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Between THE Lines TM

All Hands, No Pressure

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By Samuel Schwindt

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5 Queer Things You Can Do Right Now-ish

BY KELLI DUNHAM

If the January vibe of all the pressure and none of the joy hasn't been treating you right, maybe it's time for a pivot away from that "new year, new you" energy. Instead, check out one of these five events offering connection, creativity, pleasure and a few moments of intentional reset. Whether you are in need of music that heals religious trauma or psychic self-care, here are five options that don't demand you reinvent yourself.



Flamy Grant. Photo: IHCreates Media

Testify with Country Drag Star Flamy Grant

Award-winning and Billboard-charting drag queen Flamy Grant brings her powerful blend of country, folk, gospel and storytelling to Chelsea for a night that feels equal parts concert, cabaret and group exhalation. Grant's music takes on religious shame, queer survival and joy with humor, vulnerability and a voice that can stop a room cold. If you grew up steeped in church culture, let Grant remind you that healing can absolutely come with a great chorus and a little hip sway.

Feb. 4, 7 p.m., Chelsea Depot Association Inc. (125 Jackson St., Chelsea). bit.ly/flamygrantMI.



Build Leather Connections at the BLUF Monthly Meetup

If your idea of self-care includes community, confidence and the intoxicating smell of leather, the BLUF Detroit monthly meetup might be beckoning you. BLUF (the Breeches and Leather Uniform Fanclub) is an international organization for men who enjoy leather uniforms, with thousands of members worldwide and regular in-person events.

The February Detroit meetup (part of an ongoing series scheduled every second Saturday) offers music, social time and a chance to connect with others who take style, tradition and camaraderie seriously. Their dress code goes way beyond the "dress to impress, no llama themed novelty tee shirts" vibe, so double check the details on the website to avoid being turned away at the door.

Feb. 14, 5–8 p.m., Halo (8070 Greenfield Rd., Detroit). bit.ly/bluffeb.



Refresh Your Spirit with Psychic Self-Care

Looking for some inner-world exploration to go with your dry January? Ferndale Pride's annual Psychic Self-Care Party is indulgent, intentional and entirely alcohol-free. Guests receive a private psychic reading, participate in intention-setting rituals, enjoy music and drag performances, and leave with a generously packed goodie bag.

"This year, we have new drag queens and kings bringing entertainment and meet-and-greet-style chats," Julia Music, Ferndale Pride executive director, told BTL. "The psychics at the Boston Tea Room always give accurate readings, and we're excited for folks to join us."

Jan. 23, 6–9 p.m., Boston Tea Room (1220 Woodward Heights, Ferndale). bit.ly/psychicselfcare.





Warm Up Winter at Sapphic Social: Girls in Winterland

Midwest Sapphic Society kicks off the year with a joyful, high-energy night created intentionally for lesbians, queer women and sapphic-aligned nonbinary folks. This winter edition features live music, burlesque, dancing and DJs who understand that queer joy is serious business. You can come dressed in frosty glam or cozy chic, but expect to leave warmer than when you arrived.

Bonus: Girls In Wonderland also features an attendee arm-wrestling contest, which may be the best salve the universe (or the Midwest Sapphic Society) could offer the confused, homoerotically inclined seventh grader still lurking inside many of us.

Jan. 31, 6 p.m., *The Loving Touch* (22634 Woodward Ave., Ferndale). bit.ly/sapphicsocialwinter.

4



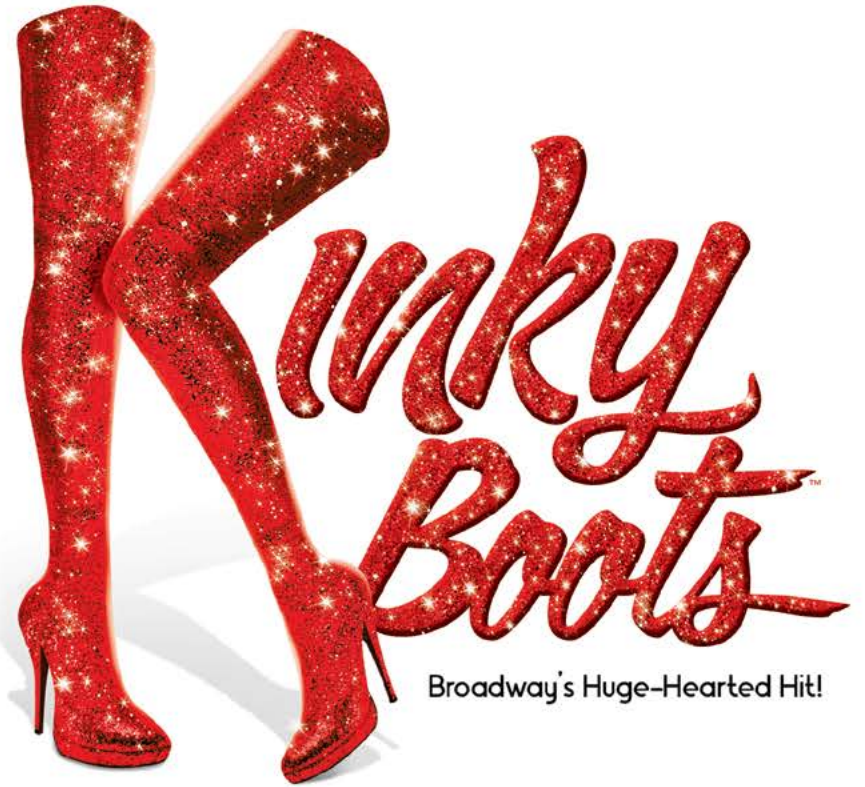
Alarm Yourself Against Seasonal Distress

If doom-scrolling has slipped from unpleasant habit to self-bullying, take your beautiful queer soul to an actual store that sells actual alarm clocks. Test out the different options. Spend your hard-earned money on a wind-up model that can't tell you anything about the state of the world beyond what time it is in that world. Plug in your phone across the room tonight.

There may be no ethical consumption under capitalism, but if 13 bucks can buy you a good night's sleep, that's a beautiful investment in our collective survival.

5

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Why Jeremy Moss Won't Be Bringing a Pie Chart to a Knife Fight as He Runs for U.S. Congress

Michigan's first openly gay state senator on why boldness wins, why marriage equality isn't settled and what Democrats need to do in 2026

BY SARAH BRICKER HUNT

When I spoke with Jeremy Moss in November, he was weeks into recovering from a car accident that shattered his dominant arm. Another driver ran a red light, he hit her head-on, and the impact sent him to the hospital for surgery and several days of recovery. His car was totaled. Doctors told him it could take three months to get back to where he was.

"My arm was honking at the very last minute, and with the impact and the airbag and everything, I shattered the bone," Moss explains during our interview, his arm still in a splint he wore nearly 24 hours a day. At the time, he couldn't drive and was dependent on other people to shuttle him around town.

Did this mean Jeremy Moss was finally slowing down?

He laughs. "I guess so."

But only a little. The Southfield Democrat has since made significant progress in his recovery, and he never really stopped working anyway. He's running for Michigan's 11th Congressional District, the seat currently held by Democratic U.S. Rep. Haley Stevens, who's running for Senate. He's leading the charge to remove Michigan's same-sex marriage ban from the state constitution. And he's making the case that Democrats need to fundamentally change their approach heading into 2026.

"The Democratic Party can no longer be the party that shows up to the knife fight with a pie chart," Moss says. "People are counting on us to be stronger, to be bolder, to fight back harder."

If you've followed Moss's career, this tracks. Whether he's confronting anti-LGBTQ+ Republicans from the front row of their own press conferences or making the economic case for civil rights protections to skeptical colleagues, Moss doesn't traffic in political theater. He just shows

up and does the work — loudly, persistently and with a Southfield-born stubbornness that refuses to take no for an answer.

One of the senator's targets in 2026 focuses on marriage equality, which exists in Michigan for only one reason: the 2015 Obergefell v. Hodges Supreme Court decision. The discriminatory language from Michigan's 2004 constitutional ban is still sitting right there in the state constitution, waiting.

reproductive freedom after Roe was overturned. His role as a legislator involves trying for a two-thirds vote in both the Senate and House to put the marriage equality question on the ballot. He's also encouraging others to launch a citizen-led ballot initiative, though he won't lead that effort himself.

The stakes are real. "Marriage equality in Michigan only exists because of Obergefell and nothing else," Moss explains. "I think it's

sex marriages would be able to be conducted and performed."

In this post-Roe world, Moss argues, nothing is settled law. "Everything is up to the whims of a future court that is demonstrated they will roll back anybody's rights. So we have to push forward to take this language out of our constitution, so that we are not leaving same-sex couples vulnerable in Michigan."

And surprisingly, he's finding

rights," he says. "It is important to strip LGBTQ+ equality from political gamesmanship and partisanship. All people in all communities stand to gain when we're all treated equally."

They secured bipartisan votes in both chambers — all Democrats and some Republicans in the Senate, all Democrats and some Republicans in the House. His strategy for building that support came from an unexpected place: listening to Republicans during the pandemic. He heard conservative colleagues emphasize how work provides fulfillment and contributes to economic productivity during shutdown debates, and he flipped that argument to advocate for LGBTQ+ workplace protections.

"For listening to kind of a chorus of Republicans talk about how people need to get back to work through 2020 and 2021, I think I was able to make the case that includes LGBTQ+ people and they need to be protected in our state's civil rights law — because some folks are just being fired or denied opportunities just because of how they identify and that also contributes to mental anguish for them personally, but also harms our economy as a whole," he says.

Moss believes marriage equality enjoys even broader support. "I think marriage enjoys even more support across the political spectrum," he says. "And I want this to not be seen as a partisan or political issue. This is just the right thing to do."

Moss's work on Elliott-Larsen has earned him recognition from LGBTQ+ advocates, including the Michigan Democratic Party LGBT&A Caucus. Jerron Totten, caucus chair, says Moss "has definitely been a force in the state Senate" and praised his leadership on updating the Elliott-Larsen Civil Rights Act and gun reform.

As Moss moves toward Congress, Totten says the caucus expects him to remain "just as proactive on the

“

You can't wait for anyone else to stand up for you. You have to stand up for yourself. If enough of us are willing to stand up for ourselves, we can make a difference together.

— State Sen. Jeremy Moss

When Moss introduced legislation in November to remove it, the urgency was clear. Months earlier, he'd made national headlines for confronting state Rep. Josh Schriver at a press conference where the Republican lawmaker called for the federal repeal of same-sex marriage equality. Moss planted himself in the front row, refused to look away, then commandeered the microphone after Schriver bolted without taking questions.

"It was very important to me that if people like Josh Schriver and others want to inflict harm upon our community, that they're going to have to see the faces of real people who are impacted," Moss says.

Now he's pushing a proactive solution, taking a page from Michigan's multi-pronged approach to protecting

important for people to know that we are one of those states that still has this language in our constitution that Obergefell deemed unconstitutional and unenforceable, but that language still exists. And it's not just a ban on marriage, it's a ban on any form of union between a same-sex couple. We have a civil union ban in our constitution."

The 2022 Respect for Marriage Act protects existing same-sex marriages, but it wouldn't prevent Michigan's ban from taking effect for new marriages. "If this language were to snap back, if Obergefell fell and then we had this language in our constitution, no new marriage licenses would be able to be issued in Michigan," Moss says. "We would recognize marriages from other states where they're lawful, but Michigan would be a state that no same-

bipartisan support — just like he did with the Elliott-Larsen Civil Rights Act.

When Moss championed adding sexual orientation and gender identity protections to Michigan's Elliott-Larsen Civil Rights Act, Lansing insiders told him he'd never get Republican support. He disagreed.

"I had kind of the chattering class in Lansing saying, 'You'll never get Republican support, this just will never happen,'" Moss recalls. "And I said, 'I'm telling you, if this goes up on the board, there will be Republican support.'"

He was right. When Democrats gained control in 2022, Elliott-Larsen was among the first bills introduced. Democrats could have passed it alone, but Moss didn't want that.

"I didn't want there to be some sort of partisan lens on LGBTQ+

issues that impact minorities and intersectional folks” — and will be paying attention to ensure his priorities stay aligned with the community’s values.

Moss announced his congressional campaign in May for Michigan’s 11th Congressional District, where he’s already represented about half the constituents as a state senator. The conversations he’s having now center on pocketbook issues and the erosion of democratic norms.

“I hear from the constituents in the congressional district now primarily about their alarm and anguish both with our economy and this unpredictable chaotic tariff policy and other driven chaos that is leading to high costs of everything from groceries to just everyday things you’d buy at the mom and pop store,” Moss says. “It’s really challenging for folks to be able to deal with rising costs.”

Healthcare remains both a health issue and a cost issue, he notes, particularly when Trump threatens food assistance programs and looms over Social Security and Medicare. “People are really worried about their financial futures. I hear it and I feel it too.”

Democracy concerns weigh heavily too. “We have a president who breaks and abuts the rule of law,” Moss says. “We have a Congress and a judiciary that rubber stamps some of his most authoritarian measures. And I really truly in my core believe that this Congress needs disruption. And if we can take back the U.S. House, which is within reach, and many of those seats come right through here in Michigan, we can be the much-needed check on policies that both dismantle families’ pocketbooks and dismantle our democracy as a whole.”

Moss believes Oakland County’s political transformation makes the area especially attractive for Democrats to grow their base. He recalls campaigning for reelection to the state Senate in traditionally Republican areas like Bloomfield and hearing from voters who said after Jan. 6, “I am never voting Republican again,” or “Yeah, we’ll take a Democratic lawn sign. This is the first year we’re ever doing this.”

That track record has earned

Moss significant support in the race, including an early endorsement from Gov. Gretchen Whitmer. “Jeremy Moss is a tough, tested leader who fights like hell every day to make Michiganders’ lives better,” said Gov. Whitmer in her endorsement for Moss last fall. “As a member of Congress, I know he will stand up for working families, lower costs for Michiganders and fight for our freedoms.”

Moss has proven to be one of the most effective legislators in Lansing, with Whitmer signing 23 of his bills into law on issues ranging from housing affordability to economic relief. He’s also secured endorsements from Secretary of State Jocelyn Benson, Attorney General Dana Nessel and U.S. Rep. Kristen McDonald Rivet.

Still, he’s realistic about what Democrats face, even while pointing out that Trump’s 2024 victory was hardly the mandate some characterized it as.

“Donald Trump won a 49-48 victory,” Moss says. “And I think we can even acknowledge that, in 2024, everything went wrong for Democrats, from Joe Biden’s campaign to the 107 days that Kamala Harris [had to] cobble together a campaign — and everything went right for Donald Trump. And he still won a 49-48 victory.”

The problem? “I think too many Democrats started the year in 2025 believing that we were losers. And when you have that loser energy, it kind of predicts your future.”

What Democrats need, Moss argues, matches Republican energy with their own boldness — and talks about their accomplishments with confidence.

“Donald Trump and congressional Republicans talk about the things that they’re doing with brazen confidence even though they know it is unpopular to kick people off of food assistance. It is unpopular to reduce folks’ health care. It is stupid to rename the Gulf of Mexico,” Moss says. “But we have to be a party that also talks about the things we’re doing with brazen confidence because the things that we’re doing are good.”

He rattles off Michigan Democrats’ accomplishments, including the first gun safety laws in a generation, returning a billion dollars to taxpayers by removing the pension tax and expanding a working families tax credit, codifying reproductive freedom and LGBTQ+ rights and investing in K-12 education.

“We should be crowing about these achievements. We should be standing up with brazen confidence to put forward the things that we’ve accomplished,” Moss says. “We have to match their energy with our energy. And I’m somebody who’s

demonstrated that I’ve done that in the legislature and willing to do that as a member of Congress as well.”

Democrats are only five seats away from a majority in the U.S. House, and Michigan will be crucial. Moss mentions several other key races to watch, including state Sen. Shawn McCann’s effort to flip a seat in West Michigan and the need to defend U.S. Rep. Kristen McDonald Rivet in the Flint-Bay City-Saginaw area.

“The road to majority absolutely comes right through Michigan,” Moss says. “I’m ready to build and grow our majority here in

Oakland County and then take that energy across the state to ensure that we flip seats here in our state to bring about a Democratic majority and a much-needed check on Donald Trump in Congress.”

The approach is rooted in the same lesson Moss took from the 2004 election as an 18-year-old who watched Michigan voters ban same-sex unions in the state constitution and wondered if he even had a future at all.

“You can’t wait for anyone else to stand up for you. You have to stand up for yourself,” Moss says. “If enough of us are willing to stand up for ourselves, we can make a difference together.”

And if his trajectory is any indication — from Southfield City Council to the state House to becoming Michigan’s first openly gay state senator to now running for Congress — he’s not waiting for anyone’s permission.

“If I have a platform,” Moss says, “I’m going to use it.”



Jeremy Moss. Photo: Michigan Democratic Party

The Free Podcast Preserving Queer History

Five years into ‘The Gayest Generation,’ the Ann Arbor District Library’s podcast remains essential listening

BY SARAH BRICKER HUNT

Here’s what you need to know about “The Gayest Generation” podcast: It will make you laugh and break your heart, and somewhere between those moments, you’ll realize you’re hearing queer history in a way you never have before — straight from the people who lived it, in their own voices, unfiltered.

Jacob Gorski stumbled into this work the way most important things happen — by accident and at exactly the right time. In 2019, his mother was president of the Saginaw chapter of PFLAG, and Gorski tagged along to a meeting. “The folks who came to this particular chapter were primarily older adults,” he remembers. “Getting to know them and to hear their stories and to be able to have access to the queer history in this way was a huge moment for me.”

The revelation hit him: These stories needed to be recorded. Lucky for everyone, the Ann Arbor District Library, where Gorski works, was building a podcast studio and looking for pitches. Five years and 18 episodes later, “The Gayest Generation” has become something more than an oral history project. It’s become proof that queer people have always been here, have always loved, have always survived.

Take Episode 1, which featured Pat, a woman Gorski met through those PFLAG meetings. Her love story — falling for her partner while working on the line at a Michigan auto plant in the ’70s and ’80s, her partner being a trans woman who transitioned while working there — immediately set the tone for what the podcast would become. “It really proved, which is something we all knew, that queer people, trans people, we have been here the whole time,” Gorski says. Pat’s natural storytelling ability made that first episode sing, and Gorski still recommends starting there.

From there, the podcast has ranged across decades and experiences. Episode 13, released in March 2024, features Thomas McCauley sharing his survival of inpatient conversion therapy — a story that feels urgently relevant as anti-LGBTQ+ politicians openly discuss bringing back such practices. But here’s what makes Gorski’s approach so effective: Thomas’s episode isn’t just trauma. “He’s also so fun to talk to and just has a certain energy and vibe where we’re talking about the traumas he experienced, but we’re also talking about the joys and we’re talking about



how life is funny and silly and mysterious,” Gorski explains.

Episode 12 captured a conversation with Kathy Kozachenko, one of the first openly LGBTQ+ people elected to public office in American history, discussing her time on Ann Arbor City Council. Episode 15 brought Roger LeLievre’s wild ride through Ann Arbor’s queer nightlife heyday, his time as a DJ at The Nectarine Ballroom (now Necto), and the time he almost killed Sylvester. Episode 11 featured Curtis Chin talking about growing up in Detroit’s legendary Chung’s Restaurant. The most recent episode, Episode 18 with Michael Brown, explores being the gay son of a trans parent and how coming out can feel like casting a magical spell.

There’s no formal selection process and no gatekeeping about who gets to tell their story. Gorski reaches out, gets to know people, and if recording feels right, that’s what they do. Some guests come through partnerships with organizations like the LGBTQ Victory Fund. Others are just folks with stories to share. “I’m really reaching out to everybody in the community any way I can, trying to find these stories and to share them with the public at large,” he says.

Why it matters right now

What makes podcasting the perfect vehicle for these stories? “I think you get to hear them speak for themselves,” Gorski says. “Podcasts are also about listening and I think we have to listen to these stories. The act of listening, it is transgressive, it is progressive.”

That simple act — listening — creates something powerful for people on both sides of the microphone. Guests have told Gorski how moving it is to hear their finished episodes, to have their lives treated as worthy of documentation. And listeners? “I know that there are listeners out there who feel less alone, whether they be teens, 20s, older adults, when they listen to an episode,” Gorski says. “And I’m just so proud and lucky to be a cog in that machine.”

The podcast’s impact reaches across generations. These stories are being archived for people 100 years from now, but they’re speaking directly to the 16-year-old kid in rural Michigan who thinks they’re the only queer person in their town’s history. They’re connecting with the 30-something who wants to understand their community better


and the straight elder who needs to hear that their LGBTQ+ peers have been here all along.

After five years, Gorski still gets that rush. “I’ve been doing it for years now and there’s still a sense of awe,” he says. “I hope I don’t ever lose that sense of awe. And what a gift.”

The Gayest Generation is available wherever you get your podcasts and on aadl.org, courtesy of the Ann Arbor District Library. There’s no subscription and no paywall — just click play and connect with your history. And if you’re an LGBTQ+ older adult with a story to share? Gorski wants to hear from you. Reach out to thegayestgeneration@aadl.org — even if you’re just curious about what being a guest involves, he’s happy to chat.

Because in the end, that’s what “The Gayest Generation” is really about: making connections across time, across generations, across the silence that tried to erase queer existence. One conversation at a time, one story at a time, proving we’ve always been here.

This content is made possible through our partnership with the Ann Arbor District Library. Learn more about The Gayest Generation podcast at aadl.org/gayestgeneration.

The Gayest Generation podcast cover features the title in a black serif font on a bright yellow background, enclosed in a black rectangular frame. A small black square with a white sunburst icon is in the bottom right corner of the frame.

The Gayest Generation

The Gayest Generation is where LGBTQ older adults speak for themselves. Every episode, we sit down with a different member of the LGBTQ community who laid the foundation for the freedoms we have today.

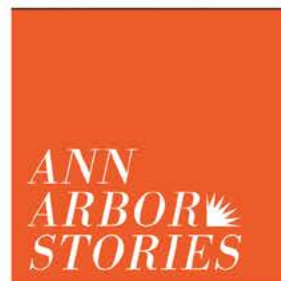
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How ‘Stranger Things’ Showed Me the Courage I Needed as a Queer Kid in Small-Town Michigan

The gut-wrenching scene that showed this writer what it means to finally stop being afraid

BY SOPHIA VALCHINE

I felt tears welling up the instant Will Byers started stumbling over his words. “I don’t like girls...,” he choked out. “I mean, I do. Just not like you guys do.” By the time he finished speaking, I was openly crying with him, moved by the nuanced, emotional work from actor Noah Schnapp in the last episode before the “Stranger Things” finale.

Since season one, the creators of the show, brothers Mark and Ross Duffer, have been planting seeds hinting at Will’s queerness. Finally, in season five, he finds the courage to come out to all of his friends and family. The fact that Schnapp himself came out as gay during the run of “Stranger Things” added another layer to this moment — there are fans like me who grew up alongside these actors, and watching one of them proudly represent himself as part of the LGBTQ+ community struck a chord that resonated beyond the show itself.

But for Will Byers, coming out is never just about coming out. It quite literally could mean the end of the world.

Will’s biggest motivation comes from his psychic connection to main antagonist Vecna and the visions Vecna showed him. Vecna filled Will’s thoughts with fear about how his friends would react: They’d be worried for him, they’d all drift apart and Will would be alone.

Listening to him say all of this reminded me of how I had those same fears, only without the pressure from an interdimensional villain. This was a smart way to incorporate a queer storyline without removing it completely from the plot and risk having it feel out of place.

In the scene itself, Will sits down with the entire main cast, which I would find incredibly nerve-wracking. He starts by talking about happy memories with his best friends; they’re very rooted in the ’80s, but it’s easy for viewers



Noah Schnapp as Will Byers in the fifth season of “Stranger Things.” Photo: Netflix

to put themselves in their shoes no matter their age and imagine sweet childhood memories.

I understood how tense and terrifying the moment was for Will as I watched it, and it reminded me of how I felt when I came out to my family. Schnapp perfectly captured the anxiety, fear and the tendency to ramble on in anticipation of awkward silence. It felt like I was right there with him. I had the same jolt of anxiety when Will began to speak, but I also felt a sense of solidarity. Here was someone like me who was brave enough to share their true self with their loved ones.

Seeing myself in Hawkins, Indiana

I really connected to the small Midwest town aspect of this show. The characters all live in the fictional town of Hawkins, Indiana, which reminded me a lot of where I grew up in Southern Michigan. When you’re

surrounded by cornfields and the nearest mall is 45 minutes away, of course you play Dungeons & Dragons with your friends. That’s just what you do.

When it comes to navigating queerness in a place like this, it’s so important to find others who understand how you’re feeling. I found this community in my high school theater program. All of us found further comfort in movies, TV shows and video games that feature queer characters, and having other people to talk to about this media really brought us together.

I wonder what would have happened if Will was a theater kid.

Connection and laughter matter in moments like these. I’m glad the scene didn’t play as incredibly serious and sad the entire time because that’s not what a coming out should have to feel like.

Another thing Will talks about is not wanting to be different. “Different” takes up so much room in my head as a queer person — it overshadows so many interactions

I have and makes me feel isolated in certain social situations where I know I’m in the minority. And, like Will said, it makes me feel like there’s something wrong with me.

But for Will, being confident and open about being different gives him the power, literally and figuratively, to defeat Vecna. If he can do that, then maybe I can feel more confident in myself too.

Also in Will’s confession is the first time he confirms his crush on his best friend, Mike Wheeler, after the prior season full of shared glances and multiple attempts to reach out. But in the end, he realizes that Mike will never have romantic feelings towards Will, and that is something he has finally accepted.

For the members of the “Stranger Things” fandom who create art and fan fiction about Will and Mike having feelings for each other, this was a crushing moment. I was one of them, but my reaction was not one of rejection or anger.

I wanted to see a gay relationship

in a show that had over 1.2 billion viewers overall just as much as everyone else, but as I got past the initial sadness and thought more about the setting and Mike’s character, I came to accept that they never were meant to be romantic.

We did, however, get to see Will and the only other queer character, Robin Buckley, interact and bond over their shared experiences. Having role models like this is another incredibly important resource to have while navigating through what seems like a whole new, unfamiliar world.

I had this in the form of my upperclassmen in high school, and to see Will have this connection with Robin really warmed my heart.

Will ends his monologue by saying that he’s ready to show Vecna he’s not afraid anymore, and I took that to heart. Not that I’m going to defeat some agent of evil, but that I’m going to continue on with the courage to be exactly who I am, without fear.

The Social Psychology Behind the Trans Terrorism Panic

How Americans are manipulated by online misinformation and political rhetoric

BY JELINDA MONTES

This story was originally written for Gay Times Magazine and appeared on Uncloseted Media.

Joseph McConville's first memory of being online was at 13 years old when he started playing Neopets, a virtual pet game, at his home in Boynton Beach, Fla. At the time, he had no clue that just months later, the internet would suck him into the alt-right.

As a young, white man, McConville says he was taught to believe that he'd have everything he wanted.

He started to realize this dream wouldn't come to fruition when he was pulled out of private school as his parents struggled during the 2008 recession.

McConville quickly graduated from kids games to popular social media sites like Myspace and Facebook. But it was when he found FunnyJunk.com in ninth grade that he started being exposed to alt-right content.

The website gave users the ability to upload memes and upvote popular content. When McConville began using it, he was initially exposed to dark humor and edgy right-wing memes.

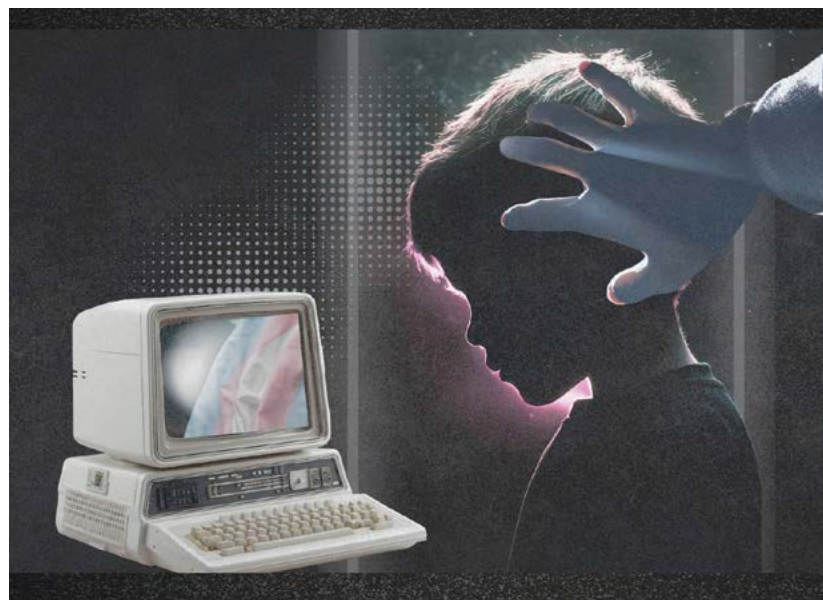
He then migrated to 4chan, a website known for hosting anonymous, fringe, right-wing communities, where he started engaging with content used to stoke extremist meaning — pushing us vs. them narratives that alienated McConville from his multicultural South Florida community.

"Everyone else is wrong. ... These guys are right. These guys get it," says McConville. The deeper he got, the more anger he felt — especially towards transgender people.

"It's all a psyop ... there's a big trans psyop to destroy manhood," McConville remembers believing for nearly a decade. "It's all about making men hate themselves, to become women, to weaken the American hegemony."

McConville, now 30, eventually found his way out of the alt-right world around 2018 when he was deradicalized by a friend who had previously been a part of the community.

But since then, the pervasiveness



Design by Sophie Holland.

of this thinking has grown. What was once conspiratorial thinking on fringe websites has now become commonplace. "The [2016] Trump election changed a lot of things, it all became serious," McConville told Uncloseted Media and Gay Times. "You feel like, 'Wow, we're actually being listened to — we're changing the mainstream talking points.'"

Transgender Americans have been one of the biggest targets of this alt-right rhetoric, and it's effective. Since 2022, Americans have increased their favorability towards laws limiting protections for trans people and have become less favorable towards policies safeguarding them.

This change in public perception may be because of the growing claims that falsely link transgender people as perpetrators of mass violence and domestic terrorism. After Charlie Kirk's death in September, these narratives reached a boiling point.

But how did Americans get taken to believe this anti-LGBTQ lie? And what does it say about how people can be brainwashed to hate?

Who's pushing the false link between trans people and domestic terrorism?

One reason many Americans began to believe that trans people are more likely to be linked to terrorism is

because trusted sources in mainstream conservative spaces are telling them it's true. Even though the overwhelming majority of mass shooters are cisgender men, the Heritage Foundation, notably behind Project 2025, recommended the FBI create a category of domestic terrorism called Transgender Ideology-Inspired Violent Extremism, which suggests transgender people pose an imminent threat.

"I think some people know that this is false, but push it," Thekla Morgenroth, a professor of psychology at Purdue University, told Uncloseted Media and Gay Times. "It's worth giving false information if you get people on your side and support your opinion, and I think that is malicious."

Unlike when McConville was in the alt-right, many of the people behind the rhetoric today hold powerful positions in the government. After a shooting in August at a Minnesota Catholic school perpetrated by a transgender person, Rep. Lauren Boebert falsely said there was a "pattern of transgender violence in our country." Trump officials and other members of Congress used this as an excuse to attack gender-affirming care. And Harmeet Dhillon, an assistant

See **Trans Panic**, page 22

An advertisement for JAN DOOR garage doors. At the top, it says "EXPERIENCE" and "PROGRESS" with a logo of a person's head. The main text reads "JAN DOOR Providing Quality Garage Doors & Service in Metro Detroit". Below this is a "Before" and "After" comparison of a garage door. The "After" image shows a more modern, green garage door. Below the images, it says "Cold weather is here. Make sure your garage door is ready for the season!". The main offer is "\$110 Residential Garage Door Tune-Up includes spring tension check, door function test, and lubrication." Below that, it says "24 Hour Emergency Service Available!" with a phone icon and the number "313-581-7300". At the bottom, there is a globe icon and the website "www.jandoor.com". The background is white with blue snowflake patterns.

An advertisement for Shop LGBTQ+. It features a yellow background with a rainbow flag and a hand holding a transgender flag. The text "Shop LGBTQ+" is written in white, and "PRIDESOURCE.COM" is written in black below it.

Abolish ICE for Good



BY D'ANNE WITKOWSKI

I have been dreading writing this column all week. There are so many things I'd rather be doing: laundry, taxes, prepping for a colonoscopy. I just really don't want to write. Not this, anyway. Not right now.

And yet, I have a deadline and an obligation. So here goes.

Let me start off by saying that we need to abolish ICE. I'm hearing lots of chatter about how ICE needs more, better training. No, they do not. The issue with ICE killing people isn't one of training any more than the issue of the Gestapo killing people was one of training. The purpose of ICE, much like that of the Gestapo, is to terrorize, imprison and murder citizens who have been deemed less than human by a blood-thirsty regime.

What is it people imagine would happen if ICE officers had more training? With more training they could, what? Terrorize, imprison and murder more effectively?

Gosh, if only Jonathan Ross had gotten the proper training he would never have murdered Renee Good. Too bad they set an inexperienced newbie loose with a gun in Minnesota.

Except Ross was hardly some untrained rube. Ross was "a veteran deportation officer in ICE's Enforcement and Removal Operations division," Wired reports. "A

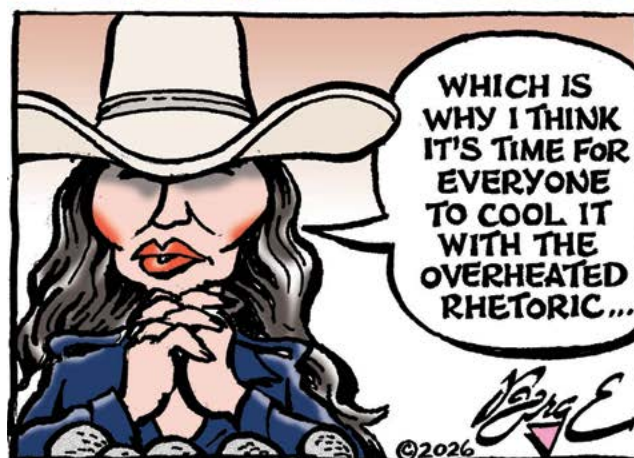


A vigil for Renee Good at a Jan. 10 Detroit protest against ICE. Photo: Judy Oldfield Wilson

member of a Special Response Team, ICE's version of a SWAT team, he's had duties as a firearms trainer and led teams drawn from multiple federal agencies including the FBI."

See? Not exactly his first day on the job. We're looking at a well-trained, fully professional murderer.

Furthermore, the Department of Homeland Security



told Wired that Ross "acted according to his training."

Except, Mother Jones reports, "For decades, cops have been trained not to shoot at moving vehicles." And yet, ICE keeps doing it.

"At least nine people across the country who have been shot by immigration agents since September," according to Mother Jones, "were in a vehicle at the time of the shooting."

Wow, what a very strange coincidence.

As I write this, ICE agents are still terrorizing citizens in Minnesota. They still have the full support of Trump, Dalmatian aficionado Cruella de Noem (who some Democrats are moving to impeach, but with a Republican-controlled House that is unlikely to go very far) and the majority of Republicans.

Any Democrat demanding anything other than abolishing ICE and pursuing criminal charges is fucking weak and is helping to prop up fascism.

As Andrew Lawrence, deputy director of rapid response at Media Matters, so helpfully pointed out on Bluesky, "They abolished the department of education, we do not need a trojan horse to abolish ICE, we can just do it."

The Department of Education was created in 1979. And the Trump Administration just got rid of it.

ICE, on the other hand, on top of actually being a real and present danger to the country, is much, much younger. It was established in 2003 by the same federal government that lied to the country to start a war in Iraq.

It's actually not hard to imagine life before ICE for the

majority of Americans.

"When you are asked to imagine a world without ICE, you're basically being asked to remember where you were when Lilo & Stitch came out," author Madiba Dennie helpfully posted on Bluesky.

ICE, we were told in 2003, would keep us safe. I don't know about you, but when I see videos of ICE terrorizing people across the country, I don't feel safe. I don't feel safe at all.

There exist many videos of Renee Good being executed by Jonathan Ross. One of them is from Ross's own cell phone camera. In that video, we hear Good say, "I'm not mad at you" shortly before Ross fires three times just inches away from her head. Afterwards he can be heard saying, "Fucking bitch."

I do not recommend watching that video. Or any of the videos. They are all stomach-turning. But don't turn away from the fact that this happened. And that it will happen again and again.

President Trump, Vice President Vance, everyone at DHS, right-wing commentators — they all want you to believe that Renee Good had it coming. They are literally calling her a domestic terrorist. Claiming she tried to run over Ross with her car. There's more than enough video evidence to show that is not at all what happened.

Renee Good was a mom. She was a wife. She was a poet. She had a dog. She saw ICE as a threat to her neighbors. She was standing up for something she believed in. She was not there to harm anyone.

To Ross she was a "fucking bitch" and someone he had every right to kill.

It could have been any one of us. It will be again.

THE SCROLL

QUICK HITS & CAN'T MISSES

Trans Americans Fleeing Red States in Historic Numbers

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An estimated 400,000 transgender people have moved to different states since the 2024 presidential election, driven by increasingly hostile anti-trans legislation and discrimination, according to a new poll from the Movement Advancement Project and NORC.

The survey of over 1,000 LGBTQ+ households found 9% of trans respondents had relocated since the election — a striking migration representing roughly one in 11 trans Americans seeking safer states. With transgender people making up approximately 1.3% of the U.S. population, the 9% figure translates

to more than 400,000 individuals.

The reasons are stark. More than half of trans respondents — 56% — reported facing discrimination because of their gender identity, while 47% experienced in-person harassment. Nearly a quarter said they were mistreated by their own local or state governments.

The migration extends beyond the trans community. An additional 1.5 million non-transgender LGBTQ+ people have also changed states since the election, citing similar concerns about harassment and discrimination.

This movement builds on patterns documented in earlier surveys. A 2023 Data for Progress study found comparable numbers of trans people relocating in response to state-level anti-trans legislation, suggesting this exodus has been underway for several years.



Detroit LGBT Chamber Launches Entrepreneur Program

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The Detroit Regional LGBT Chamber of Commerce is now accepting applications for the spring cohort of its Queer Equity Impact Program, a 12-week hybrid business accelerator designed to help LGBTQ+ entrepreneurs strengthen and scale their businesses.

The program runs Feb. 10 through May 12 and includes guided business plan development, pitch deck creation, expert-led sessions and peer support. Participants will receive chamber membership, opportunities for grants and eligibility for LGBTQ+ business certification.

Two program graduates will compete in a live pitch competition at next year's COLOURS Pride Awards Gala for cash prizes. Applications for the spring session close Jan. 30. Apply at bit.ly/queerimpact.

First-Ever Lansing Pride Leather Contest Opens

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Applications open Feb. 1 for Lansing Pride's first leather contest, bringing a new dimension to the queer community in Michigan's capital. The two-

day event is set for April 3-4 at The Studio at 414 in downtown Lansing.

Organizers Derek James and Kenny Dollins III, both Lansing Pride board advisors, designed the competition to be welcoming and accessible. The contest is gender neutral and doesn't require full leather attire, lowering traditional barriers to entry.

"Any way that you can bring the community

closer by having fun, I think is just a great thing," James told BTL. "Throwing events where people can really embrace who they are as individuals and maybe step outside their comfort zone and express who they are comfortably and publicly is a huge step for a lot of people."

The competition is open to anyone 21 and older, and proceeds will support Lansing Pride. Find out more at lansingpride.org/leatherpride.

Affirmations Hosts Wigtacular Open House

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Affirmations, Ferndale's LGBTQ+ community center, invites the community to its Wigtacular Open House on Jan. 29, from 6 to 9 p.m. The low-pressure evening features information tables about groups and programs, opportunities to meet staff and group leaders, light refreshments and a best-wig contest. Wigs are optional, but queer joy is guaranteed. Learn more at goaffirmations.org/event/open-house.

AADL Seeks TDOV Zine Submissions

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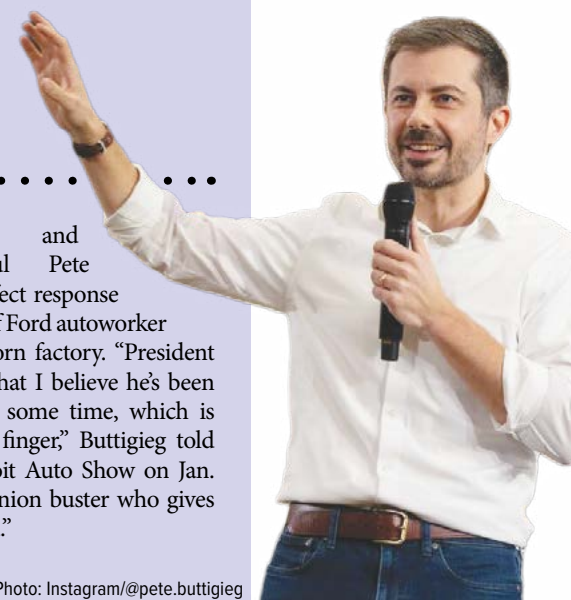
The Ann Arbor District Library is accepting submissions for its 2026 Transgender Day of Visibility zine through Feb. 15. Trans and non-binary people, along with friends, family and allies, are invited to submit art and writing celebrating trans people and their accomplishments or highlighting the importance of visibility and representation. Submissions should be no larger than 5-by-8 inches. The zine will be printed and available at AADL locations in late March and added to the library's catalog as a digital download. Learn more at aadl.org/tdov.

Buttigieg Roasts Trump's Ford Flip-Off

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Michigan dad and presidential hopeful Pete Buttigieg had the perfect response after Trump flipped off Ford autoworker TJ Sabula at a Dearborn factory. "President Trump did literally what I believe he's been doing figuratively for some time, which is give autoworkers the finger," Buttigieg told reporters at the Detroit Auto Show on Jan. 14, calling Trump a union buster who gives workers "the old F you."

Pete Buttigieg. Photo: Instagram/@pete.buttigieg





Seeing Your Friends' Dicks

For a decade, an underground group of men has gathered to explore intimacy without penetration — reshaping how connection can look

**BY SAMUEL
SCHWINDT**

The latent homoeroticism in male friendship is having a moment. In early 2025, comedian and artist Jordan Firstman's music video "I Wanna See My Friends Dicks" went viral, turning curiosity about male bodies into a campy celebration of bro-love. But in Detroit, a group has been exploring this territory seriously — and privately — for a decade.

Motor City Jacks is part of a nationwide network of clubs where men gather for mutual masturbation and non-penetrative intimacy. The rules are clear: no oral sex, no anal. What happens within those boundaries is up to members to discover.

"We're easy and low-hanging fruit," said current leadership team member Gerald in an interview with BTL (he asked his last name be redacted for privacy). "I think we attract a group of people that like to play with rules. You're restricted to

learning how to get someone off without blowing them."

Gerald said Jacks gives their members a "sandbox" to "get creative." Whether it's through learning how a fellow member gets off from being "touched on the nape of their neck" or other "different levels of intimacy" all of this "takes away a lot of pressure from sex parties."

"You don't have to be hard, you don't have to get off," he said.

His affirmations of their low-stakes encounters follows suit on their website, which states Jacks is "a community that honors mutual respect, discretion and consent, ensuring a comfortable experience for all members" during circle jerk and group masturbation sessions. The site's FAQs confront the legality of the organization and the rules of play, all to calm the nervousness of potential members. One posted FAQ reads: "I do not identify as gay, will I fit in?" Jacks responds that masturbation isn't tied to orientation — the group simply consists of men who enjoy self pleasure alongside other men. "Nearly 40% of members identify as straight or bisexual," they claim on the website.

Photos: Motor City Jacks

A Detroit outpost of the Jacks' network throughout the U.S., Motor City Jacks began gathering unofficially in 2014 and formally established the organization in 2015. They're celebrating their 10th anniversary in 2026 — a year later than the calendar would suggest, since they suspended operations for a full year during Covid. "I made a friend on 'the Facebook

the group being met with unsavory attention. On the day of one event, Collins said a hotel cancelled on them and banned them from returning. There was also the time a member had called into the podcast "Dave & Chuck the Freak Podcast" to talk about the group. "We had several members very anxious about this," said Collins about

[who] don't understand the rules." His response to members fearing a police raid or getting caught after this episode? "Nothing we do is illegal!"

The paradox has always been tricky: Motor City Jacks needs to recruit new members and build community, yet discretion is essential for protecting both out and closeted men. The leadership

Yet their most advantageous communication is their mailing list: "We have 1000s of people, and now I have visibility to see where everyone's IP addresses are from, and fortunately or unfortunately, it's people all over the world that get our emails," said Gerald, who took over from Collins in 2020. Along with longtime regulars, "it's often just curious people in general," said Gerald.

Collins retired from the leadership of Motor City Jacks after a long succession process. With his focus on graduate school and other life commitments, he sought to carefully transition management of the group to someone else. Of course, there was fear in the group falling apart without Collins. "He put it in good hands, if I can toot my own horn," said Gerald, who'd only been to Jacks once and noted that Collins' was purposeful in preserving his legacy.

Since taking over, Gerald's goal has been to make Jacks "a household name" and to ensure "potential members didn't view it as a seedy or scary event." That mission comes into focus with their upcoming 10th anniversary party on Feb. 22 in Detroit. Gerald described the upcoming celebration as "incorporating all the great themes of brotherhood, including a cum-shot contest, tightly whities, toys and more." This is all "to showcase what Jacks is all about, and join the feral fraternity

and 'bate brotherhood."

With the party and year ahead, Jacks is pushing for the progressive success of their group play activities. Some goals as they forge ahead: to create excitement for younger members, bring in new fetish activities to continue their adaptable nature and always keep a multifaceted approach. "Gerald just asked me if I'd lead a wrestling group," said Collins of the group's motivation to extend beyond regular masturbation sessions.

Part of their new approach is outreach across the country as well: "We're so inspired by all the other 'bate clubs, leaders all over the world, and hoping that we get representation [from them] at the event," said Gerald. Their February event is a "new-member recruitment drive." Their goal, of course, is to remain at their roots: "We're reclusive in a lot of ways," said Gerald, but that is part of their strength: "That we do it in real life is the differentiator."

Wherever and however gay sex is shaped by the modern world, this private club underscores the essential nature of sexual connection. Our shared queer history is steeped in the need for succession and continuity. Motor City Jacks carries that legacy forward. Their message is simple: seeing our friends' dicks is part of how we survive.

Visit motorcityjacks.com for upcoming events.

"I think we attract a group of people that like to play with rules. You're restricted to learning how to get someone off without blowing them."

— Gerald, Motor City Jacks leadership team member

of masturbation," Detroit-based Drake Collins told BTL, referencing BateWorld — a digital platform that touts itself as "the biggest masturbation community online for men." Collins recalled gathering an intimate group of 'baters in a hotel room, inspired by the connective tissues of non-penetrative brotherly socializing. He recognized the value of in-person connection over the stagnation of video chats, seeing how the safety of solo play could translate into a group setting.

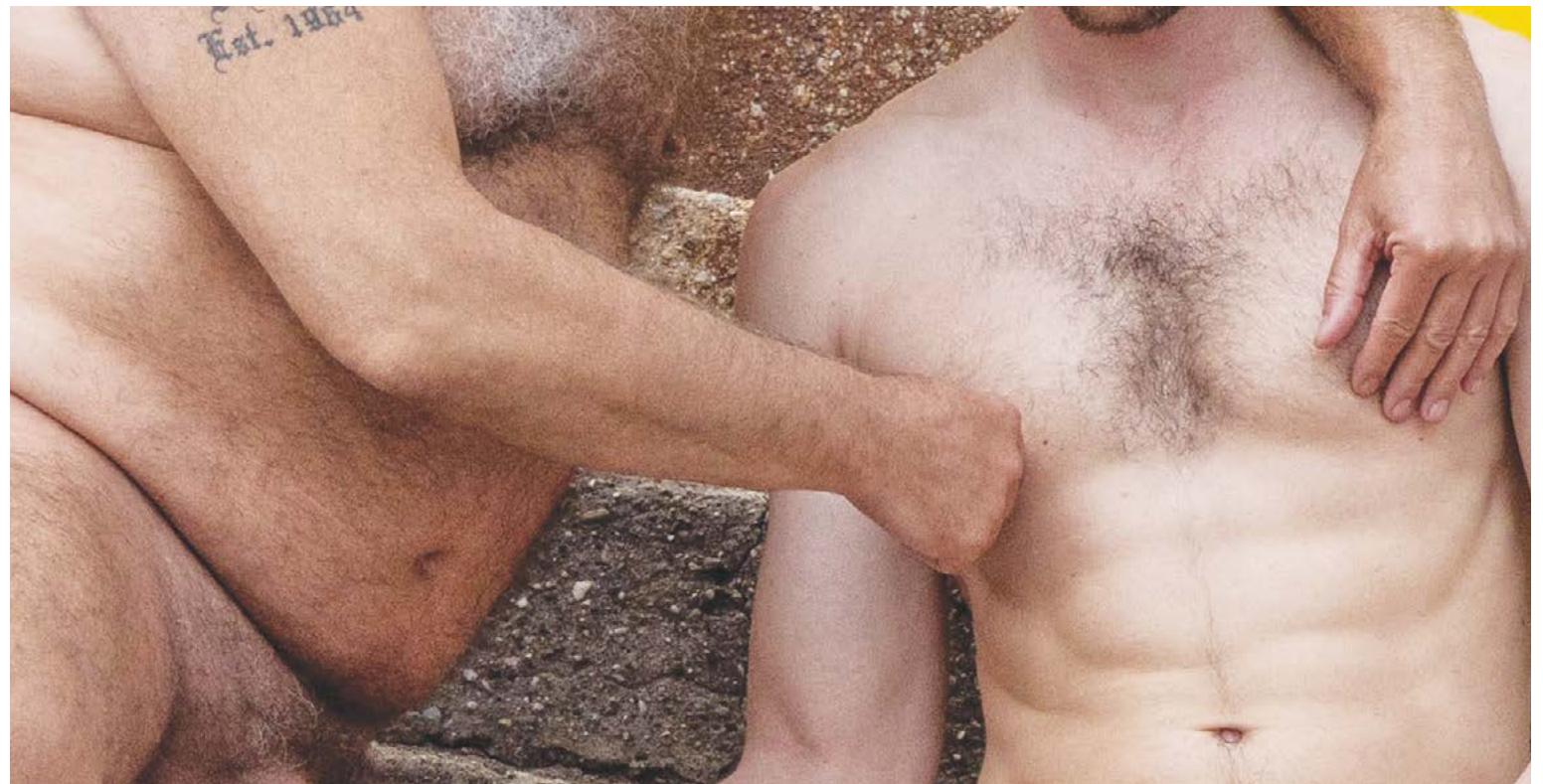
"We didn't have the official ground rules then," said Collins. Although it was always a masturbation-only scene, "it was all very interactive" and the space "set aside a unique place beyond the typical bathhouse, public environment where many people will try to push further." Collins noted various layers of intimacy: "You have the folks that wear the red wrist band that watch other people and don't touch other people, all the way to people stroking each other and making out. It runs the gamut for everybody, even for the same people from session to session." Additionally, Collins affirmed the group's role in supporting straight men: "It's not considered sex, so it's different in their own sexual expression."

When Collins first launched Motor City Jacks, he recalled

the episode's acknowledgement of their activities. The podcasters regularly cover and mock indecent occurrences in Detroit, whether it's public sex charges or callers tuning in to report indiscretions they've experienced or witnessed. At the time, Collins thought about calling in: "They read through the website [on air]." He described the hosts as "hopeless straight guys

has learned to navigate this tension, being simultaneously cautious and bold about what they do.

"I'm very vocal about [Motor City Jacks] in any social setting," said Collins. Along with this individual promotion in social networks, the club is on BlueSky, BateWorld and many other adult connection websites.



Manufactured Outrage: Trans Athlete Complaint Reveals Coordinated Attack on Michigan Student

A cis girl who never saw a trans teammate in the locker room claims privacy violation

BY ANNI ARBOUR

A cisgender girl who never saw a trans teammate in the locker room claims privacy violation, and Michigan's latest sports battle heads to court.

I try hard to find positive stories related to our community. Some days I can, but many days I can't.

Today is one of those days.

The leading story regarding the trans community in our state is taking place in a courtroom, as it does so often.

It concerns the parents of a cisgender girl who have filed a complaint naming Skyline High School in Ann Arbor for allowing a trans girl to play on the volleyball team. According to a report on Fox 2 News in Detroit, Sean Lechner, whose daughter attends Monroe High School, submitted the Title IX complaint Dec. 5 with the U.S. Department of Education, the Michigan Department of Education, the state's high school athletic association and Monroe Public Schools.

Teams from both schools used the same locker room during matches on Sept. 9 and Oct. 25, which spurred accusations of student privacy being violated.

I'm sure you are as tired of hearing this same complaint as I am. Not mentioned in this particular account — but found in other news sources that hide behind paywalls — is the fact that the complaining cis girl never even saw the trans girl in the locker room. Yet, that didn't stop the cis girl from saying in a press conference that "this was definitely devastating for all of us girls."

"This person did disguise themselves to look like a female so when we found out weeks after that there was another male in the same locker room as us as we were changing and also playing against us, it caught everyone off guard," Briley Lechner said.

So, to sum up: this cis girl was "devastated" retroactively when she found out a trans girl had played in a game against her school. Huh?

What's particularly troubling about this story is how it became a story at all. Since September, OutKick published 19 articles about this one high school student. Reporter Dan Zaksheske, who writes for the conservative sports site owned by Fox Corporation, attended at least four high school volleyball games, recorded videos of the girls playing and tweeted about the situation at least 41 times.

When Zaksheske was confronted by school officials about his presence at games, he published another article claiming he had been "harassed by faculty at Skyline High" while working on the story.

Of course, due to his relentless coverage and his claim of harassment, a local story about one high school athlete has gone national.

The lawyers for the complainant are using the guise of President Trump's provocatively titled "Keeping Men Out Of Women's Sports" executive order to justify their contention.

Excuse me while I vomit.

Here's what the complaint conveniently ignores: The Michigan High School Athletic Association confirmed in December that it received one waiver request for a transgender student athlete for the fall 2025 season, and that waiver was granted "in compliance with applicable state and federal law." The student in question was eligible to play.

Every female Republican member of Michigan's House sent a letter to MHSAA in November demanding confirmation of the waiver and calling for the student to be declared ineligible. The



student's high school season ended anyway when Skyline lost to Byron Center in the state quarterfinals. The trans athlete finished her season with First Team All-Conference honors.

Meanwhile, the collateral damage from this manufactured controversy continues to mount. Chet Hesson, Monroe Public Schools' athletic director, was placed on paid administrative leave after expressing basic human empathy in a podcast interview. "For this alleged student at Skyline, my heart goes to them, whether they're trans or not, just having that much negative eyeball on you and rhetoric is incredible," Hesson said. "The amount of pressure that you feel as a 16- or 17- or 18-year-old to have to deal with that, I would not wish that on anybody."

Less than 24 hours later, he was suspended. Monroe Public Schools

issued a statement clarifying that individual staff members' personal opinions "do not express the official position of the District."

God forbid someone show compassion for a child being targeted by a coordinated media campaign.

Anyway, we already know how this will play out. Monroe Public Schools has hired a third party to investigate the Title IX complaint. Skyline High School will issue carefully worded statements about respecting all student athletes. And the U.S. Department of Education, under Trump's administration, will likely use this case as another weapon in its broader campaign against trans youth.

The irony is that Michigan's legislative situation mirrors the national divide. The Republican-controlled state House has passed two bills to prohibit transgender

participation in girls' and women's sports. The Democrat-controlled state Senate has refused to even consider them. So we exist in this limbo where trans athletes are technically protected at the state level but under assault from federal policy and relentless right-wing media campaigns.

I wish I could predict a better outcome for Michigan trans athletes, but the prevailing winds in this country are against us. Particularly on this matter.

Trans athletes in our state and around the U.S. are competing against more than just other athletes. It's an unfair matchup that pits kids against a coordinated assault from right-wing media, politicians seeking culture war victories and a federal government determined to erase their existence. And it disgusts me that everyone doesn't see it that way.

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Cozy Up With These Queer 2025 Winter Reads

From poetry and memoir to magical realism and graphic novels, these LGBTQ+ books offer something for every reader

BY SARAH BRICKER HUNT & CHRIS AZZOPARDI

As winter stretches — seemingly endless — before us, there’s no better time to curl up with a book that speaks to the complexity and beauty of queer life. This season’s reading list spans poetry and memoir, experimental nonfiction and graphic novels, offering stories that challenge, comfort and celebrate the full spectrum of LGBTQ+ experiences. From Andrea Gibson’s final collection of transformative poetry to Nicholas Boggs’ sweeping biography of James Baldwin, from Charlie Jane Anders’ magical family drama to Sand C. Chang’s therapeutic workbook for queer healing, these titles reflect both the joy and struggle of living authentically.

Whether you’re drawn to Gaar Adams’s decade-long journey through Gulf States queer communities, Rose Dommu’s chaotic trans wedding weekend or Alejandro Varela’s meditation on polyamorous heartbreak, you’ll find something that resonates. These books remind us that queer stories are as varied as we are — tender and fierce, grounded and fantastical, deeply personal and universally human. So grab a blanket, brew some tea and settle in for a cozy read that honors who we are and who we’re becoming.

‘Middle Spoon,’ Alejandro Varela

A finalist for the National Book Award for his 2022 debut novel “The Town of Babylon,” which followed a gay Latinx professor confronting his past, Alejandro Varela’s latest continues his keen, compassionate observations on queer life. This time, he turns to the pains of polyamorous love — what happens when a married father of two has his heart broken by another romantic partner.

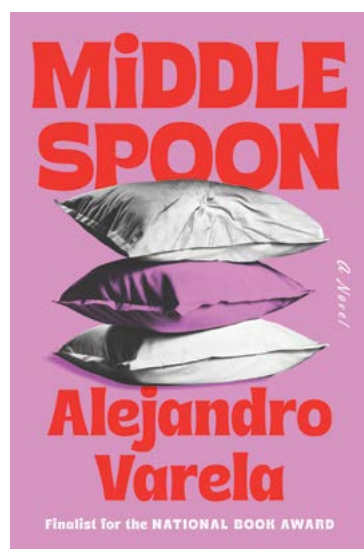
Through a series of letters to his ex-boyfriend Ben, the unnamed narrator

lays bare his tangled emotions as he grapples with rejection and wonders whether a world still uneasy with poly relationships could ever understand it. If you’re the kind of person who buys their books based on the covers, the simplicity of the image on this one — just three stacked pillows — will certainly pique your curiosity about the quiet emotional mess you’re about to tumble into.

‘Town & Country,’ Brian Schaefer

In his first novel, journalist Brian Schaefer — whose bylines span The New York Times and The New Yorker — drops us into Griffin, a fictional rural town where an influx of stylish, big-city gay weekenders collides with deeply rooted, church-going locals. If that sounds like an American fantasy (or fever dream), that’s exactly the point. Set over one election season, “Town & Country” watches these unlikely neighbors circle each other with suspicion, curiosity and the occasional spark of connection, revealing just how chaotic — and unexpectedly intimate — community becomes when everyone’s idea of “home” is up for debate.

Count Andrew Sean Greer, Pulitzer Prize-winning author of



“Less,” as one of the book’s biggest fans: “‘Town & Country’ is so thoughtfully and beautifully written I could read it over and over again. A rumination on who we think we are versus who we really are, on loyalties and betrayals, family and politics, and, above all, love, it is a book to bring us together.”

‘Uncanny Valley Girls,’ Zefyr Lisowski

Lambda Award-winning poet Zefyr Lisowski turns her eye to the strange, sometimes terrifying intersections of life, gender and desire in this memoir-in-essays. At 27, Lisowski found herself in a locked psych ward after a mental breakdown, where she turned to horror films — the very movies that scared her — as a source of comfort and connection. Across essays on films like “The Texas Chain Saw Massacre” and “Saint Maud,” she explores fears about illness, identity, class and the often-hidden violence in the world around us.

Moving from a trans childhood in the South to the sweaty dancefloors of Brooklyn, Lisowski mixes intimate storytelling with cultural insight, weaving family, friends and lovers into a reflection on fear, longing and survival. Deeply felt and full of care, “Uncanny Valley Girls” shows how moments of strangeness and terror can illuminate the most human parts of our lives.

‘Ultimate Oz Universe: The Lost Lands,’ Cullen Bunn, Larry King, Mike Deodato Jr.

The world of Oz gets a modern twist in this sprawling graphic novel



from AWA Studios, taking readers beyond Emerald City to hidden corners, forgotten lands and characters you’ve never met before. Co-written by comics veteran Cullen Bunn and songwriter Larry King, with art by Mike Deodato Jr., “The Lost Lands” is packed with adventure, imagination and a love for everything that made Baum’s world magical in the first place.

Elton John, whose own life and music were shaped by Oz, wrote the foreword — and even pops up alongside his husband, David Furnish, in a fun illustrated cameo. With “Wicked: For Good” fueling a new wave of Oz-mania, this is the perfect pick for longtime fans and first-time readers alike: a story full of magic, danger and enough surprises to make you want to follow that yellow brick road all the way home.

‘All These Ghosts,’ Silas House

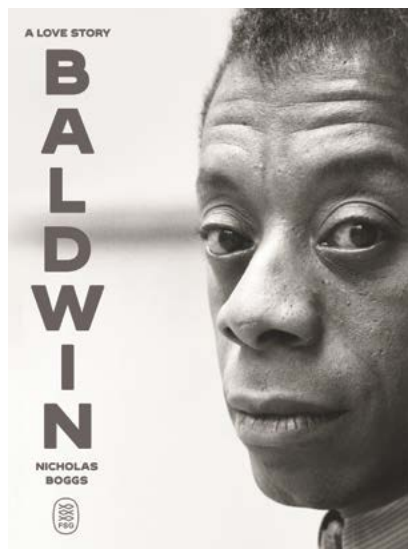
Acclaimed novelist and Kentucky Poet Laureate Silas House brings his Appalachian roots, deep love of the natural world and lived experience as a gay man to this timely and poignant poetry collection, his first ever. A recipient of the Duggins Prize, the nation’s largest award for LGBTQ+ writers, and a 2023 Grammy finalist

for writing and producing the first country music video to feature a gay love story for Tyler Childers’ song “In Your Love,” House brings both recognition and lived experience to his work. From the poem he read at Gov. Andy Beshear’s 2023 inauguration to reflections on the “loss of rural America as he once knew it,” according to the book’s description, House moves fluidly between grief, nostalgia and celebration of community, blood family and chosen family.

With wild places, lingering histories and the people who shape us — friends, fellow artists and the landscapes of the South — at the heart of these poems, House captures both the beauty and heartbreak of life in his region. This collection is a vivid reminder of the ways identity, place and memory intertwine.

‘Baldwin: A Love Story,’ Nicholas Boggs

A New York Times Notable Book of 2025. An Amazon Best Book of the Year. A Time Must-Read Book of 2025. “Baldwin: A Love Story” is the first major biography of James Baldwin in three decades — and it’s as iconic as Baldwin himself.



Nicholas Boggs digs into newly uncovered archives, original research and interviews to show how Baldwin's closest relationships shaped his art. From his mentor, painter Beauford Delaney, to his lover and muse, Swiss painter Lucien Happersberger, and collaborators like Turkish actor Engin Cezzar and the French artist Yoran Cazac — whose long-overlooked role as Baldwin's last great love is explored here for the first time — Boggs traces the love, lust, friendship and creative sparks behind Baldwin's brilliance.

Following Baldwin across Harlem, Paris, Switzerland, Istanbul, Africa and the American South, the biography shows how he turned the personal into the political, the erotic into the revolutionary, leaving a mark on Black and queer literary history that still burns bright today.

'You Better Be Lightning,' Andrea Gibson

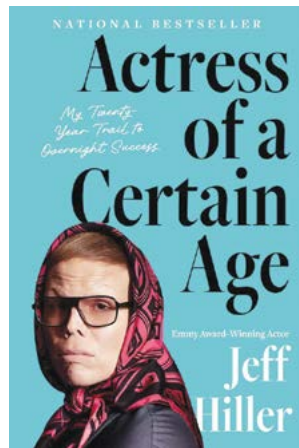
"You Better Be Lightning" captures the late poet Andrea Gibson's gift for fierce vulnerability that made their spoken word videos and Substack newsletter "Things That Don't Suck" go viral. Published in 2021, this timeless collection takes on profound resonance following Gibson's death in July at age 49 from ovarian cancer.

The book tackles depression, chronic illness and LGBTQ+ struggles, yet radiates unexpected joy and humor. Gibson charts a transformation from isolation to openness, from despair to falling in love with life again. Moments of wonder and awe punctuate even the darkest passages here.

Gibson's death makes this collection all the more precious — a final gift reminding us that beauty and hope persist even in our darkest moments. Their words continue to offer the kind of radical tenderness and honest reckoning with pain that made them beloved by so many. Perfect for reflective winter reading and honoring a voice that changed countless lives.

'Actress of a Certain Age: My Twenty-Year Trail to Overnight Success,' Jeff Hiller

If you've spent 25 years doing improv in a grocery store basement and still haven't "made it," what do you do? For Emmy Award-winning actor Jeff Hiller, star of HBO's beloved "Somebody



Somewhere," the answer was simple: Keep going. This national bestseller chronicles his journey from growing up "profoundly gay" in 1980s Texas through decades of struggle in Hollywood's lower middle tier — temp jobs, guest spots on "30 Rock" and "Law & Order," and the slow realization that success might never come.

Hiller's essay collection balances heartbreak and hilarity as he details what it means to age without laurels, to keep chasing a dream that keeps receding. Then, at 40, how everything changed when he landed the role of Joel on "Somebody Somewhere," the kind of best friend everyone wishes they had. Tina Fey calls Hiller "a human crocheted blanket," and this warm, vulnerable memoir proves exactly that. For anyone who's ever felt like a late bloomer or wondered if their dreams were foolish, Hiller offers hope, humor and, as he puts it, "three stories about buttholes."

'Lessons in Magic and Disaster,' Charlie Jane Anders

"Lessons in Magic and Disaster" by Hugo, Nebula and Locus Award-winning author Charlie Jane Anders blends witchcraft, academia and family secrets into an irresistible winter read. Grad student Jamie has it all: a loving queer relationship, an obscure dissertation and one extraordinary secret

See **Winter Reads**, page 20

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Understanding the Hard Way
Puzzle can be found on page 21

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◀ Winter Reads

Continued from page 19

— she's a powerful witch.

When her mother Serena emerges from years of isolation — grieving her late wife and hiding from the world — Jamie teaches her magic to help her heal. But Serena's harboring something dangerous, and her newfound powers are leading her down a dark path. Now Jamie must race to decode a mysterious 300-year-old spell book and unearth the scandal buried in its pages before her mother destroys them both.

From the bestselling author of "All the Birds in the Sky" comes a cozy yet suspenseful tale about the magic we inherit and the secrets that can either save or ruin us.

'Making Amends,' Nisi Shawl

World Fantasy Award winner Nisi Shawl delivers a provocative exploration of gender, embodiment and punishment in this collection of interconnected stories. "Making Amends" imagines a corporate-run interstellar penal colony where prisoners' consciousnesses are uploaded into AI systems, but there's a cruel twist: inmates are denied bodies matching their gender identity.

In stories like "Deep End" and "The Mighty Phin," a trans woman prisoner is forced to present as male in cyberspace and barred from inhabiting a female body, transforming incarceration into a form of enforced dysphoria. Meanwhile, "In Colors Everywhere" envisions a colony world where gender self-assignment is routine from childhood, offering a stark contrast to the dehumanizing restrictions elsewhere in the collection.

Throughout, Shawl uses speculative fiction to examine how systems of control weaponize gender itself. This collection is essential reading for anyone interested in trans narratives and the future of justice.

'Guest Privileges: Queer Lives and Finding Home in the Middle East,' Gaar Adams

When journalist Gaar Adams moved to the Gulf States — where penalties for queer acts include deportation, imprisonment, torture and death — he arrived with what seemed like a

simple question: Isn't it harder for you to make a life here? Over a decade of risky reporting, he discovered thriving clandestine queer communities across the UAE, Bahrain, Oman and Saudi Arabia, in a region where four out of five residents are migrants with no path to citizenship.

In "Guest Privileges," Adams weaves an intimate memoir with unprecedented reportage, documenting secret drag parties thrown by Filipino salon workers, parkour athletes cruising the Corniche promenade after midnight and a Pakistani wrestler in love with his coach. As he begins his own clandestine relationship, Adams confronts his Western assumptions about where queer joy and belonging are possible.

Published by Ann Arbor's Dzanc Books, this widely acclaimed memoir challenges readers to reconsider what home means — not as a fixed place, but as community forged against impossible odds.

'All Parts Welcome: The Queer and Trans Internal Family Systems Workbook,' Sand C. Chang

You've probably seen Internal Family Systems therapy all over your social feeds lately — and there's good reason for the buzz. IFS, which views the mind as containing multiple "parts" (like an inner critic, a protector or a wounded child), has resonated with millions seeking to understand their internal conflicts. Now there's a workbook specifically designed for queer and trans people.

"All Parts Welcome" by Sand C. Chang offers a compassionate guide to IFS techniques tailored to LGBTQ+ experiences. Chang, a nonbinary, queer clinical psychologist and certified IFS therapist, helps readers build self-compassion while honoring the complexity of intersecting identities — race, ethnicity, religion, class, ability, sexuality and gender expression. The workbook includes meditations, reflections and guided prompts for befriending the parts of yourself you've lost touch with.

As Richard Schwartz, developer of IFS, notes in his foreword, queer and trans people often carry "exiles" — wounded parts created by a culture that has marginalized or persecuted them. This workbook offers tools for welcoming all those parts back home.

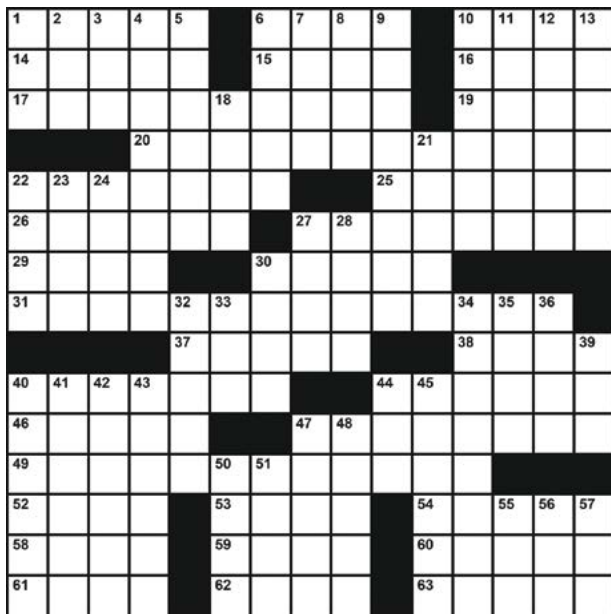
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- 46 Come out with
 47 Title for a male mayor
 49 End of the quote
 52 Pay, as the bill
 53 Hesitating sounds
 54 Group belief
 58 German river to the North Sea
 59 Karen Carpenter, for one
 60 Diana's accessory
 61 Forest denizen
 62 Carried away
 63 Playful aquatic critter
- 33 Crew tool
 34 "Don't let that bother you"
 35 Norse deity
 36 Western defense gp.
 39 "So's ___ old man!"
 40 Like some trousers
 41 Peter of "Lawrence of Arabia"
 42 Disco light
 43 Show instability
 44 "Sort of" suffix
 45 Location in an Elvis tune
 47 Start of a sex manual title, perhaps
 48 "Not to worry"
 50 Kind of room
 51 Light of the moon
 55 Insurrectionist Turner
 56 Poet's before
 57 Prefix with heel

Down

- 1 Tuba sound
 2 Docs' org.
 3 Something to pick
 4 Running things
 5 One of five on "The View"
 6 Annie of "Designing Women"
 7 "Tickle-me" doll
 8 Not bogus
 9 Props for the Penguin and Mr. Peanut
 10 Was revolting
 11 Take a deep breath
 12 Oklahoma athlete
 13 Eats away at
 18 Rams' better halves
 21 Absences of suits, in cards
 22 Cook's smidgen
 23 Melodious Fitzgerald
 24 Theodore Cleaver, to Wally
 27 Naval rank on a cereal box
 28 "Oh, woe is me"
 30 Pricy wheels
 32 Bow or Barton

See p. 19 for answers

Understanding the Hard Way

Across

- 1 Type of button
 6 Put a wave in the hair
 10 Court order
 14 Acid type
 15 Breakfast spread
 16 ___ about
 17 Employee who does the firing
 19 "Flee, bee!"

- 20 Start of what AIDS teaches us, per Anthony Perkins
 22 Brings indignity to
 25 Deep gulch
 26 Gives a heads-up to
 27 Measuring tools
 29 Smelting refuse
 30 Worked the hayfields
 31 More of the quote
 37 Expanses of blades
 38 Greeting from Crocodile Dundee
 40 Shares top billing
 44 Put a match to

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attorney general at the Department of Justice, has insisted that hormone replacement therapy played a role in the shooting, although officials do not believe the perpetrator was using hormones.

This narrative has bled into the mainstream media who are used to trusting government sources. Just a few hours after Kirk was pronounced dead, The Wall Street Journal and other media outlets picked up claims from the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives that the bullet case engravings pointed to a motive related to “transgender ideology,” a term coined by transphobic commentators. The bullet casings ultimately did not have any reference to transgender people.

Nevertheless, suspicions around this shooter being connected to the transgender community spread like wildfire.

Former Fox News personality Megyn Kelly posted a video titled “Megyn Kelly Reveals the Truth About the ‘Trans’ Phrases Found on Ammo of Gun Which Shot Charlie Kirk,” to YouTube on Sept. 11, 2025, where she falsely told over 4 million subscribers, “There’s a particularly high percentage [of transgender people] committing crimes these days and it is responsible and important to say so.” The video now has 2.1 million views and Kelly has not retracted these comments.

Her followers — who believed her false claims — began calling for extreme action in the video’s comment section. @WonkoTheDork wrote, “Trans insanity needs to end. I don’t care how, this has to stop.” And @kathleenbarton-m6c wrote, “As an American, I completely agree that this [Trans] movement needs to be completely eradicated.”

Referencing Kirk as a martyr, Texas Attorney General Ken Paxton took it a step further, writing in a press release that “corrupted ideologies like transgenderism and Antifa are a cancer on our culture and have unleashed their deranged and drugged-up foot soldiers on the American people.”

The social psychology of transphobia

Morgenroth thinks many people who endorse rhetoric around transgender domestic terrorism are threatened or afraid of otherness and of the breaking of traditional gender norms.

“People are very attached to the way that they think about gender because it gives them a sense of certainty — it gives them a sense of who they are and who they’re not,” they say.

Morgenroth says people come up with justifications for their discomfort, even if they don’t make sense.

“Here’s an explanation for why I should be scared. I’m gonna endorse that and I’m gonna believe that regardless of whether that makes



Sean Hannity on Fox News. Screen grab

logical sense or not,” they told Uncloseted Media and Gay Times. “I think that’s what’s happening and why people are so willing to endorse these conspiracy beliefs or theories about trans people.”

Joseph Vandello, a psychology professor at the University of South Florida, says that when influential figures ramp up a threat, it triggers an emotional response of fear or anger, which leads to a desire to punish or exclude people.

“This is the same playbook that people were using against gay people going back to the 1970s or against other kinds of marginalized or minority groups like Jews,” Vandello told Uncloseted Media and Gay Times, referencing the gay panic of that era. “I think there’s this idea that if you frame the issue in terms of a threat, then it becomes an issue of moral protection of the community.”

Another one down the rabbit hole

Vandello says many young men fall for anti-trans narratives because they confirm their place of privilege in the world and validate their insecurities. He coined the term “precarious manhood,” which is the idea that manhood is a social status that has to be won and can be lost. His research indicates that threats to one’s sense of manhood — like trans and queer identities — provoke not only insecurity, but aggression.

Ten years ago, Justin Brown-Ramsey became a case study of precarious manhood, lashing out when he began thinking that trans people were a threat. At 18 years old, and in search of an escape from his parents’ divorce, he started binge-watching YouTube lectures from Jordan Peterson, a clinical psychologist who’s best known as an outspoken anti-trans thought leader and has said that using someone’s preferred pronouns is the road to authoritarianism.

“He has a degree, he’s working at an institution, it seems like if that’s the kind of guy that has this opinion, I should probably

also have that opinion,” Brown-Ramsey told Uncloseted Media and Gay Times.

This intellectualized version of transphobia appealed to the sense of insecurity Brown-Ramsey faced growing up in a household with strictly enforced gender roles.

Eventually, Brown-Ramsey became an active participant in anti-trans rhetoric. As an anonymous keyboard warrior, he’d fight in the YouTube comments against the #MeToo, feminist and trans rights movements.

Near the end of his senior year of high school, Brown-Ramsey brought this hatred into the real world against another classmate.

“They mentioned they were trans, and I recall always taking issue with that for seemingly no reason, and being just generally antagonistic about that,” says Brown-Ramsey, now 28.

He purposefully misgendered the student in class and started lashing out against friends, family and romantic partners until he was almost totally isolated.

“I think over time, the less acceptable my behavior was for people in person, the more it became acceptable to lean into the online version of that,” he says. “It went from those lecture videos to watching long rant videos about trans people and gay people, or seeking out stuff that was more 4chan-adjacent.”

Brown-Ramsey, who eventually left the alt-right after deeply engaging with U.S. history in college, believes he was manipulated to hate trans people because it helped him displace his anger about other elements of his life. “I think it was the fact that I was lower working class or lower middle class, and didn’t have an economic future ahead of me,” he says. “I was like, ‘Well if the world is that way then I just might as well be hateful and try to be more powerful than somebody.’”

Undercover in the alt-right

This phenomenon of young men getting drawn in by alt-right algorithms fascinated

21-year-old Anthony Siteman, who started investigating online extremism ahead of the 2024 presidential election.

“My main goal was to understand how and why people became radicalized,” Siteman, a senior at Quinnipiac University, told Uncloseted Media.

Siteman immersed himself on right-wing sites like Rumble and Gab as well as encrypted messaging apps like Telegram where he joined channels that included Proud Boys. He noticed trends that draw people in: all caps text, red alarm emojis and inflammatory language, which all trigger a sense of urgency and concern.

He saw constant racist, sexist and transphobic language, but also violent videos and memes created from the livestreamed footage of the 2019 mosque shootings in New Zealand that left 51 people dead.

Even though he entered this project to learn about indoctrination, sometimes he felt his own views slipping. “I was really questioning myself and what I believed,” he says, adding that he had to turn to his professor to keep him grounded. “They make you really question all of reality.”

“Social media companies are feeding people more extreme content, more emotional content,” Vandello says. He explained that emotionality is what has made the online alt-right successful at manipulating users against transgender people.

Siteman agrees: “It’s always framed about fear, anger, and just some sense of belonging.”

The way out

Siteman believes that to exit these spaces, people outside the alt-right should use empathetic communication to help those in their network who have been radicalized.

For Brown-Ramsey, it was a professor that pulled him out.

“Unlike online spaces, where I curated the information that I wanted to see, and the algorithm fed me more of the same bigoted, hateful content, college was perhaps the first time I was required to engage with media outside of my usual diet,” Brown-Ramsey published in an essay about his experience.

Brown-Ramsey had to read books aloud in class like “Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass,” which detailed the abolitionist’s experience being born into slavery. “The narrative turned a mirror onto me and, in upsetting detail, showed me that my inclinations toward antagonizing those who looked, acted, or believed differently than myself [were the same beliefs that] led to Douglass’ dehumanization,” he wrote.

“That trajectory is really just me learning, ‘Why should I be at odds with a trans person if both of us work crappy jobs and can’t pay our bills?’ Obviously, that’s not who I should be angry at, but it took a while to get around to that,” Brown-Ramsey says.

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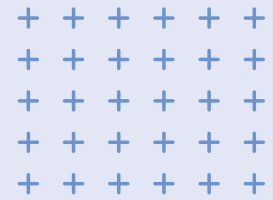
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A Personal Note

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Plan your meals.

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Make wise choices when eating out or at home.

Choose protein and fiber-rich foods first to support your long-term success.

Build habits for when the medication plateaus.

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