RACIAL FRAUD AT THE UW

After a trans student was outed for falsely identifying as a person of color, we look at the ways that whiteness contributes to the harm that POC experience from racial fraud

p.15

FUTURE OF LGBTQ RIGHTS

What the conservative Supreme Court majority means for defending and advancing our legal protections

p.48

POWER & PURPOSE

Dana Pellebon

The co-executive director of Rape Crisis Center on creating change and making a difference in the lives of traditionally underserved people
Thank you to our Madison community for 10 amazing years of creating healthy smiles.

Tamim Sifri, DDS
“I don’t see this election as being about choosing a candidate who will be able to lead us in the right direction. It will be about choosing a candidate who can be most effectively pressured into allowing more space for the evolving anti-racist movement.”

- Angela Davis

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CHECK YOUR BLIND SPOTS

I DO MY BEST to be a good ally to the diversity of identities in our community. Even so, it’s inevitable that I’ll have my blind spots.

Over the years I’ve actively worked on trying to identify them when they come up. To do this, I focus on listening, learning, changing, and then advocating for the voices expressing the harm that I am contributing to. I think part of the unlearning we all need to do is around feeling defensive or doubting on a position we hold when a group more marginalized than ourselves tries telling us that it’s causing them harm.

This issue’s take on health and families is filled with opportunities like this to unlearn harmful patterns—and then take in—ways that we can come together to collectively lift each other up.

First, Jill Nagler unpacks the complicated and messy fallout over the revelation that a community activist had been leveraging a false identity as a person of color. They look at how whiteness enables this kind of harm, and how it is something that only whiteness benefits from. The fact that this happened here, within our local queer community, is something especially concerning.

All of our featured community members in this issue—Dana Pellison, Keith Borden, and Rita Abdi—have opened up to share how anti-Blackness has impacted them and the resilience they’ve forged to not only survive it, but to help find joy and provide leadership.

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Jill Nagler (they/them/theirs; ze/hir/hirs) grew up in Prairie du Sac but has lived in Madison for nearly 20 years. They are white, queer, trans, non-binary, disabled, and working class. Jill is serving their second term as president of the board of directors at OutReach where ze has brought a focus to issues of racial justice and representation in the LBTQ+ community, including co-founding and facilitating Reading Antiracism: An Outreach Book Club. Ze is also a member of Disability Pride Madison, which has launched the Black and disabled virtual showcase that features Black disabled artists. Also a member of Groundwork, a local antiracism coalition, ze has co-founded twice-weekly discussion groups that center on antiracism work. Outside of Covid restrictions ze is a screamer/shredder in the local queer, feminist, punk band, The Hasbians, and is also guitarist in the experimental duo, dirty cops.

Steph Tai (they/them) is a professor at the University of Wisconsin Law School. Their academic research focuses on the role of science in the legal protection against health and environmental risks. They also regularly draft amicus legal briefs on behalf of scientific communities. Apart from academic and legal work, they have also actively advocated for the interests of the LBTQ+ community at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, through service on the UW LGBTQ+ staff/students committee. These efforts include advocating for full transgender health care coverage, provision of affordable PrEP coverage, and provision of sufficient mental health services for LGBTQ+ students. Steph also serves on the executive board of Trans Law Help Wisconsin, which provides legal services and training with respect to name and gender change procedures. They were a student of Ruth Laden Ginsburg’s husband, Marty Ginsburg, in law school. May both their memories be a blessing.

Melanie Jones (she/her) is a photographer who has been working in the Madison area for around five years. She specializes in dogs, women in agriculture, and weddings. When she isn’t working in town, she is most likely out west, either working for the box office at Burning Man or photographing clients in Montana. She lives with her spouse on the northside of Madison with two dogs and three cats.

Max Wende (he/him) enjoys a life steeped in photography: he’s been a freelance photographer for more than 20 years, and has the extreme good fortune to have a “day job” of creating image-processing software for photographers. He also has a passion for music and plays the upright bass. You can follow him on Instagram @maxwende..

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Inside the Movement with GSAFE
Our Lives Publisher Patrick Farabaugh checks in with GSAFE Co-Executive Directors, Ali Muldrow and Brian Juchems to learn what the organization’s current priorities and challenges are, from navigating the pandemic to juvenile criminal justice reform.

How has GSAFE been handling 2020?
Ali Muldrow: An important thing to understand about GSAFE is that it has interacted with large-scale educational systems for about 25 years. When schools close, and in Wisconsin schools close often because of snow, the GSAFE office closes based on the immediate school district. So our approach to the pandemic, as an organization that prioritizes the health and safety of kids, was to look to public safety experts and try to align our practices with those that make people safe. At first that meant canceling some really meaningful events, and then shifting a lot online. It also meant closing our office similarly to something we would do for a snow day and aligning with school districts.

Brian Juchems: Just like everybody else, we’ve had to pivot. Recognizing that we have a small staff made that easier.

What about from the districts themselves?
Brian: A lot of our work has been working with the students more so than with the districts as a whole.

Ali: I would say we’re really lucky to have a good relationship with the Department of Public Instruction, and a state superintendent who believes that every child deserves to be welcomed at their school. I think having the Seventh Circuit rule in the favor of trans students twice has been a really big deal for districts across Wisconsin. And I think that having Donald Trump undermining Title IX right now is a large problem for us as an organization doing this work. It really is doing harm here. Districts that were just coming...
around to racial justice work and making sure trans students are affirmed aren’t feeling the same level of pressure under the Trump administration that they did under the Obama administration in terms of the interpretation of Title IX.

Brian: On that, every school district has a different perspective. Again to use the northwoods as an example: The Bayfield school district didn’t have a GSA until this past year. The folks that are working with the GSA are also the ones working with the indigenous student population up there. They already get the equity and racial justice issues and recognize that whether it’s talking about cultural competence or cultural justice issues and recognize that whether it’s there. They already get the equity and racial justice work and making sure that students have a voice—particularly because the Madison school district wasn’t in a position to do that. They just need to pay for it.

Ali: When we originally took a stance, it was that the school district should not be funneling funding into the police department. School districts should pay for teachers and counselors. If the city wants to put police wherever they want to put police, they can do that. They just need to pay for it.

We also partnered with Wisconsin on an equality map to help identify where regions and districts are at. Right now two-thirds, if not three-fourths of Wisconsin school districts have a policy. When we started in 2005, there were zero. Wisconsin is a school choice state, which means that you can have abstinence-only sex ed. You have abstinence-only sex ed in Waukeake, for example. So some of our priorities expand and broaden the work we’ve always been doing. How do we make sure that students have medically accurate LGBTQ consent-based human growth and development throughout their education? These kids need accurate information that isn’t designed to be exclusionary or discriminatory. I think looking at what it looks like statewide to broaden and deepen this work does really look at the composition of our legislature. And because we believe in youth leadership and youth voice, we’re profoundly interested in making sure every young person in Wisconsin is registered as a senior in high school to vote. It’s a priority that I have become increasingly passionate about. It is a bipartisan issue and we’ve got to make sure that we are encouraging our young people to leverage their power and their leadership in every possible way.

Brian: On that, every school district has a different perspective. Again to use the northwoods as an example: The Bayfield school district didn’t have a GSA until this past year. The folks that are working with the GSA are also the ones working with the indigenous student population up there. They already get the equity and racial justice issues and recognize that whether it’s talking about cultural competence or cultural justice issues and recognize that whether it’s there. They already get the equity and racial justice work and making sure that students have a voice—particularly because the Madison school district wasn’t in a position to do that. They just need to pay for it.

Ali: Yes. GSAFE first started taking a stance on police in schools about four years ago. Freedom, Inc., and the young people at Freedom, Inc., really led the way and the charge to forcing our community to have that conversation. We are very lucky to have a good relationship with Freedom, Inc., and to amplify the voices of their young people. We’re currently working on a documentary called Child Correction that’s all about juvenile incarceration. We also did a residency with the Dane County Juvenile Detention Center for about 14 months where we taught in the jail. We have a vested interest because we’re a racial justice LGBTQ organization focused on young people. We have a vested interest in all kinds of issues, including immigration. We don’t want young people of any identity being subject to any level of cruelty or discrimination because that always impacts everybody. You know, marginalized identities.

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trans and non-binary students equally or with equity. They can’t single them out and say, “We’re going to treat you differently than your cisgender peers.”

**Brian:** We have about 30 school districts that have passed some type of procedures that are in some way similar to Madison. Madison’s probably the most robust in the state, followed by Milwaukee. We were working with one school district and it’s been a really long process—like five years. That’s an example of why we love our individual donors, and our monthly donors. They help sustain us as we do them work on these long projects that people aren’t funding. Another district was ready to pass procedures and then literally that week the WILL lawsuit got announced. As a result they said, “Well, let’s put a hold on that.”

I think WILL lawsuit presents it as the Madison school district is trying to keep sexual stuff like this hidden in terms from families. The thing that we have to remember is that 95, 96, 97 percent of the time the family is already aware of the situation. They know that their child identifies as trans or non-binaire. It doesn’t necessarily mean that they’re excited about it, but they know and are in conversation with the school about it.

What the Madison procedures do is, in those rare occasions where the student isn’t ready to be out to the family, acknowledge that we’re going to work with and going to support the student while they figure out how to have those conversations with their family. Whether now or later. And it’s also trusting the knowledge of the student’s awareness of their family to recognize it’s not safe to be out to the right now.

**DOES GSAFE HAVE ANY SORT OF STATE LEGISLATIVE GOALS?**

**Brian:** In the last year or two we’ve built a closer relationship with Fair Wisconsin. Oftentimes if we’re thinking about policy, that’s something we would develop in collaboration with them. They have the expertise as well as the seat to do that. Obviously we’re still looking to pass a statewide non-discrimination policy for our trans and non-binary students. I’d still be looking for sex education to be comprehensive, content-based, and medically accurate. We had something like that at one point, but then

back in 2010 that changed. All: I think there are a lot of things that we would like to change in terms of state statutes. There are building codes in state statute that really change how you can facilitate restrooms. We would love to get rid of those. We’re not poised in this current political climate to do that.

I think as far as Governor Evers goes, we’re lucky to have a relationship from when he was our state superintendent. He has consistently been on our side. He has continued to listen to LGBTQ groups, and it’s great to have him listen to GSAFE and to support GSAFE and support young people.

**HOW HAS THE UPRISING IMPACTED GSAFE’S PARTS OF THE WORK?**

**Ali:** In the long term, GSAFE is an organization that’s committed to ending the incarceration of children. We spoke to this for a while, and I’ve spoken to this pretty passionately. The uprising highlights things like the practices that were ongoing at the Department of Corrections’ Lincoln Hills School. What happened to George Floyd directly speaks to why having school-based policing in which not a single white student was arrested in a district where the largest single demographic is white students, to have every single child who was arrested in school this year be a student of color, is something we have to examine closely.

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**WHAT ARE THE GREATEST CHALLENGES IN DOING THAT WORK?**

**Ali:** I would say the most devastating problem with talking about criminal justice reform at the school level is when you talk about disproportionality and discipline. Who gets suspended? Who gets expelled? Who gets kicked out of class? The biggest problem is that there’s this idea that the kid deserves it. That the kid isn’t being discriminated against. That it’s just a coincidence that every kid that got arrested was a Black or brown child last year, but they’re not really in trouble.

The counter-narrative to that seems too easy for me because I grew up in Madison. There’s no shortage of young white people breaking the law. There’s no shortage of young white people under age drinking or stealing or engaging in drug use. It’s who gets therapy and who gets a cage. That’s the problem.

**DOES GSAFE HAVE A FIVE-YEAR PLAN?**

**Ali:** The long-term goal of the organization is to make it sustainable. It directly speaks to why having school-based policing in which not a single white student was arrested in a district where the largest single demographic is white students, to have every single child who was arrested in school this year be a student of color, is something we have to examine closely.

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I met CV Vitolo-Haddad in the summer of 2018 at OutReach LGBTQ+ Community Center. We were both attending an event that followed the last OutReach Pride parade, featuring HRC National Press Secretary and current Delaware candidate for State Senate Sarah McBride. McBride was taking questions from a small group of trans folks about HRC and their problematic past in regards to trans advocacy. CV and I spoke briefly at the event about academic interests and shared our trans coming out stories, which was memorable to me at the time, as I hadn’t met a lot of other trans non-binary folks that used they/them pronouns in Madison.

CV and I didn’t become close friends, but we shared some close friends, social circles, social media circles, and activist groups. We were never close enough for me to learn.

Our community had to reckon with the question of how could someone so seemingly dedicated to the cause—and by all appearances so giving to others—be exploiting racial and rhetorical ambiguity for their own personal and professional gain?

The Harm of Racial Fraud

CV Vitolo-Haddad, a trans non-binary UW-Madison grad student, was recently outed for an extensive history of falsely identifying as a person of color. OutReach board president Jill Nagler looks at the events that lead up to—and the fallout from—their outing, and the ways that whiteness contributes to the harm that BIPOC experience from acts of racial fraud.
CV’s backstory or to have an opinion of them outside of what I saw on social media. Their social media image told a story of interactions with academics, queer leftist activists, mutual aid networks, and gun advocates, as well as with Proud Boys and other white supremacists. Their professed intentions with befriending Proud Boys and white supremacists were framed as both a need and as an attempt to expose the failacies in misogynistic, white supremacist thinking. CV seemed to simultaneously exude both altruism and arrogance, a combination that is not uncommon in both academia and leftist activist circles. I expected to hear people question and challenge CV, their many identities, their politics, and their principles, their controversial platforming of Proud Boys and white supremacy; however, I never thought to question their claims of African and Cuban ancestry. That is until I read the compelling anonymous claims made in a Medium blog entitled, “CV Vitolo ‘Haddad’: Another Academic Racial Fraud,” and the fallout that ensued on September 4, 2020.

Racial Fraud

The first response I saw from CV about these allegations was in a post about their racial fraud on their Facebook page—which has since been deactivated. The response from the activist community was as confusing as the fraudulent racial claims, with white folks and Black, Brown, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) defending and attacking CV, and one another. Friends came to CV’s defense with a ferocity that was matched by those who were ready to denounce the ambiguity of what CV claimed to be her black heritage and her identity. CV undoubtedly benefited from the assumption, presumption, and posting that they were not white, effectively taking attention and resources away from BIPOC folks. They weaponized their racial lie to silence and delegitimize actual BIPOC folks, while claiming to uphold a political rooted in racial justice.

The Harm

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The Role of Whiteness

Only in the system of white supremacy can white folks use racial ambiguity to their advantage, because when a person claims to be Black is really white, they are insulated from their whiteness. It was no surprise that an academic champion of rhetoric has an answer for this to phenomenon of betrayal; of racial fraudulence, and of centering individual identity politics over collective justice.

The historic & current impacts of racial fraud

The depth of the harm that racial fraud causes, especially with white folks pretending to be light-skinned Black folks, need not be explained and named for what it is as it has historically and currently impacts BIPOC and how BIPOC are treated. We must consider actions such as the paper bag tests, skin bleaching, Westernization plastic surgery, fetization of “exoticness,” hair straightening and rules prohibiting natural hairstyles, and frankly, too many forms of dehumanization.
that is normalized in white supremacy socialization. We must also consider the historical roots in terms of laws that determine personhood: Blood quantum and the one drop rule were used to oppress even “white-passing” folks through ethnic/racialized genetic ancestry, deepening the false narrative of racialization that fuels white supremacist ideology. In modern racialization that white folks have used to exploit cultures that they do not belong to, to co-opt racial oppression that they have never experienced, and to absolve themselves.

While it is necessary as white folks to believe that anyone claiming to identify as BBIPOC is who they say they are, we know that white folks are quick to look into BPBOC’s past and ancestry to attack their credibility. Whether this is through the “birtherism” that BPBOC political candidates face, or whether it is through CAP and looking up criminal records, the default for whiteness is to question the ancestry and credibility of BPBOC who dare to enter white-dominated spaces.

The guilt of shame and whiteness; and a perverse interpersonal neoliberalism, an extreme form of cultural appropriation, appropriating oppression.

CV claimed ancestry and culture that was not her own; to claim being Black, Cuban, Habashian, Latinx, as well as possibly claiming other racial/cultural identities. CV continues to refer to themselves as Italian/Southern European instead of referring to themselves as white. It is surprising that their racial/ethnic claims were not publicly brought into question when considering a dossier entitled, “A Third Step” that was released by CV shortly after their racial fraudulence was exposed, was able to easily trace back all four sets of CV’s great grandparents identified as white. And while it is necessary as white folks to believe that anyone claiming to identify as BBIPOC is who they say they are, we know that white folks are quick to look into BPBOC’s past and ancestry to attack their credibility. Whether this is through the “birtherism” that BPBOC political candidates face, or whether it is through CAP and looking up criminal records, the default for whiteness is to question the ancestry and credibility of BPBOC who dare to enter white-dominated spaces.

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MMSD guidance allows teachers and staff to disclose students’ gender identity in their best interests for their safety and support at school.

The lawsuit was filed by the conservative law firm Wisconsin Institute for Law and Liberty on behalf of 14 parents who say it is a violation of their rights to not be informed of the name or pronoun used for their children at school. The injunction prevents the school district from enforcing the guidance. The school district maintains that the guidance is not a violation of parents’ rights, but the court’s decision did not order a district from enforcing the guidance.

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and survivors of domestic violence, intimate partner violence, and sexual assault. Freedom, Inc. also helps clients with housing assistance case management. Recent events hosted by the group include Get Out the Vote and Meet & Greet for Queer Black Folx, and People of Color (POC). Freedom, Inc. will collaborate with OutReach in our virtual COVID-19 Resource Series “The Road Forward” and our new Queer/Trans Persons of Color support group in 2021.

The coalition work has spearheaded large UW Health grants to Madison community organizations including Outreach that are working with low income and marginalized communities to provide homeless services and other relief efforts. Bidar-Sielaff has made an impact on Madison through her work on the Madison Community Foundation Board, MATC Board, Latino Health Council of Dane County and more.
May not have a home that is supportive or upon returning home last spring and this fall, networks, friends, and community on campus are removed from their respective support Dean and Director Warren (War, per/pers) distress, and a lack of support,” said Assistant 22

NOVEMBER / DECEMBER 2020

SUPPORT WITH WARREN SHEARER

UPDATE ON UW CAMPUS LGBTQ+ STUDENT SUPPORT WITH WARREN SHEARER

THIS FALL, University of Wisconsin System students returned to class, but it was only a matter of time before the COVID crisis returned to campus as well. As some students quarantined in dorms and classes on the UW-Madison campus became a mix of virtual and in-person instruction, LGBTQ+ students were left without some of the sources of community and support they might expect from a traditional campus experience.

Fortunately, the Gender and Sexuality Campus Center at UW-Madison is actively listening to students’ needs and responding in new and creative ways. Students are navigating a desire to build community, especially as they are managing isolation, psychological distress, and a lack of support,” said Assistant Dean and Director Warren (War, per/pers) Scherer. “They are rightfully frustrated. They are removed from their respective support networks, friends, and community on campus because gathering is limited. Students who, upon returning home last spring and this fall, may not have a home that is supportive or affirming. They are navigating an experience where they cannot fully be themselves, express themselves, or if they are out it may be a hostile environment.”

To meet students wherever they are, the Gender and Sexuality Campus Center has found a tool more commonly used in online gaming communities to get students connected. Through setting up an online Discord instant messaging and digital distribution platform server, staff have found ways of supporting students through threads of online conversations based on students’ interests — everything from exploring gender identity to their passion for baking or cultivating plants. Combined with virtual events and discussion, students are still finding a sense of community. “LGBTQ+ people are incredibly resilient,” per said. “They have had to find ways to not only survive but thrive in the environment they find themselves and they have found avenues to access support and community. It mightn’t be the robust community they want. They can’t kiki with friends to watch She-Ra or Pose. It’s not exactly what they envisioned for college, but they are finding ways to thrive and be resilient to all that is going on.”

Quartz Health Solutions Releases Organization’s First-Ever Anti-Racism Statement

AN OFFICIAL ANTI-RACISM STATEMENT followed a statement shared by Quartz’s then-president and CEO, Terry Bolz in June, which condemned the systemic racism faced by Black people and other communities of color in this country. In that statement, Bolz said, “Racism is a public health crisis. We must speak up and act to end the preventable and untimely deaths that are its consequence.”

Dr. Mark Selna, Quartz’s new President and CEO, echoed Bolz’s sentiments, expressed his support for the announcement and his commitment to eliminating health care disparities while improving health care outcomes for communities of color.

The official anti-racism statement is below.

At Quartz, our company values are clear: Respect Responsibility Relationships

We respect and value the differences and perspectives of our employees, customers, and communities. Our diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts support our values by:

Creating an inclusive workplace environment.

Team-up with community collaborators to improve diversity awareness.

Educating, building, coaching, and promoting diversity and inclusion.

Being accountable and measuring the impact, influence, and path of our efforts.

Basic human and civil rights are critically important, as are issues of diversity, equity, and inclusion.

We have listened and learned from our employees, customers, and communities as they have expressed emotions that span from anger to frustration to exhaustion about the history of social injustice and inequities in our country.

Quartz promotes the health and well-being of people. We owe it to ourselves and each other to do better. At this moment, regardless of our past efforts and good intentions, it’s clear we as an organization, as well as a society, need to do more and at a faster pace.

The Quartz executive team believes it is necessary to condemn systemic racism and the continued oppression of our communities of color. In alignment with our core values, we stand for anti-racism, diversity, equity, and inclusion for all.

We stand with our Black employees, customers, and communities in our network service areas, across our country and around the world.

As an anti-racism organization, we vow to intentionally identify and discuss issues of racism and color and the impacts they have on our organization, systems, and people.

We challenge ourselves to understand and correct any inequities we may discover and gain a better understanding of ourselves in the process.

We are committed to supporting and being actively involved in the communities we serve to advance diversity, equity, and inclusion, and eradicate systemic racism.

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**WINTER 2020**

**QUEER WE ARE, TOGETHER WE HEAL**

Student activist Steven Wang formed a coalition of Madison-based LGBTQ+ organizations to launch a campaign to address health equity issues and promote cross-group collaboration during the Covid-19 pandemic.

"**COVID SUCCEEDS.**" This is what I have been hearing from people since the pandemic blew up. Whether it is a chi-chat with Grindr strangers, a check-in with long-time friends, or working with community organizations—the steadily increasing number of Covid-19 cases always lingers in the background conversation, gradually consuming the little optimism left in people to believe that life will resume to normal soon.

The Covid-19 pandemic has disproportionately affected LGBTQ+ communities and aggravated systematic inequalities in health. The exact impact of Covid-19 on LGBTQ+ people is difficult to trace due to negligence of official data collection and lack of access to health services. Financial hardship related to employment, housing, and social isolation further impairs LGBTQ+ people’s capacity to cope with the pandemic. The campaign “Queer We Are, Together WE Heal” originated as a collaborative initiative to address health equity issues within and beyond LGBTQ+ communities in Madison. Several community organizations (including Our Lives magazine, Freedom, Inc., the Gender and Sexuality Campus Center (GSCC) at UW-Madison, Outreach LGBTQ+ Community Center, and Orgullo Latinx) formed a coalition to work together, including Freedom, Inc., OutReach LGBTQ+ Community Center, and Orgullo Latinx as the campaign’s main Facebook page (@we_queer). We are also lucky to have partnered with other local communities, to highlight structural inequities behind health disparities.

**CONVENING AND RECRUITMENT**

The “Queer We Are, Together WE Heal” campaign builds on this reciprocal model of collaboration to face the challenge of Covid-19. "It’s up to community organizing and mutual aid networks to support the ongoing needs of LGBTQ+ and multiply marginalized people who are being failed," M.Rose Sweetnam says. "That’s what this project is all about, highlighting the ongoing need of LGBTQ+ communities so that we can continue building better support networks."
I took an early interest in science and medicine. Both of my parents are health professionals—my mom is a neuropsychologist, and my dad is a dentist. Each dedicated themselves to the health and well-being of their patients, including taking calls during dinner and making emergency trips into the office on weekends to help someone in need.

While I knew I wanted to become a physician early in my life as a way to give back and serve those in my community, what was less clear was how professional identity would intersect with other aspects of my life—namely being gay. I did not have many LGBTQ role models growing up, and saw few on TV or in the media. I remember coming out at Haverford College and being unsure if that would impact my chances of getting into medical school or how being gay might be relevant to my desire to become a physician. I had only met a handful of LGBTQ people in my life, and none of them were doctors.

**A MILITARY TRADITION**

While I do not think of myself as having come from a military family, I do come from a long line of veterans. My father was a U.S. Army dentist, one grandfather served in the Merchant Marines and the Army, and another grandfather was also an Army man. My mom’s family came to the U.S. in the 1940s, and a direct ancestor of mine, Reverend Ebenzer David, enlisted as a chaplain under George Washington at the beginning of the Revolutionary War and died while serving as a medical officer during the infamous winter at Valley Forge. In short, our family has been serving our country in many ways for a long time. That is one of the reasons I became a physician—to serve others. Ultimately, it is also one of the reasons I decided to join the Navy after I finished medical school at the University of Chicago—to serve my country.

One of the reasons I chose the Navy was because I always figured that if I deployed, I’d rather be on a ship than in a tent in the middle of the desert. Little did I know that in 2014 I would receive orders to staff a combat trauma hospital in Kandahar Airfield in Afghanistan. The hardest part about deploying was leaving my then-partner (now husband) Judd behind. I knew that because we were not married (nor at the time could we legally be married in Tennessee where we lived), if something were to happen to me, he would have been afforded no rights or protections. But we did what thousands of military couples do each year and figured out how to minimize the stress that time, distance, war, and uncertainty brought while I was overseas.

During my deployment, I was given orders to lead the anesthesiology department at the NATO Role III Trauma Hospital—the primary receiving facility for all wounded servicemen and enemy combatants for the southern half of the country. Established in 2005 and originally supported by the UK, Netherlands, Denmark, Australia, the U.S., and Canada, the 70,000-square-foot facility. Here I spent the better part of seven months, caring for many critically ill patients who had been wounded in battle. It was a privilege to bring the lessons I had learned and taught at Harvard Medical School to our soldiers, sailors, airmen, and marines on the front lines. During my deployment, I was given orders to lead the anesthesiology department at the NATO Role III Trauma Hospital—the primary receiving facility for all wounded servicemen and enemy combatants for the southern half of the country. Established in 2005 and originally supported by the UK, Netherlands, Denmark, Australia, the U.S., and Canada, the 70,000-square-foot facility. Here I spent the better part of seven months, caring for many critically ill patients who had been wounded in battle. It was a privilege to bring the lessons I had learned and taught at Harvard Medical School to our soldiers, sailors, airmen, and marines on the frontlines.

I had never been in a room with such a high-ranking leader. I was told to be nervous and to meet him. After a few opening remarks, thanking us for what we were doing, he asked if there were any questions. I could not help myself. I made my way to the microphone, in front of a hanger full of soldiers and with the traveling press corps watching I asked, “What are your thoughts on transgender service members serving in an austere environment like this, here in Kandahar?”

Kandahar? At the time, there were estimated 15,000 transgender people in the military, but they could not come out as transgender because of a longstanding ban. Until I asked my question, Carter had not publicly stated where he stood on the issue. “I don’t think anything but their suitability for service should preclude them [from serving],” he said.

To ask that question was uncomfortable, yet it was the right thing to do. The Secretary’s response was the most favorable from a senior U.S. military official to date. Within hours, the event was being reported by news outlets all over the world, and by the next afternoon the White House added its support. A year later, in 2016, the ban was repealed. When Secretary Carter announced the repeal of the ban on transgender service at the Pentagon, my Kandahar question was described as “the spark that led to the end of the ban on transgender service” by then Secretary of the Army, Eric Fanning.

**CHANGING THE FACE OF LGBTQ HEALTH**

There are notable gaps and disparities in the health of LGBTQ people all over the country. LGBTQ people are less likely to have health insurance, a regular doctor, access to preventive health screenings, or avoid harmful behaviors like smoking. While there are many factors that contribute to this, the inaccessibility of medical care is something that pains me deeply. As a result, I have dedicated a substantial portion of my life and professional portfolio to advocating for more accessible systems that are better equipped to meet the needs of LGBTQ people.

In Massachusetts in 2007, I led an effort to create the Massachusetts Committee on LGBT Health which continues today to work to advocate for policy change. When I relocated to Nashville and joined the faculty at Vanderbilt University, I co-founded and led the Vanderbilt Program for LGBTQ Health—a multidisciplinary effort that ultimately launched four regional transgender health clinics and a comprehensive gender confirmation surgery program. We also created a first-in-the-nation, free, on-demand transgender service navigator program to provide advice and support using trained transgender peer advocates called “Transbudz.” This work had the effect of changing the face of care for LGBTQ—and particularly transgender—people across the Southeast and has become a model nationwide. I led numerous research studies about

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In September 2019, I joined the faculty at the Medical College of Wisconsin’s Milwaukee campus as senior associate dean and director of MCW’s statewide philanthropy called the Advancing a Healthier Wisconsin Endowment (AHW). It’s an organization unlike any other I’ve come across. But in many ways, it is perfectly aligned with my desire to advocate for positive change in the world around me.

While AHW is housed within the nation’s third largest private medical school, we have a public mission and statewide mandate to improve the health of Wisconsin. It’s a thrill to sit at the intersection of the power of philanthropy to create change and the power of academic medicine to find groundbreaking new solutions to critical health problems.

The legacy that was left for me was deep. Since 2004, AHW has invested more than $279 million in more than 477 projects across the state. These projects are leading to new research discoveries, developing the health workforce of the future, and creating positive impacts in Wisconsin communities. And, importantly, these projects are challenging and changing the status quo around health in our state—including the health workforce of the future, and creating positive impacts in Wisconsin communities. And, importantly, these projects are challenging and changing the status quo around health in our state—including the health workforce of the future, and creating positive impacts in Wisconsin communities. And, importantly, these projects are challenging and changing the status quo around health in our state—including several funded efforts to improve LGBTQ health across Wisconsin.

The opportunity to advance equity in health drew me to the position. As I’ve spent the last 12 months leading the organization, I’ve been deeply invested in building a healthier future for all marginalized populations, including LGBTQ individuals.

As Chair of the AHW, I championed the call for LGBTQ equity. I advanced a call to ban conversion therapy nationwide, I stood up to amplify physician voices in a nationwide call to end police brutality and racial injustice. And now, in Wisconsin, I look forward to adding my voice to those who know our world can, and must, be a better and more just place.

This past year has been a truly challenging one for all of us. We have all experienced stress and uncertainty during the COVID-19 pandemic. I continue to struggle personally with trying to make the best decisions I can to keep my family safe as we navigate an ever-changing landscape. I also grapple with the ongoing daily challenges posed by the inequities and injustice that continue to bubble up around us. Recently, I cared for a patient from Kenosha who described to me the unfathomable sight of watching armed men roam around her neighborhood with machine guns.

We can, and must, do better.

As you can imagine, there are many words that people ascribe to me and my career—mostly related to my advocacy or professional identity. But in closing, the two words that I am most proud of represent my most important accomplishment, my family. Those words are “husband” and “dad.” I could not be more grateful to have a beautiful son, Ethan, and a loving husband, Judd. Their support is what makes all my achievements possible and meaningful.

In my work leading AHW, I’m focused on building a healthier future for all marginalized populations, including LGBTQ individuals. As Chair of the AHW, I championed the call for LGBTQ equity. I advanced a call to ban conversion therapy nationwide. I stood up to amplify physician voices in a nationwide call to end police brutality and racial injustice. And now, in Wisconsin, I look forward to adding my voice to those who know our world can, and must, be a better and more just place.

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Finding Home

Sex educator and disability rights advocate Grayson Schultz came into their activism by transforming personal hardships into purposeful empowerment.

When my ex-husband asked for a divorce mid-2019, my mind flashed back to a journal article I read years earlier. Research indicated that most marriages—around 75 percent—involving a chronically ill partner end in divorce. Despite my laundry list of health issues, I was adamantly sure we wouldn’t fall into that statistic, that I had found my forever home. Yet, I found myself sitting on my bed consoling him while my world—all I had of family—fell apart.

Within weeks, I began having alarming symptoms. Within a few years, I began to struggle with the toxically monogamous notion that he and I had to be my everything. Instead, I feel like I broke his heart. Over a week, we had a disconnect, a tension there. We had settled on communicating to put a name to undiagnosed conditions. My experience with seeking a diagnosis and treatment for this pain led me to develop a research project. Anecdotally, it’s clear that patients and health care providers struggle to talk about sex, sexuality, and gender. This is true in the exam room, across electronic medical record systems, and more. In 2019, I received a grant from The Efﬁng Foundation for Sex-Positivity to explore what patients’ experiences were more directly. The data we’ve collected will lead to the development of a guide for patients on how to have these conversations. Eventually, we’ll do the same with providers, creating a collaborative guide they can use together in the exam room.

Thankfully, the last few years have brought me a good kind of change. I’ve loved my ex a lot, but we are better as friends. That relationship isn’t gone, but just shifted as many do over time. I’ve gained other partners locally and across the US, solidifying that my being trans or on testosterone isn’t a deal breaker for the right people. The vaginismus only hits here and there, leaving me to have as much or as little sex as I want.

My chronic pain has improved, a combination of finding the right providers, physical therapy, exercise for new diagnoses, and being both privileged and lucky. I found a healthy physical outlet in hockey, one that brought the best people I’ve ever known into my life.

The world is a dumber ﬁre. Things are terrifying and have been for a while. Back in June 2019, I thought my world was ending because it was turning into something I didn’t recognize. What I learned, though, was that home isn’t a person or a place. It’s a feeling. Despite all the changes in my life, I ultimately feel like I’m right where I need to be. May we all be so lucky to ﬁnd our place in the resistance.
Go Do Something Good

Dana Pellebon • co-director of Rape Crisis Center is on the OutReach board, among others.

Both are places where she can create change, advocate for others, and make a difference in the lives of traditionally underserved people—values instilled in her at a young age and reinforced along the way.

ONE OF MY EARLIEST memories of New Orleans, at age six, was politicalcause-revelling with my grand- father when he was running for the city council. Holding my hand, he would let me knock on the door. When they opened, I would smile big with my pigtailed and hot pink shirt saying, “Vote for Melvin Jones.” Scared? I was too young to re-member exactly what he said, but I know that he wanted to help people in the community. This followed what I knew about him as a deacon in the Roman Catholic Church. He and my grandmother, Helena, facilitated support groups for children and adults at the church. Finally, every morning when he drove me to the school, we would say the Lord’s Prayer, Hail Mary, and when we got to school, instead of a typical “Have a good day.” He told me, “Go do something good.”

Ancestry

I have a hobby of ancestry tracing. My immediate families originated from New Orleans, and I’ve tracked our trajectory from France, West Bengal India, Mississippi, and Indigenous persons from Florida. But we have been a part of New Orleans since its inception in the Louisiana Purchase. We are mostly ethnically Creoles. However, the South leaves me questioning of my Blackness using the “one-drop rule” of African descent to avoid the white racial category. In NOLA in particular, there are mulattos, quadroons, octoocorns, all kinds of words to say, “That person right there? They still Black.”

Black Identity

I grew up aware of some basic truths in life. One of which was my identity. My Blackness defines me. I’ve heard the stories from my grand-parents about Jim Crow and my parents of post-Jim Crow desegregation. They described the anger of being out with their children and unable to find a “colored only” bathroom to use. How embarrassing it was to walk into stores and be treated as less than human. I remember my father talking about participating in the “race riots” in high school because of resistance to integration. Even simple pleasures were racialized, such as Mardi Gras float riders targeting white children to toss the beloved doubloons, necklace beads, and favors while ignoring Black families, leaving them to scrounge what was left on the street. To assure some rewards for us, my dad sometimes hid next to white families, waiting for the toss and darting out the trinkets that would never be thrown to his kid, me.

As a survivor of sexual assault, my masculinity was very much defined by trauma, religious fervor over a woman’s place, and how other people viewed me. I remember my first time on stage, taking control of my narrative; I cried afterward.

Religious Influences

One of the other large influences in my life has been religion. While I don’t have a lot of positive associations with the current religious community, there were three impressions from my religious life. First, the ritual of Roman Catholicism sticks to me. To this day, I collect relics, antique Bibles, and rosaries/crucifixes. I incorporate them into my daily personal rituals. I also forever have respect for Reverend Alex Gee. He was the first Black preacher I met when he came to our church and gave guest sermons. I felt he understood me as a Black kid, and I knew he was just a good person. And, most importantly, I love me some Jesus. I paid close attention to his teachings: How he said his work was meant for those most marginalized, his unequivocal love for each person, and his message to treat others as one wants to be treated. That was defining for my family and me.

YWCA Second Chance Program

When I moved back to Madison as an adult, my path was not very clear. I got married young, and I started working instead of going to school. My first professional job was working in housing. In that job, I started to expand where I saw inequities. I saw Black mothers and children not being able to obtain or maintain housing due to racism, low employment, poor childcare options, and financial inequities. I worked with my mentor, Kevin Senke, and the YWCA to form the Second Chance program. It was a collaboration between housing providers and social services to create a learning opportunity for residents to learn about financial literacy, their rights as tenants, and our responsibilities to them as housing providers. At the end of the program, they were offered housing where I worked. As the years went on, the program grew beyond what we were doing, received city funding, and became a better program that helped people for years.

Life Changes

It was during this time I decided to pursue my degree. I started at MATC, and then transferred to UW. It was a great time and I was working and learning so much. By then, I had divorced. My father had moved to be the first Black tenure-track professor to earn tenure at the University of Oklahoma’s School of Social Work. My mother had resettled in one of the cities of my youth, Las Vegas. My world of what was next changed with a friend of mine fleeing New York with her two children due to a domestic violence situation. She and her kids stayed with me until we could get her settled. We connected with the Domestic Abuse Intervention Services (DAIS), and I quickly learned about how domestic violence affects survivors. I decided to leave college and focus on them. We relied on DAIS all the time, and I always said that one day I would repay them for all the help they gave us to keep all of us safe. Life became very different from


Ancestry

I Have a Hobby of Ancestry Tracing. My Immediate Families Originated from New Orleans, and I’ve Tracked Our Trajectory from France, West Bengal India, Mississippi, and Indigenous Persons from Florida. But We Have Been a Part of New Orleans Since Its Inception in the Louisiana Purchase. We Are Mostly Ethnically Creoles. However, the South Leaves Me Questioning of My Blackness Using the “One-drop Rule” of African Descent to Avoid the White Racial Category. In Nola in Particular, There Are Mulattos, Quadroons, Octoocorns, All Kinds of Words to Say, “That Person Right There? They Still Black.”

Black Identity

MY SON, MY TURNING POINT

My son was the turning point for my whole life. All the experience advocating for others became practice for him when he was diagnosed on the autism spectrum at about age 2. It began with my need to be a better advocate for others. From being a part of the protest in 2011 to working political campaigns, I connected with other mothers and allies in the community, and we all fought hard for an insurance mandate only part-time therapeutic services. I had so many new things to learn about autism, beginning with unlearning my own attitudes and prejudices. I went from being suicidally depressed, anxiety-ridden, and avoiding dealing with my previous trauma to working hard with several therapists to manage my post-traumatic stress disorder and depression. I had so many new things to learn about autism, beginning with unlearning my own attitudes and prejudices. I worked with a play at the Broom Street Theater. I was cast in my first play, starting an almost 20-year journey of my artistic pursuits. Beforehand, I had done commercial modeling, ending up in a couple of national magazine print ads and several local ads. As a “bikini model” and even won a state pageant in WI. (For fun, ask me the story of how I lost hilariously at the National Pageant in FL.) But, acting was the place where I could add my own artistic voice. As I grew and learned about so many talented people, I noticed the lack of Black actors, plays, and artistic positions. Over the years I have been able to partner with local groups in creating positions and roles about Black culture not rooted in anti-Blackness. It’s something I am still passionate about and work toward.

I look forward every day to the moment I can work with T. Banks again and have us all bring Madison its first Black Theater Festival. Celebrating our voices and our art with Black people in all the major positions on stage and backstage. My arts experience was quite a positive influence, and I continue to focus on equity in the arts.

One of the ways I regained myself during this time was through artistic outlets. In 2001, on a whim, a friend and I auditioned for a play at the Broom Street Theater. I was cast in my first play, starting an almost 20-year journey of my artistic pursuits. Beforehand, I had done commercial modeling, ending up in a couple of national magazine print ads and several local ads. I was a “bikini model” and even won a state pageant in WI. (For fun, ask me the story of how I lost hilariously at the National Pageant in FL.) But, acting was the place where I could add my own artistic voice. As I grew and learned about so many talented people, I noticed the lack of Black actors, plays, and artistic positions. Over the years I have been able to partner with local groups in creating positions and roles about Black culture not rooted in anti-Blackness. It’s something I am still passionate about and work toward.

During my artistic pursuits, one of my best friends, Jessica Jane Witham, started a Cabaretlesque group, “Foxy Veronica’s Peach Pies.” She asked me to be involved as a producer and performer. I was trepidatious. I had a young kid. I grew up in a religious background. My body did not look like the women traditionally performing burlesque—or even much like the women who were in the group. As a survivor of sexual assault, my sexuality was very much defined by trauma, religious fervor over a woman’s place, and how other people viewed me. I remember my first time on stage, taking control of my narrative. I cried afterward. I did not tell my family what I was doing. I did not tell anyone at work. I had to work on stage, taking control of my narrative. I cried afterward. I did not tell my family what I was doing. I did not tell anyone at work. I had to work through my own shame and body image issues. I have been doing burlesque since 2007. In those 13 years as a burlesque performer, I have reclaimed my body, my sexuality, my power, my bisexuality, and most importantly myself. Our shows have always been well attended by women, with their faces looking up at us with pride. There is not a show where I did not have several women come up to me to tell me how empowered they felt and how our example gave them a point of safety and learning for themselves.

Prostitution is still a thriving industry, and I began to study the incredible women who choose to work in this industry and what it means to transform the culture around prostitution. This work has meaning again. I was working with people whose voices were unheard and marginalized. I was able to work to transform the housing program to one that was kinder and easier to get through. One where all of us worked together to try to make a better situation for everyone. Everyone I worked with at Porchlight was committed and wanted to make the company better. But, even in that job, I still was unsatisfied. I had to make choices that took people out of housing. I had to fight battles I was never comfortable taking on. After almost eight years, I felt that I was in the wrong place to be able to focus solely on the needs and solutions for those most marginalized.

Then, I was given the opportunity to work at the Rape Crisis Center. It is here that I feel that I am fully in place. My work centers around survivors and their needs. My advocacy work to improve systems for victims of sexual assault is imperative. I work with an amazing team who are supportive and committed to our mission. We are doing transformative work which actively helps people every day. Working on ourselves to support a mission of anti-oppression. I am proud to be the co-executive director and look forward to the future.

This is what Black leadership looks like. Though it all, I am actively subverting ideas of what Black leadership looks like, talks like, and dresses like. I am being myself in all aspects of my life now, and it’s a damn good feeling. I know I’m looking forward to what the next half of my life brings. Forty-five is a great number for me. It’s the age where I finally feel in place.

WHAT IS BLACK LEADERSHIP LOOKS LIKE

During my artistic pursuits, one of my best friends, Jessica Jane Witham, started a Cabaretlesque group, “Foxy Veronica’s Peach Pies.” She asked me to be involved as a producer and performer. I was trepidatious. I had a young kid. I grew up in a religious background. My body did not look like the women traditionally performing burlesque—or even much like the women who were in the group. As a survivor of sexual assault, my sexuality was very much defined by trauma, religious fervor over a woman’s place, and how other people viewed me. I remember my first time on stage, taking control of my narrative. I cried afterward. I did not tell my family what I was doing. I did not tell anyone at work. I had to work through my own shame and body image issues. I have been doing burlesque since 2007. In those 13 years as a burlesque performer, I have reclaimed my body, my sexuality, my power, my bisexuality, and most importantly myself. Our shows have always been well attended by women, with their faces looking up at us with pride. There is not a show where I did not have several women come up to me to tell me how empowered they felt and how our example gave them a point of safety and learning for themselves.

SUPPORTING MY PLACE PROFESSIONALLY

Professionally, I had run my course through corporate work. Though I was on the Board of Directors for Domestic Abuse Intervention Services, I was unhappy and felt trapped until I started to work at Porchlight making life better for persons experiencing homelessness. I felt all of my work had meaning again. I was working with people whose voices were unheard and marginalized. I was able to work to transform the housing
The future of Wisconsin’s health begins with you.

Representation Matters

Throughout Keith Borden’s life, he has strived to be seen and be light in spaces where people of color are often invisible or missing altogether. Sometimes that has meant imitating those he admires, and sometimes that has meant forging his own path.

QTBBIPOC      YOGA      AUTHENTICITY      ROLE MODELS      PFLAG

I’M KEITH

I’m a yoga teacher. I’m a husband. I’m a singer. I’m a father. I’m an ordained interfaith minister. I’m a lot of things, but mostly I’m just me.

WHEN I WAS YOUNG, occasionally someone would say to me, “You’re a Borden, right? Who’s your father?” “Joe,” I’d say. “I’m Keith.” In high school, I volunteered for the local clothing bank. One evening, the woman in charge asked my last name. “Borden, I told her.” “Are you Edmonia’s son?” “Yes, I’m Keith.” Growing up in Evanston, Illinois, I was never anonymous. As the only out gay, Black man during my years at DePauw University, a small, predominantly white liberal arts university in rural Indiana, most people knew who I was. And as an adult, there has always been some part of my life more public than many people’s. All of that could be challenging for someone who is mostly introverted. Luckily, I’ve (almost) always been comfortable being me, Keith.

INTEGRATED SCHOOL

Evanston was a great place to grow up. I started public school in 1979 when integration was no longer just happening in theory but was actually beginning to happen. I thought it was totally normal to be in racially diverse classrooms and to be friends with kids of all races. My parents had migrated north to Chicago from Alabama—Dad in 1955 and Mom in 1961—for a better life and better opportunities. They told my brother and me stories about segregation, Jim Crow, and the early days of the Civil Rights movement in Montgomery. My mother was a student at Alabama State during the bus boycotts. In my childhood home, a picture of my white great-grandfather, whose family had been slave owners, hung on the wall with all the other ancestors. During summer vacation, we always went south for part of our break to visit my grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins. And because my mother and her sister were our family’s genealogists, those trips included gathering stories from aging relatives, tracing family history in archives and on plantations, and looking for names on the faded headstones in overgrown cemeteries. I was fully aware of the racial injustice that is American history, but it wasn’t my lived experience growing up. For a long time, it seemed like just that: history.

MUSIC, THEATER, AND ART

My brother was an athlete. He played baseball and football and ran track. It was assumed that I would play some sport, too, but I had absolutely no interest. I was drawn to music, theater, and art. I was a music nerd who spent almost all of my free time in rehearsal and for everything from South Pacific to Madrigal Singers to Bell Choir, and if I wasn’t perform-
ing. I was building the sets. My parents didn’t always relate to the things I was into, but they were supportive of all of it. I was a moody 80s teen-ager, into everything from the genderbending pop stylings of Boy George and Culture Club to Prince and the Revolution. I was always listening to music. My music tastes were quite varied, and I wasn’t out in high school. No one was, not really. But I knew I was gay. Years after high school, a few of us sat around and talked about that. So many of us were living in early 90s Seattle, and we were in high school where we probably could have been out, but we weren’t. It then was.

In 1991, I left home for college to study classical voice. It was an OPPORTUNITY TO PURSUE MY MUSIC AS I HAD NOTICED FROM AN EARLY AGE, I WAS A PERFORMER. I didn’t want to be a teacher. If you’d asked me if I’d be teaching anything, the answer would have been an unvarnishing, “No.” And yet here I am, a yoga teacher. And I love it.

YOGA

What I do is important. I hold space for people. I attempt to show up as authentically as possible to give others permission to do the same.

I STARTED “OFFICIALLY” practicing yoga in 1999, but I started experimenting movement—dance, Alexander Technique, martial arts, and rolling around on the floor—long before that. I credit my father and his father for my yoga practice and my commitment to it. Neither one of them practiced yoga per se, but both men had a morning regimen that I would qualify as yoga. My father always left for work before the rest of us were awake, but I have memories of waking early, coming out of my room, and seeing him lying on the living room floor twisting and stretching before heading out the door. My grandfather’s morning routine started early, but rather than the physical things that my father did, he would set out for a long walk through the back roads of his rural community. Was my father doing yoga asana? No, but there was a mindfulness to his movement. Was my father meditating? He probably wouldn’t have used that word, but I feel certain that he was communing with nature, praying, and centering himself. At some point, it became my habit to wake early, move my body, and to begin the day in a more contemplative and peaceful frame. Yoga was part of what they did, but I admired both of these men, and I imitated those they admiring. My grandfather died when I was in high school, and my father taught me that college, but they live on in me and in my practice.

NEW YORK CITY

I moved to New York two days after my college graduation to continue studying music. Yoga became a real discipline for me when I started prac-ticing at Laughing Lotus Yoga Center in New York City’s West Village. Movement had always been a useful tool for my body and my mind, but the way I practiced in the Lotus was rare to not have Black or brown people in the room when I practiced in the West Village and when I later taught in Chelsea. And the community was definitely queerer. Starting public school in the late 70s set up my expectations for life in general, and starting yoga in late 90s New York set up my expectations about the practice and its community.

In 2007, after nine years together, Johannes Wallmann and I got mar-ried on Vancouver Island. Soon after that, we left New York for Oakland, CA. He took a job running a college jazz program, and I was a small-business owner, leading the NBA’s visit to Canada and starting to teach Yoga Lotus San Francisco. San Francisco isn’t as racially diverse as New York, and that was absolutely reflected in the yoga community. Because SF is another city with a well-established yoga community, I found a spiritual curiosity similar to what drew me to the practice in New York. When my husband accepted a job offer at UW-Madison in 2012, I did a fair amount of research on the yoga community here. I was excited to see that there were so many yoga studios in Madison. I kept a draft of what I find out one Black teacher in the entire city—a woman who, by the time we arrived, was nowhere to be found. There are a handful of Black yoga teachers in Madison now, but the number of teachers does not truly reflect the number of Black folks who are practicing yoga.

MOSTLY WHITE SPACES

I have spent a lot of my life in mostly white spaces, and I never gave it a second thought because I felt seen. There is something altogether differ-ent about being a Black yoga teacher in a mostly white yoga community in a state where in 2016 The Milwaukee Business Journal reported that, “Wisconsin is the worst state for Black Americans with the country’s big-gest gap between Black and white Americans.” It is a common experience for me at yoga studios in Madison, when I’m not actually teaching, simply not be seen; it can seem sometimes like I’ve never existed.

MADISON

When we arrived in Madison in 2012, the same question kept coming up for us, “Where are all the Black people?” We lived around the corner from East High School in that first year, and I saw plenty of Black, brown, and Latino students there, but anywhere else downtown or on the near east side folks were nowhere to be found. Everywhere I’ve lived I have had a thriving Black middle-class, but when “the median annual income of Black households in Wisconsin is just $26,053, much lower than the median for Black families nationwide, and equal to just 46.5 percent of the median income of white households of $56,083,” according to The Milwaukee Business Journal, that simply isn’t possible.

Yoga is a middle-class activity; you need to have leisure time available, and you need some income. It’s impossible to do in a studio. Much of middle-class Madison isn’t used to really seeing Black and brown people. If you aren’t living near and working around and interact-ing with people of a different race, it’s harder to really see them. No one wants to practice in a space where they aren’t known. I know that there are people who practice in my classes in Madison for whom I am one of very few Black people with whom they interact in the course of their day or week. I still get a little giddy inside when I teach a class in Madison where more than one Black person shows up, and I have had more than a few of those Black students tell me that they appreciate being able to take a class with Black teacher. These are some of the reasons I still teach.

I was a Black yogi and a Black yoga teacher disrupts the normal patterns. Perhaps it makes people stop and think about the expectations they bring to yoga. I hope that it signals to other Black and brown people that yoga is as much for them as anyone else.

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Being a Black yogi and a Black yoga teacher disrupts the normal patterns. Perhaps it makes people stop and think about the expectations they bring to yoga. I hope that it signals to other Black and brown people that yoga is as much for them as anyone else.

WHEN I WAS STUDYING with Rabbi Joseph Gelberman at the All Faiths Seminary, he told me that the biggest part of our work as ministers is to be light. He also said that we don’t end up as ministers (or yoga teachers or holders of space by accident; we are predestined. Being light also means dispelling darkness. And Rabbi was right, I’d been attempting to be light for years before I started teaching yoga or studying theology. I’ve never considered myself an as full, but I’ve always taken on the darkness the way my father and grandfather would have: head on and with just the right number of words. In college, I remember sitting outside my yoga teacher’s studio waiting to go in. Another student ran up, realized he had missed his appointment, and said, “Ah man, that’s gay!” I looked up and replied, “No, I’m gay. You missed your appointment. That sucks.”

When Johannes and I moved here in 2012, we’d been together for 14 years and married for five. California recognized that, but Wisconsin didn’t. When the local PFLAG chapter suggested that we be added to the list of plaintiffs suing the State of Wisconsin for marriage equality, we didn’t hesitate. It was a chance to tell our story and to disabuse people of the notion that our family is somehow different from theirs simply because we are the same gender. That’s how I choose to take action in the world; I aim to live as fully and honestly as I can. I let these words from my husband’s guide me. It is better to do one’s own drama, even though imperfectly, than to do another’s drama, even though perfectly. By doing one’s innate duties, a person does not incur sin.”

I’m a lucky man. I’ve always had what I needed. Most of the time, I feel safe, and I’ve come to no harm. My parents always supported the kid I was, and my mother continues to support the man that I am. I’ve lived in amazing places. I’m married to an incredibly loving and talented husband. We have an amazing daughter who lights up our lives. I do work that I love, and that work is meaningful to the communities I serve.

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There was a photo on the wall in my family home. It was my mother’s 1936 kindergarten classroom. They sat and stood in order with smiles, the teacher by their side and my mother in the front row with braids, ribbons in her hair, saddle shoes and quite simple apron dress. Her best little friend was leaning into her. I think Lauren knew in Kindergarten that my mom would always be there for her no matter their paths. Lauren and my mother remained friends until Lauren’s death, and after.

My mom, who had a Norwegian/Irish background, grew up middle class, connecting herself to Madison’s Black community because of her love for R&B and racial equality issues. My father, an African-American, was from Arkansas and was sent north to Wisconsin as a child and placed in the Sparta Orphanage. He returned to Madison after serving in World War II.

In 1956, they traveled to Iowa to get married, as it was illegal for interracial couples to marry in Wisconsin. For them, becoming the first visible and married interracial couple in the Madison community was an honor, but it did carry many burdens and unrest for our family.

Baird Street and Beyond

I grew up in Madison, starting out on the south side during the 50s. It was a simple and much smaller community on Baird Street, five blocks of Black, interracial couples and two white families. Families were larger at that time, along with my family of seven children and many families with stay-at-home moms, we shared our lives. Baird Street was a place where we played in the streets and everyone knew and took care of each other, and I felt special to be in my family and live in a place where my color did not matter. The life of a very young child.

When I was five years old, my father became a WWF (now WWE) wrestler, and we moved to New York City. Our lives changed forever as he gained national notoriety and fame. We moved around the country and spent four years in Toronto. After several moves, when I was 12 years old, we came back to Madison and moved to the near east side.

Larry

It was then that I met Larry, my mom’s childhood friend who I knew...
from photos as Lauren. It was 1967, a time of civil unrest and involve-
ment with Vietnam. She sat me down and explained that Lauren, her child-
hood friend, was now Larry and transender. She was clear about her 
time and expectation for me to be respectful and accepting of 
(Larry. (Thank you, Mom.)
Larry was married with a daughter the same age as my youngest 
sister. His family and my family lived in the same neighborhood and 
spend many holidays and great times together. There was an unspoken 
acceptance, respect, silence, and understanding of those needed secrets.
Larry lived as a successful family—businessman in Madison. Today 
I cherish and know it was my first lesson in civil liberties, justice, 
and living your own truth.

A CALLING AND A CAUSE

Civil unrest across the country, especially on the UW campus 
and the Vietnam war was in full force. I was curious and wanted to be 
inovled, so I spent a lot of time on campus at the Afro House, the 
Memorial Union, State Street, and on weekends—instead of in school 
and with neighborhood friends. This was my beginning into community 
advocacy work and a drive to make a difference. It was an amazing 
time to be young, involved, and exposed to the work of making changes. It is 
not surprising for me to understand that I became a social worker. It was 
a calling and the cause I needed to feel—a measure of community 
and belonging. I kept my full-time job and exhausted myself doing 
both. I was the first African American to get an alcohol license in the 
Downtown Madison Entertainment District and was under pressure to 
have an establishment of success. I over-extended myself, and after a 
few years decided to close.

A SURPRISING TURN: COMING OUT

Then, at 45 years old, I came out. And life took a new, surprising 
turn. Being an out gay, Black woman in Madison was not easy. It was 
that was when there was enough space and opportunity to meet 
her. Life became quite different, and I tried to navigate being a mother, 
daughter, social worker, and older lesbian. My family was very 
accepting. Our lives had gone through many changes and this change 
was just another glue. All went well for about six years, and I crashed 
when it all ended.

Soon after ending the relationship, I opened Adair’s Lounge (the old 
Rainbow Room). I kept my full-time job and exhausted myself doing 
both. I was the first African American to get an alcohol license in the 
Downtown Madison Entertainment District and was under pressure to 
have an establishment of success. I over-extended myself, and after a 
few years decided to close.

FAMILY TRAGEDY

My oldest daughter Raven is smart, hardworking, and beautiful. She 
lives in my shadow of resilience and my expectations of being a 
decent, strong Black woman. I am so blessed that she loves and cares 
for me, but it is not without our battles of loss and grief and my failures 
at parenting her in the way she needed. Today we are close, and I am 
planning a move to be closer to her in Las Vegas.

My eldest, Tyrone, was handsome, athletic, talented, and suffered 
from depression since the age of 13. We had a very codependent 
relationship, and I coddled him more than my other children in my worry 
and protective mothering of a young Black boy. He had strength in his 
friendships, physical abilities, and work ethics. But he failed in his per-
sonal relationships and his internal demons. Most people knew him as 
polite, caring, and giving. He did well at hiding what caused his greatest 
confusions and pains.

On December 4, 2009, Tyrone killed his two toddler daughters and 
their mothers... then himself. 
I lost five people in one day, and the entire Madison and Middleton 
community was left in disbelief, grief, and anger. The families of my 
granddaughters and their daughter, sister, and mother were unbelievably 
kind to me and my family. The expression of love and care went beyond 
your expectations. I cannot find words that explain the love that was 
shown during the most horrific situation and experience for all of us. All 
our lives changed forever. I am forever sorrowful for their losses.

After thinking I would never get up off the floor, that I would ever 
break the same again, I too wished for death. The pain was beyond 
an understanding. I became angry about having to stay alive, but I had oth-
er children, grandchildren, a mother, and a family. I could not give the 
love, my family had all given of us, to them or anyone. So, I got up off 
the floor, tried to go back to work and be in the community, live different-
ly…. But it was too painful. My therapist suggested I find a safe space.

CHICAGO: SAFETY, HEALING

I retired and moved to Chicago in 2011, and it was the best thing I 
did for myself as an adult. Chicago gave me an opportunity to 
experience life on different terms as a Black woman, lesbian, activist, 
and mother.

I spent time volunteering at the Center On Halsted, Affinity Services, 
and Black Ensemble Theater, and I started a company: Adair Entertain-
ment, hosting the largest monthly parties for lesbians of color in Chi-
ca. And of course, I dated and stayed in therapy while writing my book. 
I loved Chicago and knew it was my needed safe place.

BACK HOME IN MADISON

After seven years, in 2017, I came back home to face myself and the 
places I needed to face. It has not been easy, yet I know that I need to 
come full circle in life. Our lives (my friends, family, and loved ones) 
deserve a better me, and I deserve personal mental health safety—and 
to finish my book.

I enjoy my daughters, grandchildren, writing, being the Stage Man-
ger for Dane Dances, and public speaking. And, lastly, I fell in love with 
Bernell. We are engaged and planning our lives together. It feels like my 
happy ending, or at least the beginning of it.

Mental health in the Black community has a history of being stigma-
ized and ignored. My own experiences are not culturally specific. It is the 
Madison area, and I am hopeful about that. I believe in silver linings and 
the gifts of joy. It is my desire to give myself and others both of those.
The Pen is Mightier Than the Ignorance

Wisconsin has a rich history of LGBTQ media, dating back to the early 70s. In his new book, historian Richard Wagner recounts the many publications that sought to give light to our community.

COMING OUT, MOVING FORWARD: Wisconsin’s Recent Gay History published this fall by the Wisconsin Historical Society Press is my second volume on the state’s LGBT story. In it I trace the post-Stonewall events in the state. A large part of the book is how a small-but-dedicated LGBT community created tremendous political progress of national significance in creating the nation’s first equality rights law and created a climate to be the first state to elect three out people to the United States Congress. Another large part of the book is how the effect of these efforts made Wisconsin a gay laboratory for democracy, encouraging LGBT folks all around the state to get involved for their rights. I would like to recap here how the Wisconsin activists used journalistic skills to advance the cause.

One chapter is dedicated to how the state developed a robust tradition of gay media that continues to benefit the readers of Our Lives. These efforts begin in the early 1970s right after Stonewall. The grand-daddy was GPU News, the Men’s Monthly published out by the Publications Committee of the Gay People’s Union (GPU), hence the GPU in the title. Later it was a separate organization, Liberation Publications, the publication would last a decade. The spark plug was Eldon Murray, a stockbroker, and a dedicated band of volunteers.

Murray would announce that the magazine which had a large number of national subscribers would be sent to major libraries in Wisconsin “to reach a mass audience.” Local activities of the Fox Valley Gay Alliance ensured that it would be in the Appleton Public Library. For Murray, “Communication is indeed the essence of liberation.”

One of the important writers trained at GPU News was Lou Sullivan, a trans man. Sullivan contributed during the 1970s several articles on trans issues. He would become a national figure with the publication of his groundbreaking Information for the Female-to-Male Crossdresser and Transsexual. He would also publish a biography of an early 20th Century trans person, Jack Garland.

Another very early Wisconsin publication began in 1971. Though it lasted less than a year. The Scared Cat was published by a Madison women’s collective including lesbians. An early article was “Come Out, Come Out Wherever You Are” by Judy Greenspan. She would go on to run an out lesbian for the Madison School Board in 1973 and is believed to be the first out lesbian candidate in the nation. In the September 1971 issue, she wrote, “Finally gay sisterhood is blooming all over this country. And our lives will never be the same.”

In Milwaukee another women’s collective published Amazon from 1972 until 1984 which would carry articles on “Dyke Tactics” and “How to Identify a Real Lesbian.” One of the journalists who emerged from Amazon and would be Jamakaya (J. M. Domebeck) who was the sole editor for later editions. She had been a counselor on the Women’s Crisis Line and office manager for the Milwaukee Woman’s Coalition. She wrote, “Until we take our own lives and contributions as feminists seriously...how can we expect to be taken seriously by others or by history itself?”

In Madison the Renaissance Newsletter was published in the 1970s on behalf of the CDs Center. One of its editors and contributors was mainstream journalist Ron McCrea. Lively issues in its pages included the “Dynamics of Drag” and the “Disco Debate.”

The above highlights just some of the LGBTQ media history of the state that preceded Our Lives. These journalists realized that the collective act of coming out by the community in the media was a powerful antidote to the oppressive attitudes of society. And it had its effects to change perspectives both within and without the community.

In December 1990 in the newsletter New Lessons a young gay person aiming the air of liberation would write that “despite facing ridicule of my lifestyle every day,” he could still say, “I have dreams of fantasy, dreams of the perfect mate, dreams of pleasant days and blissful nights, dreams that far outweigh the consequences of the state that Dreams that I will make a reality.” Ignorance vanquished! •
THROUGHOUT HISTORY, people have exchanged the commodity of sex for money to survive against poverty, to empower themselves against miserable life circumstances, and to challenge societal norms. “Sex work” is an umbrella term that describes a spectrum of transactional relationships between consenting adults. Sex work has always existed in society to varying degrees of legality. The modern Sex Workers’ Rights movement seeks to decriminalize all forms of sex work in order to lessen violence against sex workers, validate the existence and rights of sex workers, increase their autonomy, and destigmatize what sex work is and who engages in it. People from all over participate in facilitating and consumption of sex work. However, people in marginalized communities are often more at risk to engage in sex work due to extenuating circumstances such as poverty and employment discrimination.

WHAT IS SEX WORK?

Sex work predominately refers to prostitution, but it also encompasses escorting, camming, erotic dancing, adult film, phone sex, tuition, but it also encompasses escorting, camming, erotic dancing, adult film, phone sex, and does not give consent. This is antiethical to consenting adults deserve protection and autonomy is an easy one. Yes, they do.

There is no room for a moral discussion when it comes to what other people do with their bodies. This is not a debate about whether or not sex work exists. The debate about whether or not consenting adults deserve protection and autonomy is an easy one. Yes, they do.

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WHAT IS DECRIMINALIZATION?

Legalizing sex work is not the same as decriminalizing sex work. The legalization of sex work creates a system in which sex work is still regulated by government and law enforcement agencies. This still creates barriers and problems for adults engaging in sex work because of required background checks, licen-

The Equitable Case for Sex Work

Destigmatizing and decriminalizing sex work can improve the safety and support available for those often in the furthest margins of our community. Sex Workers Outreach Project-USA board member Alex Corona outlines how it also creates equity.

Alex Corona is a transgender Latina woman and born Wisconsinite. I am a community advocate, an HIV prevention and awareness consultant, and a member of the Board of Directors for the Sex Workers Outreach Project-USA. SWOP-USA is a national organization focused on giving information, destigmatizing sex work, legal policy creation and advocacy, and support for sex workers. SWOP-USA collaborates with local chapters to provide direct services and resources for sex workers, and work with other organizations to support for decriminalization and increased protections for sex workers. I believe in the mission of SWOP-USA and dedicate myself to improving the lives of sex workers everywhere.

I’m just one person, but fight for many. I see a world where sex work is as supported as any other profession with the same rights and advantages and paths to success and happiness. Sex workers are humans trying to make the best of what we have in life and contribute to the betterment of our world. We are not the enemy, we are not worthy of degradation, and we are not going anywhere. Be on the right side of this fight for autonomy, human rights, and empowerment for sex workers.
**SCOTUS: What to Expect Now**

While a decidedly conservative Supreme Court may make advancing LGBTQ rights difficult, there are still places to have hope. UW-Madison Law School professor Steph Tai gives us a preview of the 2020-21 term and beyond.

**THIS HAS BEEN A ROLLER COASTER YEAR FOR OUR COMMUNITY.** On one hand, we had a large legal victory in Bostock v. Clayton County, Georgia, in which the U.S. Supreme Court held that Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which creates antidiscrimination protections for workers “because of . . . sex,” does indeed protect LGBTQ folks. On the other hand, we lost Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg, whose absence will affect the outcomes of future Supreme Court cases. And we had an election in November, before which I am writing this column. What does this all mean with respect to our legal rights?

**BEFORE THE SUPREME COURT THIS TERM**

In Fulton v. City of Philadelphia, the Supreme Court will hear a case between the City of Philadelphia and Catholic Social Services—a religious non-profit organization that provides both foster care and other services for at-risk children—that may address the First Amendment right to same-sex couples. The legal dispute began in 2018, after the Philadelphia Inquirer reported that Catholic Social Services would not work with same-sex couples because of their religious beliefs. The orga

**WHAT’S NEXT**

The outcome of this case will be a preview of other legal decisions to come. Writing for the majority in Bostock, Justice Neil Gorsuch expressed concern that the Court could further elaborate on how “doctrines protecting religious liberty” may interact with legislation protecting against employment discrimination “because of . . . sex.” Fulton could be the avenue for Justice Gorsuch to express his views on these interactions; that is, he could use Fulton to define the outer limits of Bostock by outlining how religious liberty considerations may limit the degree to which people may be protected by legislation “because of . . . sex.”

**REMEMBER THESE WORDS**

“The design you come up with is a wonderful marriage of architecture, function, and purpose.” CHAD & DAE
Performing Gender
Bailey Mosling found that performing in drag helped him carve out space between gender identity and gender expression—all while keeping it fun.

Gender reveals set an expectation for an unborn child to follow. For me, my parents put me in a gender box that would be hard for me to see beyond until I was 11 years old. My family’s version of a gender reveal was a present filled with pink rose petals and a sonogram picture of me given to all of my family members as a Christmas gift. The pink petals lead my family to believe that I would be a girl 100 percent of the time. They were not entirely wrong; I would be a girl 40 percent of the time.

Hi, my name is Bailey, and I am 14 years old. For the most part I am a typical teen. I love animals, I like watching YouTube, spending time with my family, and reading about World War II. Oh, I’m also a trans-gender boy. This means that I was assigned the gender of female at birth but that I identify and live as a teen boy. For the past 8 months, I have found excitement in performing as a drag kid and being part of the drag kid community. Recently, I have come to realize that male drag makes people uncomfortable. People are willing to accept me as a trans boy, but they want me to stick to the “male” side of the gender spectrum in all parts of my life.

I am way more complex than that. I think we all are.

Some people get confused when they find out I was assigned female at birth, identify as a boy AND also find joy in performing as a female drag kid. Gender identity is how you feel on the inside. For me, my gender identity is boy. Gender expression is the way you express yourself to the public. My gender expression does not change my gender identity. I like to think of gender expression as an accessory, one that I have control over putting on and taking off. Part of the freedom I have in gender expression is me doing drag.

My drag name is Nemo. The name was inspired by a non-binary character in the book “The 57 Bus” by Dashka Slater. As Nemo I am able to make people laugh, make fun of myself, make fun of gender norms, and be more confident than I am as Bailey. Being Nemo is not just about putting on a wig and makeup, although that is a part of it. It’s about becoming someone else and creating a character with a point of view.

I use my social media presence as Nemo on Instagram and YouTube: Nemo_drag to fight for causes important to myself and the LGBTQ+ community, to spread awareness of gender non-conforming individuals like myself, and to spread happiness. One of my goals as Nemo is to push the boundaries of who can and cannot express themselves through the art of drag. Some people do not approve of and will not hire “bio queens” (assigned female at birth, identify as female, and are drag queens) to perform saying that they have an unfair advantage or that drag is meant to be female impersonation and illusion. Similarly, there is lots of controversy around members of the transgender community participating in drag art and performance. I feel that drag is for anyone who wants to push the boundaries of gender expression.

I believe the time has come for us to rethink our response to doctor assigned gender at birth. Gender reveals are a big topic now due to the environmental damage we have seen done recently for the sake of celebrating a gender identity that may not fit for a child. When I read “Symptoms of Being Human” by Jeff Garvin it allowed me to see a world of colors beyond 100 percent pink, and that allowed me to start the process of discovering who I really was. As a society, we need to reconsider the pressure we could be putting on our children by making assumptions of who they will be, based on their assigned gender at birth. Let them play with whatever toys they want, let them dress however they want, let them express themselves freely. Let them be the ones to decide who they will become. Most of all, let them have fun in this process. For me that fun was found in drag. Allow them to play with gender expression and be open to their gender identity falling outside of the binary boy vs. girl our society is so fixated on. ■

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