of ball culture to white audiences.

The commodification of ball culture — and Black and queer culture at large — is insidious because it profits from a scene born from oppression without confronting the sources of that oppression. Drag balls were by necessity an underground phenomenon throughout the 20th century as homosexuality was a crime in Canada until 1969 and in the United States until 2003. Yet today, pop culture contains a

Mainstream society has picked and chosen the aspects of Black queer culture that they find entertaining, while upholding the conservative capitalist system which still largely persecutes Black queer folks in a multitude of ways.

myriad of ball culture influences, from the successful reality show *RuPaul’s Drag Race* to the colloquial use of “throwing shade” (a term invented at drag balls). *RuPaul’s Drag Race* in particular has been called an example of the neoliberalization of ball culture, as it positions each contestant’s queerness as a commodity which can be exchanged for material wealth and fame. Mainstream society has picked and chosen the aspects of Black queer culture that they find entertaining, while upholding the conservative capitalist system which still largely persecutes Black queer folks in a multitude of ways.



Eva Marriott-Fabre | Visuals Editor

Over the past few decades, queer acceptance has skyrocketed. Gay marriage is now legal in 40 countries and Gen Z is much more openly queer than previous generations. The explosion of sapphic visibility in the 2020s has led some to announce that we are experiencing a Lesbian Renaissance. But while

with the punk scene, another radical movement which has historically resisted police brutality and welcomed the disenfranchised. But today, queerness seems to be de-radicalizing.

We are experiencing an aestheticization of subcultures, which ignores their radical political basis and prioritizes the “look” of transgression. This is in part due to fast fashion marketing schemes for “alternative” clothing, which bastardizes anti-consumerist (and queer-coded) styles like punk and goth. The rise of social media has also played a role in this aestheticization, as visual platforms like Instagram and TikTok encourage creators to prioritize appearances over substance. Yet another factor in the decline of queer radicalism is the marked shortage of third spaces post-COVID-19 pandemic, which have historically been sites of solidarity-building and community for radical groups. Although queerness is more socially accepted than ever before, social acceptance has come at the cost of political potency. Amidst this crisis of queer radicalism, rainbow capitalism and pinkwashing have furthered the de-politicization of queerness by selling queer-coded products which propagate the insidious lie that capitalism is a friend of queer folks.

Indeed, under Charlie Glickman’s definition of “queering,” the commodification

of queerness by mainstream culture is a process of “unqueering” — of rendering an inherently radical group familiar, orthodox, and therefore benign. We see unqueering in the appropriation of ball culture. We see it in rainbow capitalism, pinkwashing, and the aestheticization of radical subcultures. In a sense, a loss of queer radicalism has been the price of queer acceptance. This is by no means an argument that societal acceptance of queerness is a bad thing. Countless lives have been improved, and saved by the increased availability of trans-affirming care, the legalization of homosexuality and gay marriage, and the diminishing stigma around queerness. But in the face of growing anti-queer (and especially anti-trans) legislation, in the United States as well as Europe and Asia, it is imperative that queer communities maintain their political, radical roots. Our acceptance by mainstream capitalist society is transient, based on our value to the profit-generation machine, and can be revoked at any time. In a time in which organizing the left has been harder than ever, we must nurture our community spaces and maintain our radical roots if we are to persist through the darker times to come.

The West's Media Myopia

International community neglects conflicts in the Global South

Max Kabijan
Commentary Contributor

As consumers of modern news and social media, we are inundated by conflict — bleak descriptions of drone attacks in Ukraine, such as the recent September 28 attacks on Kyiv, or mass civilian casualties in the Gaza Strip as Israel continues its aerial bombardment this week, are plastered across Western publications. These geopolitical conflicts are rooted in cultural significance; they feature human rights abuses and types of asymmetric warfare that undoubtedly warrant our continued attention.

There is, however, a particular myopia in the West regarding certain conflicts. In the media, humanitarian organizations, and during world summits, there is often a neglect of the conflicts within the Global South. A lack of attention and discussion with tangible policy impacts. Ask yourself, how many headlines have you seen about Ukraine or Gaza? Now think about how much you've seen about the fighting between rebel groups and the army in Sudan's civil war, which is considered the worst displacement crisis globally according to the UN Refugee Agency's June 2025 report. Or how much is reported about Yemen's continued strife and humanitarian crisis? Even after U.S. bombardment ceased following a peace agreement in 2022, where fighting in Yemen largely died down, 18.2 million people still require humanitarian aid, according to Human Rights Watch. The M23 conflict in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), or continued Taliban political violence in Afghanistan, also represent conflicts that go largely ignored by mainstream media.

American, Canadian, and European media tend to bias Western, and fiscally or culturally Western-aligned, conflicts in their coverage. The self-centred bent of Western media doesn't just have intellectual ramifications. These culturally produced biases affect lobbying in the UN General Assembly, the provision of foreign aid, and global infrastructural funding. The endemic ignorance of Global South conflicts has tangible, fiscal impacts on nations that lack the benefits of regional hegemonic power balancing, seen when large superpowers seek to assert their regional

dominance through proxy states. While we must be vigilant in our support of the publicized conflicts, they are not the sole battlegrounds of the world.

Sudan's civil war is currently the world's largest conflict in terms of displacement. The war between the nation's military and a paramilitary group called the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) has caused 14.3 million Sudanese people to be forced to leave their homes between April 2023 and the end of 2024, according to the UNHCR. Meanwhile, the UNHCR calculates that 8.8 million have been displaced in Ukraine. This encompasses individuals who have relocated within and outside of Ukraine, since the war's inception in 2022 through the end of 2024. Highlighting this is not to undermine the tremendous loss from the war in Ukraine, but rather to ask that, given the undeniable death toll of Sudan's civil war, why do we see such limited coverage of the war and other similar Global South conflicts? A German study from news channel Tagesschau solidifies this perception, finding that over 5,500 broadcasts from 1996 to 2019 allocated roughly 10 per cent of their broadcast time to the Global South, despite the region representing 85 per cent of the world's population.

This trend is not solely the result of locale or informational availability. The West's blind spots result from a combination of the proximity of conflicts to Europe, the representation of peripheral violence as endemic, and whether conflicts reflect traditional forms of combat and violence or more covert, structural ones.

Perhaps the most significant reason for our media myopia is the commonly held perception that the Global South, particularly Sub-Saharan Africa, is doomed to continuous conflict and is thus not worth our collective attention. This "Afropessimism" demonstrates low readership within the West for issues that are not invested in relief efforts or international court rulings, such as violence in the Global South that is therefore seen as ever-present and thus immutable. Furthermore, Western media consumers are attracted to change, to sporadic developments and fast-paced reporting. As a result, the assumed unchanging state of "third world affairs" is not appealing to Western readership or publications.

Currently, ensuing conflicts in



Auden Akinc | Staff Illustrator

the Global South often arise in more subtle ways than what was seen in Ukraine or other Western-aligned conflicts. Systemic and ongoing crises like the war in Sudan often involve structural political violence instead of "conventional warfare." Sudan's civil war has resulted in a mass forced migration and displacement. The Armed Conflict Location and Event Data (ACLED) reported Sudan's combat casualties at 28,700, a likely conservative figure, but still markedly lower than the military casualties in the Russia-Ukraine war, which the *New York Times* places at nearly 1.4 million troops. While there is undeniable extreme violence in the aforementioned Sub-Saharan conflicts, the lower casualty numbers but higher amounts of displacement reflect this generally slower means of political violence and subjugation. Ultimately, cultural, geographical, and structural factors coalesce in developing countries, failing to meet the West's newsworthiness criteria.

Our collective negligence has tangible implications for foreign aid, International Criminal Court lobbying, and foreign policy in

afflicted regions like the DRC, Sudan, and Yemen. This is because the media's coverage does not just demonstrate Western-tinted understandings of interstate war, but these biases are reflected within the international judicial apparatus. Conflicts in

emergencies," peripheral wars lack the general assembly lobbying and mass recognition required for fundamental and institutional change.

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We don't need to change the fervour of our support for the causes that fill today's major headlines; we simply must diversify our attention.

Sub-Saharan Africa continue to be chronically underfunded and under-discussed by UN relief organizations like the UNHCR or the UN's Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF.) Public awareness of conflicts can be directly correlated to institutional advocacy, and while the UN creates special provisions for what it deems as "underfunded

headlines; we simply must diversify our attention. We must seek out global stories and uncover the overlooked crises. Moreover, we must encourage the same in our newspapers and the broader media. This isn't just about empathy for those overlooked, but about the prospect of effective aid and meaningful diplomacy moving forward.

WHO'S YOUR QUEER ARTIST?



ARIES
 (MAR 21 -
 APR 19)

HAYLEY KIYOKO: YOU WERE MOST LIKELY THE FIRST IN YOUR FRIEND GROUP TO COME OUT.



TAURUS
 (APR 20 -
 MAY 20)

KEHLANI: PEOPLE FLOCK TO YOU LIKE BEES DO TO HONEY...



GEMINI
 (MAY 21 -
 JUN 20)

TROYE SIVAN: EVERYBODY LOVES YOU, BABY!



CANCER
 (JUN 21 -
 JUL 22)

MXMTOON: STOP HANDLING THINGS BY YOURSELF AND START ASKING FOR HELP!



LEO
 (JUL 23 -
 AUG 22)

PHOEBE BRIDGERS: I HOPE NO TEARS WERE SHED THIS MONTH.



VIRGO
 (AUG 23 -
 SEPT 22)

KAYTRANDA: YOU MONTREAL DARLING!



LIBRA
 (SEPT 23 -
 OCT 22)

HALSEY: I HOPE EVERYTHING IS NOT BLUE THIS MIDTERM SEASON...



SCORPIO
 (OCT 23 -
 NOV 21)

FRANK OCEAN: IS YOUR GUY PRETTY LIKE A GIRL?



SAGITTARIUS
 (NOV 22 -
 DEC 21)

JANELLE MONAE: WE SEE YOU, OVERACHIEVER!



CAPRICORN
 (DEC 22 -
 JAN 19)

RENEE RAPP: MOST PEOPLE IN YOUR LIFE ARE PROBABLY BOTH SCARED OF AND ATTRACTED TO YOU.



AQUARIUS
 (JAN 20 -
 FEB 18)

GIRL IN RED: TRY AND FALL IN LOVE THIS OCTOBER!



PISCES
 (FEB 19 -
 MAR 20)

CHAPPELL ROAN: MAKE SURE SHE DOESN'T GET AWAY...