“White [Queer] Tears”: Tracing the Evolving Understandings of ‘Tenderqueer’ on Tiktok and X

by

Void Clark-Nason

Bachelor of Education, St. Thomas University, 2020
Bachelor of Arts(Hons), St. Thomas University, 2019

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of
the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Arts

in the Graduate Academic Unit of Sociology

Supervisor: Tia Dafnos, PhD, Sociology

Examining Board: Gül Çalışkan, PhD, Sociology, St. Thomas University
Celeste Orr, PhD, Sociology
Triny Finlay, PhD, English
Cathy Holtmann, PhD, Sociology, Chair

This thesis is accepted by the

Dean of Graduate Studies

THE UNIVERSITY OF NEW BRUNSWICK

May 2024

© Void Clark-Nason, 2024

ABSTRACT

Wishing to investigate an academically unexplored queer online phenomenon, this thesis traces the discussions happening surrounding the term tenderqueer on popular social media websites X and Tiktok. Employing a critical thematic analysis informed by critical race theory and homonormativity, I explore how users employ the term tenderqueer as a descriptor for young white queer people insularly focused on self-victimization. Through my analysis, I highlight how tenderqueer discussions are intimately connected to the white domination of queer spaces, the (re)enforcement of the Palatable [White] Gay, and homonormative morality policing. I argue that tenderqueer behaviour involves the weaponization of marginalized identities and advocacy language to create a culture of white [queer] enablement where racialized queer people are silenced in online spaces. I also link my research to the recent wave of sexual morality politics online and propose it as an off-shoot of emerging right-wing populism throughout the global North.

DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to my co-author, colleague, and friend for life, KD Merritt, and my sweet golden girl Gwendolyn Hunter (Gwendy). I wouldn't be where I am without the two of you.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My thesis would not have been possible without the steadfast support of my supervisor, Dr. Tia Dafnos, my second reader, Dr. Gül Çalışkan, and the guidance of other amazing faculty and staff members, including but not limited to Dr. Sabine LeBel, Dr. Nathan Kalman-Lamb, Sylvia Whitaker, and Natalie Fournier. Their kindness helped this glimmer of an idea come together into something I can say for certain I am proud of.

Table of Contents

Abstract ii

Dedication iii

Acknowledgements iv

Table of Contents v

Introduction 1

Chapter 1 – Literature Review 6

1.1 Queerness in Digital Spaces 6

1.2 Tenderqueer and Radical Softness 18

Chapter 2 – Theoretical Framework 25

2.1 Queer Theory and Critical Race Theory Overview 25

2.2 Black Feminist Thought 28

2.3 Whiteness, White Fragility, and White Supremacy 33

2.4 Compulsory Heterosexuality and Queer Feelings 41

2.5 Homonormativity 44

Chapter 3 – Methods and Methodology 47

3.1 Methodological Approach 47

3.2 Sources and Data Collection 50

3.3 Analysis 53

3.4 Ethics and Positionality 54

Chapter 4 – "A lot of your white trans favs are racist as fuck": Unpacking the Racial Origins of Tenderqueer Critique 57

4.1 Establishing the Tenderqueer 57

4.2 "I'm at capacity": Weaponizing Social Justice Language 62

4.3 If You're Not First You're Last: Playing the Oppression Olympics 66

Chapter 5 – "Vicious Little Pastel Clergy": Exploring the Puriteen Side of Tenderqueer Discussions 73

5.1 Tenderqueers and Secular Puritanism 73

5.2 What About $€X? 80

5.3 What's Age Got to do With It? 86

Chapter 6 – Tenderqueers Gone Woke: Exploring the White Co-option of

Tenderqueer 90

6.1 Tracing the Origins of Takeover 90

6.2 Uno Reverse Card: Appropriating Tenderqueer 94

Conclusion 98

References 103

Appendix A 120

Curriculum Vitae

Introduction

While engaging with queer users' content on social media platforms such as X or Tiktok, one may come across an interesting, seemingly innocuous term – 'tenderqueer'. In my preliminary research conducted in 2021, the term tenderqueer appeared to have originally been used by queer individuals to associate themselves with the idea of radical softness. The goal seems to have been a reclamation of the idea that one can be queer, can be struggling, but can still be 'soft,' caring, and tender. In 2017 Canadian writer Lindsay Nixon described Indigenous artist Fallon Simard as an "unabashed tenderqueer" (p. 70), and Toronto Metropolitan University's Consent Comes First initiative runs a weekly 'Tender Queers'' support group for 2SLGBTQIA survivors of gender-based violence (Toronto Metropolitan University, 2022). Both these examples play into this early framing of the word as a self-descriptor meant to inspire camaraderie and pride in one's tenderness.

However, like many terms that take life on the internet, the meaning behind tenderqueer quickly shifted as the landscape of discussion surrounding the word evolved. As various scholars have pointed out in their research, the internet accelerates language evolution to a degree that is incomparable with the offline world (Kumari, 2022; Satibaldieva, 2024; Sharofova, 2024). The rapid, instant nature of digital landscapes influences language to a profound degree and has irrevocably altered the dynamics of language (Satibaldieva, 2024). Kumair (2022) explains that "In the age of digital communication, where social media, instant messaging, and online platforms have become ubiquitous, language undergoes a metamorphosis at an unprecedented pace" (p. 283). My study maps the emergent conceptualizations of tenderqueer as a

disparaging descriptor for primarily younger, white queer people who are fixated on self-victimization, and traces how this meaning rapidly shifts over the span of approximately four years. To understand these online discussions, my research asks two questions: first, what are the different, changing meanings of the term tenderqueer? Second, how are online tenderqueer discussions related to white supremacy, power, and oppression within the queer community? Through my findings, I argue that the predominately self-identified racialized queer social media users in my study utilize the term tenderqueer to articulate how white queer people weaponize their identities to silence racialized queer people. I unpack other emergent discursive meanings of the term, explaining how the term connects to a legacy of sexual morality politics and assimilationist rhetoric within the queer community. I conclude my analysis by illustrating how the understood meaning of the term tenderqueer is undergoing a shift in present online discussions.

This thesis adds to the literature on online queer experiences, which is predominately focused on gay men's experiences. Despite recent attempts by queer researchers to broaden the scope of whose stories get prioritized, searches on academic databases will routinely bring up an overwhelming number of studies that center gay and/or bisexual men. The implication of this dominance is the erasure, de-prioritizing, and silencing of the experiences and feelings of other groups within the queer community in academic research. In an already stigmatized and understudied field like 2SLGBTQIA+ studies, research that focuses on non-normative identities is frequently lacking in academia. Queer research that studies the lives of people other than cis gay men is integral for building a nuanced and holistic understanding of the queer

experience. Through this study, I shed light on these undervalued experiences, and spotlight the knowledge and ideas held by the social media users in my study as no less important or meaningful as information produced by academia.

I begin my thesis with a literature review. The bulk of my literature review is an exploration of queerness in digital space, paying mind to how racism within queer spaces operate on the internet. I conclude my review of the literature drawing from two popular articles – one from the online magazine *Vice* and one from an individual's independent blog – that attempt to define tenderqueers and connect their ideas to academic work on radical softness. As of April 2024, I have not been able to find any English-language peer-reviewed scholarly publications that discuss tenderqueer discourse. I mention this fact not to imply that these popular essays are less worthwhile due to being online think-pieces, but rather to underscore just how explicitly tenderqueer discussions are going unexplored in academic circles. Throughout my thesis, I choose to recognize the importance of knowledge sources that are otherwise marginalized, such as information that comes from accessible media like online magazines and blogs. Despite scholarly devaluing of such knowledge, these public-facing writings contribute greatly to information creation and as such I treat them with the same analytical care I do academic articles.

Following my literature review, I outline my theoretical framework. I explain how I use a combination of critical race theory (CRT) ideas and queer theory concepts to orient my analysis. After a brief explanation of both frameworks, I draw from Black feminist thought and work on white fragility to create a working understanding of white supremacy. I then explore Sarah Ahmed's work on queer affect and Lisa Duggan's

concept of homonormativity, explaining how I will employ these ideas in my thesis. CRT and queer theory concepts are at the core of my study and informed my analysis and resulting discussion.

The methods chapter details my entire research approach – from beginning stages to data collection to analysis. First, I explain my methodological approach, defining critical thematic analysis and explaining how I used it in my research. Following this I give a thorough overview of my data collection, including where I collected my data, when I collected it, and the analytical process behind why I chose the sites I did. It is here that I make note of the temporality of my research, and the 'timeline of tenderqueer' that I reference throughout my analysis. I conclude my methods chapter with a brief discussion of where my research sits ethically, and my own positionality.

The latter half of my thesis is my analysis, which I have divided into three thematic chapters. My findings are organized as such to illustrate the morphing meaning of the term that emerged through my analysis. In studying tenderqueer discussions online I recognized a critical temporality to the data. My analysis outlines how these dominant understandings of 'tenderqueer' have multiplied over time, moving from a critique of whiteness/racism in queer communities, to morality policing and homonormativity, to an obfuscating, deradicalization of the term. As I explain in my analysis, rather than conceptualizing these meanings as clear, discernable shifts in dominant understandings there exists simultaneous omnipresent validity of these differing critiques. However, there is a chronological emergence – the aforementioned temporality – to each new meaning, which add new layers of context that impact how the term is understood and used. Thus, I position these interpretations of tenderqueer as

meanings that co-exist and grow overtop one another over time, like the leaves of a plant, rather than rigid definitions that overtake previous understandings.

In chapter four, I explore the early-2020s wide-spread use of tenderqueer by racialized queer people as a descriptor of white queer people who weaponize their 'tenderness' as a means of avoiding criticism and accountability for racism. In chapter five, I outline how tenderqueer discussions are enmeshed with queer assimilationist rhetoric, which are in turn connected to homonormative oppression. In chapter six, I discuss how the meaning of tenderqueer is being co-opted by those it was initially meant to describe and is presently morphing into a diluted, generic disparaging phrase for any queer person deemed 'cringe,' removing the term from its roots as a critique of racism. I conclude my thesis with a summary of my key findings, some of the limitations of my study, and avenues for further research.

Chapter 1: Literature Review

This literature review explores past and present examples of queer online research to establish thematic trends in the literature. My central concern is to foreground what research already exists on queer individuals online, paying specific attention to how racism in the queer community is replicated in online spaces. I conclude the review with an overview of literature on radical softness and reviews of the only articles written on tenderqueers, as of January 2024, to begin to contextualize tenderqueers within the contemporary queer moment. In synthesizing these varied topics, my literature review acts as a roadmap to investigate how the tenderqueer discussions users in my dataset engage in fit amongst an academic history of queer online research. It also serves to underscore the significance of my findings within this field of study.

While I choose to use queer as an umbrella term for the 2SLGBTQIA+ community in this thesis, the terms used throughout this chapter are specific to the reviewed literature. Over the years, and across disciplines, scholars have used a plethora of terms and acronyms to refer to the queer community. As such, there is a wealth of variability in terminology in this literature review, ranging from academics who use LGBT, to LGBTQ+, to more outdated terminology like 'transexual.'

Queerness in Digital Spaces

In this section, I examine research on social media and the Internet that explores queerness experiences online. As previously mentioned, there is a disproportionate focus on gay men in academic literature on queer issues. Due to this imbalance in the research,

in reviewing the work on queerness in digital spaces I underscore works that involve underrepresented queer groups. I highlight four key themes in the literature: 1) research that focuses on social media and the Internet as a safe space for queer individuals; 2) work that discusses online spaces as an unsafe or otherwise harmful space for queer people; 3) research that explores the public versus private aspects of online spaces; and 4) work that looks at how queer people use the Internet as a tool for identity building. While unpacking academic work that emphasizes ways online spaces can be unsafe for queer people, I narrow my focus on how racism perpetuates in queer online spaces.

In exploring queerness on the internet, some researchers' empirical findings highlight ways that social media and other aspects of online life facilitate the creation of safe spaces for queer people, especially queer youth (Bates et al., 2020; Craig et al., 2021; Craig, 2014; Das, 2020; Persaud & Crawley, 2022). In 2021, Craig and colleagues developed a Social Media Benefits Scale (SMBS) to investigate ways that social media sites influence the well-being of LGBTQ+ youth. Over 6000 participants, many of whom identified as gender non-conforming, completed this online survey and from the results Craig and colleagues found that LGBTQ+ youth receive a variety of multidimensional benefits from their social media use, including emotional support and access to LGBTQ+ education. The researchers' conclusions were that social media, overall, positively impacts the well-being of LGBTQ+ youth and provides them with benefits they may not always be able to safely access in offline spaces.

Similarly, Persaud and Crawley (2022) highlight the Internet as a place with the capacity for Black (queer) joy that may be harder to achieve offline. Just as Ahmed (2010) argues that queer people are not unhappy because they are queer, but rather

because they live within a society that ties queerness to unhappiness, Persaud and Crawley (2022) explain that the fear and dread Black people experience is not due to their Blackness, but is instead a product of the political and economic context that forces Black people to constantly negotiate their existence (p. 2). Black queers, then, must deal with the intersectional anti-Black racial assumptions and the harm that comes from them. Persaud and Crawley (2022) argue that the internet, as a space where "thought happens" (p. 1), has the capacity to push back against harmful racial narratives – for example, through highlighting Black queer joy. They use popular Black gay rapper Lil Nas X as an example of Black queer joy in the digital realm – particularly highlighting Lil Nas X's capacity, as a producer of Black queer culture, to harness resistance in joy (Persaud & Crawley, 2022, p. 3). Lil Nas X is an example of how a Black queer person can use his following of millions of people on social media sites like X to challenge people's notions of the world and show them that yes – Black queer joy can and should be part of the world (Persaud & Crawley, 2022, p. 4).

Andre Cavalcante (2019) touches on queer joy in his study on social media microblogging website Tumblr. Cavalcante (2019) draws on 27 interviews, four focus groups, and one year of fieldwork to paint a stirring picture of how Tumblr grew into a centre for queer discourse and community. One part of Cavalcante's analysis points to how queer Tumblr users generated a space he refers to as a "queer utopia" – a place where bloggers' desires and hopes for "something better" invigorated their creation of a safe and happy community (p. 1723). However, as Cavalcante (2019) goes on to explain, this utopia is not without consequences.

In a paradoxical relationship with its utopic nature, Cavalcante (2019) also argues that Tumblr acts as a “queer vortex” (p. 1728). This vortex refers to how the algorithm on Tumblr self-perpetuates, regurgitating likeminded posts and making it infinitely easy to become sucked into an “echo chamber of ideological homogeneity” (p. 1730). This may not seem that harmful in theory, but it can make one’s capacity for dissenting opinions and ability to withstand out-of-vortex reality difficult, because of never being exposed to them. This insularity is only one example of ways the internet can become an unsafe space for queer individuals. DeNardis and Hackl (2016) describe how digital platforms such as Facebook can be – and often have been – co-opted by repressive governments to find and silence members of marginalized groups, such as LGBT people. In this way something as innocuous as a queer person’s use of Instagram could lead to their persecution at the hands of the state.

Other researchers study how online sites frequently become spaces where hate proliferates. Keighley (2022) conducted a survey with 175 LGBTQ+ respondents, along with 15 interviews, to explore the impacts of online hate on the lives of LGBTQ+ people 25 years old and younger. Keighley (2022) found that the repercussions of this online hate included negative effects on participant’s well-being (such as feelings of shame, depression, and inferiority), and significant impacts on relationships and social interactions (such as feelings of distrust and a compulsion to hide their queer identity) (pp. 38-42). Social media also tends to favour queer narratives and stories that are familiar and recognizable to a vast audience, essentially creating online ‘closets’ for those who cannot fit into the constraints of such narratives (Fraser, 2010). These digital closets are particularly damaging to queer people of colour.

Lisa Nakamura's classic 2002 text, *Cybertypes: Race, ethnicity, and identity on the internet*, outlines how racial dynamics and racism perpetuate in online spaces. Nakamura's (2002) text is an early investigation of how, contrary to mainstream belief at the time, online spaces are not a racism-free utopia. Instead, Nakamura (2002) draws attention to how race-based stereotypes and racism are explicitly present in our many online interactions. Gosine's (2007) work speaks to this, using participant observation of the early 2000s online gay hub Gay.com to discuss racism in online gay dating spaces. In online interactions, if "visual perceptions" (such as photo avatars) are absent and self-descriptions do not name race, users are typically assumed to be white (Nakamura, 2002, p. 33). Gosine (2007) discusses that white people have historically had ample opportunities – both online and offline – to cross these visual perceptions and racial boundaries (p. 140). This phenomenon is something Nakamura (2002) dubs "identity tourism": when white people portray their online persona to be a person of colour, often based on crude caricatures (p. 39). An example of this would be the white man who portrays himself as a scantily-clad geisha-themed Asian teenager, drawing on superficial, racist, stereotypical forms of expression for their avatar. As Nakamura (2002) explains, she uses the word "tourist" to evoke how this sort of self-expression is ultimately "a fantasy of skin colour divorced from politics, oppression, or racism…the identity tourist is one who engages in a superficial, reversible, recreational play at otherness, a person who is satisfied with an episodic experience as a racial minority" (pp. 53-55).

White people who perform identity tourism have historically been welcomed by online communities, because the racialized persona portrayed is an amalgamation of stereotypes resulting in an exotic caricature that does not require white users to think

about race in a critical or meaningful way (Nakamura, 2002). In contrast, people of colour who identify as racialized are frequently met with hostility from other users for bringing “politics” into what is meant to be their “hiatus from real life” – even when they themselves choose to use racial caricatures for their profiles and avatars (Nakamura, 2002, p. 41). Even when racialized people do not make their race public online, they often end up having to disclose their identity when presumed white by other users as a correction to the assumptions– a disclosure that regularly leads to racist hostility.

Through the imagined safety of the screen, individuals may feel more comfortable reacting with overt racism than if the communication was in person. This possibility for hostility influences racialized queer people to occasionally hide their non-white status from potential partners online, and sometimes, to “pass” as white (Gosine, 2007, p. 141). Gosine (2007) argues that a deciding reason behind a person of colour’s desire to “pass” as white online comes from a longing to experience the privilege afforded to white people (p. 141). Due to the structural institutions of racism and white supremacy, white people can enjoy “racial disembodiment” in a way that racialized people cannot, online or offline (Gosine, 2007, p. 141). Even when racialized users attempt to distance themselves from race, they are frequently compelled to disclose their ethnicity – from forces built into websites (such as suggested handle names) to other users demanding the information in both public chat rooms and private messages (Gosine, 2007, p. 143). Just as the script of heterosexuality places queer people into situations where they must either “pass” as straight or “self-reveal” their Otherness (Ahmed, 2004, p. 147), the racialized users in Gosine’s (2007) study become squeezed

into passing as white or revealing their racialized identity. Even on a website like Gay.com, a place allegedly meant for the whole queer community, white queer culture forcefully dominates as *the* queer culture, and racialized users end up erased, ignored, harassed, and fetishized.

Using a mixed-methods research study that involved both interviews and thematic coding, Callander and colleagues' (2016) findings echo Gosine's (2007) study to emphasize that sexual racism – that is, racial prejudice within dating and sexual situations – is alarmingly present for gay and bisexual men of colour when looking for potential partners online. Callander et. al (2016) found that their participants experienced both subtle and more overt racist interactions in their online dating life, which negatively impacted their wellbeing and sometimes lead to the men choosing to remove themselves from online dating circles (p. 14). This kind of racism in online dating is not the only way queer people of colour experience harm on the internet. Duran and Garcia (2021) write about social media's capacity to be a conduit of harm in their article on queer women of colour (QWOC) in culturally-based sororities. Duran and Garcia (2021) analyzed data from two semi-structured interviews and a reflection journal to investigate how social media is a place where QWOC witness and experience oppressive attitudes towards their identities from other sorority members. The researchers write about how homophobic beliefs online are often couched in other language, such as reminding sorority members about the "standards of womanhood" to quell dissenting queerness on social media (p. 26). Also focusing on social media, Cho (2018) describes how queer youth of colour often feel "outed by the machine," and describes the many negative consequences that arise from how social media platforms' heteronormative

understandings of their user base and audience end up with queer youth of colour outed without their consent or knowledge (p. 3187). While Cho (2018) clearly states that this is not an issue unique to racialized queer youth, he does argue that queer youth of colour often have "very high stakes" when it comes to balancing their level of openness regarding their queer identity online (p. 1390).

This brings us to the third major theme in research on queer people's internet use: balancing the publicness and privateness of online spaces (Cho, 2018; Das & Farber, 2020; De Ridder & Van Bauwel, 2015). In Cho's (2018) research, mentioned above, he utilized five years of cyberethnographic observation and multiple interviews to discuss how social media websites have a built-in bias towards default publicness that leads to queer youth of colour not feeling safe using certain platforms in the ways white youth might. Cho (2018) argues that the default publicness of online spaces such as Facebook's main feed made participants feel like they were dealing with "constant homophobic and racist surveillance" that they already often experience in their offline life (p. 1385). In this way, social media platforms where the norm is that one's online persona be in line with one's offline life – such as Facebook – further enable and perpetuate conditions for heteronormativity and cisnormativity while creating potentially dangerous situations for their queer users. This is highlighted in how all the participants Cho (2018) interviewed describe Facebook as a "dangerous space" (p. 1387).

This "dangerous space" idea can also be seen in earlier research by De Ridder and Van Bauwel (2015). De Ridder and Van Bauwel (2015) conducted eight focus groups with a total of 51 queer youth participants between the ages of 13 and 19. They found that, when telling intimate stories online that transgress heteronormative

expectations, the fear of an imagined audience often lead to feelings of shame within their participants (p. 784). The author describes that their participants undertake large amounts of emotional labour to transform those feelings of shame into feelings of pride (p. 784). Sometimes the mental image of the imagined audience was too overwhelming, however, and participants would use self-surveillance to negotiate what stories they felt comfortable sharing online – effectively filtering out which queer stories were acceptable for the perceived public, and which were not (p. 787). Das and Farber (2020) also write about how online platforms blur the boundaries between public and private life for queer people in their literature review of user-generated online queer media. The researchers use their synthesized review of the literature to explain how queer people navigate these boundaries. Specifically, Das and Farber (2020) spotlight how online creators/influencers from privileged queer social positions (like white gay men) often receive more positive reactions and wide-spread popularity online than queer content creators with more marginalized identities, like queer people of colour, gender minorities, and older queer creators (p. 9).

With the amount of queer content available online, it is not surprising that many queer people – especially queer youth – use the internet as a tool for identity building. For queer individuals, the internet provides many intricate opportunities and ways to shape identity development (Bates et al., 2020; Craig, 2014; Das & Farber, 2020, Irmi, 2007; Laukkanen, 2007). As early as 17 years ago, scholars noted that the internet influences queer identities (Laukkanen, 2007; Irmi, 2007). Irmi (2007) explores how everyday online “techno-practices” are politicized, gendered, and sexed, and argues that we must contextualize online media by showing how online use relates to offline life and

gives room for identity exploration. Laukkanen (2007) unpacks this possibility for experimentation in her participant observation study of young, queer, Finnish teens and young adults on an online chat space called #closet. Laukkanen (2007) describes that, while #closet was originally created for “sexual minority” girls and young women, the group quickly became open to all non-heterosexual young people, regardless of gender (p. 82). Laukkanen (2007) explains how users of #closet self-identified and described themselves in unique and expressive ways relating to their sexuality and gender, such as user Erzbischof describing themselves as “heterosexual male. transexual then. temporarily lesbian” (p. 90). However, Laukkanen (2007) also highlights how common discourses emerged within the chat conversations that played key roles in how the group understood sex, gender, and sexuality (pp. 85-86). #closet users’ perceptions of their queerness and what it meant to be “homosexual” or “transexual” affected the communication and ideas they read and participated in online, and the chat room dynamic itself changed with the evolving ideas of its users. For example, Laukkanen (2007) noticed that self irony was often used against homophobic hostility, as a form of protection and defence – such as jokingly calling oneself “perverted” (p. 87). Laukkanen’s (2007) work speaks to Irmi’s (2007) observed connection between online gay communities and offline gay communities. As Irmi (2007) explains, the culture of the virtual world is distinct from but still influential on mainstream, offline gay culture (p. 57). “Technologies,” he explains, “are shaped by and are shaping our gendered and sexual identities” (Irmi, 2007, p. 61). This argument has only gotten stronger over the last decade and a half, as the internet and social media now permeate individuals' lives in ways unthinkable 15 years ago.

More recent research on the internet as a place of identity formation build on the work of scholars like Irmi (2007) and Laukkanen (2007). Bates et al. (2020) conducted in-depth narrative interviews with 11 LGBTQ+ undergraduates, and used person-centered, narrative thematic analysis to explore how these young adults' social media use influence their identity creation. The first theme the authors outline is the merging of safe spaces: participants often spoke of how they felt safe and accepted online due to being able to share their queer experience with others, often with people whom the participants only knew in an online capacity (Bates et al., 2020, pp. 62-63). By seeing others like themselves expressing their queerness on the internet and living their truth, opening up about their own queerness became an easier task. The second theme the researchers found was external identity alignment – that is, how the longing to be understood, especially when existing labels seemed to not "fit," affected how participants presented themselves online (Bates et al., 2020, p. 64). The third theme they outline is how these queer undergraduates embraced multiple context-based identities, and situate their sexuality as merely one part of their many identity markers once the process of coming out is completed (Bates et al., 2020, p. 68). In this way Bates et al.'s (2020) interviewees reject the notion of sexuality as a single core part of their identity and instead want to be seen as multifaceted beings in online and offline spaces. The final theme of identity development the researchers discuss is that of individuality and autonomy. Their participants situate themselves as very specific members of a community, with an at-times complex relationship to certain "highly personalized" identity labels (Bates et al., 2020, p. 68). While Bates and colleagues (2020) pay a particular focus on queer youth whose identities were not traditionally studied, such as non-monosexual orientations – they admit that one major limitation to their research is

the fact that most of their interview participants were white (p. 76). Despite its limitations, their study provides insight on the nuanced ways queer youth use the internet to transform, transfigure, and 'test-drive' their queer identities.

In a similar vein to Bates and colleagues' (2020) study, Craig (2014) uses semi-structured interviews to explore how online activity affected LGBTQ youth's identity development, with a particular focus on the coming out process. Craig (2014) found five themes through her analysis of ways that new online media influenced her participant's identity progression. She found that online spaces provided her participants the chance to: access resources online, explore identity(ies), find "likeness" through others, come out using social media, and take their formed-online identities into the offline world (Craig, 2014, p. 100). Many participants spoke about how online spaces created feelings of safety in physical and emotional distance, which made it easier to ignore/avoid homophobia and transphobia and instead focus on themselves and who they are (Craig, 2014, p. 105).

As my own research explores discussions surrounding the term tenderqueer on social media, establishing the major themes in past and present queer online research is integral to understanding where my own analysis fits in the literature. Throughout my findings, I conceptualize how discussions of tenderqueers on X and Tiktok are connected to racialized queer identity formation, as well as tied to how queer identity boundaries are policed and navigated online. My work speaks to how social media both facilitates harm and promotes community for queer users.

Tenderqueers and Radical Softness

To begin contextualizing the discursive shifts in tenderqueer discussions online, in this section I review how these discussions are related to the concept of radical softness. I begin with a short overview of literature on radical softness (Know, 2021; Pozo, 2018; Schwartz, 2020), exposing how the discussions about tenderqueers on social media run parallel to scholarly ideas underlying radical softness and wounded attachments. I dedicate the rest of this section to the only key writings on tenderqueers that currently exist – one popular article, and one self-published essay (Jones, 2020, Rose, 2020). As mentioned in my Introduction, just because these are not scholarly pieces of writing does not mean they are any less important and integral than the academic articles I draw from throughout this review.

The term radical softness originated from Lora Mathias, an artist whose intention with the term was to reclaim traits that are traditionally demeaned due to their association with femininity (Knox, 2021). Researchers describe radical softness as a distinct offshoot of femme culture and aesthetics, with roots in emotionality (Pozo, 2018; Schwartz, 2020). Pozo (2018), quoting an interview with author Dietrich Squinkifer, outlines radical softness as a "nonbinary transmaculine identity that approached queer femme" (para. 24). Femme, as Nestle (1992) explains, is a queer identity emerging from 1940s and 50s working-class lesbian culture in the United States. As a queer subculture, femme is understood differently depending on time and context, though a throughline in conceptions of femme is its relation to a queering of femininity (Bailey, 2014; Hollibaugh & Moraga, 1992; Schwartz, 2020; Walker, 2012).

Schwartz (2020) explains that through discourses of radical softness, femme becomes something one is/acts, rather than based on what one looks like. Schwartz (2020) argues that the term "softness" is used to "articulate belonging and resist neoliberal, masculinist logics" (p. 1). Here Schwartz (2020) is tying radical softness to an idea of resistance, an argument furthered by Knox (2021), who suggests the power inherent in embracing softness when dominant structures shun such emotionality. For both Knox (2021) and Schwartz (2020), radical softness is tied to queer understandings of vulnerability, emotionality, tenderness, and relationality. Schwartz (2020) explains that radical softness is inextricable from femme Internet culture and describes this kind of softness as both "a politically informed aesthetic and a code of conduct" (Schwartz, 2020, p. 2). Knox (2021) draws from the work of Sara Ahmed, explaining how Ahmed's writing on affect and the politics of emotion help show how softness is both gendered and understood as "a proneness to injury", an example of how the "subordination of emotions" facilitate the subordination of bodies and lives (pp. 8-9)

Schwartz (2020) also views radical softness as a form of online healing and redefining – a way of showing power through authentic vulnerability and aspects traditionally seen as weak due to their connection to femininity. Pozo (2018) and Knox (2021) echo this sentiment, with Pozo (2018) explaining, through their article on feminist game design, how radical softness can be recognized as a weapon. This framing of radical softness as a form of power and strength is consistent across the literature (Knox, 2021; Pozo, 2018; Schwartz, 2020).

What, exactly, does the idea of radical softness have to do with tenderqueers? The embracing of emotionality and vulnerability are identified as key features of

‘tenderqueers’ in both pieces of writing that explore the phenomenon. In Jones’ 2020 *Vice* article, “Introducing: The tenderqueer, the softboi of the queer community”, Jones defines the tenderqueer, focusing largely on the tenderqueer “look” and referring to them as a “style tribe” defined by a set of behaviours and characteristics (para. 7). ‘Softboi’ originated as a descriptor for “overly sensitive males” who are said to use their emotional availability exclusively to attract and solicit sex from women (Wright, 2019, p. 20). The “sensitivity” of these men is read as performative and lacking authenticity. By comparing tenderqueers to softbois, Jones (2020) frames tenderqueers as at best immature, and at worst emotionally manipulative. The same year that Jones’ *Vice* article came out, independent blogger Rose (2020) published “The cursed privilege of the tenderqueer” on her personal blog DollyScribes, where she gives her own definition of what a tenderqueer is and provides advice on how to avoid becoming one. While both Jones (2020) and Rose (2020) have similar definitions of tenderqueer behaviour, only Rose (2020) – a Black woman – discusses the racialized context of tenderqueer discourse.

So, what is a tenderqueer? According to both Jones (2020) and Rose (2020) tenderqueers are members of the queer community who skillfully appropriate advocacy and therapy language and weaponize their own trauma and oppression to dodge personal responsibility for harm they cause others (Rose, 2020, para. 3; Jones, 2020, para. 4). Both describe how tenderqueers using social justice concepts and terms – like radical softness – is a targeted way to intentionally avoid accountability (Rose, 2020, para. 3). Jones (2020) makes it clear that it is not the language itself that is the problem (there is nothing inherently wrong with using phrases like “holding space” or “setting

boundaries") but rather, that the problem lies with how the language is used to evade discussions of harm caused (para. 5). She writes that often tenderqueers attempt to deftly turn their own destructive actions into other people's problems – through deflecting blame, engaging in rampant hypocrisy, and accusing others of being the "true" perpetrators of harm (Jones, 2020, para. 4). As Rose (2020) succinctly writes, "[tenderqueers] co-opt the language of the oppressed and use it as a hall pass to treat people like garbage" (para. 10).

Along with ascribing behaviours to the tenderqueer, Jones (2020) focuses on fashion and hobbies to bolster her explanation of what a tenderqueer is, in a way that comes across as derisive and mocking. In fact, one of the first things Jones writes about tenderqueers is that they are "hard to define, but easy to *recognize* [emphasis added]" (Jones, 2020, para. 2). Jones (2020) outlines a variety of tenderqueer style choices, including wearing dungarees, having coloured hair, and enjoying primary colours (para. 2-3). According to Jones (2020), examples of tenderqueer hobbies include activities such as finger-painting workshops, astrology rituals, and poetry (para. 2-3). While it is true that curated fashion and hobbies are a huge part of certain subcultures, Jones (2020) explicitly characterizes tenderqueers as dressing in clothing typically worn by "nursery school children," or being the "sober ones" at parties (para. 2). Though Jones's (2020) focus on the aesthetics of the tenderqueer helps us form a picture in our head of what their subculture looks like, it ends up feeling like infantilization – Jones is associating tenderqueers with immaturity and child-like activities. Paired with Jones' (2020) repeated mention that this is a culture of "women and non-binary people" (para. 2, 6) she problematically construes non-binary people as 'woman-lite'. Many non-binary people

are AMAB (assigned male at birth), but it is clear through Jones' writing that they are particularly focused on an idea of non-binary identity that situates non-binary-ness as a different form of AFAB (assigned female at birth) presentation. In contrast, Rose (2020) troubles the association of tenderqueer to a specific 'look' or style by explaining that a tenderqueer can "present themself in many forms" (para. 2). Rose (2020) explains that it's their actions that matter because that is where the harm comes from.

Rose (2020) argues that tenderqueer behaviours are unextractable from racism and white supremacy. She makes it clear that she does not believe that she, as a Black woman, would be able to "get away" with acting like a tenderqueer (para. 1). She goes on to explain that people of colour, who must always be reliable and responsible lest they be read as not "good self-advocates," have much less ability to "indulge" in tenderqueer behaviour (Rose, 2020, para. 11-13). Specifically, Rose (2020) evokes the Black Mammy stereotype, explaining how, as a Black woman, she must be a source of dependable comfort for others (para. 12). Even when white people burden Rose (2020) with unsolicited private messages about their feelings of white guilt, she becomes seen as "combative" for telling these people off and setting a boundary (para. 14). Rose's words are an explicit example of white fragility and how white people will use their white tears and white rage to avoid accountability and consequences. From Rose's (2020) account, the actions associated with tenderqueers are both enabled by white privilege and reproduce white privilege within the queer community.

Tenderqueer discourse is emerging on the digital scene during what Kai Cheng Thom (2019) describes as an era of enabling in the queer community. In her work, Thom (2019) writes that many inter-queer friendships and relationships become built on

constant, unquestioning validation, in part due to the trauma most queer youth face from growing up in an oppressive society that consistently tells them their feelings and actions are wrong (pp. 33-34). This leads to a desire to constantly feed each other validation and seek out validation from friends and strangers both online and offline. All experiences, feelings, and ideas must be met with positive affirmations and reinforcement. Thom (2019) believes that queers are caught up in this “all-encompassing” validation culture because “this is how queer counterculture has trained us to love” (Thom, 2019, p. 33).

While Thom (2019) acknowledges that validation can be helpful and important in certain situations, she argues that focusing solely on validation leads to a culture of enabling that creates more harm than good. Avoiding conflict is not sustainable to long-lasting, healthy relationships, and occasional tensions can be beneficial for the growth of yourself and others – one does not need to always validate someone to still maintain a positive relationship with them (Thom, 2019, p. 34). The tenderqueer discussions online are happening during this contemporary queer moment, in which enabling is favoured over meaningfully engaging in tension and conflict management, where queerness is deployed as a means to avoid accountability.

Presently, Rose (2020) and Jones (2020) are the only substantial interventions on tenderqueer discourse; as such, their essays are instrumental in how I navigate understandings of tenderqueer in my analysis. Rose’s (2020) argument of how tenderqueer behaviour is a white queer phenomenon highlights the need for a multi-axis analysis the underscores complex intersectional identities when unpacking discussions of tenderqueers. Both Rose (2020) and Jones (2020) writings on the weaponization of therapy language and vulnerability emphasize the need to understand radical softness,

and the term’s relation to queer culture. Finally, as a phenomenon that both authors mention is present predominantly in online communities, a thorough comprehension of the literature on queer people’s varied and multifaceted experiences online is necessary to my analysis. By exploring discussions about tenderqueers on X and Tiktok, my analysis systematically traces these themes in the existing social media landscape and adds to the growing scholarship of queerness online, while shedding light on a term that has not yet been explored academically.

Chapter 2: Theoretical Framework

My theoretical framework combines concepts and ideas from queer theory with critical race theory (CRT). I begin this chapter by outlining a brief history of queer theory and CRT; I then unpack the concepts of whiteness, white supremacy, queer affect, homonormativity, and how these concepts relate to my research and influenced my analysis. These concepts are building blocks for two interrelated analytical dimensions within my findings: compulsory and normative sexuality, and the significance of affect in the expression and weaponization of (white, queer) identity. Throughout the chapter I explain how I use this framework to position how tenderqueer discussions reflect and reproduce hierarchical structural power inequities within the queer community.

Queer Theory and Critical Race Theory Overview

Queer theory is a nuanced critical framework that emerged near the end of the 20th century, with roots in feminist theories, gay and lesbian studies, and post-structuralism (Oxford Reference, 2023). Feminist theorist Teresa de Lauretis first coined the term 'queer theory' in 1990, after which the term gained momentum in a vast array of disciplines, especially sociology, feminist theory, literary theory, cultural studies, and postcolonial studies (Oxford Reference, 2023). Pillars of the queer theory field include Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, Judith Butler, and Leo Bersani, to name a few. Many of queer theory's early theorists, such as aforementioned Bersani, Butler, and Sedgwick, draw from post-structuralist thought – and particularly the works of Michael Foucault – to critically interrogate modern understandings of gender and sexuality. For example, Bersani, perhaps most well-known for his 1987 essay *Is the Rectum a Grave?*, offers an

understanding of society as a force that has excluded many, including queer individuals, despite appeals to an idyllic understanding of gay sex and gay culture before the AIDS epidemic. Just a few years after Bersani's collection, in 1990, Sedgwick would publish *Epistemology of the Closet* where she underscores, through literary analysis, how our contemporary moment is one in which sexual identity and specifically categories of sexual identity shape how people think and perceive the world. Also in 1990, Butler would publish their first edition of *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, a book that would go on to influence the fields of feminist studies, gender studies, and queer theory for decades to come. In *Gender Trouble,* Butler pioneered their argument of gender as something that is performative, an idea which has grown roots throughout many critical academic fields.

Like many critical theoretical frameworks, queer theory is trans- and interdisciplinary, and as such is often utilized differently depending on the discipline and theorist (Cannon, 2020). At its core, queer theory understands identity as a historical socio-cultural phenomenon that is ever in flux and always tied to dynamics of power and control (Cannon, 2020). Those working with a queer theory framework reject and deconstruct binaries while critically interrogating the oppressive and restrictive nature of binary identity categories through an anti-essentialist lens (Cannon, 2020).

While queer theory is integral to my analysis, many racialized queer theorists, such as José Esteban Muñoz, Michael Hames-García, and Nikki Lane, have criticized (white) queer theory for its historical centralizing of whiteness while ignoring conversations about race. Many of these criticisms revolve around mainstream queer theory's lack of intersectionality. In *Disidentifications: Queer People of Colour and the*

Performance of Politics, Muñoz (2013) unpacks how individuals who exist outside the margins of mainstream society twist and transform otherwise offensive and exclusionary works to change their overall meaning and resist dominant ideology. Queer people of colour perform this disidentification, and, through this process, create a world in which their multitudes can exist. Hames-García's (2011) work has pointed out how, despite negative discourse surrounding 'identity politics,' that social identities are fundamental to exploitation and that to honour and understand people's lived experiences, identity must be part of that process. Much of Lane's writing revolves around the experiences of Black queer women, and how the intersections of their race, gender, and sexuality affect their everyday lives. In her essay *All the Lesbians are White, All the Villages are Gay, but Some of Us are Brave: Intersectionality, Belonging, and Black Queer Women's Scene Space in Washington DC* Lane (2015) criticizes the whiteness of 'urban gay spaces' and uses interviews with self-identified Black Queer women to highlight their experiences within the "urban sexual landscape" (p. 220). Keeping such criticisms in mind, I work to employ a critical, intersectional queer analysis throughout this thesis.

Much like queer theory, those who employ a CRT framework do not all approach topics and methods from the same angle. However, two key tenets influence anyone who utilizes CRT: understanding and challenging the white supremacy existent in social structures, and a deep motivation to work towards anti-racist change (Crenshaw et al., 1995). Scholars, researchers, and activists drawing from CRT aim to illuminate how racial injustice persists and operates, such as through exploring racist discrimination in the workplace, or through calling attention to the insidious school-to-prison pipeline that systematically targets Black, Brown, and Indigenous youth (McLean, 2022). Many

activists, philosophers, and academics over the last century have influenced the rise of CRT, including but not limited to W. E. B. Du Bois, Sojourner Truth, and Frederick Douglass (Delgado & Stefancic, 2023). In Crenshaw, Gotanda, and Peller's 1995 collection, *Critical race theory: The key writings that formed the movement*, the editors explain that CRT began as a movement of mostly racialized law academics looking to critique the United States' (US) legal culture. Victor Ray (2022) echoes this explanation, writing that a key part of CRT's birth was in response to trying to understand how huge legal civil right gains in the United States did not always beget "lasting improvements in the lives of people of color" across the country (p. xi-xx). Legal scholars, drawing from the work of Black lawyer and professor Derrick Bell, argue that contrary to popular understanding, law is a "tool of the economically powerful", and that law was and is systematically influenced by "white prerogatives" (Ray, 2022, p. xxii).

While its inception is tied to a critique of the US legal system, since its beginning in the mid-1970s and early 1980s CRT has grown to become a broad, transdisciplinary framework for understanding inequity and racist oppression. CRT frameworks are heavily influenced by Black feminist thought (BFT), which I explore below. As Johnson (2015) explains in her article documenting the historical and contemporary intersections and distinctions between BFT and CRT, BFT has influenced CRT to a point where some researchers choose to employ a framework referred to as critical race feminism. My study works within this conjunction of BFT and CRT frameworks.

Black Feminist Thought

Exploring the complex intersections of identities is fundamental to understanding oppression (Collins, 2019). In my research, I am looking at a group of individuals who

share a common identity trait – that of belonging to the 2SLGBTQIA+ community – but within this community there is a vast amount of diversity and range of experiences. As I articulate throughout my analysis, emotion – and specifically the weaponization of emotions – play a key role in how users define tenderqueers. As such, Audre Lorde's (1981; 2012) writing on anger, and modern scholars who have built off Lorde's work (Chemaly, 2018; Cooper, 2018), are important for grounding my data and drawing a distinction between anger as a tool of anti-racist struggle, and rage that is used to further white supremacy and maintain the status quo. In this section I explore how Lorde's ideas have grown and evolved over the decades, describing the creation of the term intersectionality (Combahee River Collective, 1977; Crenshaw, 1989), and briefly outlining how critical scholars employ intersectionality in contemporary research. I conclude by drawing from scholars who emphasize Lorde's distinction of anger as a tool to combat oppression (Chemaly, 2018; Cooper, 2018)

In the early 1980s, Lorde published the seminal feminist essay on anger, *On the uses of anger*. In this essay, Lorde (1981) drew a clear distinction between anger and hatred, suggesting that despite their frequent conflation the two emotions are not the same and serve different purposes – that while anger has productive possibilities, hatred is rooted in destruction and annihilation (pp. 281-282). Lorde (1981) described how harnessing the power of anger in useful ways can lead to change. She explained that anger, as a thing embedded with "information" and "energy," can help liberate, clarify, and identify allies and enemies (p. 280). Lorde (1981) also unveiled typical white responses to Black anger, and explained how these responses work to uphold white supremacy – a thought echoed by bell hooks in her 1984 book *Feminist theory: From*

margin to center. White women, Lorde (1981) explained, will only listen to Black women's anger if it is not said "too harshly" (p. 278) – a tactic which serves to silence Black women from fully expressing their frustration with the status quo and allows white women to disconnect from and outright avoid difficult conversations about racism.

Lorde (1981) wrote her essay within a society that reads Black women's anger as a stereotypical racist caricature (the Angry Black Woman) and explains to the reader how Black women's anger can be a powerful tool to strategically combat against and re-shape society. Lorde (1981) argued that anger can be transformed and "translated" into action towards building a liberating future (p. 280). For example, anger is informative rather than destructive: it helps us discover who our allies are, as well as our enemies (Lorde, 1981, p. 280). In making a distinction between hatred and anger, Lorde (1981) explains how hatred is the source and cause of the constant threats that exist against marginalized people, while anger can be skillfully weaponized to combat against this vitriol and discrimination (p. 281).

Lorde's arguments and observations continue to influence Black feminist thought contemporarily, both in academic writing and popular writing. One such way these ideas have grown is through the increased emphasis given to intersectionality. While the authors never explicitly used the word intersectionality, one of the earliest writings on this topic comes from the Combahee River Collective (CRC) in 1977. In their *Combahee River Collective Statement*, members of the collective articulate how there are "simultaneous factors in oppression" such as, but not limited to, one's race, class, and sex (1977, p. 281). The Collective explains that those who are marginalized, especially along multiple lines of identity, are often dehumanized and/or used as tokens

to justify exploitation under capitalism (Combahee River Collective, 1977). Kimberlé Crenshaw, drawing on the work of past Black feminist activists and scholars like the CRC, coined the term intersectionality in 1989. Crenshaw (1989) details how those who are “multiply-burdened” are often disregarded and ignored in favour of the most privileged members of any marginalized group, and that rather than a “single-axis” framework of understanding marginalization, we must look at individuals through an intersectional lens (Crenshaw, 1989, p. 140; Crenshaw, 1991; Crenshaw, 1995; Crenshaw et al., 2019).

Many contemporary critical scholars draw from Lorde’s work and use an intersectional lens in their analysis of structural oppression (e.g., Chandrashekar, 2022; Chemaly, 2018; Cherry, 2021; Cooper; 2018; Kay, 2019; Marshall, 2022; Rubin, 2021). Some, like Cherry (2021), explore how social justice and anti-racist work must have intersectionality at the forefront. Others explore the ideas in relation to specific phenomena – such as Chandrashekar’s (2022) essay on how we must reject a deracialized mindfulness and embrace a mindfulness understanding that leaves room for racialized rage. Black feminist Cooper (2018), using a Lorde-inspired argument, challenges the idea that rage is useless or dangerous. In her book, Cooper (2018) uses a multitude of examples to describe how Black women’s anger manifests in modern-day, and how Black women’s anger can and is used to eloquently resist against discrimination and oppression.

Cooper (2018) describes respectability politics, which are often engaged in by Black people for survival purposes, as “at their core a rage-management project” (p. 151). Suppressing one’s rage in order to be seen as respectable is a tactic strategically

engaged in by Black people in order to claw back dignity from a world that might kill them for expressing Black anger (Cooper, 2018, p. 151). However, Cooper (2018) writes that respectability politics specifically place Black feminists in a frustrating situation – on one hand, white culture attempts to silence Black feminists who refuse to engage in respectability politics, while on the other hand fellow Black people will chastise Black feminists for failing to be polite and palatable for a white audience (p. 150-152). Black women, then, are denied the right to anger by both white people and their Black peers. While Cooper (2018) recognizes that Black survival matters, she argues that though individual acts of anger have a small reach, that "the collective orchestrated fury of Black women can move the whole world" (p. 168). Unfortunately, despite the immense power collective fury can bring, this power is often beaten down and systematically suppressed by structural institutions that both deny the importance of and right to feel such anger. As Cooper (2018) explains: "American democracy is as much a project of suppressing Black rage as it is of legitimizing and elevating white rage" (p. 169).

To collectively harness anger in productive ways, women must have the tools to understand and work through their anger. This is a tall order, as Lorde (1981) explains that for many women, these tools have not been developed (p. 282). What happens, then, to anger that is repressed, or anger that is not expressed in a healthy way? In Chemaly's (2018) work, she explains how rage piles on in the body, ultimately contributing to a multitude of physical health issues like chronic pain, high blood pressure, and heart disease. Chemaly (2018) is not positing that anger causes illnesses and disorders, but rather that the mismanagement of anger influences health concerns among women (p. 54). In fact, certain researchers have proposed that many of the illnesses women live

with, especially ones that are more prevalent in female populations, are "transformations of anger into socially acceptable forms of distress" (Chemaly, 2018, pp. 56-57). These socially acceptable forms of distress are also heavily racialized. Chemaly (2018) – herself a racialized woman – puts forward the argument that women must harness their anger towards changing and resisting an oppressive society. Cooper's (2018) work mirrors this call, inviting and imploring white feminist women to hold to account the plethora of white women who are content to vote against the well-being of racialized people and continue to prop up the institution of white supremacy.

Whiteness, White Fragility, and White Supremacy

How are white emotions used to exert power and control? In this section I begin by establishing how whiteness and white supremacy functions (Alang et al., 2021; Gebhard et al., 2022; Embrick & Moore, 2020), followed by explaining the origins of writing on white fragility and describing different approaches to understanding how white fragility operates (Cooper, 2018; hooks, 1984; Liebow & Glazer, 2023, Phipps, 2021). I conclude this section by exploring examples of how concepts of whiteness and white fragility are used in modern research.

I draw from the work of Ahmed (2007) and Walcott (2020) to define and understand whiteness. As these theorists articulate, whiteness orients bodies, and influences the trajectory of bodies, including determining what things a certain body can do or not do. Specifically, whiteness is about moving through the world without the "noticeability" (Ahmed, 2007, p. 149) of non-white bodies, and with the privileges of whiteness. In Gebhard and colleagues' 2022 text, the authors outline that the ideas that would come to lay the foundation for understanding whiteness and white supremacy in

scholarly work were first developed by Du Bois in the early twentieth century (Gebhard et al., 2022, p. 6). Du Bois, a Black scholar who lived through the Reconstruction era in the US, wrote about how

> The value of whiteness depends on the devaluation of Blackness; whiteness provides compensation in material and psychological forms; whiteness manifests in vehement beliefs about entitlement and superiority; and whiteness is expressed through brutal violence as well as acts of charity. (Gebhard et al., 2022, p. 6)

The understanding of how white supremacy sometimes operates under the covert disguise of "charity" has been explored by many scholars following Du Bois, including but not limited to Ruth Frankenberg, bell hooks, Peggy McIntosh, and David Roediger (Gebhard et al., 2022, pp. 6-7). Gebhard and colleagues' (2022) text in particular focuses on a form of whiteness they dub "white benevolence," which they describe as "a form of paternalistic racism that reinforces, instead of challenges, racial hierarchies" (p. 1). The writers explain that this type of insidious racism is found across institutions throughout Canada (and beyond). The helping professions, where Gebhard and colleagues (2022) narrow their focus, are typically feminized fields, where racism operates "under the guise of doing good" – hence the use of the term 'benevolence' (p. 19).

Throughout the book, the authors describe how, under the "guise of care," white settlers use their knowledge of racist stereotypes and historical oppression to "justify, rather than challenge" these same stereotypes (Gebhard et al., 2022, p. 253). For example, McLean's (2022) chapter on whiteness in education provides examples of how white teachers perform racism while simultaneously claiming "innocence and race evasiveness" – such as white teachers normalizing racial segregations in their schools as

natural rather than the result of a toxic climate (p. 47). These same teachers, if they were to be called out/called in on the racism implicit in their assumptions, might react with white tears of victimhood. After all, how can they be racist when they are so compassionate and kind? By highlighting this rush to white tears, the contributors to *White Benevolence* (Gebhard et al., 2022) show how certain kinds of racist rhetoric and actions masquerade under niceties and politeness.

What happens, then, when white feelings are prioritized? White fragility refers to when the racial stress a white person feels leads to defensiveness, aggression, and other negative actions and emotions (Liebow & Glazer, 2019). While most cite Robin DiAngelo, a white woman scholar, when discussing white fragility, many Black scholars and authors identified the phenomenon decades earlier, including the aforementioned bell hooks (1984). Specifically looking at women, hooks (1984) explains that white women who consider themselves feminists bond as "victims," leaving no room to conduct internal work on how their own experiences may be oppressive towards non-white women (p. 46). This victim identity and mentality leads to a fragility when confronted with their own role in marginalizing others (hooks, 1984). The work of hooks exemplifies how intersectionality literature is in part experienced through, and a reaction to, the exclusionary logic of many mainstream (white) feminist circles.

Researchers who explore white fragility tend to approach the issue as either an individualistic issue in need of personal correction (Liebow & Glazer, 2023), or a structural problem (Cooper, 2018; Lorde, 1981; Phipps, 2021). In Liebow and Glazer's 2023 article, the scholars offer an individual-based, neoliberal view of white fragility, defining a phenomenon they refer to as "emotional white fragility" (p. 124). According

to the authors, emotional white fragility is a white person's failure of emotional regulation when they experience racial stress emerging from race-based encounters and interactions, and react in defensive and aggressive ways (Liebow & Glazer, 2023, p. 124). Emotional white fragility can show itself in many forms – it could be a white man erratically fidgeting and huffing after his Black co-worker performs a workshop on anti-racism, or a white woman who bursts into tears after a racialized friend critiques her culturally insensitive Halloween costume. The key is that it is a form of emotional dysregulation that comes from white people who feel shame, anger, or frustration because of racial stress. Liebow and Glazer (2023) dedicate most of their article to describing techniques of emotional regulation that white people can and should access to mitigate their feelings of emotional white fragility to avoid emotionally dysregulated outbursts that cause harm, such as suppression or perspective taking (Liebow & Glazer, 2023, p. 131).

While Liebow and Glazer's (2023) work contains some useful information, its focus on white fragility as an individual problem with an individual solution – emotional regulation – ignores the structural aspects of white supremacy. Their focus on teaching white people emotional regulation creates a hyper-neoliberal approach to combating racism. The article also reads as infantilizing and coddling of white people. Theorizing white people's racist reactions as being (at least partially) the result of emotional dysregulation ignores the structural power of racism. Taken most critically it is possible to interpret Liebow and Glazer's (2023) essay as implying racism is the result of emotional dysregulation.

Unlike Liebow and Glazer's (2023) focus on white fragility as an individual issue, both Cooper (2018) and Phipps (2021) provide structural understandings of racism and how forms of white fragility operate. In her book, Cooper (2018) speaks to how white fragility is often heavily gendered, and laments over how white feminists continue to not "get their people" (p. 171). What Cooper (2018) is referring to in this statement is that while white women historically vote Republican (in the context of the US), this fact is largely ignored by white feminists who choose to play the victim when Republicans are elected while simultaneously avoiding confrontation with the racism prevalent within their own population. Cooper (2018) also calls out white feminists who fail to denounce white men who perform acts of violence, and argues that Black women have historically "viciously drag[ged]" men and women from their community who were presumed to be perpetrators of violence or those who refused to denounce said perpetrators (pp. 185-186). For many white women, their whiteness, Cooper (2018) argues, comes before and above their capacity for gender solidarity. White women are unable to recognize how their whiteness "elevates the value of their femininity" and lets them get away with actions, behaviours, and displays of emotion that women of colour cannot. White-women tears serve to overpower the voices and concerns of racialized queer people (Hamad, 2020).

These white-women tears are further explored in Phipps' 2021 article. Phipps (2021) argues that mainstream feminism (that is, Anglo-American public feminism) operates as a kind of "political whiteness," which involves wounded attachments (to the self and to power), with victimhood at its core (p. 83). Building on Brown's (1995) theorizing of woundedness as a foundation for identity, Phipps (2021) explains how

progressive movements like feminism take on these wounded attachments which place victimhood as central to battles against oppression. Phipps (2021) herself draws on Cooper's (2018) critique of white feminists who do not acknowledge the weaponized whiteness of their tears. She points out how white women will joke about "bathe[ing]" in male tears, yet are unable to do the mental work to realize that white women often put on those same crying fits when they feel threatened – in particular, when they feel critiqued by women of colour (Phipps, 2021, p. 84). Lorde (1981) wrote about this directly when she explained how her attempts to share her anger are marred by reactions of defensiveness, frustration, and guilt on the part of white women surrounding her (p. 278). She described how white women's usual responses to her anger are dismissive, prioritizing silence and the maintenance of the status quo: "Tell me [a white woman] how you [a Black woman] feel but don't say it harshly or I cannot hear you" (Lorde, 1981, p. 278). One way of not hearing is to fall back on these white-women tears. These tears of dismissal and guilt are powerful in that they evoke a certain response: that is, a protective stance from white society (men more specifically) that serves to maintain harmful racist stereotypes of the aggressive person of colour (Phipps, 2021, p. 84). As Phipps (2021) writes: "White women's tears enable us to center ourselves and marginalize women of colour…victimhood is dressed in white" (pp. 84-90).

I understand whiteness and white fragility as a structural issue rather than an individual problem that requires a neoliberal solution. While individual white people can work to unlearn harmful racist behavioural patterns, no amount of solo 'self-help-esque' improvement will dismantle the institutional embeddedness of white supremacy. As I outline in my analysis chapters, the actions and discussions occurring online related to

tenderqueers are indicative of, and inextricable from, whiteness, white supremacy, and white fragility. Theoretically white fragility is part of a broader discussion of white supremacy. Spears (2021) writes that, when considering white supremacy, it is useful to consider its “fuller” name – that is, “capitalist, antiblack, racializing, systemic white supremacy” (p. 157). Spears’ (2021) framing illuminates a core component of the structural context of white supremacy: that is, how white supremacy is inextricable from and a fundamental part of Western, capitalist society. This framing of white supremacy as an entrenched and entrenching social structure is echoed by Toole (2021), who explains that white supremacy is “more than the sum of its parts,” arguing that the influences of white supremacy are not only cultural and political, but also epistemological (p. 76). In other words, Toole (2021) understands white supremacy not just a socio-economic structure, but also as a knowledge system – an epistemological discourse – that works to justify oppression (p. 76). The ideological, knowledge system of white supremacy has a mutually influential relationship with our societal institutions, and the circular nature of this connection works to provide perceived institutional justification for white supremacy. In simpler terms, white supremacy and resulting systemic racism is not something that exists only through ideas or only through actions or only through institutions. Rather, all these function in tandem and impact one another in complex ways.

By unpacking how whiteness is reproduced and functions, and the privileges associated with whiteness, we can begin to understand how whiteness works to enforce white supremacy (Owen, 2007). In societies in the Global North, white supremacy often operates in paternalistic, covert ways that can be harder to recognize than overt violence

and segregation (Gebhard et al., 2022). Critical whiteness scholar Owen (2007) explains how whiteness is “parasitically attached” to layers of hidden privileges and relies on ‘Othering’ to maintain white supremacist racial order (Clarke & Watson, 2014, p. 70). Owen (2007) argues that understanding the “functional properties” of whiteness can help individuals recognize how whiteness (re)produces white supremacy (p. 205). Some of these properties include how the social location of those racialized as white is a location of structural advantages, how whiteness is often “invisible” to white people yet inescapable to racialized folks, and how whiteness is unextractable from violence – both the violence it produced in the past, and the violence it continues to produce in the present (Owen, 2007, p. 205). Specifically, Owen (2007) explains how whiteness is “normalized” (p. 205). Whiteness, and everything associated with it, dominates society while simultaneously being considered “natural, normal or mainstream” (Owen, 2007, p. 205).

Social scientists of all backgrounds have contributed to our academic understanding of how white supremacy operates economically, politically, and ideologically (Embrick & Moore, 2020). Many such researchers point out how white supremacy is not a force that oppresses in isolation. As researchers Beliso-De Jesus and Pierre (2019) write, “white supremacy does not work alone” (p. 1). Rather, just as theorists like the Combahee River Collective (1977), Crenshaw (1991), and hooks (2000) explain, racism and white supremacy operate within ever-complicated societal organizations, where factors such as gender, class, and sexuality interweave. One example of this interconnectedness of oppression is how gender subordination cannot be understood as identical or even similar across racial backgrounds, since white

supremacy positions white women differently than racialized women (Belsio-De Jesus & Pierre, 2019, p. 1). Understanding this intersectionality is paramount to gaining a clear picture of how white supremacy operates.

In my study, I understand white privilege, white supremacy, and white fragility as integral to understanding tenderqueer discussions. Throughout my analysis, I explore how these discussions on tenderqueers describe the tendency of white queer people deploying their whiteness as a shield, relying on the privilege of their whiteness to enact harm without notable consequence. In doing so, discussions on tenderqueer-ness work to make visible how white queer people reproduce white supremacy and racial oppression within the queer community. I draw specifically on concepts of white fragility and white tears in my discussion of the self-victimization narratives discussed within my data.

Compulsory Heterosexuality and Queer Feelings

Discussions about tenderqueers reflect contestation around the weaponized deployment of queer feelings. I rely on the work of queer affect theorist Sara Ahmed to help understand this phenomenon. Ahmed is an independent feminist scholar, whose work centers "the intersection of feminist, queer, and race studies" (Ahmed, 2023). She often uses the concept of affect in her work and is particularly interested in ideas of power in everyday life (Ahmed, 2023). In a 2004 text, Ahmed discusses what she calls "queer feelings", their affective potential, and compulsory heterosexuality. The term 'compulsory heterosexuality' was popularized by Adrienne Rich in 1980 and refers to how heterosexuality is normalized and understood as the innate and only option of being in the world. In her essay, *Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence*, Rich

(1980) explains how romantic and sexual relationships with men are understood to be the driving force behind women's sexuality and life choices.

Ahmed argues that compulsory heterosexuality "shapes bodies by the assumption that a body 'must' orient itself towards some objects and not others, objects that are secured as ideal through the fantasy of difference" (Ahmed, 2004, p. 145). For example, a body understood to be a woman's body must orient itself towards bodies of men for the fulfillment of romantic and sexual desires. Failing to orient in such a way has a variety of bodily effects, including psychic and social costs. Compulsory heterosexuality, and the Othering that comes with failing to follow these norms, impact the agency of people in every conceivable sense.

Ahmed (2004) describes the "script of heterosexuality," which, as the dominant script of everyday life, means queer people must constantly either "pass" as heterosexual, or "self-reveal" their queerness to those around them (p. 147). Seemingly innocuous phrases and questions, such as 'Do you have a girlfriend?' or 'What does your husband do for work?' are harder to field if answering them means either lying or outing yourself repeatedly. Ahmed (2004) argues that deflecting the script of heterosexuality builds up over time in the body and becomes a body injury of discomfort for those who cannot inhabit heterosexuality with ease (p. 147). Those who fit nicely into hetersexual norms may not even be able to conceive of them as norms – instead, they are understood as normal. Queer people, however, will feel persisting discomfort that, over time, leads to disorientation (Ahmed, 2004, p. 148).

In her 2010 text, Ahmed describes how it is near-impossible to sever representations of "the good life" from domesticated, monogamous, heterosexual life (p.

90). As such, queerness and happiness have been imagined as things that cannot coexist. Queer life, as a "deviant" life, is a life that is always dancing with the threat of unhappiness (Ahmed, 2010, p. 91). "Things that make you happy" are part of the heteronormative script of society: a woman needs a husband and children to make her happy, a man needs a wife and children to make him happy (Ahmed, 2010, p. 91). To not have these things, or to live a life where these things are not accessible, is to experience a life in direct contradiction to the promise of happiness. Importantly, Ahmed (2010) is not saying that queerness causes unhappiness; rather, queers are "judged to be unhappy" by not being a part of heterosexual society, and that this judgement creates feelings of unhappiness in queer people (p. 93).

Ahmed's (2010) discussion of the fear of being infected by another's unhappiness, and how this fear orients certain bodies to avoid others, draws from Judith Butler's (1990) concept of liveable and unlivable lives. In this way, happiness not only involves acquiring certain things for yourself, but also the persecution of others who are imagined as disruptors of your happiness (Ahmed, 2010, p. 96). This plays an integral role in how the queer becomes unhappy: the heterosexual world is disgusted and unhappy with queer love, and thus queer love becomes "an unhappiness-cause" for others around them, which in turn contributes to queers becoming unhappy (Ahmed, 2010, p. 98). Queer people are connected not just through their shared trauma of living against the script of heterosexuality, but through the shared knowledge that their queerness is often the cause of friend's and family member's unhappiness (Ahmed, 2010, p. 101-102). As Ahmed (2010) poignantly writes, "The unhappy queer is unhappy with the world that reads queers as unhappy" (p. 105). As I argue in my analysis, this

unhappiness expressed in tandem with white supremacy manifests in avoiding accountability, conflict avoidance, and racialized homonormativity. I use Ahmed's work to explore how queer affect and white supremacy collide to create this fixation on self-victimization.

Homonormativity

I argue that the discussions revolving around the term tenderqueer reflect both the reproduction of and a resistance to compulsory heterosexuality and homonormativity. Homonormativity privileges heteronormative traditions, beliefs, and conservative values within mainstream queer culture (Duggan, 2003). The term was popularized by theorist Lisa Duggan (2003), who acknowledges that homonormativity is often a political strategy, akin to strategic essentialism, by which queer people argue that they are identical to heterosexual people in everything but their sexual proclivities as a tactic for gaining legal rights. Homonormative conceptions of queerness also function to promote and reinforce dominant gender norms, class norms, and "colour-blind" race rhetoric within the queer community, while ignoring intersectional issues of sexuality, gender, class, and race (Duggan, 2003, p. 44). In this way, homonormativity is intimately connected to the reproduction of white supremacy. Aspiration to citizenship (via avenues like legal rights recognition) and 'normality' is tied to aspiring to obtain the (full) privileges of whiteness.

In Walcott and Abdillahi's 2019 text, the authors explain that the man-human paradigm "suggest[s] the foundational premise of Euro-political religio-philosophical orientation, which understands human as a category always already gendered as man, raced as white, and sexualized as heterosexual" (p. 24). While Walcott and Abdillahi

(2019) explain that activist social struggles can revise "reigning conception of [the] man-human", ultimately people's understanding of a conceivable human life remains the European, heterosexual man-human (p. 24). To be a white, upper-class queer is to have access to social capital and cultural tolerance that is not afforded to many members of the queer community – especially queer people of colour.

Homonormativity, then, works as a "gay tunnel vision" (Duggan, 2003, p. 47) which reproduces traditional heteronormative values and relations. Ahmed claims that homonormativity, and the subsequent embracing of heteronormative scripts and assimilation, is tied to violence. Ahmed (2004) uses the example of infamous gay assimilationist Andrew Sullivan, who argued that homosexuals should aspire to have a "heterosexual life" – that is, a life equivalent to heterosexuality where the only difference is the gender of their partner – to illustrate this point (pp. 149-150). Despite increased visibility and legal recognition, ongoing discrimination, erasure, and violence continues to demand queers "approximate the straight signs of civility" (Ahmed, 2010, p. 106). Homonormative rhetoric is precarious, and perpetuates dangerous distinctions between what queer lives are considered legitimate and illegitimate (Ahmed, 2004). Promoting assimilation creates uneven, treacherous divisions between 'good/normal queers' who can effectively reproduce a semblance of heteronormativity, and 'bad/abnormal queers' who either refuse to cater to heterosexual dominance or never had the option to conform in the first place.

Homonormativity and queer assimilation cannot be discussed in any meaningful way without acknowledging the role of neoliberalism in queer politics. Duggan (2002) describes how gay equality rhetoric has devolved into an ideology centered on earning

public favour through "domesticated, depoliticized privacy" rather than radical queer possibilities (p. 190). Homonormativity dilutes and erases the radical history of gay politics: equality becomes imagined as the freedom to gain access and live within the same conservative institutions as heterosexuality, all the while bolstered by neoliberal privatization and capitalism (Duggan, 2002). Ahmed (2004) discusses this topic as well, writing that queer people are, to global capitalism, merely a new, under-tapped market (p. 163). Ahmed (2004) goes so far as to argue that much of recent queer visibility has less to do with mainstream acceptance and more to do with money – after all, queer people are a category of consumer (p. 163). Using Duggan and Ahmed's understandings of homonormativity and compulsory sexuality, I argue that online tenderqueer discussions are unextractable from neoliberal, homonormative understandings of queerness. Specifically, I understand tenderqueer behaviours as reproducing homonormativity by policing boundaries, and critiques of tenderqueer actions to be challenging homonormativity through calling attention to tenderqueer assimilationist rhetoric.

In Rose's (2020) essay, she describes how tenderqueer behaviours are tied to racism and white supremacy. It is not possible, then, to unpack online tenderqueer discussions without scrutinizing the role of whiteness and white supremacy in queer spaces. I use my theoretical framework drawing on the word of Black feminists, concepts of white supremacy and white fragility, queer affect, and homonormativity to examine the roles whiteness and normative ideas of sexuality play in tenderqueer discussions on social media.

Chapter 3: Methods and Methodology

In this chapter I begin by outlining my methodology, explaining what critical thematic analysis is and how I utilize it in my work. I then explain my data collection method, giving a detailed breakdown of how, when, and why I collected the data that I did. This includes providing background on my sites of collection (X and Tiktok), as well as acknowledging some of the limitations of my dataset. I finish this chapter by underscoring the ethics of my research, and how I position myself in relation to the work that I do.

Methodological Approach

I use a subjectivist, semi-inductive, theory-informed approach in my research. In this approach, a researcher gathers data concerning a particular phenomenon and looks for patterns in the data to generate understandings of the topic in question (Varpio et al., 2020, pp. 10-11). My analytical framework uses the theoretical framework outlined in the previous chapter as an interpretive tool in analysis (Varpio et al., 2020, p. 12). As qualitative researchers often "go where the research takes us," what I learn from my data and discover throughout my data collection help generate my themes, topics of inquiry, and further questions (Belgrave et al., 2002, p. 1430). Both my theoretical and methodological framework shifted, grew, and evolved along with my analytical process.

When I first began this study, I intended to use critical discourse analysis (CDA) to analyze my dataset. Specifically, I planned to use Fairclough's (2001; 2013) approach to CDA, as I believed that most posts in my dataset would be white queer individuals self-identifying with the term tenderqueer. Since that is what I thought my dataset would

be comprised of, I intended to use CDA to explore the discursive elements in these posts, and their connection to white supremacy within the queer community. However, as is often the case with research, sometimes our dataset surprises us and causes us to take pause and re-evaluate our methodological approach. When my dataset ended up being vastly comprised of racialized queer individuals already engaging in discursive critique of tenderqueers, I changed my trajectory to be one of critical thematic analysis (CTA). Thus, rather than attempting to create a genealogy of 'tenderqueer,' I present a CTA of the use of 'tenderqueer' by predominately queer people of colour in their critical analysis of white queer behaviours.

While there are certainly similarities between CDA and CTA, as Lawless and Chen (2019) write, thematic analysis is an arguably better recognized tool for "inductively analyzing qualitative, empirical data" (p. 95). Scholars employing CTA work to contextualize their dataset within shifting landscapes of power and oppression (Onuoha et al., 2023). Many who use CTA in their qualitative work draw from Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis method, which follows a six-step process: 1) review your data; 2) begin to create your initial codes; 3) uncover themes; 4) explore the themes; 5) expand and define themes; and 6) write your analysis (p. 87). The steps can be repeated and re-evaluated throughout the analysis. Besides being incredibly iterative, another stength of thematic analysis is that it can be used in conjunction with any theoretical framework the researcher desires (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 81). This aspect was important for my own work, as I am aware that I must use a methodology that compliments my theoretical framework of queer theory and CRT.

Lawless and Chen (2019) build on the work on Braun and Clarke to develop a method of CTA that systematically explores the interconnected relationships between "social practices, power relations, and ideologies" (p. 92). Part of this systematic method involves two steps during the analytical process: Open coding and closed coding. During the open coding process, the focus is on sticking "as close as possible" to the words and discourses coming directly from the data, which in turn influences the creation of emerging themes (Lawless & Chen, 2019, p. 98). Closed coding comes after open coding and involves interlinking how the themes embedded in the data fit within societal ideologies, keeping in mind both what is said in the data and what is unsaid in the data (Lawless & Chen, 2019, p. 98). Throughout both coding steps, recurring patterns are investigated, unpacked, and reimagined constantly (Lawless & Chen, 2019). I employ these practices in my own analysis, paying particular attention to discussions of power and oppression within my dataset. It is through the CTA process that I uncover the main themes of my analysis: self-victimization, assimilation, and morality politics.

There is an established history of using thematic analysis for theory development in social media research by academics such as but not limited to: Davis et al. (2023), Lindstadt et al. (2024), Tadros et al. (2024), and Tahamtan et al. (2021). There is also a precedent of using thematic analysis to examine specifically queer discourse, narratives, and experiences in online spaces – such as Curry's (2022) thematic analysis of queer symbolism on Tiktok, or Handley and colleagues' (2023) exploration of how X users perceived the rights of individuals with intersecting Black and LGBTQ+ identities during the Black Lives Matter and LGBTQ+ rights movements of 2020. My thesis exists

within this framework of using thematic analysis to explore queer experiences and meaning-making online.

Sources and Data Collection

Since discussions surrounding the term tenderqueer are primarily taking place online, I analyzed posts on two popular social media platforms: X (formally known as Twitter) and Tiktok. The self-proclaimed first quantitative study of X was performed by Kwak and colleagues (2011), where researchers describe the site as a “microblogging service” in which information is diffused fast over an intricate network of followers (p. 591). Since the creation of X, both quantitative and qualitative scholars have used X data in their research studies (see, e.g., Kearney, 2019; Rufai & Brunce, 2020). Tiktok is a newer, but arguably just as if not more influential, social media site. Formally known as musical.ly, Tiktok was founded in 2016 and has found immense popularity and notoriety worldwide, particularly with young adults (Montag et al., 2021). Just as with X, many scholars using both qualitative and quantitative methods have looked to Tiktok as a source of rich data, showing how Tiktok can also be a meaningful, data-rich site of scholarly investigation (see, e.g., Jerasa & Boffone, 2021; Li et al., 2021).

While X posts are primarily text-based, Tiktok posts are audio-visual (video) media. My decision to use these specific social media platforms over others was influenced by two factors: first, Tiktok’s main user base is Gen Z youth and young millennials (Montag et al., 2021; Summerfield, 2021), which, based on my preliminary analysis, are the main age groups participating in discussions about tenderqueers. Second, X’s “microblogging” (Kwak et al., 2011, p. 591) interface of short posts, quote

posts, and post replies facilitate unique discussions unlike those found on other major social media platforms, lending itself well to CTA.

My dataset was a compilation of all posts meeting inclusion criteria (see below) from these two platforms gathered during a one-week period. There was no timeframe exclusion on posts. For example, a post from five years ago was as likely to be included in the dataset as a post from the day of data collection, so long as it met my delimiting criteria. Posts from X were saved to my hard drive through screenshotting the posts and replies as JPEGs; Tiktoks were saved to my hard drive by downloading the videos as MP4s, and comments were saved as JPEG screenshots.

The landscape of social media is transient and ever-changing as post popularity and availability fluctuate regularly. This transient nature is why I chose to collect my dataset in a short time frame. Posts were saved to an external hard drive to keep static copies, since user-generated content can be deleted, edited, or forcefully removed at any time – including entire accounts. Collecting copies of the posts ensured I could have access to them in case of removal. As Quan-Hasse and Sloan (2017) explain, researchers must fully understand the timeline of what social media posts they will include in their dataset, as this can greatly impact one's study and results (p. 112). By not excluding older posts (that is, including all popular posts in my dataset regardless of publication year), I was able to explore the entirety of public popular tenderqueer discussion on X and Tiktok, as it existed as of September 2023, the time of my collection.

My criteria for inclusion were any posts (on X or Tiktok) found under the hashtags 'tenderqueer', 'tenderqueers', 'tender queer', or 'tender queers' that had been interacted with at least 500 times, which reflects a high level of popularity/engagement.

It is possible to determine a posts' amount of interaction by checking its "like/favourite" count (both Tiktok and X), the number of times the post has been saved (Tiktok) or reposted (X), and through the number of comments (Tiktok) or replies (X) to it. My final data set included all public posts that had over 500 interactions. I chose to focus on high engagement posts because I wanted to narrow my attention to posts that generated the most discussion and had the highest reach and as such, posts which arguably are most reflective of the discussions occurring around the term tenderqueer. Public replies and quote posts (on X) of these high engagement posts were also included as part of the dataset. This collection method and criteria strategy was inspired by Jacobsen and colleagues' (2022) Tumblr study, where researchers collected their dataset by determining specific, relevant search terms and selected key popular posts from among the search results. I used an incognito browser during data collection to minimize the chances of my own personal browsing history and accounts on X interfering with the algorithm in my advanced search. Social media can create echo chambers, where search results are influenced by an algorithm based on a user's previous interactions with information and posts (Zimmer et al., 2019). Since I have accounts on these social media sites, and my own interactions have influenced the posts I see and what the algorithm feeds me, using incognito browsers as a guest user without an account helped to mitigate the issue of the algorithm.

When collecting my Tiktok dataset, I gathered a variety of videos which varied in length from under 10 seconds to over three minutes long. Once these videos were saved to my hard drive, I transcribed them into text; these transcriptions were also kept on my hard drive. Transcripts for each Tiktok video included detailed descriptions of the

visuals and audio included in each video, along with video narration and video text. In Appendix A I provide a visual representation of what a Tiktok post, Tiktok comment, X post, and X reply look like for those unfamiliar with said social media platforms.

In total, my dataset consisted of 248 individual X posts and 31 Tiktoks. My X data was comprised of 56 core posts; 28 of these core posts had threads (multiple sequential posts by the same user expanding on their thoughts), while 96 of the posts were replies or reposts to core posts. The timespan of my data ranges from June 2019 to September 2023, with my earliest piece of data being from June 11th, 2019, and my most recent piece of data being from September 10th, 2023. This means my research spans roughly four years of tenderqueer discussion.

Analysis

I performed a theory-informed, semi-inductive CTA to provide insights related to power, privilege, and oppression. During the preliminary stages of my analysis I relied on scrutiny techniques, specifically Ryan and Bernard's (2003) techniques for discovering themes. Using these techniques, I created my initial thematic key (open coding), which was refined over the length of my research. Since my research is theory-informed, guided by both CRT and queer theory, the critical and investigative nature of CTA strategies gave me breadth of flexibility in my qualitative goals of discovery and meaning-making (Belgrave et al., 2002, p. 1431). CTA helped me explore both the minute and broad themes emerging from the online discussions, and provided me with the methodological tools to connect my findings to my theoretical framework while also uncovering unexpected topics of exploration.

During my analysis, I printed every post as a separate physical sheet of paper that could be moved and piled. I wanted to have the opportunity to tactilely sort my data based on patterns and themes, and visually see differences and connections forming. I created my thematic key to organize and sort my individual pieces of data, which I continuously re-visited and re-formulated. As is common with thematic analysis, my coding followed an iterative process: new themes were added to my key the more I re-read my data, and some themes were changed upon further inspection. My coding process shifted and changed even well into my final writing process.

Ethics and Positionality

There is ongoing debate over what ethical protocols should be applied to social media research, specifically with regards to whether to classify social media studies as human-participant research, or text-based research (Hibbin et. al., 2018). I conceptualize my study as text-based research. This is because I only use posts that are publicly available for consumption by anyone with access to the internet. While both X and Tiktok are public platforms, they each have a variety of privacy options that users can use to limit access to their posts. For example, on Tiktok you can control who is able to watch a video you post, with your options being only you, friends (which are followers that you follow back), or everyone (including those without a Tiktok account). You can also choose to have your entire account private, meaning only users you approve of can follow you and watch your videos. On X you can use the setting ‘protect your posts’ to make it so only current followers can see your posts. This means that people would be able to find your account but would not be able to see anything you have posted without you first approving their request to follow your account. I did not use any posts from

private accounts, nor from accounts that require approval or passwords to access content. I also did not engage with the creators of these posts in any manner – instead, I read and mined through posts published publicly. In line with Jacobsen and colleagues (2022) and Vásquez and Creel (2019), I aimed to preserve the users' pseudonymity by not publishing specific usernames in my analysis.

It is important for me to touch on my positionality in this research, and how my various identities are interrelated and deeply connected to the work I perform. As a queer non-binary/agender person, I am an insider to queer topics and had noticed tenderqueer discourse while scrolling through my own personal social media accounts in the past. In fact, it was through incidental social media scrolling and conversations with fellow queer people that I decided on this course of research. While the exchanges that make up my dataset include posts I may have come across prior to this work in my daily life, I have not interacted with these exchanges in any way, whether that be reposting, commenting, liking, or sharing a post.

Insider research, as Chavez (2008) explains, has both positives and negatives. She describes insider positionality as not a static identity but rather something that can shift, change, and exists on a continuum. Just as I am an insider to this research in some ways, there are other ways in which I am an outsider. For example, while I am a queer person, I am not a racialized queer person, nor am I someone who engages in many discussions on social media platforms. Importantly, Chavez (2008) argues that by keeping oneself aware and educated on the potential issues that can arise while conducting insider research, a person with insider positionality can better account for reflexivity (p. 491). As a white researcher, I am part of a system that has and continues

to oppress and eliminate racialized voices from academia and beyond. It also means that my intersecting identities are directly related to my topic of study: that being, certain queer (white) identities. While there is no way to extract myself from my whiteness, the privilege it provides, and what it biases, I work to mitigate this throughout my thesis by incorporating anti-racist theory and prioritizing the ideas of racialized users, theorists, and scholars in my analysis.

Chapter 4: "A lot of your white trans favs are racist as fuck[1]": Unpacking the Racial Origins of Tenderqueer Critique

Through my investigation, I uncovered how the term tenderqueer has been used in multiple ways in online spaces. As mentioned in my Introduction, there are three discernable 'dominant' meanings of the term, which emerge between early 2019 and late 2023. In this chapter, I describe the earliest, and most prevalent use of the term by racialized queer people to call out specific kinds of behaviour by white queer people. I outline the origins of the term as a critique of white homonormativity, using quotes from my data to create a composite of how users articulate what a tenderqueer is and how a tenderqueer acts. I explore how tenderqueer behaviour is understood by users to uphold homonormative, hierarchical understanding of queerness, as well as how white homonorms proliferate within online queer spaces. Using concepts of queer affect and white fragility, I illustrate how users describe tenderqueers as weaponizing social justice and advocacy language in the deployment of white [queer] tears that support homonormative rhetoric. This rhetoric reemerges in the following chapter, where I explore the term's relation to morality politics.

Establishing the Tenderqueer

In Rose's (2020) essay, she argues that the term tenderqueer is largely associated with whiteness. My analysis reinforced this observation, with additional clarification that the term is understood by most users in my dataset as having been coined

[1] (Xuser48, 2023)

specifically by Black queer people to denote the racism present within “progressive,” leftist, white-dominated queer spaces. As Xuser18repost1 (2023) explains, “it [the term tenderqueer] was indeed created by black ppl [people] to make fun of annoying queer yt [white] ppl [people] who talk over us.” Xuser42replier2 (2023) places the tenderqueer label in the same category as other phrases originating in Black communities, such as “woke” and “cancel”: words with origins to keep Black people safe that are frequently co-opted by broader society and misunderstood or re-imagined to such a degree that the dominant meaning is obfuscated and no longer resembles the original meaning.

Many of the Tiktok and X users whose posts comprised my dataset self-identified as racialized queer people engaging in discussions about how they understand the term tenderqueer and used their posts to vent frustrations about white queer people’s behaviours. For example, in TiktokUser10’s (2023) video, the text of their video reads:

> If I go to a mostly black space I’ll have to deal with homophobia and transphobia. If you [I] go to a mainstream lgbt space you’ll [I’ll] have to deal with racist tenderqueers.

At the end of the video, TiktokUser10 decides that “black space it is,” providing an example of the compromise many racialized queer people make when determining whether a mainstream queer space will be welcoming to them. For TiktokUser10, their sense of belonging is stronger when surrounded by fellow Black people, despite the possibility of having to endure queerphobia in a Black space. The “tenderqueers” TiktokUser10 refers to are framed as not only racist, but also inevitably so – you’ll “have to” deal with them. It is not a ‘maybe’, a ‘might’, or a ‘perhaps.’ The existence of “racist tenderqueers” in “mainstream lgbt space” is understood by TiktokUser10 to be

inescapable. Their video description simply reads “daily battle,” indicating that this is a compromise they make frequently.

This frustration over mainstream (white-dominated) queer spaces was echoed by other users, like TiktokUser23 (2023) who asks using video text:

> black queer ppl in cities full of white leftists how do you do it? Im tired of being whitesplained to by tenderqueers who think i’m an aggressive person for being normal.

White supremacy within supposedly radical activist spaces is not a new phenomenon. As early as the 1980s, Black queer feminists were vocal about these issues. Lorde (1981) wrote that white people’s reaction to Black anger works to systematically reinforce white supremacy and continue the cycle of silencing Black voices. In the scenario described above by TiktokUser23, however, the expression of anger is not even present: rather, just by merit of being a Black queer person, they are sharing that their actions and words are read as aggressive by white queer ‘leftists.’ Through this framing, racialized queer people are always and already understood by their white peers as fitting into a racist caricature – such as the Angry Black Woman (Lorde, 1981) – despite and regardless of the way they carry themselves. For example, in her video discussing “the issue with tenderqueers,” TiktokUser9 (2021) displays screenshots of a Tiktok comment section that illustrates how white queer people reacted when she – a self-described racialized trans woman – responded to a white creator who was rude to her by saying that she does not “debate with white queer people.” The white creator in question commented: “This is scary. As a white nonbinary queer person. Like uhhhh wtf,” with other white queer people’s comments echoing the idea that TiktokUser9’s (2021) stance

is “terrifying” (TiktokUser32, 2021). By simply stating a boundary – that she does not engage in debates with white queer people – white queer people framed TiktokUser9 (2021) as dangerous, scary, and a threat to the queer community merely because she did not want to engage in an argument with a white queer creator.

Some users claim the creation and use of the tenderqueer label is an example of “chronically online” sign-posting, critiquing its use by Black queer folk (Xuser20, 2022; Xuser25, 2023). The term chronically online – sometimes interchangeable with the term terminally online – refers to when someone spends so much time on social media and the Internet that their sense of reality becomes skewed (Al-Heeti, 2021). Being chronically online is said to impede one’s ability to effectively communicate, especially about topics like “politics or social justice” (Al-Heeti, 2021, para. 3). Chronically online individuals are believed to focus on “problematic” issues to an extreme, up to and including creating issues out of nothing (Al-Heeti, 2021, para. 3). However, TiktokUser10 and TiktokUser23’s videos show that racialized queer people find important use in the term. By putting a label to the kinds of actions and behaviours many white queer people engage in, racialized queer people were able to connect across platforms and discuss an issue that reaches beyond online communication and affects people in their offline life as well. Xuser2 (2022) highlights this point, explaining that:

> every time i write about the “tenderqueers” […] some tend to claim it is only an online phenomenon but i get dozens of dms/texts every time telling me of horrible examples of this shit happening in organizing spaces/unions/schools/etc [.] i would never claim to be an organizer but to pretend it’s not happening in “real world” spaces is really stupid. it’s everywhere and really affects everything.

Many X users replied to Xuser2's post, agreeing with their statement while adding their own personal accounts of dealing with tenderqueers in their offline realities. Xuser2Replier2 (2022) writes that:

> they're [tenderqueers] all over 'queer housing groups' and organizing spaces' irl [in real life] but strangely enough I almost never see them at like gay bars or purely social events. I almost suspect they can't handle being in an environment where there's no obvious hierarchy to situate themselves within.

Xuser2replier5 (2022) repeats this observation, claiming that young queer leftists have "toxic, hierarchical ideas of what counts as a valid queer identity".

Each of these quotes imply that those labelled as tenderqueer refuse to recognize themselves as privileged because of their whiteness, since recognizing this privilege means challenging their sense of marginalization (as a queer person) and 'progressiveness' (as a leftist/organizer). This has a damning implication for mainstream queer spaces – specifically, that the ideas and feelings of white queer people are prioritized in these social settings, especially at the expense of racialized queer folk. Specifically, as Xuser2replier5's post explains, it is a certain kind of white queer 'leftist' who gets to feel most welcome in these mainstream queer spaces and who gets to create the boundaries of what kind of queers are acceptable. This leads to an emphasis on and promotion of homonormative narratives of queerness that racialized queer users' stories and words point to as a key feature of tenderqueer behaviour.

"I'm at Capacity": Weaponizing 'Social Justice Language'

> You should know, I get triggered when people say things to me like 'Hey, you've hurt me' or, um, 'We need to hold you accountable' or, um, they ask me to apologize [...] oh yeah, actually, I'm at capacity. (TiktokUser30, 2021)

Words and phrases like the ones used above call to mind ideas of social justice and therapeutic language – of holding space for yourself, of acknowledging triggers and trauma, of communicating clearly when you can no longer participate in a conversation. None of these ideas in isolation is harmful. Being attuned to your mental health and personal boundaries is not problematic in isolation. However, as I explore below, the manipulation of mental health and therapy-inspired language can become harmful when used as a means to avoid accountability.

Xuser12 (2022) claims that "social justice/therapy language" is systematically "misuse[d]" by tenderqueers to avoid accountability. This obfuscation serves to create a rhetoric that they, the white tenderqueer, are the victim in any situation, even when they are the perpetrators of harm. TiktokUser5 (2022) claims that this manipulation of therapy language is a tactic to "get out of being [held] accountable for their bullshit." TiktokUser1's (2021) video plays with this idea, with TiktokUser1 speaking into the camera and laughing while discussing the idea of tenderqueers getting upset at them explaining that:

> what are they [tenderqueers] gonna do - hold space? Make an infographic? Maybe like completely avoid accountability for the transmysoginistic things they'll say trying to defend themselves?

Concepts like self-care, holding space, and being overcapacity become devoid of their original meanings and intention and instead are used to excuse or even justify problematic actions – an "escape route from accountability for racism and white privilege" (Xuser8, 2022). As Xuser26 (2020) explains:

> the true essence of being a tenderqueer is giving yourself infinite room for bad behavior because of mental health stuff/trauma/marginalization but not extending that to anybody else, & even attributing malice to the same behaviors when done by other people [.]

Interestingly, visual markers and aesthetics are associated with this weaponization of self-care and therapy language. Just as Jones (2020) described tenderqueers as a "style tribe," posts frequently associated a style or aesthetic to these kinds of behaviours. For example, TiktokUser12's (2020) video where they dress up as a "tenderqueer stereotype" features a person outfitted in brightly coloured clothes, big chunky glasses, with many digital stickers overlaying the video that say things like "radical softness", "hewwo" (a 'cutesy' baby-ish way of saying hello online) and "soft bb." While associating a specific style to tenderqueer, Xuser12 (2022) provides an important clarification in their X thread, explaining that being critical of tenderqueer behaviour does not mean you are anti-"soft" or anti-"gentle." Rather, it is about calling out the hypocrisy in utilizing the aesthetics of "softness and innocence [...] to obfuscate harmful behaviour patterns" (Xuser12, 2022). Thus, 'softness' and the language of radical self-care are used as a protective cloak to deflect accusations of harm.

This projection of innocence, while "being anything but [innocent]" (Xuser12, 2022) is intimately connected to white supremacy. As Xuser53 (2020) describes,

> for a lot of white queers (esp [especially] those who are mentally ill) the entire concept of "self-care" becomes a stagnation point where we never move beyond seeking our own comfort. but when white people prioritize our own comfort over all else, it inevitably leads to white supremacy[.] white queers who “self-sooth” (aka repress) deeply uncomfortable feelings about race will uphold white supremacy [.]

When white queer people fail to acknowledge the lives and experiences of those around them, and instead fixate entirely on their own comfort, what often occurs is a focus on white comfort. With this white comfort comes a failure to ever be truly radical, as Xuser53 goes on to write: “white comfort IS white supremacy” (2020).

Thom’s 2019 essay speaks to this issue of comfort. Thom (2019) argues that mainstream (white) queer culture has become built around constant, unquestioning validation, and that this perpetual validation leads to a culture where any kind of conflict is feared – even necessary, positive conflict – leading to the enablement of harmful behaviours. We can consider Thom’s essay in the context of white tenderqueers’ prioritizing of their own comfort over sitting through tough conversations: for example, discussions which ask white queer people to think critically about their own privilege or acknowledge their own toxic behaviours are dodged in favour of maintaining an enabling culture of constant comfort. The aforementioned discussion of TiktokUser9’s (2021) comment section getting swarmed with white queer people up in arms over TiktokUser9’s assertion of a boundary towards white queer people is a clear example of this.

TiktokUser14's (2022) video provides a dramatic recreation of what this avoidance might look like in real-time. In the video, TiktokUser14 (2022) explains to the audience what a tenderqueer is by portraying two characters: one character is a tenderqueer, while the other character is someone trying to bring up an issue with them.

> Um, for example let's say, uh, you are engaging with someone who said something racist and you're trying to be like 'Hey what you said was actually incredibly fucking racist girl, that was not cool.' Um, and then they counter and be like 'I'm not a girl and you saying that is deeply triggering and an act of violence against me because I'm not a girl and you're misgendering me.' And then the conversation becomes about how you have misgendered them through the colloquial use of 'girl' versus them being racist.

Rather than experience a potentially stressful and discomforting conversation, the tenderqueer TiktokUser14 characterizes deflects critique back at the racialized queer person attempting to initiate the serious discussion. TiktokUser17's (2023) video is similar, playing out an imaginary conversation between a queer person of colour and a white tenderqueer. In TiktokUser17's video, the tenderqueer character tells the queer person of colour character they are upset at them for being "mad" at the tenderqueer character and asking them apologize for their hurtful behaviour. TiktokUser17's (2023) tenderqueer character illustrates how social media users understand tenderqueers to weaponize radical self-care/therapy language, with the tenderqueer character stating: "Actually, one could argue that you doing that [thinking I'm a bad person and being mad at me] is worse than what I did [racism] in the first place."

If You're Not First You're Last: Playing the Oppression Olympics

"Does tragedy make me interesting and special?"

(Thom, 2019, p. 35)

Denying racism denies (and perpetuates) the compounding marginalizations experienced by racialized queer folks. Coupled with white privilege and self-victimization, not only does this reinforce whiteness as a queer norm, but also positions racialized people as threats to white queer folk. Throughout my dataset, users predominately establish tenderqueers as not only white queer people who avoid accountability, but specifically as people who engage in self-victimization. TiktokUser4 (2021) describes this self-victimization as tenderqueers "center[ing] themselves above everyone else." This victimization is two-fold. Firstly, it is the use of their queer identity to perform victimhood – "queerness for white people is their minority card" (TiktokUser31, 2023). Secondly, it is invoking queer victimhood when being called out for racism, thus creating situations where they are doubly the victim.

TiktokUser31 (2023) speaks to this phenomenon when they argue how white people turn their queerness into an ethnicity online as a means to distance themselves from their white privilege. They explain that:

> white people use queerness as a way to avoid being perceived as white. They've taken the label of being LGBTQ+ and turned it into a pseudo ethnicity [...] They add cultural mannerisms to queerness because they're trying to give queerness a cultural ethnic identity.

TiktokUser31 (2023) believes progressive queer spaces, online and offline, are crowded with and often led by white queer folk who treat their queerness as a racial culture – a culture that has trouble reconciling with queerness as anything other than white. This whiteness is not only anticipated and expected, but also understood hierarchically. TiktokUser26's (2021) video discusses this idea, claiming that many white people with marginalized identities – like, for example, queerness – fight not for equality and equity, but rather for opportunities to "exercise […] their white privilege." For these individuals, then, equality is defined in terms of an ability to exercise the full privileges of their whiteness. TiktokUser26 (2021) argues that the social identity of queerness keeps white queer people from being able to fully take advantage of the privileges associated with (cis, hetero) whiteness; as such white queer people try to instead reap the benefits of their whiteness within their queer peer group. This may manifest in situations like TiktokUser31 (2023) describes, where harm comes as a refusal to acknowledge one's white privilege, or through attacking symbols that "keep them from exercising that white privilege."

The argument being put forth by these Tiktok users is similar to Nakamura's (2003) argument discussed in the literature review. Nakamura (2003) explains that the idea of the internet as a raceless, diverse playground utopia is false. Just as Nakamura (2003) shows how discrimination and racism proliferates online despite contrary claims of it as an anti-racist utopia, these users claim that white supremacy continues to dominate queer, English-speaking online discourse and in turn, leads to white, normative understandings of queerness within these online queer communities.

Take, for example, the skit performed by TiktokUser30 (2021). In this video TiktokUser30 (2021) pretends to have a conversation with a tenderqueer, and plays both the role of the tenderqueer and themself. During the conversation, TiktokUser30's (2021) character attempts to begin a conversation with the tenderqueer character about something the tenderqueer character did to hurt the feelings of TiktokUser30's character. Rather than acknowledge the hurt, the tenderqueer character twists the conversation into making TiktokUser30's character apologize to them for asking them to apologize, as it "caught [them] off guard" and is "super triggering for [them]":

> TiktokUser30: "Thank you for being here." Tenderqueer Character (TQ): "Yeah of course! It's so good to see you. And, oh my god, yes, I'm such a good listener, um, so I'm super excited. What did you want to talk to me about?" TiktokUser30: "So, the other day you actually sort of hurt my feelings, um, and I wanted to talk to you about it – " TQ: "Oh, oh, ah, oh, that's…super important. We should talk about this. Yes. Yes. *[TQ character begins to back away out of frame to avoid the conversation*]. TiktokUser30: "What…what?" TQ: "Sorry sorry sorry, um, forgot my purse! But, um, I'm still listening, yes, uh huh-" [*TQ character walks out of frame, then returns*]. TQ: "Okay, hi, sorry, I'm back. I'm back. Um…so sorry about that. Uh, you should know, I get triggered when people say things to me like 'hey, you've hurt me' or, um, 'we need to hold you accountable' or, um, they ask me to apologize. You know, all those things - super triggering for me. So yeah, yeah, maybe just don't do that to me next time. Um, you really caught me off guard and I don't think that was fair to me. [*TQ character checks watch*]. So sorry, so I actually just looked at the time and it looks like I'm at capacity. So I will actually

be leaving. Um, but, this conversation is super important to me – as you know, because I care about you deeply. But uh, maybe you should reflect on your actions, and how you put me in a really uncomfortable situation, so…yeah. Um. Catch up soon, love you! Bye. [*TQ character leaves*].

This individualistic prioritizing of oneself over others results in an advocacy that, as TiktokUser9 (2021) argues, "begins and ends with themselves." TiktokUser9's (2021) personal anecdote, described earlier in the chapter, is indicative of this kind of behaviour. When a white creator did not like how TiktokUser9 (2021) said she does not debate with white queer people, the white creator attempted to begin a harassment campaign with their followers against TiktokUser9 for having such a "scary" stance. TiktokUser9 (2021) uses this story to explain why she does not attempt discussion with tenderqueers, claiming that all they can concentrate on is "feelsy […] self-victimization" and that they only care about themselves. The focus becomes exclusively on topics that infringe on 'their' peace of mind, wellbeing, and comfort. Xuser53 (2020) argues that this is a problem for "a lot" of white queer people, explaining that "self-care" for white queer people becomes a journey of only ever seeking out (white) comfort. When white people prioritize personal comfort over everything else, according to Xuser53 (2020), "it inevitably leads to white supremacy." The act of ignoring any even marginally uncomfortable feelings about race is not revolutionary – it is a feature of white supremacy. This denial of intersectionality while fixating on self-victimization through the accumulation of marginalizations is a key aspect of the oppression Olympics.

The phrase 'oppression Olympics' refers to the trend of seemingly never-ending arguments over who "has it toughest" (Hancock, 2012, p. 22) – debating who deserves

the moniker of victim. Relatedly, both Cooper (2018) and Phipps (2021) use the term "white women tears" to describe the phenomenon of white women in mainstream feminism attaching themselves to this core of victimhood. Within this identity of victimhood, they argue that white feminists can systematically fall back on their weaponized white tears to overpower and silence any concerns raised against them by people of colour. While these white tears can be deployed deliberately, the feelings that arise from whiteness being challenged can also result in unexpected tearfulness. Pulling from Cooper (2018) and Phipps' (2021) discussion of white women tears, I consider tenderqueers' focus on self-victimization to be a weaponizing of white queer tears. Through both instrumentally directed and reactionary, defensively-elicited white queer tears, tenderqueers prioritize their own white comfort while evading the need to reconcile with difficult feelings, such as guilt or shame, or engaging in conflict resolution.

What exactly is the result of this self-victimization? According to TiktokUser31 (2023), it is a way to be understood as progressively more marginalized. In their video, TiktokUser31 (2023) explains that white queer people, rather than acknowledge the privilege they experience as white people, will fixate on their queerness and how their queer identity gives them access to a "minority card" so that they do not need to identify as "part of the problem." According to TiktokUser31 (2023):

> the more queer you add, the more labels you add, the more mental health issues you add, the more, the more neurodivergences you add, the more anything but white labels you add –the more marginalized you become […] White marginalized people exist. White marginalization is a thing, it's a very real thing - however,

> history has proven time and time again that just because there are white marginalized people, does not mean they will not take that chance to jump up as the faces of whiteness if given the chance.

Here, TiktokUser31 (2023) explains how white queer individuals will enumerate different dimensions of identity to appear just as, if not more, marginalized than racialized queer people. This focus on their own marginalization is often at the expense and erasure of the struggles of racialized queer people. To exemplify this idea, TiktokUser31 (2023) uses the example of white gay director Ryan Murphy immortalizing and humanizing white serial killer Jeffrey Dahmer through the creation of the Netflix drama series *DAHMER Monster: The Jeffrey Dahmer Story*. In directing this Netflix show, Murphy made the active choice to include humanizing elements into his story, despite the fact that Dahmer tortured, murdered, and cannibalized mostly Black and brown queer men (Barnard, 2000). As Salon writer McFarland (2022) explains, many relatives of Dahmer's victims were "livid" (para. 25) at the portrayals of characters in *DAHMER*. As TiktokUser31 (2023) explains, this was all because Murphy, himself a white gay man, wanted to "see the human in the monster" and explore how Dahmer was himself a victim. To see "the human in the monster," however, we are expected to hold empathy and compassion for a white man who committed numerous deplorable acts towards racialized people, many of whom were queer. The racialized queer body is just another plot point, an unfortunate backdrop, amidst efforts to unpack the 'tragedy' of Dahmer's life. Thus, white queer people, even those who commit atrocious acts, are conceptualized as victims at the expense of the bodies and lives of queer people of colour.

Xuser6 (2022) echoes the sentiments behind TiktokUser31's video. In their post, Xuser6 (2022) explains how they once heard an unnamed poet say that "white queer people's real gender is actually whiteness." Xuser6 (2022) explains this phrase as referring to white queer people placing their whiteness first – white before they are women, white before they are transgender, white before they are queer. The marginalized identities white queer people do hold, then, become useful tools to fall back on to avoid critiques.

Ahmed's writing on queer affect can help situate this discussion of white queer self-victimization within a legacy of violence. As Ahmed (2004; 2010) explains, assimilationist politics over legitimate versus illegitimate queers create a hierarchy of oppression. In situating themselves as the perpetual victim due to their queer identity (and sometimes other aspects of their identity such as neurodivergence) tenderqueers distinguish themselves from the 'illegitimate' queers, those queers who are undesirable and undeserving of victimhood. Legitimate queerness is (re)produced and (re)constructed through the framing of racialized queer people as always and already a racist caricature, and the white queer as always and already the innocent victim. Their marginalized status in other dimensions of identity (sexuality, gender, mental health) provides a basis for their victim status, while their whiteness provides them with the privilege of benefiting from an alignment with dominate homonorms – the acceptable and agreeable white queer. In the coming chapter, I unpack how these discussions are part of an evolving narrative over what a "legitimate queer" is, taking time to explore how my data understands tenderqueers in relation to white assimilationist rhetoric and conservative morality policing.

Chapter 5: "Vicious Little Pastel Clergy[2]": Exploring the Puriteen Side of Tenderqueer Discussions

In the previous chapter, I outlined the origins of the term tenderqueer as a critique of racism and white fragility in queer communities. This chapter builds on such understanding by focusing on a second dominant theme of tenderqueer discussions that emerges in 2022: sexual morality politics. I begin this chapter by using a narrative from the data to explore how users in my dataset connect tenderqueers to secular puritanism. I show how tenderqueer as a term is increasingly being used to describe a shift towards "gay normality" (Duggan, 2003), assimilationist rhetoric, and morality policing within queer communities. I conclude the chapter by exploring how the users in my dataset distinguish the specifics of the morality policing performed by tenderqueers, with a focus on how age plays into these discussions.

Tenderqueers and Secular Puritanism

Tenderqueers are intimately tied to the image and idea of the puriteen (a portmanteau of purity and teenager) – or, put more broadly, the concept of secular puritanism. According to Moskowitz (2022), secular puritanism refers to "a quasi-religion in which your adherence to rules and norms endows you with moral authority over others, a religion in which any misstep from these rules and norms is viciously punished" (para. 5). Moskowitz (2022) describes this as a phenomenon wherein folks can rid themselves of personal responsibility by situating themselves as authorities of moral justice. Puriteen is a term originating from popular discourse and online

[2] (Xuser44, 2022)

discussions to describe youth who participate in this kind of behaviour. To help illuminate the connection between tenderqueers and secular puritanism, I turn to the queer Lockheed Martin drama of July-August 2022 on X. This narrative provides not only contextualization to the tenderqueer/puriteen link, but is significant to my data, as several posts in my dataset engage with and reference the following situation.

The Lockheed Martin Corporation is one of the United States' top weapons and defence manufacturers, with headquarters in Washington, DC ("Lockheed Martin," 2023). In 2018 the company came under fire for its involvement in the Yemen school bus attack, in which 40 children and 11 adults were killed via a Saudi-led air strike (Borger, 2018; Elbagir et al., 2018). The weapon used by Saudi Arabia in this attack – a 227kg laser-guided Mk-82 bomb called a GBU-12 Paveway II – was supplied to the country by Lockheed Martin (Borger, 2018). This bomb was only one of thousands sold to Saudi Arabia, with the Middle Eastern country being the largest customer of US (and UK) weapons in the world (Borger, 2018). When questioned about their role in the Yemen school bus attack, Lockheed Martin officials deflected questions to the Pentagon (Borger, 2018). In a mass funeral held for the victims of the attack, Yemeni children expressed anger at not only the Saudi perpetrators, but also towards Washington, DC (Borger, 2018). While the Yemen school bus attack gained international attention and drew the concern of human rights organizations worldwide, other investigations have made it clear that it is only one example of the hundreds of civilians that are routinely killed by US-created weapons of mass destruction (Brennan, 2019). With Lockheed Martin being one of the US's top weapons manufacturers, it follows that many of these mechanisms of death are produced by their company.

Four years after the Yemen school bus attack, a white, transmasculine/nonbinary author of young adult (YA) fiction who was very active on X, Ana Mardoll, was revealed to be an employee of Lockheed Martin (Giardina, 2022). Mardoll was infamous among segments of the queer and trans X community, with many labelling him a tenderqueer. Mardoll earned this label because of his tendency to post "takes" (opinions) on X steeped in moral authority – for example, when he wrote that it was "ableist" to ask people to read books (Giardina, 2022, para. 2). According to Xuser5 (2022), Mardoll frequently used X to crowdfund money to self-publish his YA fantasy novels, and sections of the community upheld Mardoll as a key voice for social justice. He was also no stranger to launching pile-ons against those he deemed problematic. A pile-on refers to when a large group of users on a social media site attack one user, or a smaller group of users (Murrihy, 2021). In January of 2020 then-unknown writer Isabel Fall published a story titled "I Sexually Identify as an Attack Helicopter" (St. James, 2021). During the initial days after its publication, the story received many positive responses, especially from fellow trans people (St. James, 2021). The story uses complex prose to explore gender as innate to one's self, gender as a societal performance, and gender as "a (literal) weapon of the state" (St. James, 2021, para. 27).

However, anxiety on social media began to bloom from both the story's title (which pulls from a common transphobic saying), and the fact that no one had heard of Isabel Fall before (St. James, 2021). Since Fall was unknown, and the title of the story was so provocative, some queer people were worried it was written by a cis-het person with malicious intentions, despite pushback from those who had read the story and understood its meaning (St. James, 2021). Fall's intentions in using the title she did was

to channel the ironic reclamation of the phrase, which had become undercut by many trans people taunting transphobes to "get better material" – but Fall using the phrase in this way was not understood by everyone (St. James, 2021, para. 33). During the height of the online arguments surrounding "I Sexually Identify as an Attack Helicopter," Mardoll became "the driving force" behind a harassment campaign targeting Fall, which took the original context of Fall's short story and the intentions behind it out of context (St. James, 2021; Giardina, 2022). The amount of vitriol and hate sent to Fall and being said about Fall led her to ask her editor to remove her story from the website it was published on and check into a psychiatric hospital (St. James, 2021). The harassment that was leveled at her – a unknown writer with no fanbase yet to speak of – by an established X persona and author who effectively 'sicced' their followers on her led to Fall contemplating suicide and self-harm (St. James, 2021).

It was not until almost two years after the harassment campaign Fall endured that Mardoll's role as a nepotism hire at Lockheed Martin was uncovered by X users (Giardina, 2022). Users discovered Mardoll's involvement with the company and began to criticize not just where he worked, but how his occupation meant a complicity in violence – specifically, violence against racialized people in Western-oppressed countries (Giardina, 2022). Mardoll immediately chose to defend his employment at Lockheed Martin by claiming that it was the only job he could get that could pay his medical bills (Giardina, 2022). This justification was disbelieved by many, and sizeable segments of the queer X community highlighted that Mardoll's militant identitarianism and moral superiority complex was ironic given his place of work (Giardina, 2022). Some users claimed that those who steadfastly supported Mardoll and justified his

choice to stay at Lockheed Martin were the same people who had gleefully participated in Mardoll's harassment campaign against Fall two years prior, and that these users' actions were a prime example of transmisogyny (Giardina, 2022). Those continuing to defend Mardoll and his actions began to label all those critical of Mardoll as being ableist due to Mardoll's pre-established disabled identity (Giardina, 2022).

The Mardoll situation stands out as a clear case study of what is meant when social media users describe tenderqueers as puriteens, and the connection between the two labels. In the essay "Fuck Puritanism," Moskowitz (2021) describes "[the puriteens], the tenderqueers, the cancel-obsessed, whatever you want to call them" as individuals who "must constantly reaffirm their own moral goodness and authority over other people's moral goodness" (para. 15). Moskowtiz (2021) argues that rather than contributing to material progress and fostering necessary radical societal change, puriteen morality policing reproduces a white, conservative, individualistic culture of identity politics (para. 8) – a politics similar to white feminism and the white [queer] tears established in the previous chapter. This leads to a system where these puritanical-inspired, "fake social justice warriors" lash out against everyone and everything they believe to be morally flawed except themselves – with no desire or capacity to look inward and recognize the moral greyness of their own character (Moskowitz, 2021, para. 23). Despite their dreams for a better future, Moskowtiz (2021) argues that puriteens find it more palatable to live in a morally black and white world, where they are always the harbingers of moral and ethical authority, instead of working towards true material change (para. 23).

During the height of the Mardoll situation on X, several users commented on the situation – both directly and indirectly. Xuser5 (2022), in their series of posts about the situation, wrote:

> wait there's *another* SFF social justice grifter crybully who works for a fucking weapons manufacturer??? you make at least 6 figures designing new orphan-seeking missiles for Lockheed Martin but come on Twitter to crowdfund for your terrible squeecore self-published YA fantasy novels oh my god dude [.] The number of uwu smolbean tenderqueers who work for death merchants in SFF and still get held up as voices for social justice-that does a lot to explain why the industry gatekeepers were so upset at Isabel Fall. She held up a mirror to them and they didn't like what they saw. If these people would just be honest about who they are, it wouldn't bother me as much. But if you make money building drones to blow up hospitals and wedding parties then you don't get to present yourself as an authority on social justice.

Xuser5's (2022) initial post in this thread gained over 2000 likes and was reposted by over 200 other users. Their frustration over a trend of tenderqueers portraying a certain persona online of innocence, softness, and moral superiority, only to be later revealed as involved with dubiously moral actions themselves resonated with a sizable section of the X community engaging in this conversation. Xuser11 (2022) shared similar thoughts, writing that:

> …using the existence of systemic ableism to justify working for fucking Lockheed Martin, a company that maims and murders countless people worldwide, is just so fucking foul. Tenderqueer culture at its zenith.

Not only were individuals upset at Mardoll's flagrant hypocrisy, but also at what seemed to them to be a clear use of Mardoll crying ableism to avoid accountability from their community and fanbase. Some users took to openly mocking Mardoll, through jokes and sarcasm. About a month after the initial wave of posts about the situation, Xuser46 (2022) wrote:

> the Lockheed-Martin enby has decided that this story about unresolvable conflict can actually be non-confrontationally and non-violently resolved with Guantanamo Bay for tigers. It's so incredible.

The story of Ana Mardoll provides a glimpse into the disconnect between hyper-individualistic, neoliberal notions of advocacy and actual capacity for radical social change. Mardoll presented himself as a bastion of moral superiority, going so far as to use his sizable following to reign judgement on those he determined to be problematic. However, once a scrutinizing lens was flipped towards himself, he refused to look inward and recognize how his own actions and choices upheld oppression. Mardoll's situation harkens back to the previous chapter's discussion of self-victimization, and how white queer individuals will weaponize their queerness and other aspects of their persona – in Mardoll's case, their disabled identity – to prioritize their own comfort over others and evade accountability. The work of Phipps (2021) speaks to this, emphasizing how white people can and will use wounded attachments to garner pity and turn their victimhood into violence. Both Mardoll's attack against Fall, and the subsequent revelation of his job at Lockheed Martin, exemplify how secular puritanism is hypocritical, tyrannical, and tied to tenderqueers.

What about $€X?

The intertwining of sex, sensuality, and sexuality to morality has roots throughout much of human history, specifically in relation to queer peoples bodies (Chitty, 2020; Mosse, 2020; Ross, 2020; Smith, 1996). This moral regulation has, and continues to be, an integral mode of governance in many societies, establishing authority over which individuals are offered inclusion and which are ostracized. Shifting definitions and understandings of sexuality and morality have played a key role in the historical struggle for queer acceptance and rights and continue to affect queer movements today. A timely example would be the seemingly ever-present 'No Kink at Pride' debate which circles through online and offline queer communities every June like clockwork. According to Kingsbury (2021), this debate has been ongoing since the beginning of Pride Month. Back and forth argument over this issue runs deep within the community. Abad-Santos (2021), in his essay for *Vox*, writes that "what LGBTQ people quickly learn when they come out is that the 'sex and respectability at Pride' discourse is like the villain in a horror movie who is never, ever truly defeated, even if you burn the bones" (para. 9).

Those who advocate against kink at Pride claim that having kink and partial nudity on display at Pride makes the queer community "look bad" to heterosexual people (Kerri, 2019, para. 3). Gabriel (2022), writing for *Out*, describes the no kink at Pride discourse as a dangerous trend coming from a segment of supposedly "Leftist internet voices" who advocate for removing various forms of sexuality from Pride festivals. Gabriel (2022) points out that this is an argument that, intentionally or not, mirrors right-wing conservative talking points around sexuality, predation, morality, and

what should or should not be considered “family-friendly” (para. 2). A similar thought is echoed in an article by journalist Hudson (2022), who interviews gay YouTube comic Michael Henry about younger queer people’s responses to overt sexuality at Pride. In advance of a video Henry created aptly titled ‘No Kink at Pride,’ the Youtuber completed social media research to try and pinpoint where the no kink at Pride debate was coming from (Hudson, 2022). From his research, Henry claims that it was mostly younger queer people who shared the no kink at Pride viewpoint, and that those most vocal about the topic were younger queer people under the age of 25 (Hudson, 2022, para. 9).

Kingsbury (2021) argues that a fundamental problem with the no kink at Pride discourse is that deciding what is and what is not intrinsically sexual is a near-impossible task. What is sexual to one person may be blasé to the next. The context of what is worn and where also plays a role in its perceived sexuality, as does the audience meant to see the outfit. Nudity, for example, is sexual – except not always. Nudity can also be art, or clinical, or any number of things other than sexual (Kingsbury, 2021, p. 73). Cultural contexts, societal expectations and taboos, and a myriad of other factors combine to make it incredibly difficult to determine what should and should not be considered sexually appropriate. Also, the dominant group in any society is the one that has the most sway and power in deciding what is considered sexual or predatory – a fact that has led queer identities and queer expressions of romance and sexuality to be ostracized and criminalized countless times throughout ancient and modern history. For example, Foucault (1978) argues that Western societies in the 1700s and 1800s began to fix their interests towards the “world of perversion” – that is, sexualities that were not representative of the heterosexual marriage. Queerness was one of these ‘perversions,’

and as such queerness became heavily policed by both regulatory institutions like the law, and by individuals towards each other through the categorization of the 'homosexual' (Foucault, 1978).

My data analysis found that many users understand tenderqueers as having puriteen, assimilationist views on queer sexuality. Some, like Xuser39replier1 (2023), have seen the term tenderqueer used in this context so much that they described it as the "original context" of the term, indicative of how this understanding of tenderqueer is becoming more prevalent. This association is significant, as over half of the posts in my dataset characterize tenderqueers as engaging in morality politics in some capacity. While some, like Xuser39replier1, exclusively frame tenderqueers as engaging in secular puritanism, others made sure to not forego the racial critique, like Xuser6 (2022) who writes that "[white queer people will] use as many other marginalized identities to avoid critiques re: racial politics" when discussing the aforementioned Mardoll situation. Xuser30 (2023) writes that tenderqueers' desires to "perpetuate an [sic] virginal uwu softness assimilation further let conservatives, who actually just want us dead, win." Xuser30's words echo Kerri's (2019) essay for *The Advocate*, where she argues that those focused on pushing a no kink at Pride agenda fail to recognize that those who hate the queer community and see us as perverts will see us as predatory and vile no matter how we are dressed or how we act (para. 3).

Users' posts often directly referenced the danger of the no kink at Pride argument, especially given the current backlash against transgender rights in many parts of the world (Bellemare et al., 2021; Johnstone, 2023). Xuser16 (2022) writes that:

> doing kink at pride discourse right now, while the anti-queer onslaught is accelerating at the highest pace in years, sure seems like dumping fuel on the fire. Baby tenderqueers shut up challenge (impossible) and sort out your "uncomfy" feelings elsewhere. People want us dead.

Xuser33 (2023), in a series of posts, describes how tenderqueers who push this idea of "adult queer consensual sexuality as inherently predatory" are parroting the beliefs of the religious right and reinforcing society's focus on policing the sexuality of queer people. Queer sexual autonomy becomes disregarded for perpetuating a fabricated dichotomy between 'good, pure queers' versus 'bad, impure queers.' Xuser47 (2022) also calls out this behaviour policing, going so far as to call tenderqueers "a passively fascist fifth column within broader queer culture."

In Duggan's 2003 text, she describes the shift that occurred in neoliberal politics from the 1990s' "culture wars" rhetoric to a one-dimensional "multiculturalism" focus (pp. 44-45). Duggan (2003) explains that with this shift towards superficial multiculturalism came the rise of what I refer to as the Palatable Gay. With the emergence of the Palatable Gay persona, radical queer liberation movements fell out of favour for a focus on a "neoliberal brand of identity/equality politics" (Duggan, 2003, p. 44), where the goal is not radical societal transformation, but rather gay assimilation into heterosexual society. I conceptualize the puriteen tenderqueer as intimately related to this shift towards "gay normality" (Duggan, 2003, p. 44). Enmeshed with assimilationist sexual morality politics, users articulate tenderqueers as individuals seeking to establish and police what sexual behaviour is appropriate for a Palatable Gay to participate in,

while simultaneously and paradoxically holding themselves up as the voice for progressive rights.

To demonstrate, we can explore Xuser14's (2022) popular thread, which collectively has over 10,000 likes. In Xuser14's thread, they emphasize that the danger with tenderqueer puriteen thinking is how it creates a "culture of performative moral purity" wherein the moral purity in question is being defined by sixteen-year-olds on the internet. As Xuser14 (2022) writes:

> The difference between holding queer people accountable for real harm, and attacking queer people over imaginary harm, is clear when the latter almost always manifests as a backlash to any challenge of status quo, centrist, patriarchal cishet definitions of "respectable" [.] It's a politic that punishes queer people who refuse to bow to the social pressures of assimilation

Other X users replied to and reposted Xuser14's post thread, agreeing with their sentiment. Xuser14replier1 (2022) described the phenomenon as "respectability politics prey[ing] on complacency." Xuser14replier4 described it as "hyper-moral gay Twitter discourse" that they cannot stand. In another X thread, Xuser21 (2022) described tenderqueer puriteens as focused on assimilation, describing them as utilizing:

> a combination of queerphobia and slut shaming, couched in appropriated social justice rhetoric intended to make their very conservative ideology more palatable, where they just accuse people en masse of bringing shame on the community at best, being child predators at worst. They tend to target trans and nonbinary people, and bisexuals. They both hate asexuals and use them as justification for

> compulsory public modesty that should be enforced—according to some—by the state, because they conflate any amount of public nudity with sexual assault (…) Some tend to be extremely harsh in their community gatekeeping and policing, and engage in coordinated harassment, or will spread accusations of pedophelia even when no victim exists.

This "hyper-moral gay Twitter discourse" (Xuser14replier4, 2022) is exemplary of the issues Duggan (2003) outlined with gay equality rhetoric and homonormativity, and by no means is it new. In the late 1980s and early 1990s an emerging form of gay moralism grew alongside progressive AIDS activism, which sought to vilify gay "promiscuity" as a strategy to slow the spread of the virus (Duggan, 2003, p. 53). Gay people could be saved from disease, if only they acted more like heterosexuals. This gay moralism offered a public/private sphere structuring wherein a gay person's public sphere dramatically narrows and their sexuality is reserved for only (the right kind of) domestic privacy (Duggan, 2003). The no kink at Pride debate serves as one such instance where the "remapping of public/private boundaries" (Duggan, 2003, p. 50) by tenderqueers invokes a vision of queer people as inherently predatory and queer sexuality as confined to the private sphere lest they give themselves away as impure queers and ruin progress for everyone. Users in my dataset articulate tenderqueers as publicly positioning themselves on social media as the "conventional gays who represent the responsible center" (Duggan, 2003, p. 50), in direct contrast to the perverted, problematic queers who engage in and debate about the history and importance of kink and sex at Pride. This positioning is in turn justified by the puriteen tenderqueer, acting from a mixture of moral superiority, positioning themselves as the righteous harbingers

of moral sanctity. However, it would be careless to understand this as just some queer individuals being 'prudish' and self-righteous, when they are in fact recycling assimilationist rhetoric that has been used in the queer community for decades. Fear of ridicule and oppression from heterosexual society, then, is also a driving factor. Thus, we can contextualize tenderqueers as a continuation of a long history of morality policing within queer communities. However, something distinct about discussions on tenderqueers is how users specifically point towards young people as the perpetrators of this policing behaviour. Below I investigate how age plays a key factor in the ways users in my dataset understand tenderqueers.

What's Age Got to Do with It?

It is clear, from the very word itself – puri*teen* – that age is part of this particular construct of 'tenderqueer.' Within my dataset, discussions of tenderqueers often mentioned, either in passing or in great detail, age as a factor. TiktokUser27 (2021) describes tenderqueers as "13 year old LGBT children with bad takes online." Xuser6 (2022) uses the phrase "baby tenderqueers" to convey an image of them as young, naive, and immature. In their explanation of who fits into a tenderqueer profile, TiktokUser9 (2021) describes them as "typically younger people." Xuser31 (2022) associates tenderqueer behaviour with "financially privileged college kids," while Xuser2replier3 (2022) uses the term "teenage tenderqueers."

Xuser33replier2 (2023) ponders whether the expression of "prudish, negative sentiments towards queer sex" coming from younger queer people is a result of greater societal acceptance, lending to less desire for "kink and taboo stuff" and instead a focus on ascribing to the norms of heterosexual sexuality. They point to the idea that greater

acceptance means less queer trauma, resulting in less potential desire to seek out 'taboo' forms of sexual pleasure. Xuser21 (2022) shares a different theory for this influx of young queer individuals on social media who cringe at overt displays of queer sexuality, arguing that:

> tenderqueers/puriteens are just words to describe a phenomenon where many young queer people have decided the reason for anti-queer discrimination is that older queers haven't tried hard enough to assimilate.

However, despite this spotlight on younger queers, several posts in my dataset call this focus on age into question. Xuser21reposter2 (2022), in response to an X thread explaining tenderqueers and how they act, writes:

> what's with the shift in folks pinning tenderqueer discourse on youth and not the fragile white and white aligned neoliberal smol beans and soft bois aged 21-35 who infiltrate historically black neighborhoods breadcrumb partners and post infographics as a main form of activism?

Here, in this post, we see Xuser21reposter2 (2022) making an important intervention in the dominant discussion – that framing tenderqueer behaviour as exclusively or mostly the product of youthful ignorance erases the role that race and white supremacy play in morality policing. Xuser17's (2022) thread also unpacks this topic, with particular attention to the rhetoric envisioning tenderqueers as youths:

> i agree with a whole lot of the tenderqueer thread [referencing a popular X thread on tenderqueers], except i know a lot tenderqueer adults. tenderqueer is a function of white, middle class queerness more than age to me. perhaps these new ones are

> super tenders but the terminology has been around for at least a decade, possibly longer. i wish most tenderqueers *were* youth bc [because] that would be more redeemable. the impact tq [tenderqueer] logic has had on queer spaces has been a long time coming and will be hard to undo.

Like Xuser21reposter2 (2022), Xuser17 (2022) disagrees with the popular narrative of tenderqueer behaviour being the result of assimilating, unworldly youth, and instead highlights tenderqueer actions as fundamentally connected to whiteness and class. Xuser17's (2022) thread inspired over 30 replies, with many fellow users agreeing with Xuser17. Xuser17replier1 (2022) explains that they have seen commentary from others who posit that many tenderqueers are adults who are projecting based on what they believe would have kept them safe as underaged queers – hence such a strong focus on repression and visceral reactions to overt sexuality. This idea ultimately ties back to the infantilized depiction of tenderqueers discussed both above and in Jones' (2020) *Vice* article on tenderqueers. Offering a clarifying distinction, Xuser17replier3 (2022) explains:

> i think (white) people talk about tenderqueers as teens because many of us were them/were more similar and see that behaviour as something to be grown out of. when i see a tq [tenderqueer] 35 year old online i am usually first like "well some people are still 16" before i realize they ARENT 💀[.]

Here Xuser17replier3 (2022) is illustrating why so much of the discussion around tenderqueers frames them as youths – arguing that for many white people, tenderqueer conduct is something they worked on unlearning and thus they envision it as a stage of development rather than toxic behaviour patterns unmoored from age.

What happens then when harmful – and often racist – behaviour in the queer community is explained away as a product of immaturity? Just as Cooper (2018) explains that white women's whiteness gives them the power to evade accountability for certain actions and emotional displays, dismissing or undermining the problematic behaviours of tenderqueers due to a perception of the age of those engaging in such behaviour provides means for easy dismissal. After all, no one wants to hold youth to the same standards as adults. Thus, associating tenderqueers with an image of ignorant teenagers serves to silence discussion on how these problematic actions proliferate across generations and operate more as an aspect of white queerness than pubescent queerness. This is particularly insidious, since, as Lorde explained in 1981 and Cooper repeats in 2018, an inability to take accountability for one's harmful actions is, and always will be, unreconcilable with intersectional solidarity. What is left is a homonormative understanding of queerness and queer communities which upholds white supremacy.

In the first chapter of my analysis, I discussed the racial origins of the tenderqueer label and how it was conceived as a term to describe certain white queer people and criticize aspects of white queerness. Throughout this chapter I unpacked an additional layer of understandings of tenderqueer, focusing on the term's connection to assimilationist discourse and sexual morality politics. In the coming chapter, I conclude my analysis by unpacking how the label of tenderqueer is now being levied at the very racialized people who used the term to call out racism in the queer community. In interrogating this dramatic shift, I theorize what this change in meaning implies about privilege and oppression in the queer community.

Chapter 6: Tenderqueers Gone Woke: Exploring the White Co-option of Tenderqueer

In chapter 4, I discussed the term tenderqueer as it was originally understood – that is, a label created by Black queer people to describe white queer people who use the language of advocacy and self-care to self-victimize and deflect personal criticism, especially as it pertains to racism. I explored the harm of this behaviour, tying it to the exclusion of racialized queer folks from mainstream (white) queer spaces. As discussed in chapter 5, tenderqueer is also used to describe those engaging in secular puritanism and assimilationist politics. This usage of the term did not begin in earnest until roughly 2022, showing how the term's layers of meaning evolve over time. As I explore below, a recent co-option of the term tenderqueer is occurring, resulting in an obfuscation of the word's previous understandings. Specifically, tenderqueer is beginning to be used by white queer people to position racialized queer people as the perpetrators of harm in conversations about accountability. I use the Keffals situation – brought up multiple times in my X dataset – to explore the implications of this co-option below.

Tracing the Origins of Takeover

> A lot of y'all follow @keffals who is now telling her followers to pretend to be 'black butch lesbians' to 'infiltrate tenderqueer communities'. These are your faves.
>
> (Xuser48, 2023)

In early 2022, a well-known white trans streamer, Keffals, came under fire for engaging in racist behaviour and actions (Xuser18, 2023; Xuser37, 2023; Xuser48,

2023). Keffals' racist harassment had allegedly been called out by Black trans people years prior, but the situation came to a head in 2022 when Keffals and other influential white trans women associated with her were rumoured to be running block chains on Black trans X users (Xuser37, 2023). On X, a block chain refers to the process of, either manually or through a browser extension, blocking all the followers of a specific account, or all the accounts a specific user is following. The most common way X users perform this action is through the browser extension Twitter Block Chain, which was developed by devFluid to help X users block other users en mass (Flrn, 2020). By mass blocking, a user can tailor their social media experience and ensure that large sections of the community are unable to view their account, direct message them, or tag them in posts. To navigate these accusations of running block chains, Keffals and her friends claimed that they were blocking these Black X users because of worry they were Kiwi Farm 'sockpuppets' (Xuser37, 2023). Kiwi Farms is a notorious forum-based website that regularly organizes harassment campaigns against public figures, and has been taken offline multiple times (Tiku, 2023). That year, Keffals had been a victim of a targeted abuse campaign by Kiwi Farms users that culminated in her private information being posted publicly online (doxxing) and police being called to her house by strangers (swatting) (CBC Radio, 2022). Despite this context, Black X users refused to believe Keffals' explanation for mass blocking the Black trans community, and instead viewed her behaviour as a deliberate silencing and refusal to engage with Black trans people and their concerns regarding her racist actions. As Xuser48 (2023) describes:

> A lot of you are responding perpetuating lies about why Keffals and Erin [another white trans creator] block chained most of black trans twt [Twitter/X] and even if

> you don't believe it now, even stating these lies helps keep them going. Ultimately it doesn't matter what they said the reason is. Blocking black trans people but platforming fascists while telling people to engage in blackface is sick. Please just leave it at that. We do not care about anything else.

The Keffals situation is particularly helpful for understanding the present metamorphosis the term tenderqueer is undergoing. Before 2022, many X users, Black and otherwise, used the word tenderqueer to describe Keffals: that is, they perceived her as a white queer person who used her queer identity to avoid accountability for harm and talking over racialized queer users (Xuser18, 2023). However, recent white co-option of the term tenderqueer has led to the term sometimes being used by white queer people to describe queer people they perceive as 'cringe,' or queer people whose views they want to shut down. In this respect, 'cringe' refers to any queer person the labeller in question finds to be annoying, embarrassing, overly sensitive, uncomfortable, awkward, and/or otherwise non-normative. As Xuser18 (2023) explains:

> 'tenderqueer' used to be a word that described people like keffals: queer people who use their queer or otherwise marginalized identities to avoid accountability. Much like "woke", it's [tenderqueer] now a word that's been co-opted by right-wingers to mean something completely different.

In Keffals' case, she created a fake X account under the username @theboywife while live on one of her streams to make fun of those she deemed to be tenderqueers (Xuser37, 2023). On her stream, Keffals used this sock puppet account to find queer X users who she determined to be cringe-worthy – with these users tending to be self-described neurodivergent people – and trolled them (harassed them) live to her audience. One

example of an X account that was trolled by Keffals on stream and subsequently harassed by her followers was @LiteralGrill (Allie), who describes herself as a polyamourous, autistic, amputee and author (Xuser57, 2023). Allie was targeted by Keffals due to speaking up against Keffals' behaviour in the past, specifically regarding Keffals' use of the R-slur and treatment of the Black queer community (Xuser57, 2023). Allie's act of speaking out against Keffals made her into a target – a 'cringe' tenderqueer.

The Keffals situation is particularly ironic – a white queer person who was originally described as a tenderqueer by Black and other racialized X users now uses the term herself to humiliate and mock large sections of the queer community who "take bigotry seriously" (Xuser37, 2023). Xuser42replier3 (2023) summarizes the concerning aspect of this shift, writing that:

> what's crazy is how the word tenderqueer has been appropriated from its original meaning of "white queer people who weaponize their marginalizations to avoid critique of their racism" to "anyone who calls out racism in the queer community" and it's so insidious.

In Ahmed's 2023 text*,* she explains that one becomes a feminist killjoy by refusing to sit back quietly and ignore injustice, even and especially when it impedes the happiness of others. By pointing out harm, you become seen as the problem, as the person who has ruined the atmosphere – the 'killjoy.' As Ahmed (2023) writes, "You become a feminist killjoy when you are not willing to go along with something, to get along with someone (…) you become a feminist killjoy when you react, speak back" (p. 4). I argue that the racialized queer users in my data are acting as feminist killjoys – not

only through their use of tenderqueer discussions to critique the behaviours of white queer people, but also by vocalizing their frustrations over how the term is being co-opted by the white queer community in present day. By refusing to ignore these issues, these queer people of colour are acting as "disruptors of happiness" (Ahmed, 2010, p. 96), standing up against the white comfort that comes from white queer people using any tactic available in their arsenal to avoid racial stress – including not only white tears, but also aggressive defensiveness in some cases.

Uno Reverse Card: Appropriating Tenderqueer

The recent white co-option of the term tenderqueer has led to some queer community members labeling those who use the word as dangerous, with Xuser42 (2023) writing that "Tenderqueer is now a racist dog whistle for me and if I see you using it, know your space is not safe for me." Xuser39's (2023) own discomfort with the label stems from what they claim is an oversaturation, arguing that tenderqueer has become shorthand for "the embarrassing queers" rather than its earlier association with racism and "puriteens." Xuser26reposter1 (2023) claims that discussions surrounding certain aesthetic "tells" for tenderqueers – which were unpacked in previous chapters – are simply aesthetics common with non-binary and polyamorous people, furthering the argument of how the term is presently used to Other rather than effectively critique:

> I fucking hate this article, this take, & this term [referring to the term tenderqueer]. It's not a coincidence that a lot of the "tells" for being a "tenderqueer" in this article are aesthetics common to young non-binary folx & polyam queers. "Tenderqueer discourse" is just purity politics with concern trolling.

Xuser24 (2023) goes so far as to say that tenderqueer is now being used as a word to describe “neurodivergent non-binary trans people” that prominent, popular white queer social media personalities like Keffals disparage online. These users are calling attention to how the term tenderqueer is becoming less about calling out racism and assimilationist rhetoric in the queer community, and more about Othering any queer person deemed mockable. We can see this mocking in TiktokUser12’s (2023) video, where they dress up a ‘stereotypical tenderqueer.’ In their video, TiktokUser12 portrays their tenderqueer character as someone acting in a childish manner, wearing big chunky glasses, colourful hair clips, and bright clothing. Problematic actions and behaviours become less important that emphasizing visual markers that can be used to parody and degrade.

These critiques stand in stark contrast to previous understandings of the term. Popular internet personalities like Keffals have hundreds of thousands of followers, and with these large followings come significant potential in influencing dominant understandings of tenderqueers. As previously discussed in my Introduction, the internet accelerates language evolution tremendously (Kumari, 2022; Satibaldieva, 2024; Sharofova, 2024). I believe that the large cultural influence Keffals has due to her sizeable follower count is playing a significant role in shifting the common usage of the term tenderqueer online.

As Xuser18 (2023) explains, this is by no means the first or only example of white people taking a term coined by racialized people and distorting it to a point where the original intent and purpose of the word is lost:

> it's especially heinous because these words [referring to the term tenderqueer] get turned around on the groups that coined them. "woke" came from Black ppl [people] as a way to describe staying alert to the dangers of white supremacy, which are everywhere. it's a big red flag to see white people using these words [tenderqueer; woke] this way [.]

Woke is a term with roots in the Black Lives Matter movement (Pulliam-Moore, 2016). Aerial et al. (2017) describe woke as a word that refers to having a "critical consciousness of intersecting systems of oppression" (p. 90). However, as the word grew in popularity and mainstream use, the definition of it changed (Coulter & Moruzi, 2022). In a 2023 interview with the New Yorker, linguist Thorne explains that woke has become an "unusable word," arguing that because of the co-option of the term by the conservative right as the reason for everything they perceive as bad or morally wrong, woke "doesn't actually mean anything" anymore (Remnick, 2023, para. 1). Woke's present use as both a boogeyman phrase and a 'catch all' for radical critiques – such as its conflation with critical race theory and Marxism – has obfuscated the original intent behind the term. Rather than describing critical consciousness, woke is instead often used in the context of defending racist and nationalistic 'values,' framing 'wokeness' as an attack on the nation-state and the white supremist status quo.

Based on my analysis, I argue the change we are seeing online in understandings of the word tenderqueer mirrors what happened with the term woke. While tenderqueer once held specific racial significance as a word used to critique white queer individuals absconding personal accountability for racism, it now serves to shut down discussions about racism when turned against Black/racialized folks. This is, in fact, a direct

example of the original understanding of tenderqueer behaviour – a direct manifestation at play of white queer people using deflection and directed denial to avoid accountability by shifting blame. As Xuser42replier2 (2023) succinctly writes: “it sucks bc [because] anything with origins to keep Black people safe, white people co-opt and turn into something completely opposite to what it means.”

As of early 2024, it remains to be seen whether this obfuscation of the term tenderqueer will continue. If we use the history of ‘woke’ as a point of reference, we can theorize with some clarity that tenderqueer’s co-option may continue, reaching a point where its new, sanitized meaning dominates online conversations. However, as demonstrated in many of the posts quoted above, I believe this domination will not come without pushback.

Conclusion

This thesis has mapped how the term tenderqueer is understood and used on social media sites X and Tiktok, drawing primarily from the voices of racialized queer folk. I began by underscoring the racial origins of the term, relying on user's descriptions of tenderqueers to build a composite. In unravelling the term's connection to white fragility and white supremacy, I described how queer people of colour use(d) tenderqueer to criticize the harmful actions and behaviours of white queer people. This included looking at how self-victimization and the weaponizing of queerness (among other marginalized identities) is used by white queer people to evade accountability and silence queer people of colour. Following this, I explored how secular puritanism, morality politics, and assimilationist rhetoric is embroiled in online tenderqueer discussions. I concluded my main analysis by describing how the word tenderqueer, and its meaning, is presently being appropriated by the very community it was originally intended to critique – white queer people – and, in some cases, is now deployed against those who were originally using it. I draw parallels to how this co-option mirrors the cultural trajectory of other words with roots in racial justice, like woke and cancel. The significance of this appropriation happening in online spaces provides a critical look into queer identity formation online.

As discussed in the literature review, researchers studying queerness online is not new – and my work contributes to this body of literature, illustrating how studying tenderqueer discussions online can provide a nuanced look into how white supremacy is understood by users to be (re)produced and (re)enforced by white queer individuals. My findings particularly connect with the literature on how online spaces can be conflicting

areas for racialized queer folk, showing how social media can simultaneously provide queer people of colour with platforms to critique white supremacy and racism within the queer community, while also existing as spaces that perpetuate harm and distrust towards racialized queer people. My work also links to how racialized queer folk feel forced into self-identify/outing themselves online in order to make truth claims, which I noticed throughout my data. Many times, users would state their identity as a queer person of colour before beginning their critique of tenderqueers, presumably to give credence to their thoughts and ideas.

Through my analysis, I found that how tenderqueers are understood in relation to oppression within the queer community is incredibly layered. Through tracing the evolving understandings of tenderqueer, I argue that the predominant meanings associated with tenderqueers on Tiktok and X work to call out white, homonormative understandings of queerness. Through the weaponization of marginalized identities and advocacy language, tenderqueers create a culture of white [queer] enablement where racialized queer people are silenced – both in online and offline spaces. This highlights key, on-going issues within queer culture: that of white queer people's refusal to engage in meaningful conflict resolution, white queer people's centralized focus on individualism and self-victimization, and how their subsequent actions perpetuate harm, uphold white supremacy, and dominante 'progressive'/activist spaces. This white self-victimization connects to the recent wave of sexual morality politics online, such as the ones referenced in discussions of tenderqueers. It also aligns distressingly with the resurgence of right-wing populism throughout the globe, such as traditionalism, anti-immigration sentiments, and anti-2SLGBTQIA+ discourses (Barbee et al., 2022; Doval

& Souroujon, 2021; Lavin, 2020). As some users in my dataset point out, morality politics and sex-negative sentiments rely on heteronormative, queerphobic, white supremacist logics that serve to justify the violence and oppression faced by much of the queer community, particular those most marginalized.

A focus by white queer people on uplifting and underscoring the Palatable Gay – the modest, assimilationist, deradicalized queer – is at the expense of all those who do not neatly fit into homonormative understanding of queer sexuality. As illustrated in my analysis, not conforming to these white, homonormative understandings of queernees can sometimes mean online harassment campaigns of morality policing against those who do not fit within the mold of gay normalcy. I also argue that my findings serve as another example of how language initially created to inform and protect people of colour is systematically co-opted by white culture. This has implications for how racism perpetuates within mainstream, English-speaking queer online spaces. White queer people's appropriation of the term tenderqueer is an example of how the tools meant to critique whiteness are systematically obfuscated through situations such as a shift in the meaning of a single word.

No study, however robust, is without limitations. The first, and most pressing limitation I would like to mention, is my status as a white queer person. While I worked to ensure reflexivity over the course of my study, my positionality as a white person is unquestionable and not something I can erase. As a white person, I am cognizant that my own white privilege and biases can influence the work I produce. Due to this fact, I encourage folks who are interested in exploring this topic further to read popular writing on this topic by racialized queer authors, such as Dolly Rose and queers of colour on

social media sites. I also urge individuals to seek out, read, and engage with CRT scholarship and the work of Black feminist theorists, as tenderqueer discussions relate directly to many points made by critical race scholars.

Another limitation of my work is the nature of my dataset. As discussed in my methods chapter, social media posts are transient pieces of information that often lack longevity and may be deleted or removed without warning at any time. Search engines on social media platforms are also poorly optimized and can led to different results even when two users input identical parameters. This means that another researcher trying to replicate my study may not find the exact same number of posts I did, and that pieces of my data may not longer exist. Despite these limitations, I have done my best to create a rigorous and illuminating study, which I hope will influence other academics to consider this topic of inquiry in the future.

If remaining online-specific, future researchers might choose to explore how tenderqueers are understood and discussed on alterative social media sites, including but not limited to Instagram, Tumblr, Facebook, or Reddit. Further research may attempt to bridge the gap between online and offline discussion by conducting one-on-one interviews or focus groups with queer individuals on the topic of tenderqueers. Other avenues for further research may also include an in-depth look at the aesthetics and symbols connected to tenderqueers, an exploration of how current tenderqueer discussions connect to right-wing populism and homonationalism, or a critical analysis of the role of ableism and disability politics in tenderqueer discussions.

While academic studies have their place, what tangible, pragmatic things can individuals do to remedy some of the problems I have highlighted throughout this

thesis? Firstly, white queer people must acknowledge that their queerness does not mean they cannot be racist, or that their sexual marginalization means they can avoid performing the important internal work of unlearning racist thoughts and behaviours. This internal work is not a one-time thing, but rather an active, reflexive action that white people should consistently perform. Additionally, white queer people must recognize that radical queer liberation is impossible without intersectionality. To undermine the experiences, concerns, and critiques of queer people of colour, and hide from necessary conflict, upholds white supremacy. Queerness is not a white monolith. Queerness contains multitudes: to begin working towards collective liberation, one must recognize that queer liberation is not possible without gender liberation, without racial liberation, without class liberation, without disabled liberation. I call on all white queer individuals to think of things that they do (or do not do) in their everyday life that contribute to upholding a white, colonial, patriarchal, sexist society, and resolve to put in the work to change these patterns of behaviour. I also call on academia to recognize that all knowledge, not merely information that come from the academy, is valuable and worthy of engagement. Much of my thesis involved analyzing an issue that has been discussed at length by racialized queer folk, through the avenue of online social media communication. Just because a work is not 'scholarly' does not make it any less important or worthwhile.

References

Abad-Santos, A. (2021, June 2). Can Pride even be radical or kinky if it's sponsored by Target and JPMorgan? *Vox*. https://www.vox.com/the-goods/22463879/kink-at-pride-discourse-lgbtq

Aerial A. A., Zamora B., & and Karikari, S. N. (2017). "We are Woke": A collaborative critical autoethnography of three "womxn" of color graduate students in higher education. *International Journal of Multicultural Education*, *19*(1), 89–104. http://doi.org/10.18251/ijme.v19i1.1259

Ahmed, S. (2023). *Bio*. Sara Ahmed. https://www.saranahmed.com/bio-cv.

Ahmed, S. (2023*). The feminist killjoy handbook: The radical potential of getting in the way*. Seal Press.

Ahmed, S. (2010). *The Promise of happiness.* Duke University Press.

Ahmed, S. (2007). A phenomenology of whiteness. *Feminist theory*, *8*(2), 149-168.

Ahmed, S. (2004). *The cultural politics of emotion*. Routledge.

Al-Heeti, A. (2021, September 9*)*. 'Chronically online': What the phrase means, and some examples. *Cnet*. https://www.cnet.com/culture/internet/chronically-online-what-the-phrase-means-and-some-examples/

Alang, S., Hardeman, R., Karbeah, J. M., Akosionu, O., McGuire, C., Abdi, H., & McAlpine, D. (2021). White supremacy and the core functions of public health. *American Journal of Public Health*, *111(*5), 815-819.

Bailey, M. M. (2014). Engendering space: Ballroom culture and the spatial practice of possibility in Detroit. *Gender, Place & Culture*, *21*(4), 489–507. https://doi.org/10.1080/09663 69X.2013.786688

Barbee, H., Deal, C., & Gonzales, G. (2022). Anti-transgender legislation—a public health concern for transgender youth. *JAMA Pediatrics*, *176*(2), 125-126. http://doi.org/10.1001/jamapediatrics.2021.4483

Barnard, I. (2000). The racialization of sexuality: The queer case of Jeffrey Dahmer. *Thamyris Overcoming Boundaries: Ethnicity, Gender and Sexuality*, *7*(1-2), 67-97.

Bates, A., Hobman, T., & Bell, B. T. (2020). "Let me do what I please with it... Don't decide my identity for me": LGBTQ+ youth experiences of social media in narrative identity development. *Journal of Adolescent Research*, *35*(1), 51-83. https://doi.org/10.1177/0743558419884700

Belgrave, L. L., Zablotsky, D., & Guadagno, M. A. (2002). How do we talk to each other?: Writing qualitative research for quantitative readers. *Qualitative Health Research*, *12*(10), 1427-1439. http://doi.org/10.1177/1049732302238753

Beliso-De Jesús, A., & Pierre, J. (2020). Anthropology of white supremacy. *American anthropologist*, *122*(1), 65-75. http://doi.org/10.1111/aman.13351

Bellmare, A., Kolbegger, K., & Vermes, J. (2021). Anti-trans views are worryingly prevalent and disproportionately harmful, community and experts warn. *CBC*. https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/anti-transgender-narratives-canada-1.6232947

Bersani, L. (1987). Is the rectum a grave? *AIDS: Cultural Analysis/Cultural Activism*, *43*, 197-222.

Borger, J. (2018, August 19). US supplied bomb that killed 40 children on Yemen school bus. *The Guardian*. https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/aug/19/us-supplied-bomb-that-killed-40-children-school-bus-yemen

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, *3*(2), 77–101. http://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa

Brennan, D. (2019, March 6). U.S. bombs killed hundreds of Yemeni civilians: Report. *Newsweek*. https://www.newsweek.com/yemen-war-american-bombs-civilians-children-us-saudi-arabia-uae-1353447

Brown, W. (1995). *States of injury: Power and freedom in late modernity*. Princeton University Press.

Bruns, A., & Moe, H. (2014). Structural layers of communication on Twitter. In Weller, K., Bruns, A., Burgess, J., Mahrt, M., Puschmann, C. (Eds.), *Twitter and society* (pp. 15-28). Peter Lang.

Butler, J. (1990). *Gender trouble: Feminism and the subversion of identity*. Routledge.

Callander, D., Holt, M., & Newman, C. E. (2016). 'Not everyone's gonna like me': Accounting for race and racism in sex and dating web services for gay and bisexual men. *Ethnicities*, *16*(1), 3–21. https://doi.org/10.1177/1468796815581428

Cannon, C. E. B. (2020). Queer theory. In G. Ritzer (Eds.), *The Blackwell encyclopedia of sociology* (Vol. 1479). Blackwell. https://doi.org/10.1002/9781405165518.wbeosq003.pub2

Cavalcante, A. (2019). Tumbling into queer utopias and vortexes: Experiences of LGBTQ social media users on tumblr. *Journal of Homosexuality*, *66*(12), 1715-1735. https://doi.org/10.1080/00918369.2018.1511131

CBC Radio (2022, September 5). What is Kiwi Farms, the forum a streamer blames for harassment that prompted her to leave Canada?. *CBC*. https://www.cbc.ca/radio/day6/kiwi-farms-online-forum-1.6565229

Chandrashekar, S. (2022). "My response to racism is anger": A "Mindful" approach to mindfulness. *Western Journal of Communication*, *86*(2), 224-231. https://doi.org/10.1080/10570314.2021.1953575

Chavez, C. (2008). Conceptualizing from the inside: Advantages, complications, and demands on insider positionality. *The Qualitative Report, 13*(3): 474-494.

Cherry, M. (2021). *The case for rage: Why anger is essential to anti-racist struggle*. Oxford University Press.

Chemaly, S. (2018). *Rage becomes her: The power of women's anger*. Atria Books.

Chitty, C. (2020). *Sexual hegemony: Statecraft, sodomy, and capital in the rise of the world system*. Duke University Press.

Cho, A. (2018). Default publicness: Queer youth of color, social media, and being outed by the machine. *New Media & Society*, *20*(9), 3183–3200. https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444817744784

Clarke, V., & Watson, D. (2014). Examining whiteness in a children's centre. *Contemporary Issues in Early Childhood*, *15*(1), 69–80. http://doi.org/10.2304/ciec.2014.15.1.69

Collins, P. H. (2019). *Intersectionality as critical social theory*. Duke University Press.

Combahee River Collective. (1977). The Combahee River Collective statement. *The Library of Congress*. https://www.loc.gov/item/lcwaN0028151/

Cooper, B. (2018). *Eloquent rage: A black feminist discovers her superpower*. St. Martin's Press.

Coulter, N., & Moruzi, K. (2022) Woke girls: From *The Girl's Realm* to *Teen Vogue*. *Feminist Media Studies*, *22*(4), 765-779. http://doi.org/10.1080/14680777.2020.1736119

Craig, S. L., Eaton, A. D., McInroy, L. B., Leung, V. W. Y., & Krishnan, S. (2021). Can social media participation enhance LGBTQ+ youth well-being?: Development of the Social Media Benefits Scale. *Social Media & Society*, *7*(1), 1-13. https://doi.org/10.1177/2056305121988931

Craig, S. L., & McInroy, L. (2014). You can form a part of yourself online: The influence of new media on identity development and coming out for LGBTQ youth. *Journal of Gay & Lesbian Mental Health*, *18*(1), 95-109. https://doi.org/10.1080/19359705.2013.777007

Crenshaw K., Harris, L. C., HoSang, D., & Lipsitz, G. (Eds.). (2019). *Seeing race again: countering colorblindness across the disciplines*. University of California Press.

Crenshaw, K. (1995). The identity factor in multiculturalism. *Liberal Education*, *81*(4), 6–11.

Crenshaw, K., Gotanda, N., & Peller, G. (Eds.). (1995). *Critical race theory: The key writings that formed the movement*. The New Press.

Crenshaw, K. (1991). Mapping the margins: Intersectionality, identity politics, and violence against women of color. *Standford Law Review*, *43*(6), 1241-1299.

Crenshaw, K. (1989). Demarginalizing the intersection of race and sex: A Black feminist critique of antidiscrimination doctrine, feminist theory and antiracist politics. *The University of Chicago Legal Forum*, *1989*(10), 139-168.

Curry, K. O. (2022). *Do you listen to Girl in Red? A thematic analysis of queer symbolism on Tiktok* [Master's thesis, Virgina Tech]. ETDs: Virginia Tech Electronic Theses and Dissertations.

Das, S., & Farber, R. (2020). User-generated online queer media and the politics of queer visibility. *Sociology Compass*, *14*(9), 1-12. https://doi.org/10.1111/soc4.12824

Davis, H. A., Kells, M. R., Roske, C., Holzman, S., & Wildes, J. E. (2023). A reflexive thematic analysis of #WhatIEatInADay on Tiktok. *Eating Behaviors*, *50*, 1-6. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.eatbeh.2023.101759

Delgado, R., & Stefancic, J. (2023). *Critical race theory: An introduction* (Vol. 87). New York University Press.

DeNardis, L., & Hackl, A. M. (2016). Internet control points as LGBT rights mediation. *Information, Communication & Society*, *19*(6), 753-770.

https://doi.org/10.1080/1369118X.2016.1153123

Doval, G. P., & Souroujon, G. (2021). *Global resurgence of the right: Conceptual and regional perspectives*. Routledge.

Du Bois, W. E. B. (1935). *Black Reconstruction in America: An essay toward a history of the part which Black folk played in the attempt to reconstruct democracy in America, 1860-1880.* Harcourt, Brace and Howe.

Duggan, L. (2003). *The twilight of equality? Neoliberalism, cultural politics, and the attack on democracy*. Beacon Press.

Duggan, L. (2002). The new homonormativity: The sexual politics of neoliberalism. *Materializing democracy: Toward a revitalized cultural politics, 10*, 175-194.

Embrick, D. G., & Moore, W. L. (2020). White space(s) and the reproduction of white supremacy. *American Behavioral Scientist*, *64*(14), 1935-1945. http://doi.org/10.1177/0002764220975053

Elbagir, N., Abdelaziz, S., Browne, R., Arvanitidis, B., & Smith-Spark, L. (2018, August 17). Bomb in Yemen school bus strike was US-supplied. *CNN*. https://www.cnn.com/2018/08/17/middleeast/us-saudi-yemen-bus-strike-intl/index.html

Fairclough, N. (2013). *Critical discourse analysis: The critical study of language*. Routledge.

Fairclough, N. (2001). *Language and power* (2nd ed.). Pearson Education.

flrn, rsl. (2020, January 30). Block chain and the ridiculous sense of entitlement. *Medium*. https://ursulaflorene.medium.com/block-chain-and-the-ridiculous-sense-of-entitlement-fe18719cfe4d

Foucault, M. (1978). *The history of sexuality: An introduction*. Random House.

Fraser, V. M. (2010). Queer closets and rainbow hyperlinks: The construction and constraint of queer subjectivities online. *Sexuality Research and Social Policy*, *7*, 30-36. https://doi.org/10.1007/s13178-010-0006-1

Frye, M. (1992). *White woman feminist: 1983-1992*. Crossing Press.

Gabriel, C. (2022, April 15). “No kink at Pride:” What the discourse leaves out about LGBTQ+ history. *Out*. https://www.out.com/commentary/2022/4/15/no-kink-pride-what-discourse-leaves-out-about-lgbtq-history

Gebhard, A., McLean, S., & St. Denis, V. (2022). *White benevolence: Racism and colonial violence in the helping professions*. Fernwood Publishing.

Giardina, H. (2022, August 1). A definitive guide to the tenderqueer Lockheed Martin drama. *INTO*. https://www.intomore.com/the-internet/definitive-guide-tenderqueer-lockheed-martin-drama/

Gosine, A. (2007). Brown to blonde at gay.com: Passing white in queer cyberspace. In K. O'Riordan & D. J. Phillips (Eds.), *Queer online: Media, technology & sexuality* (pp. 139-153). Peter Lang.

Hamad, R. (2020). *White tears/brown scars: How white feminism betrays women of color*. Catapult.

Hames-Garcia, M. R. (2011). *Identity complex: Making the case for multiplicity*. University of Minnesota Press.

Hancock, A. (2011). *Solidarity politics for Millennials: A guide to ending the oppression Olympics*. Springer.

Handley, V., Story Chavez, M., Jordan, S. S., & Story, C. (2023). #blacklgbtqlivesmatter: The intersectionality of Black and LGBTQ+ rights movements on Twitter inhonor of Dominique "Rem'mie" Fells, Riah Milton, Egypt Powers, Brayla Stone, and Merci Mack. *Journal of Feminist Family Therapy*, *35*(2), 115-133. https://doi.org/10.1080/08952833.2023.2208427

Hibbin, R. A., Samuel, G., & Derrick, G. E. (2018). From "a fair game" to "a form of covert research": Research ethics committee members' differing notions of consent and potential risk to participants within social media research. *Journal of Empirical Research on Human Research Ethics*, *3*(2), 149– 59. https://doi.org/10.1177/1556264617751510

Hollibaugh, A., & Moraga, C. (1992). What we're rollin' around in bed with: Sexual silences in feminism: A conversation toward ending them. In J. Nestle (Ed.), *The persistent desire: A femme butch reader* (pp. 243–253). Alyson Publications.

hooks, b. (1992). *Black Looks: Race and Representation*. South End Press.

hooks, b. (1984). *Feminist theory: From margin to center.* South End Press.

Hudson, D. (2022, June 25). Is it mainly younger LGBTQ people who have a problem with kink at pride?. *Queerty*. https://www.queerty.com/mainly-younger-lgbtq-people-problem-kink-pride-20220625

Jacobsen, K., Devor, A., & Hodge, E. (2022). Who counts as trans?: A critical discourse analysis of trans Tumblr posts. *Journal of Communication Inquiry*, *46*(1), 60-81. DOI: 10.1177/01968599211040835

James, E. S. (2021, June 21). A sci-fi writer got meta about gender. The internet responded by ruining her life. *Vox*. https://www.vox.com/the-highlight/22543858/isabel-fall-attack-helicopter

Jerasa, S., & Boffone, T. (2021). BookTok 101: Tiktok, digital literacies, and out-of-school reading practices. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, *65*(3), 219-226. http://doi.org/10.1002/jaal.1199

Johnson, L. (2015). From the anti-slavery movement to now: (RE) examining the relationship between Critical Race Theory and Black Feminist Thought. *Race, Gender & Class*, *22*(3–4), 227–243.

Johnstone, F. (2023). The horrifying consequences of anti-trans attacks. *The Walrus*. https://thewalrus.ca/anti-trans-attacks/

Jones, D. (2020, Nov 24). Introducing: the tenderqueer, the softboi of the queer community. *Vice*. https://www.vice.com/en/article/939aap/tenderqueer-meaning-define-what-dating-Type-introducing

Kay, J. B. (2019). Introduction: Anger, media, and feminism: The gender politics of mediated rage. *Feminist Media Studies*, *19*(4), 591-596. https://doi.org/10.1080/14680777.2019.1609197

Kearney, M. W. (2019). rtweet: Collecting and analyzing Twitter data. *Journal of open source software*, *4*(42), 1-3. https://doi.org/10.21105/

Kennedy, M. (2020). 'If the rise of the Tiktok dance and e-girl aesthetic has taught us anything, it's that teenage girls rule the internet right now': Tiktok celebrity, girls and the Coronavirus crisis. *European journal of cultural studies*, *23*(6), 1069-1076. http://doi.org/10.1177/1367549420945341

Kerri, A. (2019, June 4). No kink at Pride? What's next, a drag ban? *Advocate*. https://www.advocate.com/commentary/2019/6/04/no-kink-pride-whats-next-drag-ban

Keighley, R. (2022). Hate hurts: Exploring the impact of online hate on LGBTQ+ young people. *Women & Criminal Justice*, *32*(1-2), 29-48. https://doi.org/10.1080/08974454.2021.1988034

Kingsbury, K. (2021). A history of leather at Pride. *Aphyr*. 1-89.

Kumari, N. (2022). Analyzing the impact of technology on language evolution. *Eduzone: International Peer Reviewed/Refereed Multidisciplinary Journal*, *11*(1), 283-287.

Lane, N. (2015). All the lesbians are white, all the villages are gay, but some of us are brave: Intersectionality, belonging, and Black queer women's scene space in

Washington DC. In K. Browne and E. Ferreria (Eds.), *Lesbian Geographies* (pp. 219-242). Routledge.

Lavin, T. (2020). *Culture warlords: My journey into the dark web of white supremacy*. Legacy Lit.

Lawless, B. & Chen, Y. (2019) Developing a method of critical thematic analysis for qualitative communication inquiry. *Howard Journal of Communications*, *30*(1), 92-106. http://doi.org/10.1080/10646175.2018.1439423

Li, Y., Guan, M., Hammond, P., & Berrey, L. E. (2021). Communicating COVID-19 information on Tiktok: a content analysis of Tiktok videos from official accounts featured in the COVID-19 information hub. *Health education research*, *36*(3), 261-271. http://doi:10.1093/her/cyab010

Liebow, N. & Glazer, T. (2023). White tears: emotion regulation and white fragility. *Inquiry*, *66*(1), 122-142. http://doi.org/10.1080/0020174X.2019.1610048

Lindstadt, C., Boyer, B. P., Ciszek, E., Chung, A., & Wilcox, G. (2022). Drunk girl: A brief thematic analysis of Twitter posts about alcohol use and #MeToo. *Qualitative Research Reports in Communication*, *23*(1), 90-104. http://doi.org/10.1080/17459435.2021.2016919

Lockheed Martin. (2023, September 20). In *Wikipedia*. https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Lockheed_Martin&oldid=1176322353.

Lorde, A. (2012). *Sister outsider: Essays and speeches*. The Crossing Press.

Lorde, A. (1981). On the uses of anger. *Women's Studies Quarterly*, *25*(½), 278-285.

Marshall, J. E. (2022). Not letting it go: Anger, empathy, and interdisciplinarity as trauma-informed approach. In J. E. Marshall & Skibba, C. (Eds.), *Trauma-*

informed pedagogy: Addressing gender-based violence in the classroom (pp. 157-171). Emerald Publishing Limited.

McFarland, M. (2022, September 30). Ryan Murphy's "Monster: The Jeffrey Dahmer Story" is an example of the brand undermining the mission. *Salon*. https://www.salon.com/2022/09/30/ryan-murphy-monster-jeffrey-dahmer-story-problem/

McIntosh, P. (1988). *White privilege and male privilege: A personal account of coming to see correspondences through work in women's studies*. Wellesley Centers for Women.

McIntosh, P. (1988). White privilege: Unpacking the invisible knapsack. *Gender through the prism of difference*, *235*(8), 188-192.

McLean, S. (2022). Toxic encounters: What's whiteness doing in a nice field like education?. In A. Gebhard, S. McLean & V. St. Denis (Eds.), *White benevolence: Racism and colonial violence in the helping professions* (pp. 37-50). Fernwood Publishing.

Montag, C., Yang, H., & Elhai, J. D. (2021). On the psychology of Tiktok use: A first glimpse from empirical findings. *Frontiers in public health*, *9*, 1-6. https://doi.org/10.3389/fpubh.2021.641673

Mosse, G. L. (2020). *Nationalism and sexuality: Middle-class morality and sexual norms in modern Europe*. University of Wisconsin Press.

Moskowitz, P. E. (2021, February 10). Fuck puritanism. *Mental Health*. https://mentalhellth.xyz/p/fuck-puritanism

Muñoz, J. E. (2013). *Disidentifications: Queers of color and the performance of politics* (Vol. 2). University of Minnesota Press.

Murrihy, C. (2021, February 1). The mental health effects of social media pile-ons. *Childline*. https://www.childline.ie/the-mental-health-effects-of-social-media-pile-ons/

Nakamura, L. (2002). *Cybertypes: Race, Ethnicity, and Identity on the Internet.* Routledge.

Nestle, J. (Ed). *The persistent desire: A butch-femme reader*. Allyson Books.

Nixon, L. (2017). Fallon Simard – Monetized, but agential, bodies in ghost worlds / Des corps monétisés agissant dans des mondes fantomatiques. *Esse*, *91*, 70–73. https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/86091ac

Onuoha, A. C., Arbeit, M. R., & Leath, S. (2023). Far-right misogynoir: A critical thematic analysis of Black college women's experiences with White male supremacist influences. *Psychology of women quarterly*, *47*(2), 180-196. https://doi.org/10.1177/03616843231156872

Owen, D. S. (2007). Towards a critical theory of whiteness. *Philosophy & social criticism*, *33*(2), 203-222. https://doi.org/10.1177/01914537070741

Oxford Reference. (2023). Queer theory. *Oxford Reference*. https://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/oi/authority.20110803100358573.

Phipps, A. (2021). White tears, white rage: Victimhood and (as) violence in mainstream feminism. *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, *24*(1), 81-93. https://doi.org/10.1177/1367549420985852

Puar, J. K. (2007). *Terrorist assemblages: Homonationalism in queer times*. Duke University Press.

Pulliam-Moore, C. (2016, January 8). How 'Woke' went from Black activist watchword to teen internet slang. *Splinter*. https://splinternews.com/how-woke-went-from-black-activist-watchword-to-teen-int-1793853989

Quan-Haase, A., & Sloan, L. (2017). *The SAGE handbook of social media research methods*. Sage Publications Ltd.

Ray, V. (2022). *On critical race theory: Why it matters & why you should care*. Random House Trade Paperbacks.

Remnick, D. (2023, January 30). What does "Woke" mean, and how did the term become so powerful?. *The New Yorker*. https://www.newyorker.com/podcast/political-scene/what-does-woke-mean-and-how-did-the-term-become-so-powerful

Rich, A. (1980). Compulsory heterosexuality and lesbian existence. *Signs*, *5*(4), 631-660.

Rose, D. (2020, Nov 24). *The cursed privilege of the tenderqueer and why you should cultivate some resilience in order to avoid becoming one*. Dolly Scribes. http://dollyrose.substack.com/p/the-cursed-privilege-of-the-tenderqueer

Ross, M. (2020). *Morality police: Sexuality governance at the League of Nations*. University of Toronto.

Rubin, D. A. (2021). Anger, aggression, attitude: Intersex rage as biopolitical protest. *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, *46*(4), 987-1011.

Rufai, S. R., & Bunce, C. (2020). World leaders' usage of Twitter in response to the COVID-19 pandemic: a content analysis. *Journal of public health*, *42*(3), 510-516. http://doi.org/10.1093/pubmed/fdaa049

Ryan, G. W. & Bernard, H. R. (2003). Techniques to identify themes. *Field Methods, 15*(1), 85-109. http://doi.org /10.1177/1525822X02239569

Satibaldieva, N. (2024). Dynamics of linguistic evolution in the technological epoch. *Western European Journal of Linguistics and Education*, *2*(1), 9-11.

Schwartz, A. (2020). Soft femme theory: Femme internet aesthetics and the politics of "softness". *Social Media+ Society*, *6*(4), http://doi.org/2056305120978366

Sedgwick, E. K. (2008). *Epistemology of the closet*. University of California Press.

Sharofova, S. (2024). Syntax in the digital age: examining language evolution in online communication. *Interdiscipline innovation and scientific research conference*, *2* (16), 90-95.

Smith, A. (1996). *The Victorian nude: sexuality, morality, and art*. Manchester University Press.

Spears, A. K. (2021). White supremacy and antiblackness: Theory and lived experience. *Journal of Linguistic Anthropology*, *31*(2), 157-179. https://doi.org/10.1111/jola.12318

Summerfield, P. (2021, August 13). Tiktok is the most popular social app with Canada's youth. *Media in Canada*. https://mediaincanada.com/2021/08/13/Tiktok-is-the-most-popular-social-app-with-canadas-youth/

Tadros, E., Morgan, A. A., & Durante, K. A. (2024). Criticism, compassion, and conspiracy theories: A thematic analysis of what twitter users are saying about COVID-19 in correctional settings. *International journal of offender therapy and comparative criminology*, *68*(4), 370-388. http://doi.org/10.1177/0306624X221102847

Tahamtan, I., Potnis, D., Mohammadi, E., Miller, L. E., & Singh, V. (2021). Framing of and attention to COVID-19 on Twitter: Thematic analysis of hashtags. *Journal of Medical Internet research*, *23*(9), 1-15. http://doi.org/10.2196/30800

Thom, K. C. (2019). *I hope we choose love: A trans girl's notes from the end of the world*. Arsenal Pulp Press.

Tiku, N. (2023, September 3). The endless battle to banish the world's most notorious stalker website. *Washington Post*. https://www.washingtonpost.com/technology/2023/09/03/kiwifarms-website-offline/

Toole, B. (2021). The epistemic roots of white supremacy. In E. Edenberg, M. Hannon (Eds.), *Political epistemology* (pp.76-95). Oxford University Press.

Toronto Metropolitan University. (2022). *Consent Comes First Toronto Metropolitan: Groups*. Toronto Metropolitan University. https://www.torontomu.ca/sexual-violence/get-support/groups/

Varpio, L., Paradis, E., Uijtdehaage, S., Young, M. (2020). The distinctions between theory, theoretical framework, and conceptual framework. *Academic Medicine*, *95*(7), 989-994. https://doi.org/10.1097/ACM.0000000000003075

Vásquez, C., & Creel, S. (2019). Conviviality through creativity: Appealing to the reblog in Tumblr chat posts. *Discourse, Context & Media*, *20*, 59-69. http://doi.org/10.1016/j.dcm.2017.08.005

Walker, L. (2012). The future of femme: Notes on femininity, aging, and gender theory. *Sexualities*, *15*(7), 795–814. https:// doi.org/10.1177/1363460711417482

Walcott, R. (2020) White lies: Race, power, and the future. In G. Çaliskan (Ed.), *Gendering globalization, globalizing gender : postcolonial perspectives* (pp 61-74). Oxford University Press.

Walcott, R., & Abdillahi, I. (2019). *Blacklife: Post-BLM and the struggle for freedom*. Arbeiter Ring Publishing.

Wu, S., Hofman, J. M., Mason, W. A., & Watts, D. J. (2011, March). Who says what to whom on twitter. In *Proceedings of the 20th international conference on World wide web* (pp. 705-714).

Wright, B. (2019) *"Weird Internet Aesthetics: Are Lo-Fi Media Inherently Revolutionary?"* (Publication No. 26). [English Honor's Theses, Skidmore College]. Creative Matter.

Zimmer, F., Scheibe, K., Stock, M., & Stock, W. G. (2019). Fake news in social media: Bad algorithms or biased users?. *Journal of Information Science Theory and Practice*, *7*(2), 40-53. https://doi.org/10.1633/JISTaP.2019.7.2.4

Appendix A

Tiktok Posts

Image Description: A Tiktok post is typically comprised of a short (<10 minutes) video, with background music and occasional text superimposed over the video. Along the right-hand side of each Tiktok video is a button to follow the video creator, a button to 'like' the video, a button to open the comments section of the video, a button to save the video, and a button to share the video.

Image Description: By clicking the comment button on the right-hand side of a Tiktok video, a page of comments will pop up covering the bottom half of the video. Most popular comments will appear near the top. Individuals can like, dislike, or reply to other user's comments.

X Posts

Image Description: This is what a generic X post looks like. Hashtags are coloured blue, and any images used in the post are placed underneath the post text. At the bottom of each X post you can see how many replies the post has, how many user’s have reposted the post, how many users have liked the post, as well as how many users have seen the post.

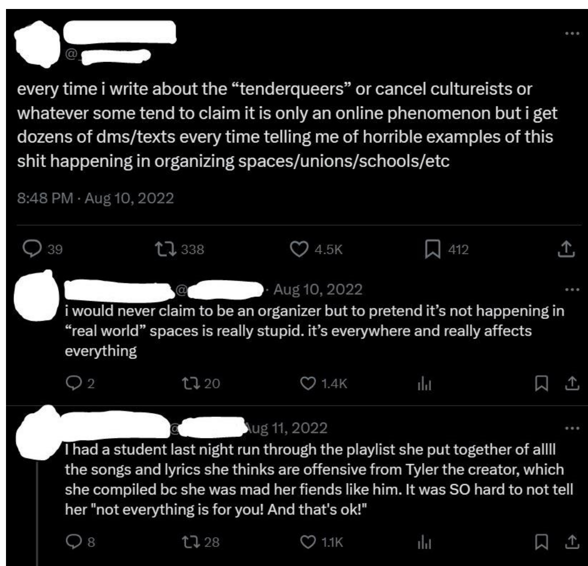

Image Description: When you click on an X post, you can read any replies that the post may have garnered, as well as click “Quotes” to see any public reposts of the original post. Replies to a post can generate their own replies, and so on and so forth.

Curriculum Vitae

Void Vida Clark Nason

University Education

University of New Brunswick
Master of Arts (Sociology)
2024

St. Thomas University
Bachelor of Education, Major in Elementary
2020

St. Thomas University
Bachelor of Arts, Honours in Sociology, Major in English
Concentration in Creative Writing
2019

Publications

"Conceptualizing Queer Self-Care as Radical Resilience and Political Resistance when Navigating University Oppression"
Book Chapter in *We Were Never Meant to Be Here: Student Voices, Activism, and Canadian Universities*
Edited by Jacob Barry & Alessia Servin
Publication Date TBD

"Forging Racial Solidarities in Education: A Duoethnography of Juxtaposing Racial Experience"
Book Chapter in *Enacting Anti-Racism and Activist Pedagogies in Teacher Education: Canadian Perspectives*
Edited by Ardavan Eizadirad, Zuhra Abawi, & Andrew B. Campbell
Co-author: Alicia Noreiga
June 2023

"Egg Poets: All Things to Keep You Here"
Qwerty Press
Co-authors: Jenna Lynn Albert, Spencer Folkins, Jamie Kitts, and Emma Rhodes
2023

"liquid birth"
Anstruther Press
2021

Conference Presentations

“White [Queer] Tears”: A Critical Mapping of Tenderqueer Discourse on Tiktok and X
Federation of Humanities and Social Sciences Congress
Film and Media Studies Association of Canada
McGill University, Montreal, Quebec
June 2024

“If a parent...would prefer for them to be referred to as she or he...that's a parent's right": A Critical Discourse Analysis of CBC New Brunswick's Heteronormative Media Bias in the Coverage of Policy 713 Changes”
Co-presenters: Katie Merritt, Courtney Pyrke
Federation of Humanities and Social Sciences Congress
Canadian Sociological Association
McGill University, Montreal, Quebec
June 2024

"It didn't matter to me if the flag was threaded in gold, it didn't belong on the same mast with the Canadian flag": A duoethonography of homonationalist discourses at Oromocto High School, New Brunswick
Co-presenters: Katie Merritt
Federation of Humanities and Social Sciences Congress
Canadian Sociological Association
McGill University, Montreal, Quebec
June 2024

“White [Queer] Tears”: A Critical Mapping of Tenderqueer Discourse on Tiktok and X
Queer Research Day
University of New Brunswick, Fredericton, New Brunswick
March 2024

“Dismantling Anti-Black Racism Pedagogies in New Brunswick’s Classroom and Beyond”
Co-presenter: Alicia Noreiga
American Educational Research Association Annual Meeting
Chicago, Illinois, United States
May 2023

“Forging Racial Solidarities in Education through Juxtaposing Racial Experiences”
Co-presenter: Alicia Noreiga
American Educational Research Association Annual Meeting
Chicago, Illinois, United States
May 2023

“Celebrate Pride…at the bank?”: A Critical Discourse Analysis of Homonormativity Across Baroness Von Sketch Show and This Hour has 22 Minutes”

Co-presenter: Katie Merritt
Federation of Humanities and Social Sciences Congress
Canadian Sociological Association
York University, Toronto, Ontario
May 2023

"Incorporating Anti-Black-Racism Pedagogies in New Brunswick's Education & Finding Solidarities in Education Among Juxtaposing Racial Experiences"
Co-presenter: Alicia Noreiga
Canadian Society for the Study of Education Conference
Ottawa, Ontario
2022

"I Don't Need to be Told Things are Shitty; I Know": Queer Self-Care as Radical Resilience and Political Resistance"
Canadian University Queer Services Conference
University of Regina, Regina, Saskatchewan
2020

"I Don't Need to be Told Things are Shitty; I Know": Queer Self-Care as Radical Resilience and Political Resistance"
Consortium for Graduate Studies in Gender, Culture, Women, and Sexuality
Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Boston, Massachusetts, United States
2019

"I Don't Need to be Told Things are Shitty; I Know": Queer Self-Care as Radical Resilience and Political Resistance"
Research and Ideas Fair
St. Thomas University, Fredericton, New Brunswick
2019

"Our Fellow Critters: An Animal Rights Reading of Moby Dick"
Annual Atlantic Undergraduate English Conference
Mount Saint Vincent University, Halifax, Nova Scotia
2018

"Queer Literature"
Queer Research Day
University of New Brunswick, Fredericton, New Brunswick
2017