THE LOVE BOOTH AND SIX COMPANION PLAYS

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ABSTRACT. This article describes and reports on findings from a project called *The Love Booth and Six Companion Plays* (2021–2023). The overall goal of the project was to conduct archival research on moments of activism and care that have challenged cis-heteronormativity and racism and then share these moments through verbatim theatre scripts and performances. Working with an ethic of community care, and a lens that examines the intersections of cis-heteronormativity with other forms of structural discrimination (such as anti-Asian racism, anti-Black racism, anti-Indigenous racism, and settler colonialism), the project asked and answered the following research question: What kinds of activism and care in the 1970s and 1980s challenged cis-heteronormativity and racism in North America?

RÉSUMÉ. Cet article décrit les résultats du projet intitulé : *The Love Booth and Six Companion Plays* (2021–2023). L'objectif global du projet était de mener une recherche archivistique sur des moments d'activisme et de soins ayant remis en question la cishétéronormativité et le racisme, puis de partager ces moments à travers des scripts et des performances de théâtre verbatim. En adoptant une éthique de soin communautaire et un regard porté sur les intersections entre la cishétéronormativité et d'autres formes de discrimination structurelle, le projet a posé et répondu à la question de recherche suivante : quels types d'activisme et de soins, dans les années 1970 et 1980, ont remis en question la cishétéronormativité et le racisme en Amérique du Nord?

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This article describes and reports on findings from a Research-based Theatre in education project called *The Love Booth and Six Companion Plays* (2021–2023). The research project, led by Goldstein in the spring and summer of 2021, explored several moments of 2SLGBTQI+[1] (two-spirit, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, plus) activism and care in the 1970s and early 1980s and then shared these moments through verbatim theatre scripts, visual images, and music. To carry out our analysis and to create *The Love Booth and Six Companion Plays*, we worked with an ethic of community care (Malatino, 2020; Owis, 2024; Piepzna-Samarasinha, 2018) and utilized a lens that examines the intersections of cis-heteronormativity[2] with other forms of structural discrimination. The following research question framed our analysis and creative work: What kinds of 2SLGBTQI+ activism and care in the 1970s and 1980s challenged cis-heteronormativity and racism in North America?

The research team worked with a variety of data sources — archival databases, books, academic articles, and documentary films. Research team member Bishop Owis found that activism in the early LGBT liberation movement was supported by practices of caring for the community. Owis also found that while there was an abundance of information about white middle-class activists, deeper exploration was required to uncover histories of QTBIPOC (queer and trans Black, Indigenous, people of colour) activism. This is important to note because the LGBT movements of the 1960s were also fueled by queer, trans, and racialized people, specifically by transgender women of colour, and this activism led to the accomplishments of white LGBT communities in the 1970s and 1980s.

Working with the team's research findings, Goldstein created a set of seven short verbatim plays that feature moments of activism undertaken by Black, Latinx, queer, straight, cisgender, transgender, and working-class activists, as well as white, middle-class gay and lesbian activists. The seven plays have been gathered under the title of *The Love Booth and Six Companion Plays* (Goldstein, 2023; see Appendix A for a brief description of each play).

The opening play *The Love Booth* tells the story of how white, middle-class, cisgender lesbian and gay activists mobilized to delist homosexuality from the American Psychiatric Association's *Diagnostic Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM) in 1973. The DSM is the handbook used by health care professionals in the United States and much of the world as the authoritative guide to the diagnosis of mental disorders. It contains descriptions, symptoms, and other criteria for diagnosing mental

disorders. Prior to 1973, homosexuality was labelled a mental illness in the DSM, which led to a variety of oppressive practices against people who identified as lesbian and gay. As activist Barbara Gittings says in Scene 6 of *The Love Booth*:

> BARBARA
>
> The lives of gay people were under the thumb of psychiatry. The sickness label was an albatross around our neck — it infected all of our work on other issues. Anything we said on our behalf could be dismissed as "That's just your sickness talking." Sickness was used to justify discrimination in all kinds of places, but especially in employment. Brilliant people like [physicist and astronomer] Frank [Kameny] lost their jobs when their bosses found out they were gay. (Goldstein, 2023, p. 32)

Goldstein decided to make *The Love Booth* the opening play because she wanted to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the DSM delisting with a performance of the play at the 2023 Toronto Pride Festival. Moreover, the activism that led to this delisting marked the beginning of the depathologization of same-sex desire and relationships in the field of psychiatry. Goldstein felt it was important to perform and share the story of a moment of activism that successfully challenged the idea that people who identified as lesbian and gay were living with a mental illness.

The six companion plays that accompany *The Love Booth* respond to the story of this moment of activism. However, by making *The Love Booth* the opening — and longest — play, Goldstein understood that she had privileged and centred white middle-class stories and voices in the project.[3] Still, Goldstein also chose to end the set of plays with an equally powerful, if lesser known, story of trans activism and care. *STAR House* tells the story of several transgender women of colour activists who discuss their experiences of caring and providing for one another with very little resources and limited, if any, recognition and support from the larger LGBT movement. The placement of *STAR House* at the end of the set of plays is a deliberate acknowledgement of the vital labour that trans women of colour did for their community that impacted generations of trans communities to come. In this way, trans women of colour have the last word in the set of plays.

Furthermore, Goldstein's intent in having the six companion plays follow the opening play was to portray the ways Black, Latinx, queer, trans, and working-class activists in the 1970s and 1980s responded to the work of white, middle class, cisgender gay and lesbian activists. For example, as discussed below, in the fifth play of the project, *A Press of Our Own,* Black

activist and writer Audre Lorde talks about how the poetry she sent to *The Ladder* — a lesbian magazine edited by Barbara Gittings, one of the activists featured in *The Love Booth* — was rejected:

> AUDRE LORDE
>
> When I started looking for a place to publish my poems I sent them to *The Ladder*, a magazine for lesbians published by the Daughters of Bilitis.
>
> I was a loyal reader of both *The Ladder* and the Daughters of Bilitis newsletter, as I tried to figure out where to meet other gay-girls in New York. In 1955, meeting other lesbians was very difficult unless you went to the bars, which I didn't go to because I didn't drink.
>
> All of my poems were returned to me — immediately. I was crushed.
>
> A few years later, a few Black literary magazines began to publish my poems. And several poems were also published in anthologies. But finding my way into the anthologies of Black poetry wasn't easy either. Most of the poets the editors published were men and liked to read work by other men.
>
> When I started writing feminist lesbian poetry, it got even harder.
>
> So, one day, when I was on the phone with Barbara Smith [Black scholar, writer, and activist], I said, "We really need to do something about publishing."
>
> (Goldstein, 2023, p. 68)

What Audre Lorde and her colleague Barbara Smith decided to do was create Kitchen Table: Women of Color Press, which is the story told in *A Press of Our Own*. Further discussion of Kitchen Table: Women of Color Press appears later in this article.

Returning to our introductory remarks about the history of the project, after Goldstein completed a strong draft of each of the seven plays, she asked arts-based researcher and theatre artist Jenny Salisbury to do some dramaturgical work with the research team to give voice to each play. With Salisbury's skills in dramaturgy, she and the research team worked through the scripts and listened for tone, emphasis, humour, irony, and vulnerability in their performances of the words of different characters using inflection and intonation, pauses and pacing, breath, and emotional expression. Moving the words of the activists off the page and coaching the team to embody the voices of the characters in each play brought the scripts of the seven plays to life. Through these embodied readings of the plays, the activists and their work began to feel more human, which allowed the team to better understand the activists as actual people and their experiences as lived. After Salisbury's dramaturgical work with us, the

team knew the plays would be able to offer audiences a powerful way into the archival material, and an engaging way to imagine and learn about the activism and care that had gone before us and brought us to the current moment.

While Salisbury began doing dramaturgical work with the plays, artist-researcher, composer, and musician Kael Reid began to compose music using ethnographic songwriting (Reid, 2024), a method they developed and have used in a range of ways in other arts-based research projects (e.g., Reid, 2022a, 2022b). In addition, artist-researcher and visual artist benjamin lee hicks[4] began to create illustrations to accompany the play. The music and illustrations offered additional paths into the research findings represented in the plays, which were performed at the Toronto Pride Festival in June 2023.

In what follows, we provide a description of our theoretical frame of centring queer and trans concepts of community care, situate the project within current discussions in Research-based Theatre and verbatim theatre, and provide examples of how hicks' visual images and Reid's song lyrics deepen the ways audiences engage with the plays.

CENTRING QUEER AND TRANS CONCEPTS OF COMMUNITY CARE

Early in our archival research work, Owis introduced an important set of ideas. They noted that while care is often conceptualized as a feminine practice with roots in cis-heteronormative understandings of the nuclear family (Malatino, 2020; Chatzidakis et al., 2020), queer and trans activism has often featured practices of care that are community based (Malatino, 2020; Piepzna-Samarasinha, 2018). Our preliminary research also showed that queer and trans activism in the 1970s and 1980s was characterized and fueled by "care webs" (Piepzna-Samarasinha, 2018, p. 27) by queer and trans people of colour.

Care webs — which provide people with a way to find care without shame or judgement — are a response to the realities of gendered, raced, and classed dynamics that are embedded within 2SLGBTQI+ communities (Owis, 2024; Piepzna-Samarasinha, 2018). They operate in lieu of systemic and institutional support for queer and trans people of colour (Fink, 2021) and provide queer and trans people of colour a network of interlocking communities of care that positions them as the experts in the care they need (Piepzna-Samarasinha, 2018). The theoretical model of care webs is rooted in the care work from women of colour writers and BIPOC communities (e.g., hooks, 2000; Moraga & Anzaldúa, 1981; Lorde, 1988),

whose activist work has always sought to restore the care often systemically withheld from QTBIPOC people (Rose, 2021).

Owis' connection of activism with care provided the research team with a key focus: The team needed to work to uncover historical moments of queer and trans activism that were rooted in an ethic of community care. In doing so, the team could demonstrate the importance and power of care in creating moments of resistance and mobilization throughout 2SLGBTQI+ history.

SITUATING *THE LOVE BOOTH AND SIX COMPANION PLAYS* IN CONVERSATIONS ABOUT THE LITERARY TURN IN ANTHROPOLOGY AND ETHICS IN RESEARCH-BASED THEATRE

Goldstein's work with performance ethnography has been a deliberate attempt to engage with the "literary turn" in American anthropology that had begun in the mid 1980s. This turn was set off by discussions about the predicaments of cultural representation in ethnography raised in the 1986 anthology *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography*. The anthology was edited by James Clifford, a historian of anthropology, and George Marcus, an anthropologist and critic of "realist" traditions in ethnographic writing. As explained by feminist anthropologist Ruth Behar (1995), the book's purpose was to make an obvious point: Anthropologists write. And the ethnographies they write — "a strange cross between the realist novel, the travel account, the memoir, and the scientific report" (p. 3) — had to be understood in terms of poetics and politics.

At the heart of the literary turn in American anthropology was the understanding that ethnographers invent rather than represent ethnographic truths (Clifford, 1983). Ethnographies were not transparent mirrors of culture that traditionally trained realist ethnographers presumed them to be. The contributors of *Writing Culture* also questioned the politics of a poetics, that is, a system of writing, which relied on the words and stories of (frequently less privileged) others for its existence without providing any of the benefits of authorship to the research participants who assisted the anthropologist in the writing of their culture.

In response to these predicaments of cultural representation, James Clifford set out a new agenda for American anthropology in his introduction to *Writing Culture* (Clifford & Marcus, 1986): Anthropology needed to encourage more innovative, dialogic, and experimental writing that highlighted the ways ethnographies are invented by the ethnographers who write them. At the same time, the "new ethnography" needed to reflect a more profound self-consciousness of the workings of power and

the partialness of all truth, both in the text and in the world. As summarized by Ruth Behar (1995), while the new ethnography would not resolve the profoundly troubling issues of inequality in a world fueled by global capitalism, "it could at least attempt to decolonize the power relations inherent in the presentation of the Other" (p. 4).

The Love Booth and Six Companion Plays project responds to the still relevant call for writing that highlights the ways ethnographies are invented by the ethnographers who write them.

Turning now to recent conversations in Research-based Theatre about ethics (Cox et al., 2023), our arts-based research team has been contributing to these conversations through a principle we call a "slow ethics of care." We adopted this principle in our 2019–2021 verbatim theatre project *Out at School* (Owis, 2024). A slow ethics of care draws on several theoretical frameworks to ground stories from the field: ethical principles of working with 2SLGBTQI+ families, care work, and slow scholarship (Hartman & Darab, 2012; Mountz et al., 2015).

In *The Love Booth and Six Companion Plays*, we extended the principle of an ongoing slow ethics of care to include the idea of communal feedback and dialogue. To illustrate, during rehearsals of *STAR*[5] *House* the trans and non-binary actors who were performing the roles of Sylvia Rivera and Chelsea Goodwin had questions about the original ending of the play. Both actors argued that the end of the play disregarded the complicated relationship of medicalization that trans people currently live with in North America. In response, Goldstein re-wrote the ending and performed the final new words of the play in her role as playwright.

> TARA GOLDSTEIN (Playwright)
>
> While the American Psychiatric Association agreed to delist homosexuality from the DSM in 1973, gender dysphoria became a psychiatric diagnosis in the fifth edition of the DSM 40 years later in 2013.
>
> The term gender incongruence appeared in the World Health Organization's 11th edition of International Classification of Diseases in 2019.
>
> The medical naming of gender dysphoria and gender incongruence has been hailed as progress because it helps people access hormonal therapy, surgeries, and medical coverage that affirm their gender. But some folks believe that gender dysphoria is a response to society's limiting options around understanding and defining gender. It shouldn't be subject to an individual diagnosis. Other folks don't believe that medical

> authorities should have the power to sanction people's decisions around their gender. Or not sanction them. There is still work to be done.[6]
>
> (Goldstein, 2023, p. 85)

What was important in creating a new ending to *STAR House* was signaling the tension around the usefulness of the diagnosis of gender dysphoria within trans communities. The team wanted to end the play with the idea that there is still work to be done around the power medical authorities hold over trans lives. The new ending provided a bookend to the opening play *The Love Booth*, which described the activism needed to delist homosexuality from the DSM in 1973.

SITUATING *THE LOVE BOOTH AND SIX COMPANION PLAYS* IN CURRENT CONVERSATIONS ABOUT VERBATIM THEATRE

Verbatim theatre has been described as theatre that is created by interviewing people about their everyday lives or about an event that has happened in their community (Brown & Wake, 2010). In verbatim plays, the words of real people are recorded and transcribed by a playwright during an interview or are appropriated from existing records, such as the transcripts of a court hearing. Approaches to working with these words vary from those with a very strict adherence to the source material, such as the work of Anna Deavere Smith (1993, 1994), to those in which the words are edited, arranged, and/or recontextualized to form a dramatic script that can be performed on stage by actors who take on the characters of the real individuals whose words are being used (Hammond & Stewart, 2008).

The Love Booth and Six Companion Plays project falls close to Deavere Smith's (1993, 1994) strict adherence to source material. We very lightly edited the source material for clarity by omitting words or phrases that were unnecessary to the story or message the activist was sharing. Our master script contains a record of where these omissions were made.

The sources the research team worked with to create the seven verbatim plays included a biography about Barbara Gittings (Baim, 2015); an autobiography by Shirley Chisholm (1973); a scholarly book about the history of HIV/AIDS drawn from HIV archival material (Fink, 2021); a collection of newspaper columns written by Iris De La Cruz (1989); a journal article about the Kitchen Table: Women of Colour Press written by Barbara Smith (1989); a poem by Chrystos (2021) included in the anthology *This Bridge Called My Back*; and a collection of historical documents, speeches, interviews and analyses about STAR House and Transy House (Untorelli Press, 2013).

SHARING RESEARCH FINDINGS THROUGH VERBATIM THEATRE, MUSIC, AND VISUAL ART

As discussed earlier, the opening play of *The Love Booth and Six Companion Plays* dramatizes the story of Barbara Gittings and Kay Lahusen who started attending and disrupting meetings at the American Psychiatric Association (APA) where psychiatrists were promoting brutal methods for "curing" people who identified as lesbian and gay. This is predominantly a story of white cisgender activists working in spaces of power and privilege. The six companion plays tell additional stories of activism and care taking place in the 1970s and early 1980s by QTBIPOC activists and their allies. They include stories of the gay activists that supported Shirley Chisholm, the first Black women to run for president in the United States in 1973; the work done by Iris De La Cruz and her mother Beverley Rotter who used Jewish community rituals to challenge the stigma and shame of living with HIV; the creation of Kitchen Table: Women of Colour Press by Black lesbian poet Audre Lorde and Black scholar and writer Barbara Smith; the poetry writing of two-spirit artist and activist Chrystos; and the activism of trans activists Marcia P. Johnson, Sylvia Rivera, and Chelsea Goodwin to support homeless young drag queens, gay youth, and trans women living in New York.

In the 2023 performance of the plays at the Toronto Pride Festival, the overall theme of activism and care in each of the plays was layered by Reid's music and hicks' visual illustrations. Reid composed and performed original music and lyrics for each play and hicks' visual illustrations were projected onto a large screen at the back of the stage during the performance.

In composing two original songs for *The Love Booth and Six Companion Plays*, Reid wanted to demonstrate the way "songs [can] make life experiences audibly tangible" and "*document* life histories" (Reid, 2015, p. 43). Reid suggests composing songs from theatre scripts breathes another layer of affective life into them: Songs intensify the lived experiences of a script's characters through lyric, vocal work, and music. By infusing the stories in the play with emotionality and musical narrative, songs embellish the script and provide another access point for audiences to enter the story of the play. Expressed through singing, lyric, rhythm, tone, and feeling, songs animate the experiences of the characters musically, making them emotionally resonant. As Reid (2022b) argues, "We encounter one another through song. This is music's power" (para. 1).

Reid (2024) developed a three-step coding process when composing songs for research-informed theatre projects that enables them to analyze and synthesize scripts with care. This coding process enables Reid to turn the stories into theatre scripts and qualitative interviews into lyrics and melody with accompanying guitar. The process is similar in some ways to how researchers code a qualitative interview.

In the first step, "macro coding," Reid examines the theatre script in its entirety, surveying the script to understand the arc of the story being told. At this level of analysis, Reid notices the tone and feel of the script while documenting predominant themes, ideas, and concepts.

In the second step, "narrative coding," Reid codes for specific anecdotes or stories. Here, they focus on particular "through-lines" of lived experiences that are narrated in the play. In other words, in this second layer of coding, they look for subplots that provide a foundation for the overall narrative of the script. In this read-through, they highlight these narrative subplots.

At the third step of "verbatim coding," Reid re-reads the script again and pinpoints key phrases, metaphors, similes, idioms, descriptive phrases, and words that specific characters say that stand out as thought provoking, compelling, and evocative. These codes are connected in some way to the overarching themes that Reid makes note of in the first macro-layer of analysis. These verbatim codes are set aside to be used as potential verbatim lyrics in the song.

Reid composed two songs for *The Love Booth and Six Companion Plays*. The first song, named "The Theme for The Love Booth," contains verses which tell stories from individual scenes in the first play *The Love Booth*, as well as narrating the stories from each of the companion plays. Individual verses were performed at the end of each corresponding *Love Booth* scene and at the end of the six companion plays. The second song, "Bridge These Differences," was performed in its entirety at the end of the play as a summary for the whole production, addressing the themes of activism and care that appeared throughout each of the plays.[7]

Next, we provide three examples of how hicks' images and Reid's first song layered the performances of the verbatim plays to ground the actors and audience in multiple, affective representations of the past.

Example 1: Scene 1 from The Love Booth

The image hicks created for the first scene of *The Love Booth*, called "Mystery," consists of a drawing of Barbara Gittings talking to two visitors

at the display she and her partner Kay Lahusen created for the 1972 APA Convention (see Figure 1). To this drawing, hicks added images from the lesbian magazine *The Ladder*, which was published by the lesbian organization Daughters of Bilitis (DOB) between 1956 and 1972 (Baim, 2015). Barbara Gittings was the editor of *The Ladder* for many years. The magazine included book reviews, news, poetry, short stories, a running bibliography of lesbian literature, letters from readers, and updates from DOB meetings. This image provided the audience with an opportunity to see how the display of photos of proud, healthy, well-adjusted lesbians on the covers of *The Ladder* challenged contemporary psychiatric understanding of homosexuality as an illness.

FIGURE 1. *"Mystery," Scene 1 from* The Love Booth. *Activist Barbara Gittings talks to conference goers at The Love Booth exhibit.*

In the verse that accompanied Scene 1 of *The Love Booth*, Reid focused on Barbara Gittings' coming out story. In the scene, Gittings describes her confusion about her relational experiences and identity, and how she sought the help of a psychiatrist to find some answers. Gittings is relieved when a psychiatrist she visits confirms that she is indeed homosexual. With this new-found knowledge and validation, Gittings is able to move into her life in a transformed way. She leaves the appointment with the psychiatrist and begins searching for a community of women and ways to build a new life. The year is 1949.

Verse 1 from "The Theme for The Love Booth"

There's a mystery to be solved
She was trying to understand
How something that felt so right
Could be so wrong in their eyes and

Their whispers mystified her
Gossip can be a slow-moving floodtide
Exposing the truth people already see
She went searching for clarity

She said, I don't need you to cure me or fix me
This label is enough for me
You see, you've done me a favour, doc
And it feels fine by me

Because there's a word for women like me
It's funny how language can help us feel free
But now if you'll excuse me, I'm
Going looking for my people

(Reid, 2023a, in Goldstein, 2023, p. 11)

Gesturing towards the overarching themes of activism and care in this verse, derived from the process of narrative coding, Reid highlights a moment of self-discovery that Gittings experiences in her session with the psychiatrist. This moment gives Gittings an opportunity to enact a form of self-care. After acknowledging that she does not need to be cured and that "this label is enough for me … and it feels fine by me," Gittings decides it is time to go looking for her people. This moment of recognizing that she is a lesbian also sets Gittings off on a road of personal activism that sets the stage for her life as an activist. Even though Gittings does not fully comprehend what it means to be a lesbian, she understands she is different from most people around her. She also understands that to thrive, she must begin a quest to go looking for her "people." The phrase "looking for my people" is taken verbatim from the play and is an example of verbatim coding in Reid's process of songwriting.

Example 2: A Press of Our Own

When the research team began uncovering stories of QTBIPOC activists working in the same era as Gittings and Lahusen, we learned that the community created by the DOB was not always inclusive of racialized and working-class writers. As discussed earlier, in the play *A Press of Our Own,* Black activist and writer Audre Lorde talks about how the poetry she sent to *The Ladder* was rejected, and how this and other rejections led to the creation of Kitchen Table: Women of Color Press. The name of the press immediately evokes an image of community and care: women of colour gathering around a kitchen table, talking and writing together.

> AUDRE LORDE
>
> We chose our name because the kitchen is the centre of our homes, a place where women work and talk to each other.
>
> BARBARA SMITH
>
> And the fact we were a kitchen table let folks know that we were a grass roots operation, begun and kept alive by women who couldn't rely on inheritances or other benefits of class privilege to do the work we needed to do.
>
> (Goldstein, 2023, p. 69)

In their image for *A Press of Our Own* (see Figure 2), hicks portrays Audre Lorde and Barbara Smith sitting at a kitchen table, working one of the press' publications by Combahee River Collective. On the table are several other books published by the press, including the anthology *This Bridge Called My Back: Writing by Radical Women of Colour,* edited by Cherríe Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa. Originally published in 1981, a fortieth anniversary edition of the anthology was reissued by SUNY Press in 2021 with a new preface by Moraga who reflects on the book's living legacy and how important the words and ideas from the writers in *This Bridge Called My Back* are to new generations of activists.

> I was 27 years old when Gloria Anzaldúa and I entered upon the project of *This Bridge Called My Back*. I am now 62. As I age, I watch the divide between generations widen with time and technology. I watch how desperately we need political memory so that we are not always imagining ourselves the ever inventors of our revolution; so that we are humbled by the valiant efforts of our foremothers; and so, with humility and a firm foothold in history we can enter upon an informed and re-envisioned strategy for social political change in decades ahead. (Moraga, 2021, p. xxix)

The image that hicks created captures the living legacy Moraga discusses.

FIGURE 2. *Image for the play* A Press of Our Own. *Audre Lorde and Barbara Smith in an editorial meeting.*

Reid's verse for *A Press of Our Own* tells and layers the story of how Audre Lorde responded to the rejection of her poetry by *The Ladder* — and other publications edited by "straight men and white feminists" — by creating Kitchen Table: Women of Colour Press. Reid layers hicks' illustration of the kitchen table with lyrics when they share the story of how women of colour writers "united" and "gathered" around a kitchen table to bring their words to the written page. Reid's first line of the verse for *A Press of Our Own* comes verbatim from the character description for Audre Lorde in the play script. The character description itself comes verbatim from Lorde's own description of herself.

Verse for *A Press of Our Own*

She was a Black, lesbian, mother, warrior poet
Informing those straight men and white feminists
She wouldn't settle for the occasional letter of acceptance
Or being "special" or separate

She resisted claims to "sisterhood" saying
"There's no such thing as a single-issue struggle

Because we don't lead single-issue lives," you see

Today, we call this "intersectionality"

So, women of colour writers united

They gathered at a kitchen table one night

They brought their words of survival, renewal, and rage

And wove their knowledge onto the written page

This was more than move of resistance

It was a ground-breaking alliance, a disruptive insistence

Writing their lives to defy white hegemony

They built a press of their own

(Reid, 2023a, in Goldstein, 2023, p. 71)

Example 3 from STAR House

The final play in the project, *STAR House*, features two trans activists who discuss being rejected by the early LGBT liberation movement in the 1970s. The play begins with trans activist Chelsea Goodwin critiquing the kind of activism taken on by middle-class white activists like Barbara Gittings, Kay Lahusen, and Frank Kameny in *The Love Booth*.

CHELSEA GOODWIN

Lesbian and gay activism in conference hotel rooms in the 1970s did nothing to help us.

We were homeless gay youth and young drag queens living on the streets of New York. People called us runaways, but we were actually throwaways. Throwaway children whose families tossed them out when they refused to live with who we were. When we found ourselves homeless on the streets of New York we became sex workers to survive.

Marsha and Sylvia looked out for us. When they were able to rent a hotel room or an apartment, they would sneak up us into their rooms. Sometimes 50 people slept in their two rooms.

In 1970 they founded Street Transvestites Action Revolutionaries — STAR.

The first STAR House was a parked trailer truck in an outdoor parking lot in Greenwich Village. One day, very early in the morning, Sylvia and Marsha came by the trailer with food for us and saw that the trailer moving! We were still sleeping as the trucker was driving it away! Most

> of us got out in time, but one of us didn't get up and found herself driving to California.
>
> (Goldstein, 2023, p. 78)

The racialized trans activists Chelsea talks about — Marcia and Sylvia — are Marcia Johnson and Sylvia Rivera. As Chelsea tells us, Sylvia was the co-founder of Street Transvestite Action Revolutionaries (STAR), a group formed in 1970 to help homeless young drag queens, gay youth, and trans women living in New York. When STAR House moved from its trailer to an apartment it became a place of community and care:

> CHELSEA GOODWIN
>
> The apartment didn't have any electricity and didn't have any heat. But we all started working to repair it. Some of us also helped out by liberating food from the A&P. In those days, they used to leave everything out in front of the store before it opened. It was a revolutionary thing.
>
> Everyone in the neighbourhood loved STAR House. They left their kids with us, and we'd baby-sit them. If they were hungry, we fed them. We fed half the neighbourhood!
>
> Marsha and Sylvia kept STAR House going for a while. They had all kinds of plans. Like to start a school on the third floor. Some of us left home so early we couldn't read and write.
>
> SYLVIA RIVERA
>
> We had a lot of fun. Until we couldn't pay the rent and were evicted. First STAR House died, then on the fourth anniversary of Stonewall[8] in 1973, STAR itself died.
>
> (Goldstein, 2023, p. 79)

The death of STAR was directly connected to the rejection Sylvia experienced by the white, middle-class, mainstream early LGBT liberation movement.

> ***Content warning: The next excerpt contains stories of violence against trans women and thoughts of suicide.***
>
> SYLVIA RIVERA
>
> Bette Midler came to sing "Happy Birthday" for us. It was happy day for lots of people, but not for us. The organizers stopped the drag queens from performing. They said drag queens were a threat and an embarrassment to women …
>
> … After that day, I left the movement — the movement I helped to create. Who do you think was there at Stonewall that night in 1969, the night of the rebellion? We were the ones who were there — the street queens.

> I was really hurt. So hurt I tried to kill myself and landed in the hospital. They had to put 60 stitches into this arm.
>
> At the time, my boss in New Jersey told me, "Ray, the oppressed always becomes the oppressor. Be careful. Watch it."
>
> You know, I'm still so angry with this fucking community that sometimes I wish 1969 (the year of Stonewall) had never happened.
>
> But it did happen, and now I have a whole lot of children. And I got to see them last year at the World Pride in Italy. The Italian transsexual organization in Bologna asked me to come and speak at their celebration. It was one of the most beautiful moments of my life. After all those years I was asked to speak in front of 500,000 people. Lots of them were mainstream gay people who had oppressed our community.
>
> I reminded all those 500,000 children out there that day that if it wasn't for us, they would not be where they're at today. They wouldn't have anything, none of them, from one corner of the world to the other. Because it was our community, the street kids, the street queens of that era, who fought for what they have today.
>
> (Goldstein, 2023, p. 80)

STAR House ends on an activist note. A year after Sylvia Rivera speaks at World Pride in Italy, she resurrects STAR, changing the "T" from transvestite to transgender, and begins running it from her home at Transy House, a trans collective begun by Chelsea Goodwin and Rusty Mae Moore in Brooklyn, New York. Chelsea, as Sylvia tells us, was one of her original children at STAR House, "one of the children who made it. One of the children who survived" (p. 55). Transy House was a loving home for the trans people and activists who lived there. Sylvia Rivera died at Transy House in 2002, still fighting for trans rights and the respect trans people deserve, surrounded by a community of activists and chosen family.

The image that hicks created for the play *STAR House* features the front door and stairs of Transy House (see Figure 3). The image is full of colour, celebrating the care and activism that emanated from the home.

In the verse they composed for *STAR House*, Reid begins by telling a story about the Stonewall rebellion, and reminds the audience, as Sylvia Rivera does in the play, "who was there at Stonewall that night in 1969." The people who "lit up Christopher Street" were "pissed off butch dykes, trans folx, and drag queens." Reid then layers the story Sylvia Rivera told the audience about New York Pride 1973 when organizers prevented the drag queens from performing.

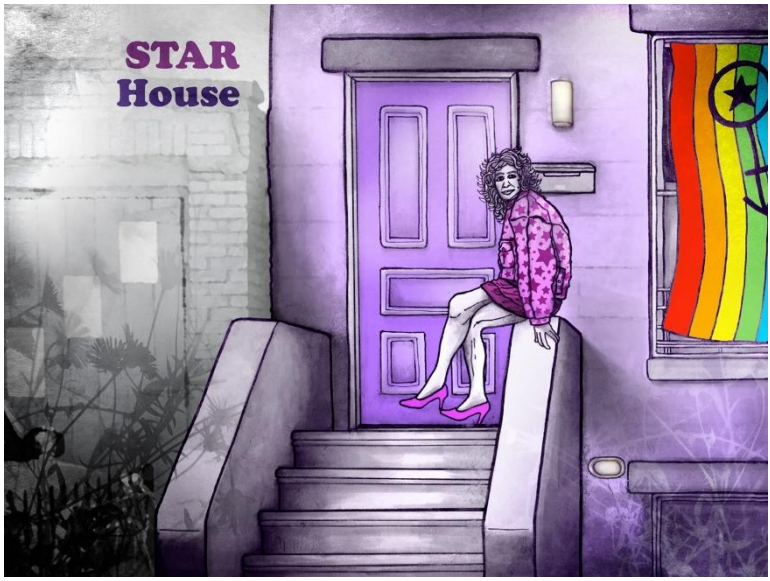

FIGURE 3. *Image for the play* STAR House. *Sylvia Rivera sits on the stairway of Transy House.*

The last stanza of Reid's verse layers Sylvia Rivera's last lines in the play: "Transy House was a loving home for the trans people and activists who lived there." The last line of the stanza, "May you rest in power," both salutes and honours the work of STAR and points to a legacy of powerful activism and care that STAR has left future generations of transgender young people.

Verse for *STAR House*

The year was 1969
During the height of the fight for human rights
Pissed off butch dykes, trans folx, and drag queens
Lit up Christopher Street

Enraged with ongoing police violence
They launched a defiant civil uprising
This was no boozy bar room brawl
This was the infamous Stonewall

Then, at Liberation Day in '73

Sylvia screamed, "Y'all better quiet down,

I've been trying to get up here all day

For your gay brothers and your gay sisters in jail"

Our families turned their backs on us,

And now you white, middle-class gays are just the same

We got queer teens and young queens clinging to the streets

And y'all don't do a goddamn thing"

She said, come and see us at STAR house sometime Apartment 14 at 640

East Twelfth

We hustle the streets to feed all our kids

And give them a safe place to sleep

Chosen, intentional, intergenerational

This was family at its most radical

Street Transgender Action Revolutionaries

May you rest in power

(Reid, 2023b, in Goldstein, 2023, p. 84)

THINKING ABOUT THE SIGNIFICANCE OF *THE LOVE BOOTH AND SIX COMPANION PLAYS*

Our public performance of *The Love Booth and Six Companion Plays* at the 2023 Toronto Pride Festival provided an audience of activists, artists, and community members with an opportunity to learn about a variety of hidden histories of QTBIPOC care and activism within the early LGBT liberation movement.

By pairing archival research that shares a story of activism from the early white LGBT movement alongside the grassroots activism by queer and trans racialized communities often ignored by white activists, we hoped to move towards a better, clearer, more accurate depiction of the era. Pride events are often co-opted by funding partners and organizations who do not provide ongoing sustainable financial support to 2SLGBTQI+ communities, or care for BIPOC communities. Contemporary Pride

celebrations often erase the ways queer and trans communities of colour have always been grassroots leaders at the forefront of equity and justice. Without continuous research into, and dissemination of, the realities of our shared past and present, it is easy to forget that greater awareness, legal rights, and visibility (Feder, 2020) for some queer and trans people have not meant greater thriving, joy, or justice, especially for racialized, Indigenous, and disabled communities of colour. Our research into the histories of QTBIPOC community care and activism ultimately aimed to help educators, researchers, and audiences better understand the realities of ongoing oppression and violence against QTBIPOC people. Our project sought to unseat the embedded whiteness and cis-heteronormativity found within popular representations of the early LGBT liberation movement.

When art is shared in its many forms — theatre scripts, songs, illustration — it can also be understood as a form of care and activism. *The Love Booth and Six Companion Plays* not only focuses on the theme of activism and care, the plays are also an example of the work of activist care. Working together on this project, our research team embodied an activist stance of care in documenting and archiving the lives and work of the activists that came before us in theatre script, song, and illustration. In researching, writing, and performing stories which are often erased and forgotten, we worked to honour the legacy of QTBIPOC communities whose activism and care continue to pave the way towards justice.

NOTES

1. "2SLGBTQI+" stands for two-spirit, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and intersex in the Canadian context and includes a plus sign to encompass additional identities. The inclusion of "two-spirit" acknowledges the unique experiences of Indigenous peoples who embody both masculine and feminine spirits, while the addition of "intersex" and "queer" reflects a broader and more inclusive understanding of gender and sexual diversity. This modern acronym recognizes and respects a wider range of identities and experiences within the community. We use this acronym in our research question and throughout our article to acknowledge the people whose identities are not included in the LGBT acronym and to recognize their important contributions to the liberation movement.

2. The term "cis-heteronormativity" describes socio-cultural, institutional, and individual beliefs / practices which assume a cisgender identity is the only natural, normal, and acceptable gender identity and heterosexuality is the only natural, normal, and acceptable sexual orientation. A person who identifies as cisgender is a person whose gender identity is the same as their sex assigned at birth. A person who identifies as transgender is a person whose gender identity is not the same as their sex assigned at birth. In a cis-normative culture, everyone is assumed to be cisgender until they "come out" as being otherwise. Similarly, in a heteronormative culture, most people are assumed to be heterosexual until they come out as otherwise.

3. Tara Goldstein, the lead author of the article and the principal investigator of the project, changed the name of the project from its original title of *The Love Booth and Other Plays* to *The Love Booth and Six Companion Plays*. In making this change Goldstein hoped to signal that the six companion plays were as important as the opening play. She made the change in response to feedback that the original title could lead some readers and audience members to view the six companion plays as less important.

   The authors of the article would like to thank one of the reviewers for suggesting that they were privileging white, middle-class, cisgender lesbian and gay voices in the examples of the plays they discussed in an earlier draft. The authors addressed this issue by diversifying the examples of plays discussed in the final draft of the article.

4. The author benjamin lee hicks intentionally does not capitalize their name.

5. STAR is an acronym for Street Transvestite Action Revolutionaries. The name later changed to Street Transgender Action Revolutionaries.

6. For more information on the history of the term "gender dysphoria," see Marc-Antoine Crocq's 2022 article "How gender dysphoria and incongruence became medical diagnoses — A historical review."

7. The songs, along with the audio play, can be found at: https://gaileyroad.com or https://kaelreid.com/love-booth-and-other-plays/.

8. The Stonewall riots (also known as the Stonewall uprising and the Stonewall rebellion) were a series of spontaneous demonstrations by members of the gay, lesbian, and trans communities in response to a police raid that began in the early morning hours of June 28, 1969, at the Stonewall Inn in the Greenwich Village neighbourhood in New York City.

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APPENDIX A

Full List of Plays from *The Love Booth and Six Companion Plays*

The Love Booth

Set in 1972, white lesbian and gay activists mobilize to remove homosexuality from the DSM.

Chisholm and the Advance Men

Set in 1972, Shirley Chisholm becomes the first Black woman to run for president of the United States with the support of a group of gay activists.

The Sero-Positive Seder

Set in the mid 1980s, Iris De La Cruz mobilizes both straight and queer people living with HIV to challenge the stigma and shame of living with HIV and fight for resources.

Lies at the Library

Set in 1973, white lesbian and gay activists mobilize to put queer books on public library shelves.

A Press of Our Own

Set in 1981, Black lesbian poet Audre Lorde and Black scholar and writer Barbara Smith co-found Kitchen Table: Women of Colour Press.

I Walk in the History of My People

Set in 1981, two-spirit writer, artist, and activist Chrystos recites her poem "I Walk in the History of My People."

STAR House

Set in 1970 and 1971, trans activists Marcia P. Johnson, Sylvia Rivera, and Chelsea Goodwin form STAR to support homeless young drag queens, gay youth, and trans women living in New York.

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