

Uncensored: Ecofeminist Art Dismantles Toxic Masculinity

An Artist Statement

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...and those who have triggered me into this space of healing...

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Artist Biography

Lucine was born in Trenton, New Jersey, and grew up across the Delaware River in a small, conservative town of Bucks County, Pennsylvania. She claimed the title, “artist” at age seventeen when she was ranked multiple first-place awards for her unique medium of portraits in nylon pantyhose. Today as a graduate of Naropa University, she resides in Los Angeles, running her ecocentric, wearable art company called Twin Flame Productions in the Arts District. Lucine is continuously featured and sponsored in art expositions, auctions, galleries, and fashion shows nationwide. Some events of which she hosts and organizes herself. As her career expands with her recent series titled, “Allies,” you can find her multimedia work in galleries, online, and in the cryptosphere as NFTs.

Disclaimers

As a white, pansexual, able-bodied, middle-class, multicultural descendent, cis-woman, this paper is written from such lens. The scope of my research includes observations from my own personal experience in this body as an artist, entrepreneur, and ecofeminist. My personal perspective adheres to the political aspirations, desires, personal autonomy and dignity for all genders. The extent of my research is limited regarding complete gender and sexuality inclusion due to potentially outdated resources. My efforts and intentions are that of inclusion and I am confident that I have met the limited spaces with respect. While acknowledging that this

conversation around inclusive language is evolutionary, soon, it is possible that this information, too, will become outdated.

A major challenge in my translation of this research was to correct myself and others in our westernized, heteronormative, chauvinistic and colonized conditioning of the binary genders. What our westernized society has labeled as “feminine” has become falsely advertised as that relating to a cis-woman, person who owns a vulva, and person who can bear children. Progressively, we must understand masculinity and femininity as energetic categories for the sake of this research.

“Neither as the biological affiliation of sex, nor as gender, the social response, or echo, of this biological affiliation. Rather, it is the spiritual attitude (psychic, spiritual being, mind) which is the norm for psychic manifestations in general, and is its subtle psychosomatic background” (Milcinski, 1997).

The polarizing energies of masculinity and femininity are not exclusive to one another. A person of any gender can experience a masculine trait one minute, and a feminine trait the next. Humans are fluid creatures that have been brainwashed to fit in a constricted box. Categorically, gender is one of those boxes.

When I speak of gender in this paper, I am referring to the inclusive and diverse color wheel concept of gender (including a-gender). If I refer to the binary of “men” versus “women,” it is likely that I am quoting a source with the recognition that it may not be politically correct. Otherwise, I am deconstructing my own language. When I speak on the physicality of “masculine” vs. “feminine” bodies as we have been conditioned to believe, I am also considering

the hormonal makeup and physical build of the person I am referring to. I do apologize in advance if my filtration does not resonate. The universal language of gender is not set in stone and it is bound to evolve over time. My efforts in political correction may one day be outdated. However, I personally believe that the future is non-binary, non-monogamous, and sexually-fluid so I have applied this belief to the best of my ability. Thank you for your patience.

Through this project, I hope to support the decolonization and detoxification process of at least one reader. May this curated research serve as a vessel to understand ourselves on a deeper level through the means of deconstructing what we have been taught of gender roles, censorship, pleasure, and intimacy with an open heart and curious mind. And so it is. Let's dive in.

Introduction

Sexual harassment is a common threat that I have been experiencing daily since I was ten years-old. The environment in which this occurs varies (walking in my neighborhood, on social media, at a bar, etc.) and the outfit I choose to wear does not influence the harassment (what I am wearing does not matter). This collective harm has evolved to become developmental trauma and has a critical impact on my mental health. I know I am not alone in this experience. Sexual harassment targets vulnerable bodies such as mine everywhere and it must end.

My recent artwork series, “Allies,” is a response to this chauvinistic misogyny while pushing back on the heteropatriarchy. The queer, iconic, anthropomorphic figures are presented as guardian deities, painted in earth tones, ruby, and emerald colors with cool greyscale backgrounds while sculptures are casted to reflect precious metals.

As a figurative artist, my work is categorically erotic and is not considered “family friendly.” Therefore, censorship of my artwork has caused many issues, obstacles, and limitations in my early career. On social media, my accounts and content are often shadow-banned or completely removed and unable to be recovered. In public, my work is often pigeonholed. As my career evolves, I am navigating the industry and grasping a better understanding for the spaces in which my artwork can not only belong, but professionally thrive in the industry. In doing so, I have explored the reasoning behind society's limitations in displays of my work, toxic masculinity.

I began to recognize the professional consequences of creating nude art with my popular digital illustration titled, “Madam Frog” (Figure 1). Upon my initial posting of this image, I

received a lot of engagement on social media. She got a lot of attention and many social media followers loved her.

Figure 1

Madam Frog



Note: By L. Ajamian, 2019, Digital Illustration

Two years later, Madam Frog continues to attract new followers and frequently sparks their question, “Why is her butt so big?” According to my Instagram Business Insights, seventy-five percent of my followers are men and I noticed the demographic of my followers asking this question were too, always men. Importantly, the majority of men inquiring have either flirted or sexually harassed me in some way through social media.

This paper explores the root cause of such impactful topics, censorship and sexual harassment, discovering that it all boils down to toxic masculinity. My artwork stands as a threat to dismantle this harmful aspect of the heteropatriarchy by raising awareness of this highly common and oppressive experience.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Toxic Masculinity

Masculinity is a very broad part of what makes up a whole person. Masculinity has traditionally been defined as traits of being a man ("Definition of masculinity | Dictionary.com", 2021). However, masculinity in the contemporary understanding now references a way of being, feeling, and communicating that can be found in people of all genders. Women, nonbinary, two-spirit, A-gender individuals etc. can, too, hold traits of masculinity, including the toxic ones. There is a mistaken impression out there that toxic masculinity means that everything about masculinity is somehow toxic. But that is not the case. In fact, the term, toxic masculinity, is used to distinguish the difference between the more damaging or destructive [masculine] behaviors from more positive [masculine] behaviors. Traits of toxic masculinity include (and are not limited to) emotional detachment, hyper-competitiveness, aggression, intimidation, violence, sexual objectification, and sexual predatory. These behaviors are often driven by an overwhelming fear of emasculation. Otherwise known as the fear of being perceived by others as 'feminine' or 'unmanly' and is observed as 'boys being boys' (2021). The most terrifying products of toxic masculinity have and continue to cannibalize humanity, including (but not limited to): racism, homophobia, transphobia, classism, ableism, xenophobia, sexism, and most importantly for the focus of this research, chauvinistic misogyny.

Inertia: Boys Being Boys

According to Newton's Law of Inertia, an object in motion continues in motion with the same speed and in the same direction unless acted upon by an unbalanced force, or the resistance of a body to any alteration in its state of motion (Inertia, 2021). I see this holds true on an energetic level in regards to arousal. Our arousal holds the same amount of energy in the body until it is released. That release of energy and hormones can be expressed as either the full bodily orgasm or simple sensational pleasures. Unfortunately, our westernized heteropatriarchal society has commonly conditioned us to believe that sex with another human is the only way to experience that bodily pleasurable release.

This moment of arousal is often a turning point. Once aroused, I have witnessed people drop their sense of critical thinking, sense of self, and allow their stimulation to take over, becoming brainwashed in a way. Our society has normalized uncertainty and miseducation (especially for cis-men) of how to care for ourselves once aroused. This is a vulnerable environment for toxic masculinity to infest, if we are not careful. So, if the aroused person is triggered to shift to a more negative mindset, that same energy is brewing in their body. Depending on their own state of mental health, that highly stimulated triggered energy can easily become reactionary, misconducted, and potentially violent. If the aroused person does not have the tools to cope with a decline, it may psychologically resonate as a rejection, surfacing ugly visceral memories that they have yet to process, and cause this person to perpetuate harm. This is why rape and harassment culture exist within the cycle of toxic masculinity, specifically relating to the traits of domination (power-hunger) and emotional bypass. These characteristics have

historically been acted upon without correction, and so, with inertia, the energy continues throughout generations.

Yes, and Intergenerational Toxicity

Sure, not all men exclusively experience this hand-me-down of toxicity, however, as a society, we *all* have been conditioned to either participate in the culture of toxic masculinity or stand-by and dismiss it. Growing up at the turn of the millennia, gender roles and toxic traits were extremely evident in the mainstream U.S. media I absorbed as a kid. Girls were told to be pretty and sweet who play with barbies in their dollhouse and fantasize about a world where they can cook for their domestic family so the man can do their thing. While boys were handed toy soldiers, trucks, toy guns, trains and airplanes. They were taught how to fight, build things, and travel. Highlighting the fact that traditionally in our westernized culture, boys have been invited, encouraged, and supported in their dreams to repeat the toxic traits of domination and colonization. “The transformations of masculinity required to eradicate men’s violence against women [(political,) sexual and otherwise] are also the key to eradicating all forms of...violence” (Posadas, 2017).

Masculinity and Testosterone: An Interview

“Our toxic attachment to a monolithic masculinity which finds its most profound expression in destruction and force is a form of Stockholm Syndrome; as if testosterone were a race poison to which we’ve developed a fatal addiction” (Kemp, 2014). After noticing personality changes in the people I have known to be taking Testosterone including but not limited to both transgender, and cosmetic muscle purposes, I became curious. As an attentive cis-woman, I know when my hormones are off balance. When this occurs due to birth control, pms, miscarriage, etc. I find myself incredibly reactive and hypervigilant. I feel the toxic feminine traits bubbling to the surface such as manipulation, attachment, and obsession. I pray that I have the emotional maturity and consciousness to recognize these shifts from within before I cause a ruckus around me (easier said than done). All this said to wonder, if this happens to me when my hormones (primarily estrogen, feminine sex hormone) are fluctuating, what does testosterone (masculine sex hormone) actually do and how does it differ from the categorically toxic feminine traits I feel? Is my internal sense of imbalance obvious to others, or would an outsider be oblivious to the shift of my mood swings?

Dr. Spark, hormonal specialist, claims that in his office, his “secretaries, years ago, would know precisely what the testosterone level would be depending upon how the patient behaved in the office. And they also knew that as soon as we normalized their testosterone levels, they would become very, very nice and kind people, and very courteous and never be rude to them again” (Parker & Armitage, 1999).

I interviewed a dear friend, Trey Casen Williams, a transgender man, whom since I have known, has begun his sacred journey of hormonal replacement therapy, taking testosterone regularly.

For Trey, his journey in discovering who he is in relation to toxic masculinity has been complicated and sacred, neither black nor white. While prior to his hormone replacement therapy, he stated his toxic masculine traits such as circumstantial projection were evident. “I was very obnoxious within the first 6 months of taking ‘T’ and socially annoying. I was very insertive and obviously immature.” However, once he got in the initial rhythm of testosterone therapy and “enough facial hair to pass” along society’s standards of masculinity, that projective toxicity subsided (Williams, 2021).

Although the external social efforts of masculinity had settled and come naturally, other toxic traits had manifested for him.

I couldn’t cry... I did not cry when I started ‘T’. And I thought that not crying was socialized. I would feel the full body experience of crying but tears could not come out of my eyes. So, I had to find other ways to express hurt, anger and became more violent during that time. Not physically with other people, I was mindful and yet reactive. This has never happened to me before (Williams, 2021).

This period of transition taught him to retract from expressing his emotions the way he would have prior to hormonal therapy (Williams, 2021).

‘T’ shifts my mind to a *male* brain. And so I find that I compartmentalize and react from logistics and thought based, [rather] than feeling based. I was never able to compartmentalize before. And now that I’m able to. It is incredibly fascinating. It also helped my [symptoms of] ADHD for a while (Williams, 2021).

Trey’s two year anniversary recently passed, noting that testosterone replacement therapy typically takes about five years to regulate in the body. There were a brief four to six weeks within these last two years that he did not have access to his hormones. During that time, he admits, “I was crying often and everything was very emotional for me. There was no logical thinking. I was experiencing a lot, it was overwhelming” (Williams, 2021).

“I have heard from others that taking T is participating in toxic masculinity” (Williams, 2021). Additionally, studies show that higher levels of testosterone do correlate to the risk of projecting toxic masculinity (Archer, 1991). However, that was not entirely the case for Trey. He had the evolved mindfulness to recognize the harm that his reactive toxicity could have potentially caused. Based on what I know of Trey, his efforts in combating toxic masculinity in social and public spaces were successful in the name of peace, recognizing that a balance of energies is necessary. However, his testosterone therapy has been weaponized against him in unfortunate misunderstandings. In this new possibility, Trey recognized that he had to apply extra effort to respect women in a way he had not known before in the experience of his body prior to hormonal replacement therapy.

I noticed when my voice was deepening and passing better, I became much more aware how I was interacting with femme people. [Today,] if I am walking down the street and I

see a bunch of young adult women, I will normally walk across the street to be sensitive to their experience of safety. In addition, I am [by nature], just a person who likes to look at people and so I am mindful not to look for too long because I know how creepy it can be. It is extremely important for me to be a conscientious man (Williams, 2021).

Sexuality and Testosterone: Continued Interview

For Trey, the early stages of HRT (Hormone Replacement Therapy) seemed like “another level of puberty... I completely understood all of the boys from 8th grade... I have random boners that I wish would never happen to me” and there are not many public resources to process these changes as an adult, especially due to the United States’ controlling governmental system that further oppresses the LGBTQIA+ community (Williams, 2021).

Before ‘T,’ I would watch porn out of sheer curiosity, not necessarily for arousal. Now masturbation is something that I *have* to do, although, it was not something that I needed to do before. Which has been very weird. Solo sex is something that has been happening [more often]. It is not necessarily a want, it is more of a need. Granted, it is pleasurable, but it is [primal] a need. Sometimes I notice that I can’t sleep [due to arousal]... Sex was something I didn’t always experience pleasure in before. But I have never placed sex as a priority until recently. I [now] seek out having sex and it is important for me to have while my body has been changing. When my libido first started rocketing [in the early stages of hormonal replacement therapy], it was physically stressful for me and I wished

it wasn't happening. It was definitely arresting and tied to toxic masculinity. Now I'm engaging in healthy sexuality [and ethical pornography] like I never have before within a sense of demisexuality" after a period of adjustments during initial biological transitions (Williams, 2021).

To summarize, hyperactive testosterone levels can trigger toxic masculine traits and sexual arousal that could be relatively overwhelming. Just as people who are more concerned with their levels of estrogen for emotional swings, those who have more active testosterone levels should be equally as concerned with theirs as well. For masculine traits hold far too much power in our society, and such should be held with utmost responsibility and respect for others. Historically, that has not been the case. At minimum, the awareness of this impact will suffice because awareness calls upon accountability.

Moment of Reflection

As I write these words, I am in my studio, nude, eating a popsicle, and watching the sunset through my window curtains. At this moment, I am experiencing pleasure. Some may visualize my experience and project a sexual innuendo because my appearance may stimulate a personal (sexual) fantasy.

If you are one of those people, without shame or judgment, please ask yourself:

1. Do you know *why* this is your train of thought?

2. Keep asking, 'why,' with every answer until you bring it down to a circumstantial narrative or memory.
3. What happened in that memory?
4. Can you recall one of the first times you were aroused by a visual?
5. What was the content/context?

May I dare to ask, please consider reflecting on these inquiries around future random sexual attractions.

Male Gaze: The Cycle of Censorship

The First Amendment to the Constitution guarantees freedom of expression. Unlike censorship, this freedom is in part a theoretical concept because it is part of a body of constitutional law that has developed through judicial opinion during the past two hundred years. The most important aspects of that theory are 'primacy' and 'indivisibility' and 'non-abridgment.' 'Primacy' means that speech or expression is not to be divided up into categories, some of which are to be protected, others not. A result of indivisibility is that not only words but all forms of expression are protected. The implications of the First Amendment have been applied not just to our political speech but to our culture generally, applying to such things as scientific inquiry, artistic expression, and freedom of information. There are three possible (but not binding) limitations on free expression: 1) libel; 2) dear and present physical danger; and 3)

regulation of time and place in order to protect the rights of others. In terms of these limitations, "non-abridgment" means that that may limit freedom of expression itself to be given prior limitation (Hetric, 1991).

So, why does society limit contemporary artists' exposure and full expression through this absurd system of censorship? According to the First Amendment as described above, artwork is legally protected against censorship. Therefore, the cause of censorship has been conducted by pure opinion of the industry board and leaders (traditionally, white, heterosexual, able-bodied, cis-men). This opinion was developed from pure fear of the impact by which "inappropriate" art has emotionally on an individual and as a result, creates further limitations and oppression. I believe that toxic masculinity and those who perpetuate the culture are intimidated by empowered nude figures due to a projection of their own interpersonal conflicts such as shame.

Male Gaze: Free the Nipples

Nudity is a social construct based on the male gaze. The male gaze is a lens in which the heteropatriarchy has glazed over humanity. In the arts and entertainment industries, it centers the cis-male experience as a main target audience, "VIP," if you will. It is blatant and "at the heart of remarks such as 'Great tits!', 'What. Were there words?' and 'How would you rate that out of 10?'" (Schaare, 2000). Misogyny is the result. It was created as a way to further oppress and

exclude all genders, while centralizing the cis-male perspective as default. “Many women artists are targets for [these] conservative resentments” (Altmann, 2008). Myself, included.

It seems as though the artwork that may intimidate a traditional man to feel surprisingly aroused, shameful, or insulted, results in a form of standard industry censorship. What many informal or unprofessional art viewers may not consider, is the fact that “art can be used not only for aesthetic purposes, but also as a vehicle for the expression of belief systems and ideologies” (Fitch, 2018). Often, the reaction of the audience is key to a successful work of art. A conversation with one viewer could have a butterfly effect and land within the personal ethics of hundreds of people. Art has the power to transmute entire societies. The measurement of such impact is untraceable, however, this is what makes artwork so important to humanity. In my opinion, great artwork goes beyond the visual attraction and deep into philosophy, prompting the viewer to question the very nature of our human experience.

“Censorship has become an invisible, ubiquitous threat...” (Altmann, 2008). We have been taught that nudity is synonymous to sexuality and sexuality, to sin, therefore, perpetuating fear. This is simply not true. At some point, nudity for women was deemed as sexual, because it aroused the heteropatriarchal man. However, a nude body does not inherently consent to their own arousal. Biologically, the symbol of arousal for penis owners is an erection, vulva owners actually do not have a consistent physical symbol. Although there are biological symbols such as vulva wetness and erect nipples, these symbols can also relate to non-sexual experiences, contrary to penis erections. The difference between penis owners versus vulva owners in regards to symbolism, is the fact that an erect penis always equates to arousal. So, why are parts of the body where vulva and breast owners experience the utmost pleasure (erogenous zones) conservatively defined as harmful to the “family friendly” eye and censored?

There is something about images that arouses both admiration and hostility, desire and revulsion... censorship turns into iconoclasm... [and] condemnation becomes destruction.... The fact that so much art has been [censored,] defaced and destroyed over time is evidence of the deep significance of art... the fear of art is the other side of the coin. Those people who seek to destroy art... testify to its very power. They acknowledge that works of art enter our deepest feelings and rouse our deepest emotions. What is 'feared' is art's evocative power, its meaningfulness, its aspirational and inspirational impact on people (Gund, 2016).

Censorship is an issue due to chauvinistic toxicity within the heteropatriarchy and fear of demasculinization. Feminist artwork is often censored because it is powerful and decentralizing. Those who can not handle the potency remain intimidated and may not yet have the tools to cope with the confronting emotions. We have toxic masculinity to blame for society's inability to cope. I believe that a world of compassion and empathy could not possibly be offended by an empowered feminine energy.

In order to recalibrate society's standards of masculinity, the toxic parts must be dismantled. Not to emasculate, but to empower the feminine parts of ourselves. Feminine traits applied to a toxic masculine structure will encourage a healthier worldview. Therefore, more accepting people in power positions. In the arts, these roles are those who continue to censor work and throw obstacles in feminist artists' careers. My hypothesis is that less censorship will occur overall with a global balance of masculine and feminine energies because the the toxic judgments subside.

BODY

Personal Experience: Sexual Harassment

I grew up in the wealthy suburbs of Philadelphia, Bucks County. It was a safe-haven of incomprehensible conservative shelter. It remains the type of place where the cops have nothing better to do than bust underage kids for drinking (been there). Our highschool, Council Rock North, was at one point ranked one of the top public schools in the nation by frequent statistics of ivy league graduates. Our mascot was “the Indian,” an incredibly colonized and harmful image. This place was your typical “Pleasantville” that swept everything under the rug and glazed it over with our capitalist version of success. Growing up, ignorance was absolute bliss and we all abided by that example. All the harm that I experienced as a kid, particularly sexual harassment, was normalized. It wasn’t until I left home for college in 2014 when I realized just how harmful, bypassive, and miseducated this culture was. After much therapy, I can confidently say that all of my, now realized, childhood trauma and current mental health issues stem from the ignorance and lack of accountability of the nucleus that is the Council Rock School District education. This environment continues to breed toxic masculinity.

On paper, Council Rock School District is exceeding their goals in conditioning children to abide by the systems of the capitalist heteropatriarchy. However, we were never taught proper and inclusive sex education and autonomy. This directly impacted me in various forms. At the innocent age of ten years old, I began experiencing sexual harassment in school. Boys my age created a game based on who can slap my bum the most frequent and with the most force. They

would keep track of points. I didn't speak out about it. The rare times that I did, teachers would tell me to change my outfit into something less revealing. I was taught that it was my fault. As if gauchos and yoga pants were inappropriate and "distracted the boys from learning." Admittedly, to survive, I adapted to the attention. Eventually, this was how I made my friends, by means of my body. This lasted until I was about thirteen years-old because I started dating an incredibly terrifying boy who threatened everyone who looked my way. That relationship became domestically abusive and lasted until I was sixteen. In reflection, I felt protected from sexual harassment by domestic abuse. I had such a twisted perspective of body image, consent, abuse, sexuality, romance, relationships etc. These topics are what the sex education system failed to address and therefore, perpetuate the culture of sexual harassment due to lack of accountability around toxic masculinity.

Sex Education

We have an opportunity to raise children into adults who respect one another and live in harmony. Instead, the United States public school curriculums have failed our society by choosing capitalism over humanity and adhering church to the state. In sex education, these curriculums are known to be based on fear-based lessons around worst-case scenarios, rather than understanding the daily occurrence of sex as a natural part of life.

Fully fifty percent of American high schools teach a 'sex education' curriculum that includes deceptive information about the prevalence of STDs and the failure rates of

condoms. Students are taught that homosexuality is curable, and that premarital sex ruins future marital happiness. Afraid of sounding godless, American liberals have failed to challenge these retrograde orthodoxies. The truth is Americans have not become anti-sex, but they have become increasingly anxious about sex (Herzog, 2008).

In conservative states such as Texas (as of September 2020), “the standards [that] regulate instruction in Texas public schools, and the sections pertaining to health and sex ed have remained unchanged since 1997” so children are likely learn about [actual] sex on their own terms, while STD’s and teen pregnancies are at a comparatively high rate in Texas than more progressive states (Tribone, 2020).

In fact, “twenty-nine states and the District of Columbia require public schools to teach sex ed, but Texas is not among them. If a Texas school offers sex ed of its own accord, it is mandated to emphasize abstinence before marriage, per the Texas Education Code. Schools must teach that “if used consistently and correctly, [abstinence is] the only method that is [100] percent effective in preventing pregnancy (Tribone, 2020).

The miseducated demographic will, too (follow the Law of Inertia) and continue on the path of ignorance until a greater force interrupts and redirects the perspective. When children are exposed to correct information about the human body and how it works, then society’s relationship with pleasure, intimacy, and interpersonal impact will grow toward a world of integrity, respect, autonomy, and dignity.

Dr. Emily Morse, a leading voice in contemporary studies of human sexuality, claims that our entire experience of human existence is portrayed through the five senses: sight, smell, touch, taste, and sound, even if they are perhaps more limited or disabled than others. Therefore, what (the) God (of our own unique understanding) set out to create for humans is primarily linked to experiences of pleasure or pain. We are genetically engineered to experience one (or both) of the two at all times (Masterclass, 2021).

Had I understood this healthy concept of sex at a young, impressionable age, I may not have felt so much shame, guilt, and fear around my bodily experience. Learning this concept as a young adult has been confronting to unravel, as it can be for many of us, to break traditions, conditionings, and epigenetic beliefs. Many people go their entire lives without an awakening to the truth of what pleasure is, sexually or otherwise.

Sex is a primal act of pure pleasure with oneself, a partner, or multiple. All the while, it can and has been used against us in toxic masculine forms such as control, censorship, ownership, and harmful/violent domination. “We must transform the apparatuses by which boys are objectified into toxically masculine men” (Posadas, 2017). Fostering sex education is an ethical effort of basic sexual integrity that does have the power to dismantle toxic masculinity. In my own definition, sexual integrity is having the courage and the wisdom to know when to walk away in peace without causing or projecting harm. It is agency plus responsibility with the freedom of choice. This culture of dignity and sexual integrity is required to end the culture of toxic masculinity, however, it must be voluntary to be effective. Sadly, I can only imagine an idyllic world where this exists. And so, we push forward toward a culture that cherishes human bodies for the sacred vessels that they are.

Touch yourself early and often
Learn your body before you share your body
Use mirrors to find out how beautiful you are
Let yes come from every part of you until you share you
When your eggs drop, you are in heat
The risk is greater than the heat-- use protection
If your pussy gets sick, feed yourself plain yogurt, garlic
Drink primrose tea, rub her with coconut oil
When your blood comes, it's time to rest
Know that you are never unclean, never untouchable
Use a cup within, or rag without; no trash needed
Now you have power of life, a child is a forever decision
Your pleasures will grow with you, never say never
Whether voracious or sated, you are whole, unbroken
Your orgasms are medicine and magic, use them well
Be a lifelong lover to yourself, let others join you
Always, always; celebrate your miraculous body (Brown, 2019).

Ecofeminism

Traditionally, men hold the power. Founder of nonprofit, *A Call to Men*, Tony Porter, believes that true feminism is “achieving gender equity [which] hinges on a redistribution of

power. Sharing power in a way that fairly corresponds to all those represented. This applies to our government, to our corporations, to our communities, and to our families” (Porter, Motley, Bunch & Porter, 2021) .

Ecofeminism, otherwise known as ecological feminism, is the intersection where sociology and environmentalism meet. Coined in 1974 by French feminist, Françoise d’Eaubonne. It “examines the effect of gender categories in order to demonstrate the ways in which social norms exert unjust dominance over women and nature... its practitioners advocate an alternative worldview that values the earth as sacred, recognizes humanity’s dependency on the natural world, and embraces all life as valuable” (“Ecofeminism | sociology and environmentalism”, 2021). Integrating ecofeminist practices into sex education is a key thread of academia that I believe, if taught properly, regularly, and developmentally, can dramatically change the world and end the curse of toxic masculinity.

Contrary to the scarce and limited patriarchal society we live in today, ancient “matrilineal societies flourished particularly in situations of relative abundance, where there was not severe competition for resources” (Reuther, 2005).

‘Masculine’ values, enshrined in the male supreme deity of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, promoted male domination, aggressive violence, subjugation of women, and exploitation of the earth. The reclaiming of [ecofeminism, takes] the vision of a redemption of humanity and the earth from the nadir of violence and destruction that had been unleashed by patriarchal religion and rule (Reuther, 2005).

Civilization continues to cause this harm on a global scale. Thus, patriarchal colonization in itself is synonymous to controversial environmental issues such as deforestation, technological advancements, fracking, and pollution. I believe deadly natural disasters and pandemics are examples of Mother Earth fighting back, applying her rage effectively, and reclaiming her peace. “What makes enduring change possible is the development of an environmental consciousness equally committed to the struggle for social justice” (Lee, 2009). Therefore, the solution to the patriarchy’s contemporary cycle of toxic masculinity is to return to our Divine Mother, the sacred feminine, apply feminist theories, and balance a larger system of unity.

“[Ecofeminism can be practiced] ...as the unitary power of life and renewal of life underlying the process from gestation and birth to death and rebirth, as a shared religion of [its practitioners]. The earth as the place of burial identified with the mother’s womb. In descending into the earth for burial in womb-shaped underground temples, one [is] at the same time arming a faith in the rebirth of nature from death... [Thus, have] no fear of death, understanding it as an integral part of the life process” (Reuther, 2005).

Just as the origin of thought behind the sacred feminine traits of depth, nurture, slow-paced, acceptance, surrender and pleasure, ecofeminism includes the practice of honoring the Earth as the birthplace of all humanity and following suit to the synonymous traits linked to values that promote peace, harmony with nature, equality, and love for all.

“The only way we can, as human beings, integrate ourselves into a life-sustaining relationship with nature, is for both males and females to see ourselves as equally rooted

in the cycles of life and death and equally responsible for creating a sustainable way of living together” (Reuther, 2005).

May protect what is sacred, restore, reconnect, and meet the imbalance of toxic masculinity with sacred femininity. May we balance dominance with surrender, emotional detachment with reflections and accountability, hypercompetitiveness, aggression, intimidation, and greed with deep pleasure, communication, a slower-paced fluidity, compassion and nourishment.

When East Meets West

Masculinity and femininity are characterized by polarizing traits such as the left and the right sides of the human brain. Therefore, the perspectives of either end portray different experiences of the same moment.

The right-brain produces society's non-logical, gatherer/nurturer role and the left-brain brings out society's logical, hunter/killer capability. Both roles are of vital importance in the survival of the human race. The left-brain is rational while the right brain is intuitive. The left hemisphere processes words and numbers, and the right side is more abstract, recognizing images rather than words. The right brain develops first in the womb yet the

left-brain is dominant in right-handed people (about 92% of the world's population) (Jones, 2005).

“We live in a world that has learned to honor the brain over the heart, war over peace, and control over connectedness” (Jones, 2005). Spirituality is about balancing the left and right sides of the brain to neutralize the human experience. Founder of Naropa University, Chogyam Trungpa Rinpoche built an entire legacy on the claim, ‘when East meets West, sparks will fly (*40 Years of Naropa University*, 2014). I believe this concept validates the fact that no matter what East or West represent, they are opposing forces, not in defense or in spite, but in reason. Everything that represents the East, will never be the West and vice versa. When they meet, magic will occur.

The left brain is linked to masculine traits, while the right, feminine. This is traditionally an Eastern philosophy as renownedly exemplified in ancient Taoist teachings of Yin and Yang. “Yin the Earth, in correlation with Yang, the Heaven... subsists in the mythical past where both principles are joined in androgynous unity” (Milcinski, 1997). The qualities of Yin align with that of feminine while Yang, masculine. Now to break it down, if it is true that when East meets West, such as Earth and heaven, and surely, when feminine meets masculine, the rule still applies, the sparks fly. This too, defines my personal efforts within pleasure activism and specifically, ecofeminism. In order to dismantle and decentralize toxic masculinity, we must cultivate a balancing culture of sacred feminism, encouraging androgynous neutrality.

Sacred feminism indicates an honoring of women's worth rather than a rejection of feminine gifts. The expanded definition is to see it as the difference in perception

between the right brain and left-brain. The right-brain produces society's non-logical, gatherer/nurturer role and the left-brain brings out society's logical, hunter/killer capability. Both roles are of vital importance in the survival of the human race (Jones, 2005).

Spirituality and Pleasure Activism

Spirituality, in my philosophical opinion, is directly correlated to the deepest polarizing energies of pleasure and rage. Pleasure is what we strive to achieve, and what we (ideally) hope that people around us experience. It is ease, freedom, joy, and consensual abundance.

The pleasant feelings [such as pleasure] are attracting; they pull us toward the thing that has stimulated those feelings. The unpleasant feelings [such as rage] are repulsing; they push us away from the stimulating thing or thought. Given a choice, we generally want more of the good feelings and less of the bad feelings. These impulses toward and away are hardwired into our animal bodies, based on the need to find food and mates and to escape predators and other dangers (Kaza, 2008).

Rage, on the contrary, is an indicator that we have lost touch with our sense of pleasure. Rage evidently causes harm and becomes the utmost toxic and reactive trait, often rooted in the

resonance of shame. I honor my rage just as equally as I honor my pleasure and I believe it is important to have a balance of each in order to grow ethically as a human being. Spirituality is about holding both ends of the spectrum and acknowledging that neither way of being is good nor bad, they just are the way that they are. One creates a sense of peace and unity, the other, destruction. The choice is ours to look deep enough within our own selves and be intentional about our inner work so that our interpersonal efforts to equity and balance may impact the world around us. May we embody the pleasure in the world we wish to experience.

Pleasure invites us to slow down, embrace the moment, be at peace, and release emotions of shame, guilt, and rage. The definition of pleasure activism is “Acting from an analysis that pleasure should be a natural, safe, and liberated part of life. That, we can offer each other tools and education to make sure sex and drugs and other pleasures aren’t life threatening, but life enriching” (Brown, 2019).

Unfortunately, the practice of pleasure is often easier said than done in today’s “fast-paced” society. In my opinion, the term, “fast-paced environment,” is quite synonymous to that of a toxic masculine environment. Some people can “keep up” while others operate at a slower, more feminine rate which trails them behind the patriarchy’s class standards. Neither way of operating is better nor worse, however, our society has been conditioned to believe that the only way to be “successful” as a human being is through the masculine ways. The system that upholds this culture of capitalism is a toxic masculine issue of control and domination. The U.S’s entire government was founded upon toxic masculine traits that continue to fester a few hundred years later in our daily lives, even in our own homes. We can not escape it as our society operates today, therefore, something must change. This is where the work begins. Adrienne Marie Brown,

author *Pleasure Activism* states, “Part of transformative justice is getting to the root of harm, and so much... is rooted in [erotic] shame and repression” (Brown, 2019).

Eroticism

The concept of eroticism has become that of westernized, commodified, and hetero-washed pleasure with a sexual currency. Our society has been conditioned to believe that it is synonymous to sex, therefore a sin to common organized religion (a conversation for another paper). As a culture, we have cancelled the idea that eroticism can exclude sexual acts. In fact, eroticism is an embodiment of feeling that is often present during sexual acts, however, not always.

“The very word erotic comes from the Greek [word] Eros, the personification of love and all its aspects. Born of chaos and personifying creative power and harmony. When I speak of the erotic, then I speak of it as an assertion of the creative life force of women. Of that creative energy, empowered. The knowledge of which we are now reclaiming in our language, our history, our dancing, our loving our work, our lives... The erotic has often been misnamed by men and used against women. It has been made into the confused, the trivial, the psychotic, the plasticized sensation. For this reason we have often turned away from the exploration and consideration of the erotic as a source of power and information, confusing it with its opposite, the pornographic. But pornography

is a direct denial of the power of the erotic, for it represents the suppression of true feeling. Pornography emphasizes sensation without feeling (Brown, 2019).

In raising this topic of eroticism, I question the veil of hyper-sexuality, domination, and control. Does the fulfillment of personal pleasures through the lens of erotic (pleasure) activism combat the culture of toxic masculinity? According to Adrienne Marie Brown, yes, “if everything else in the world stayed the same, but every single person deepened their physical and spiritual practices of self love and great sex, the domino effect would be a revolution of our understanding of our purpose here” (Brown, 2019). Which exemplifies the deconstruction of toxic masculinity.

Therefore, pleasure is a reclamation of divine femininity and a return to our loving, and primal nature. For many adults, the deconstruction of our sexual conditionings toward pleasure can be stubborn. So, we must look to the future adults, the children, and reform developmental sexual education in schools. Teaching kids about eroticism in a healthy way. This, liberating our future society from the burdens of shame, guilt, and fear around what our human bodies are ultimately made for, pleasure (Morse, 2021).

Feminist Artivism

Consider materially everything around you in this exact moment. An artist designed that. There was a particular curation of ideas that birthed the item you see, such is my definition of art. My passion for creating visual art is inspired by the dialogue around my creations, it always has

been. The earliest piece of artwork I remember made an imprint because there was further conversation around it. Art inherently makes an impact and it makes the world go ‘round, whether we realize it or not. Therefore, it holds immense power.

“Subcultures have, for example, used the arts and fashion as a way of resisting the dominating culture of the mainstream. Art creates meaning, and functions as a tool for and protest movements and the expression of dissent” (Sommer, 2021). Because art has created the world we live in, many artists have discovered a way to bridge society on activist theories and concepts. “An important mechanism by which activist art affects people is emotional activation, whether positive or negative... for example anger, guilt, hope, happiness and surprise” (Sommer, 2021). When a person is emotionally activated, engagement is created and change occurs.

“Thereby, emotions can be conceived as episodes, which change [/invokes] cognitive processing (‘What does this artwork mean/tell me?’), motivational aspects (‘Does the artwork motivate me to a certain action?’), physiological reactions (sweat, chest tightness, etc.), and maybe even actual behavior (‘I will cycle to work tomorrow’)” (Sommer, 2021). This is how and why we raise conversation through art and again, why I have always been so passionate about this profession.

My art is heavily influenced by the works of: Frida Kahlo, who portrayed the pain and pleasure of being a queer, disabled, woman; Georgia O’Keefe, who was a trailblazer in illustrating the beauty and power of the vulva; MissMe, who is known as the “Artful Vandal... confronting issues of dignity and forcing us to reconsider our own truths through public art” (“ABOUT — Miss Me”, 2021); Louise Bourgeois, who was highly impacted by her parents’

relationship around her father's affair and processed the toxicity through her art; and Firelei Baez, who is "asking the viewer to come to terms with their own thoughts about the femme sex body" through her mystical characters ("Firelei Báez: An Open Horizon (or) the Stillness of a Wound | Art21 ``New York Close Up" | Amara", 2021). All statements of which I connect with in my own work.

Anthropomorphic Embodiment

Unfortunately, many men and predatorial-bodied people have been conditioned to believe that women and vulnerable bodies say 'no' when they mean 'yes.' Additionally, they "do not always distinguish between friendly and sexually connotative behavior" (Kowalski, 1992). These are incredibly toxic products of the heteropatriarchy which factors to the social issue of sexual harassment. As a naturally vulnerable-bodied person, I am often hyperalert, anxious, and sometimes fearful to walk alone during the day. At night, I avoid walking alone at all costs. Growing up in the tri-state area, I have learned how to be both reactive and passive in different scenarios of public sexual harassment such as cat-calling while holding the developmental trauma. Eventually, I felt that something needed to change within me as I approached these instances.

One particular day, I was brainstorming ways I could combat this experience of daily sexual harassment and prepare myself rather than reacting in the moment. I closed my eyes and immediately saw siberian tiger eyes looking back at me. I took that visual literally and on my walk that day I chose to embody the energy of that tiger. All I had to do was envision that tiger

proudly and swiftly cruising through the jungle in my mind's eye as I strolled along the Boulder Creek. Beneath my sunglasses, my eyes wide and engaged with a sense of ferocity. I felt more alert than usual, as though I was ready to pounce.

Needless to say, this embodiment resonated. I felt protected and empowered by my own energetic field. This was a rare mindset for me. I felt on-goers whom I would normally be intimidated by, seemingly neutral. Thankfully, no one messed with me that day. Was it because of my tiger embodiment? I will never know, but it felt damn good. "Tiger Kween" (Figure 2) was conceived that day.

Figure 2

Tiger Kween



Note: By L. Ajamian, 2019, Digital Illustration

Anthropomorphic Embodiment

“Nezlek et al. (1997) suggested that negative feelings in response to [(interestingly, both rejection and) anthropomorphic images] were stronger for people with low self-esteem than for people with high self-esteem” (Fu and Xu, 2021). Therefore, viewers of my art with low self-esteem may feel intimidated, censor it, dislike it, and perpetuate toxic masculinity in reaction. Here lies a fine line of provocative irritation that I find myself around often. Through my art, I aim to invite empowerment to those lacking by raising this exact conversation.

Though I am speaking to those who may feel less confident in my message, they are not necessarily my resonating target audience. My anthropomorphic characters stand as allies to the confident and empowered folks who know themselves, their boundaries, demons, and fears; and show up anyways. Each ally portrays a glare of unamusement because they have seen and heard it all. They are the guardians against all shame and guilt, energetically and circumstantially. The allies protect what is sacred and ward off all evil (toxic masculinity). Their wisdom is ancient, yet, contemporary and present. In this frame, they are unphased and untouchable.

Conclusion

It is Our Duty to Heal

Toxic masculinity is the root cause of all contemporary destruction we have witnessed for humans, mentally, physically and spiritually. The systems of harm that it has produced include: sexism, misogyny, racism, homophobia, transphobia, xenophobia, classism, ableism, and more. We all must hold one another accountable for perpetuating this cultural cycle before it completely cannibalizes humanity. Feminism is the foundational movement needed to make this change and reverse the systems of harm. While, ecofeminism is the movement to push forward.

According to my research , the efforts of decentralizing and dismantling toxic aspects of the patriarchy will advance with uncensored ecofeminist art and proper sex education. Thus, inspiring inquiry for viewers, educating children and adults properly on coping with arousal, reconstructing the “family friendly” worldview, and recoiling society’s healthy relationship with the energies of femininity, masculinity and the natural, primal world we live in. This uplifts authentic empowerment, confidence, and healthy self-esteem, so when a predatorial body is approached with arousal and potential rejection, their reaction is educated and nonthreatening with healthy coping mechanisms. This, dismantling all forms of toxic masculinity, including aggression, ownership, projection, oppression, and sexual harassment that has historically destroyed human ethics and the planet along with it.

Doing so requires the continual application of pressure, exposure in the form of ecofeminist principles, which then inspires more profound and accurate developmental sex

education for future generations to redistribute the power away from the toxic parts of the heteropatriarchy and toward a sense of balance.

For the sake and wellbeing of vulnerable bodies who experience sexual threats on a regular basis, such as myself, I propose that we can no longer afford to fearfully censor children from the diverse arena of pleasure. Nude figure art is a healthy way to raise the conversation of eroticism and transmute a former potentially harmful perspective, to an empowering and respectful understanding. Ecofeminist anthropomorphism has a relatively embodied way of provoking the spiritually holistic approach to pleasure activism and proper sex education. We must normalize pleasure in all its glory and honor every aspect of sacred femininity, including the wonders of Mother Earth's naturally occurring, miraculous world.

Thus far, no further. It is our responsibility as people with this information to dismantle the system that continues to perpetuate all harm, and therefore, toxic masculinity as a whole. We owe it to ourselves and our future generations who deserve to experience a world of dignity, autonomy, and mutual respect. Time is of the essence. May this healing begin with me and may it begin with you.

Allies: Artist Statement

The series, *Allies* (formerly known as *Beastiality*), personifies the human-animal hybrid in posh-surrealist paintings, digitally animated images, NFT's, and cast sculptures forming a multi-media, total sensory experience. Lucine's preoccupation with anthropomorphic symbology speaks to ecofeminist pleasure activism. Iconic portraits offer their presence to confront issues of dignity and dismantle the culture of toxic masculinity. Her queer guardian deities are painted in earth tones, ruby, and emerald colors with cool grayscale backgrounds, while figure sculptures reflect precious metals.

For more information, visuals, and further inquiries, please visit
www.LucineVisions.Art and www.instagram.com/LucineVisions

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