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February 14th, 2024

Through The Kaleidoscope: Binary Categorization and Slow Violence in Maggie

Nelson's *The Argonauts*

Once we name something, you said, we can never see it in the same way again . . .

You called this the cookie cutter function of our minds.

- Maggie Nelson, *The Argonauts*

Introduction

This epigraph from her award-winning work of auto-theory, *The Argonauts*, encapsulates Nelson's attitude towards binary categorization, especially as it pertains to her identity. Through autobiographical, critical examination of her relationships and experiences, Nelson scrutinizes the negative impacts that categorization, specifically binary categorization, has had on her life and the lives of her loved ones. I share Nelson's skepticism towards binary categorization and, therefore, have defined categorization for the sake of this argument as the restriction or limitation of intersectionality by separating an identity or a concept into individual categories. I will reference the understanding of categories by Pablo Andres Contreras Kallens, Rick Dale, and Paul E. Smaldino who explain that "Cultural Evolution of Categorization," which is that "[c]ategories allow us to parse our interactions with the world and divide complex and otherwise chaotic stimuli into discrete kinds" (Contreras Kallens et al. 2). This definition of categorization

highlights the central contention that Nelson has with binary categorization; While reducing the “chaotic” nature of identities makes understanding them simpler, Nelson contests that this is limiting and thereby reduces the intersectionality of identities. As a queer woman married to a transgender man, Nelson counters that the chaos of our identities is what makes it possible to be intersectional and that to categorize or parse an identity into “discrete” categories is violent. Nelson understands that our perspective(s) should instead be “kaleidoscopic” (Nelson 4). Anything less than kaleidoscopic, Nelson holds, is a kind of violence. This thesis will consider the categorization of intersectional identities as a form of what Rob Nixon has termed “slow violence.” In *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor*, Nixon describes this phenomenon as something that is experienced over extended periods of time and which eventually creates conditions that are insufficient for sustaining life. Slow violence is dispersed across time and is an attritional form of violence that is often invisible. This concept, though initially intended to discuss the effects of global warming and environmental pollution on the poor, is also applicable in a discussion of the violent effects that the categorization of intersectional identities can create. Attesting to the motility of Nixon’s original definition of slow violence, Jenna Marie Christian and Lorraine Dowler invoke the concept in their feminist relational critique of the role of binaries in our society. They explain in their work that “the invisibility of slow violence is intimately tied to the very raced and gendered epistemologies that conventionally separate binaries of personal and political, hot and banal, violence and peace, and intimacy and war” (Christian and Dowler 1070). In other words, feminist relational theory can provide a lens through which to understand the slow violent effects of binary gender categories. Christian and Dowler’s feminist relational perspective of categories helps to bridge Nixon’s original definition of slow violence to my analysis of the categorization of queer identities and

love. Through categorization, a hierarchical structure is developed in which certain categories are generally considered to be superior to others. In the contemporary context of Nelson's work, heterosexuality is subjectively placed above homosexuality in a binary hierarchical structure.

In *All About Love: New Visions*, bell hooks considers different categories of love and meditates on their worth and value. hooks's theory brings her to the question of "how much easier it would be for us to learn how to love if we began with a shared definition" (4).

While hooks identifies the many different ways to love and to categorize love, she argues that this process creates a hierarchical system that places certain types or practices of love above others and thereby, devalues others. hooks's understanding of categorization as a sorting tool that often places romantic love above all else emphasises the systemic hierarchization of binary categories. This structure is also evident in *The Argonauts*.

Finally, this paper will address Julia Kristeva's theory of abjection from *Powers of Horror* as a form of the resistance to binary categorization and the slow violence it perpetuates. By applying Nixon's theory to Nelson's work, I will argue that the learned practice of categorization, when imposed upon intersectional queer identities and queer love, is a form of slow violence that reinforces a hierarchical structure by placing certain categories above others. I will find support for this argument in *All About Love* where hooks employs the socially constructed hierarchy of love to argue that love should rather be a universal concept with a sole, over-arching definition.

Rob Nixon's Theory of Slow Violence

In his discussion of the impact of environmentalism on the poor, Nixon describes the concept of slow violence as follows:

By slow violence I mean a violence that occurs gradually and out of sight, a violence of delayed destruction that is dispersed across time and space, an attritional violence that is typically not viewed as violence at all. Violence is customarily conceived as an event or action that is immediate in time, explosive and spectacular in space, and as erupting into instant sensational visibility. (Nixon 2).

Nixon's definition of slow violence explains his theoretical discussion of attritional, gradual, and invisible violence for his case study featuring corporate strongman Lawrence Summers and his plan to "export rich nation garbage, toxic waste, and heavily polluting industries to Africa" (1) so as to correct the global imbalance of toxic pollution. Summers reasoned that doing so would offer a "double gain: it would benefit the United States and Europe economically, while helping appease the rising discontent of rich-nation environmentalists" (2). Specifically, the violence in this scenario is "slow" as its impact occurs out of sight of the rich-nation consumers. That is, the impact of dumping the toxic waste occurs gradually, as does the damage that causes attritional harm to people and environments in Africa. Nixon offers the comparison that "[h]ad Summers advocated invading Africa with weapons of mass destruction, his proposal would have fallen under conventional definitions of violence and been perceived as a military or even an imperial invasion" (3). Given the malleability of Nixon's theory, it is no surprise that scholars in other disciplines have utilized it. Feminist geopolitical researchers Christian and Dowler employ feminist relationality to defend their adoption of Nixon's theory; they pose that:

feminists address the gendered politics of visibility and care is by denaturalizing binary divisions and adopting a politics of relationality... they have demanded equal citizenship and protection by declaring 'the personal is political'... and they have illuminated how presumably 'natural' characteristics of sex and gender are in fact deeply social" (1071).

By adopting Nixon's theory to assist in a feminist relational approach, Christian and Dowler work to understanding the negative affect that gender binaries as learned social concepts have on our identities. Christian and Dowler assert that "slowness works to reinscribe binary divisions of public/private, intimate/global, and active/passive, and the subsequent invisibility of slow violence is shaped as much by these gendered bifurcations as it is by time" (1069). In establishing slow violence, Nixon explains that his theory contrasts mainstream forms of violence which are typically big, loud, disruptive, and obviously violent; in this way Nixon poses a violence binary. Consequently, Christian and Dowler assert that just as Nixon's slow violence is shaped by "binary divisions of public/private, intimate/global, and active/passive" (1069), it is also shaped by the gender binary. By establishing this fact, Christian and Dowler apply Nixon's theory to feminist relationality theory and create the possibility for their adapted version of slow violence to be applied to queer and feminist studies. A feminist relational approach to Nixon's theory provides a necessary perspective for evaluating the negative effect that the slow violence of binary categorization has had in Maggie Nelson's life as a queer woman in a queer relationship.

Categorization as a form of Slow Violence

In addition to environmental humanities, Nixon's theory is transferable to this paper's analysis of categorization in *The Argonauts*. In order to apply Nixon's theory of slow violence, however, categorization and its role in society must first be defined. For the sake of this argument, Pablo Andrés Contreras Kallens et al, define categorization as follows in their text "Cultural Evolution of Categorization":

a core cognitive skill, with wide-ranging implications for the rest of the cognitive system. Categories allow us to parse our interactions with the world, and divide complex and otherwise chaotic stimuli into discrete kinds. Thus, an individual furry moving thing becomes an instance of the category cat, which in turn allows us to reason that it would be a bad idea to tug on its tail (Contreras Kallens et al.1).

This is a crucial point to the argument that categorization is a learned process originating from social interactions and constructions. These authors also address the hierarchy that forms when we categorize. They identify that “categorization is affected by prototyping effects. Subjects are able to rank members of a category according to how good a representative they are of it. We recognize that apples are better exemplars of fruits than tomatoes” (3). While this is a subjective understanding, the authors insist that this is a socially manufactured system of ranking both categorical members and categories. This in turn creates a hierarchy in which certain members and categories are valued over others and is therefore, a form of slow violence. Additionally, Christian and Dowler’s invocation of binary categories in the discussion of slow violence allows us to evaluate the hierarchical structure that is created by the social perception of binaries.

The Slow Violence of Categorization in Maggie Nelson’s *The Argonauts*

Maggie Nelson’s novel *The Argonauts* is described by the publisher as “[a]n insistence on radical individual freedom”. An apt description for the novels attempts to disavow categorization through reflection on the impact categorization has had on her own life to date. Written shortly after the controversy of Proposition 8 which re-constituted the illegality of same-sex marriage in the state of California (HUSL Library), Nelson’s work is praised for its criticism of a “culture still too quick to ask people to pick a side—to be male or female, to be an assimilationist or a

revolutionary, to be totally straight or totally gay, totally hetero or totally homo-normative...” (Rooney, Chicago Tribune). As a mother who biologically carried a fetus, a step-mother, and queer-identifying woman married to a transgender man, Harry Dodge, Nelson has experienced categorization of her own and her loved one’s intersectional identities. The repressive nature of binary categorization has obliterated her and her family’s rights and has rendered them both indivisible and impossible in terms of social belonging. For Nelson specifically, categorization of her identity has brought her to feelings of “shame or befuddlement...[for] the person who keeps making all the wrong presumptions and has to be corrected, but who can’t be corrected because the words are not good enough. *How can the words not be good enough?*” (7). Nelson supposes that any attempt to categorize is incorrect due to the inherent limitations of words. She reflects on the correct or incorrect use of words that identify a person in one of Harry’s film projects, *By Hook or By Crook* in which “the butch characters would class each other ‘he’ and ‘him’, but in the outer world of grocery stores and authority figure, people would call them ‘she’ and ‘her’” (8). The point of the movie was not to demonstrate that, had the other characters been adequately informed of the butch characters identities, they would have used the correct identifiers. But rather that this would have created new and similarly problematic categories: “Because if the outsiders called the characters ‘he’, it would be a different kind of he...The answer isn’t just to introduce new words [. . .] and then set out to reify their meanings...One must also become alert to the multitude of possible uses, possible contexts, the wings with which each word can fly” (8). Nelson does not insist that we stop categorizing, but rather that we expand our collective understand of what the categories mean. There is a multitude of identities fall into he/him or she/her categories, but that do not fit the heteronormative prototype associated with such categories. While my paper does argue that using categorical identifiers to parse an identity is a

form of slow violence, I, like Nelson, maintain the understanding that to categorize is a learned experience unlikely to come to an end. In other words, if we adopt a kaleidoscopic perspective, it becomes possible for us see a multitude of uses, contexts, and meanings of categories and those who fit them.

Nelson and her partner Harry exist as queer and trans people respectively, they face countless attempts from those around them to categorize their identities and their shared identity as a couple. Nelson tells of “when the *New York Times* ran [Harry’s] piece on [his] art in 2008, the editor said [he] couldn’t appear in the pages unless [he] chose *Mr.* or *Ms.* [He’d] been waiting [his] whole life for this kind of recognition; now here it was, but with this price. ([He] chose *Ms.*, ‘to take one for the team’)” (137). Although the presence of heteronormative categorization in Harry’s having to choose between binary identifiers is unaccompanied by weapons and is unlikely to be perceived as violent, it certainly constitutes slow violence by Nixon’s definition. In pressuring the choice between binary pronouns with which Harry might not comfortably identify, slow, attritional violence is being perpetrated, where in “the conditions for sustaining life become increasingly but gradually degraded” (3) as the effects of heteronormative binaries create limiting conditions for the expansion of an individual’s identity. Here, Nelson touches on feminist relationality theory and its role in deconstructing gender binaries. Nelson also examines impositions of heteronormative binary categorization of her family structure. She recalls an interaction with a friend who categorized a picture of Nelson’s family on a mug as heteronormative:

Wow, my friend said... I've never seen anything so heteronormative in all my life. The photo on the mug depicts my family and me, all dressed up to go to the Nutcracker at Christmastime...But what about it is the essence of heteronormativity?... That we're

clearly participating. . . in a long tradition of families being photographed at holiday time in their holiday best? That my mother made me the mug, in part to indicate that she recognizes and accepts my tribe as family? What about my pregnancy-is that inherently heteronormative? . . . As more queers have kids, will the presumed opposition simply wither away? Will you miss it? (11-2)

Nelson argues that this perception is misguided, and it forces her to question binary categories, she poses that there is “something inherently queer about pregnancy itself, insofar as it profoundly alters one's "normal" state” (12). She wonders: “How can an experience so profoundly strange and wild and transformative also symbolize or enact the ultimate conformity?” (12). As a queer woman married to a transgender man, Nelson’s family is anything but heteronormative, and as she highlights, her pregnancy in and of itself is queer. As we can see, binary categorization imposes on an individual’s understanding of their own identity.

For this reason, heteronormativity, as a normative social construct, is a form of slow violence. As Nelson reflects on this moment, the hierarchy between heteronormative relationships and queer relationships is clear, as the socially accepted normal, heteronormative relationships have a higher social value than queer relationships.

In addition, to experiencing categorization of gender binaries, Nelson also experiences categorization as a parent or a specific type of parent. Categorization of parenthood in *The Argonauts* is supported by Christian and Dowler’s approach to slow violence. Nelson explores D.W. Winnicott’s theory of “‘good enough’ mothering” (19). This theory creates an exclusionary category in which mother’s forcibly conform to the subjective notion of being “good enough” (19). Nelson disavows this notion by asserting that “*When a mother has a capacity quite simply to be a mother we must never interfere*” (37). A concept that should be applied to all attempt at

categorization. Later Nelson references Julia Kristeva and explains that “[Single or lesbian motherhood] can be seen as [one] of the most violent forms taken by the rejection of the symbolic... as well as one of the most fervent divinizations of maternal power—all of which cannot help but trouble an entire legal and moral order” (78). While this duality does not fit the heteronormative binaries, single/dual parenthood, it does fit the homonormative binary, single/lesbian parenthood; as Nelson says: “homonormativity seems to me a natural consequence of the decriminalization of homosexuality” (73). Nelson goes on to explain that one third of American families are considered single-parent households, but that “the census doesn’t ask about two mothers or any other forms of kinship—If there is anyone in the house called mother and no father, then your household counts as single mother...” (78). Forcing the distinction between Mr. or Mrs., single parent or lesbian parent, and good or bad mothers, is a form of slow violence in that its effect is dispersed across time and space by reinforcing the use of harmful binaries that have shaped our society.

Supporting Texts of Categorization as a form of Slow Violence and its Effects

I turn now to bell hooks, a famed author, professor, and cultural critic whose work on love dovetails with this argument in interesting and generative ways. In 2001, hooks wrote *All About Love: New Visions*, an intra-personal theory of love and different categories of love. hooks holds several assertions throughout her theory, that “love is primarily a topic women contemplate with greater intensity and vigor than anyone else on the planet” (hooks xx), that “[m]en theorize about love, but women are more often love’s practitioners” (xx), and that “[m]ost men feel that they receive love and therefore know what it feels like to be loved; women often feel [they] are in a constant state of yearning, wanting love but not receiving it” (xx). However, hooks argues

that this is a proto-feminist notion and that by theorizing love, she disavows the categories previously limiting her as solely a practitioner of love. She says that “[s]omewhere along the way, in that passage from girlhood to womanhood, [she] learned females really had nothing serious to teach the world about love” (xxii), stemming from the sexist notion that has “lead a woman to feel she already knows what another woman will say. Such a reader may feel that she has more to gain by reading what mean have to say [about love]” (xxiv). hooks’s theory, therefore, has brought her to the understanding that everyone wants to love and be loved, but the issue hooks highlights, is that society lacks “a commonly held understanding of the meaning of love” (3). Leading hooks to her discussion of the different categories of love, she explains that since the act of loving is a chose and “since the choice must be made to nurture growth, this definition counters the more widely accepted assumption that we love instinctually” (5). In other words, hooks understand love to be a learned practice, that, by Contreras Kallens’s definition, would make love a social construct. Contreras Kallens pose in their theory that “[a]lthough it has been argued that some representations of categories are innate, the vast majority of categories we employ on a day-to-day basis are learned” (4). Therefore, we can conclude, that if neither love nor categories are innate, then they must be learned. Having established this, hooks goes on to provide different categories of love. She first defines romantic love as “profoundly tender, passionate affection for another person, especially when based on sexual attraction” (3). She then defines genuine love which is “a combination of care, commitment, trust, knowledge, responsibility, and respect” (7-8). She also points out that love can exists differently in a family structure, as well as between friends. However, her concern with these categories is that above all else, romantic love is social considered to be the most important type of love. She explains that while many consider family love to be the primary form of love, those “who do not learn

how to love among family are expected to experience love in romantic relationships” (xxviii) and that even “[d]ictionary definitions of love tend to emphasize romantic love” (3) above other forms of love. In other words, what hooks would instead like to emphasize, is that a commonly held understanding of love is unachievable, that because of our unique learned experiences, love, in any such form, cannot be experienced in a common fashion. Nelson holds a similar claim that pertains to sexuality, romantic relationships, and multi-faceted relationships in that they are individual experiences that cannot compare to any others; in her relationship with Harry, her relationships to her son and stepson, and her relationship to the authors she references, she expresses very different, but very real love for them all. Like hooks, Nelson struggles with the limitations of categorization in her life. She reflects in her writing on the fact that:

There are people out there who get annoyed at the story that Djuna Barnes, rather than identify as a lesbian, preferred to say that she ‘just loved Thelma.’ Gertrude Stein reputedly made similar claims about, albeit not in those exact terms, about Alice. I get why it’s politically maddening, but I’ve also always thought it a little romantic—the romance of letting an individual experience of desire take precedence over a categorical one (Nelson 9).

Additionally, Nelson reflects on similar experience she has had wherein she received unwanted attention on the specifics of her relationship with Harry. She tells of a time when a woman asked her: “‘So, have you been with other woman, before Harry?’ [Nelson] was taken aback. Undeterred, she went on: ‘Straight ladies have always been hot for Harry.’ Was Harry a woman? Was [she] a straight lady? What did past relationship [she’d] had with ‘other woman’ have in common with this one? Why did [she] have to think about other ‘straight ladies’ who were hot for [her] Harry?’” (Nelson 8). Nelson concludes that individual experience takes

precedence over categorical experiences as they pertain to love, sexuality, and relationships is in line with hooks's understanding that love should not conform to fixed social constructs of gender, sexuality, and gender roles. For hooks, an ideal understanding of love should be, as Nelson says, kaleidoscopic.

Social Hierarchy and Abjection

While categories simplify our interactions with the world, we often hierarchize these categories according to our individual bias. As categorization pertains to families and bodies, we have the tendency to hierarchize queer families and bodies lower than heterosexual and/or cis-gender families and bodies. In her work, Nelson addresses criticism that her family structure appears heteronormative, that her pregnancy, and pregnancy in general, is heteronormative. Nelson specifically addresses criticism she faces regarding the changes that her pregnancy has on the category that their new family structure fall into. Nelson recalls American writer and activist, Rita Mae Brown who "once tried to convince fellow lesbians to abandon their children in order to join the [queer liberation] movement" (75). Evidently frustrated by Brown's understanding that having children hinders one's ability to be an activist, Nelson cites Susan Fraiman's work, which identifies that this tendency to place "*femininity, reproduction, and normativity on one side and masculinity, sexuality, and queer resistance on the other*" (75) is a binary understanding of queer existence and as such, is a form of slow violence. Fraiman explains in further detail in her *Extreme Domesticity: A View from the Margins*, that domesticity has a quality of "doubleness" (Fraiman 19). Fraiman's own account of domesticity falls outside of the traditional; her research concerns "unorthodox (though not unusual) homemakers who, whether by choice or circumstance, fall outside the domestic ideal. Some rebut traditional 'family values' by

reinventing home in ways that are feminist, queer, or otherwise ‘improper’” (19). As a queer mother, this understanding evidentially resonates with Nelson as it accepts her lifestyle and queer family structures that include children. Brown’s binary perspective and those like it, villainizes queer people who choose to have children in their lives, whether or not they fight the “*queer resistance*” (Nelson 75). This is because they fall on the ‘wrong’ side of the binary spectrum and are thereby hierarchized lower than both queer people without children and heterosexual individuals both with and without children. In addition to queer families who fall outside traditional family structures, single mothers, Nelson notes, also fall outside traditional family structures; “[g]iven that one-third of American families are currently headed by single mothers [...], you’d think the symbolic order would be showing a few more dents by now” (78). While single mothers can be any intersectionality of mother, be they single, dating, divorced, queer, heterosexual, or any other variation, there are also queer couple who parent together that are considered single mothers. Nelson notes that “the census doesn’t ask about two mothers or any other forms of kinship—if there is anyone in the house called mother and no father, then your household counts as single mother” (78). Nelson finds support in her frustration about this disregard for queer couples and families with children in theorist and philosopher, Julia Kristeva. Nelson refers too Kristeva’s work from her book *Powers of Horror in Abjection*; Nelson interprets that:

[Single or lesbian motherhood] can be seen as [one] of the most violence forms taken by the rejection of the symbolic. . . as well as one of the most fervent divinations of maternal power—all of which cannot help but trouble an entire legal and moral order without, however, proposing an alternative to it (78).

Kristeva and Fraiman both refer to the socially acceptable heteronormative side of the binary that is traditional or, for Kristeva, “*symbolic*” (78). Kristeva’s understanding implies that not only do single or lesbian mothers fall to the wrong side of the, they take “*the most violen[t] form[]*” (78). Kristeva’s concept of abject also ties this paper’s discussion of slow violence nicely to queer motherhood. Abjection, for Kristeva, is something that “lies outside, beyond the set, and does not seem to agree to the latter’s rules of the game. And yet, from its place of banishment, the abject does not cease challenging its master” (Kristeva 2). In other words, to have a quality of abjection, a person, or, in this case their family and/or body, does not apply to the rules or expectations of the higher/est category in the structure of social hierarchy and at the same time, challenges those standards simply by being. For example, Nelsons non-traditional family and queer-pregnant body can be termed abject as they directly oppose traditional values and even some transphobic, patriarchal census surveys. To be abject however, is not necessarily a choice, it occurs by default creation of a hierarchical binary. If heteronormativity was hierarchized lower than queer or homonormativity, then heteronormativity could be considered abject by default. This is not to say that being abject is negative thing; abjection can be viewed as a form of resistance to the standards of the “set” (2) or higher hierarchical category. However, given that abjection is a product of hierarchy and binary categorization, it is also a product of slow violence. If we stopped hierarchizing or categorizing, though it simplifies our understandings of the world around us, we would not be able call something or someone abject.

In her discussion of her family structure, Nelson discusses changes in both her and Harry’s bodies during the time of Nelson’s pregnancy and Harry’s time taking testosterone (T) medication. She calls this time “the summer of our changing bodies. Me, four months pregnant,

you six months on T” (Nelson 79). Nelson questions a lot of the binary presumptions of pregnancy that she hears during this time. At one point she notes that:

Many women describe the feeling of having a baby come out of their vagina as taking the biggest shit of their lives. This isn’t really a metaphor. The anal cavity and the vaginal canal lean on each other; they, too, are the sex which is not one (83).

She then quickly notes that many women question whether their husbands will ever find them sexy again after watching them give birth. Nelson explains that this confused her as the “description of labour did not strike [her] as exceedingly distinct from what happens during sex, or at least some sex, or at least much of sex I had heretofore taken to be good” (84). The idea of comparing the vaginal canal and anal cavity, and giving birth and having sex enforces a binary distinction between the two sets of things. Like all binary categorization, a hierarchy is inherently formed. By noting that the vaginal canal and anal cavity are “the sex which is not one”, Nelson notes that though these two anatomical systems are a part of an individual’s sex, they are two separate workings. Similarly, both giving birth and having sex are two distinct acts or workings, but they can occur within that same sex. Nelson even contributes to the hierarchization of giving birth and having sex noting that the sex she’s experienced that could be compared to giving birth has been good, and thereby ranks higher than giving birth which she later calls a “pain luge” (128). Earlier in *The Argonauts*, Nelson notes that there is something “inherently queer about pregnancy” (13) and as a result, everything that happens to a pregnant body. She argues this as pregnancy “profoundly alters one’s ‘normal’ state, and occasions a radical intimacy with—and radical alienation from—one’s body[.]” (13). The idea of alienating one’s self from their body touches on an element of Kristeva’s theory of abjection which implies that being abject is a form of “sublime alienation, a forfeited existence” (Kristeva 9). The

implication of alienation being sublime somewhat clarifies Nelson's feeling of alienation. Nelson says that her sense of alienation separates her from her normal state. Because to be normal is associated with the highest hierarchical category or the traditional, anything outside of the normal is bad. But Kristeva's classification of alienation as sublime counteracts this binary understanding of normal by obscuring the hierarchical structuring placing non-normative below normative. This obscured understanding of non-normative as sublime provides a different lens through which to understand Harry's experience with their gender-affirming surgery recovery that occurs during the 2011 "summer of their changing bodies" (Nelson 79). Nelson illustrates that, post-surgery, Harry's torso was bound tightly by a bandage, "a drain hanging off each side, two pouches that filled up over and over again with blood stuff the colour of cherry Kool-Aid" (80). While Harry has altered his "normal" state by undergoing gender-affirming surgery, he has entered a non-normal state, that, Nelson explains he has found "new comfort in [his] skin" (85). This change could be understood, as occasioning a "radical intimacy with [...] one's body" (Kristeva 13). By exiting or changing his normal state, Harry is finding comfort and intimacy with his body, a similarly sublime understanding of the non-normative. In this way, Harry's abjection from what is normal, combats the slow violence of binary gender categories by resisting binary gender expectations.

Conclusion

Maggie Nelson's introspection has allowed me, and many other readers, to relate and reflect on Nelson's experience having her identity obscured by binary categorization. Her experiences and those of others in her life have allowed me to determine that categorization, specifically heteronormative binary categorization is a form of slow violence that is harmful to intersectional

identities. Through careful analysis of Maggie Nelson's experience with categorization of her intersectionality, body, and family this paper identifies that categorization is a learned practice and, when imposed upon intersectional queer identities and queer love, is a form of slow violence that reinforces a hierarchical structure by placing certain categories above others. Through additional support from bell hooks's *All About Love* which addresses the socially constructed hierarchy of love and Julia Kristeva's theory of abjection which addresses the ways that being other or non-normative resists hierarchization of identities, families, and bodies. With that, I have found that a kaleidoscopic perspective, as Nelson describes it, allows us to expand the binary, limiting categories that we've learned allowing for a more inclusive perspective of categorization.

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