
#COMPULSIVEHETEROSEXUALITY

AM I A LESBIAN? — Last night I re-watched [My Sexual History Vol. 1 Ages 4-17](#), a confessional film I made in 2017 about the erosion of memory, self-trust and the victim/perpetrator binary following various sexual encounters during my childhood. There's a string of sentences towards the end of *My Sexual History*, something along the lines of, "Sex really scared me and still does if I am being honest with you. Even though it feels very good sometimes. And love is something completely different." Three years later, the sentiment still rings true, but with a different tenor. After re-watching, I read the open source document "[Am I a Lesbian?](#)," a modern-day holy grail text within the discourse on compulsive heterosexuality, a term popularized by Adrienne Rich in her 1980 essay titled "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence." As to be expected, I spiraled.

— Compulsive heterosexuality describes the involuntary repression of one's own innate, non-heteronormative tendencies under the pressure of a patriarchal, transphobic, and queerphobic society. It feeds a dialectic that works tirelessly to invalidate and pathologize the desires of non-straight women, until they cannot trust their own instincts, fold, and partner with a cis man. Heterosexuality is the default, the background we are expected to blend into without protest. Lately, I've been very taken by the idea of corrupted intuition, venturing into the space where our deepest instincts seem to exponentially diminish into fragments of absurdity. Ascending from this murky swamp is the monster I seem to be running from and to.

— The *Am I Lesbian?* text finishes with the declaration, "Being a lesbian is healing, and loving women as a lesbian does not make you predatory in any way" and I thought to myself, what a curious note to end on. Beyond feeling uncomfortable about my feelings for women was this paralyzing guilt concerning this "predatorial" urge that I felt needed stifling, for I had never known or understood women as anything other than as victims or puppets in sexual life. The string tugs at me, lifts an ankle, opens my mouth, which lets out a moan I still to this day do not recognize.

— In college, my one-liner was: "I can hook up with women, but I would never date them". Looking back, I am both amused and horrified: what a psychotic thing to say. The subtext: *I experience a visceral, spiritual, and sexual desire for women but I'm gonna go ahead and center my energy around building ties with cis*

men because it will be easier to survive in this patriarchal, homophobic society with that allegiance. Well, maybe not psychotic, but surely a half-baked perspective of survival, the only kind accessible to me at the time, forgotten, reflected on later, forgiven, still a bit confused. Through a deconstructed prism I see, with equal parts regret and compassion, the motivations behind those promiscuous, brownout nights, the slurring and spit-filled laughter, the shameless, probing fingers in places they probably shouldn't have been, searching for something they never thought they would find.

— I am making an exhibition about corrupted intuition and perversion: isn't compulsive heterosexuality the same thing? Moreover, why am I so distrustful of it still? In my most shameful thoughts, I wonder if feminism has infiltrated my clitoris and commanded it to shrivel back into itself, not necessarily at the thought of a man, but at the reality of being with one. All the things it seems I would have to lose, but also maybe gain in the process. I think about B and how beautiful I thought he was when he wasn't touching me. And then when he was on top of me, I would really look at him, watching the unrepentant contortions of his face, and actually be disgusted sometimes. But I never gave it a second thought, assumed it was fine because of how much women's repulsion during hetero-intercourse has been normalized; backed by a choir of fake orgasms, groans of "Are you done yet?" and the laughter of the audience of another comedian who hates his wife. But then I get confused when I recall other memories from our sleepovers and my cheeks get hot and fill with drool.

— That is until I remember the section in the master doc which explicates how experiencing attraction to unavailable men, whether emotionally blocked real-life partners, fictitious characters in books, television, and movies, or celebrities, is a tell-tale sign of compulsive heterosexuality. For deep down, the desirous know their longing for said object of desire will always be unmet, which fills them with a secret relief. A part of me recognizes this tendency in myself, though I also wonder about the ways in which exposure to trauma extends beyond sexuality and affects one's capacity to bring their fantasies to an external culmination.

— I don't have the energy or attention span to unpack everything I read in that document yesterday, but let's just say it was specific in the sweet way that is also probably universal, and I think I need to read it again, although I still don't think I'm a lesbian, *am I?* I hate labels, and yet I search for them. Maybe labels are the edge of intuition and intuition is this formless blob, like shoving a

cloud into a jar. What remains? Is it still a cloud in a jar or is it now a jar wrapped around nothing? What I am trying to say is, my whole life these projections of lesbians have been shoved onto me, by TV shows, by my classmates, by religion, by family. But I think I realized maybe just yesterday that to be a lesbian the only criteria is that you identify as one. All this other stuff, the asymmetrical haircuts, short fingernails, bossiness, vaginas, U-Hauling, etc., are all merely attachments, to be rearranged, replaced, disregarded, or discarded at any time.

// References

Olayemi Ilupeju, Monilola (2017): My Sexual History. Vol. 1 Ages 4-17. Film. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ASrYJ4eSaPE> (13.12.2021).

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// About the Author

Monilola Olayemi Ilupeju is a Nigerian-American artist and writer living in Berlin. Her transdisciplinary practice confronts the distortions of systemic structures while offering avenues toward emancipation and repair. As she works through personal subject matter, she also interrogates the broader, political contexts in which these issues and observations lie.

Monilola graduated from New York University in 2018 where she studied Studio Art (Honors Studio) and Social and Cultural Analysis, the latter of which focused on the intersections of critical race studies, gender and sexuality studies, and urban studies. She is also an alumna of the Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture, Class of 2018. In addition to her studio practice, Monilola has done extensive curatorial and editorial work with SAVVY Contemporary and Archive Books, amongst others.

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