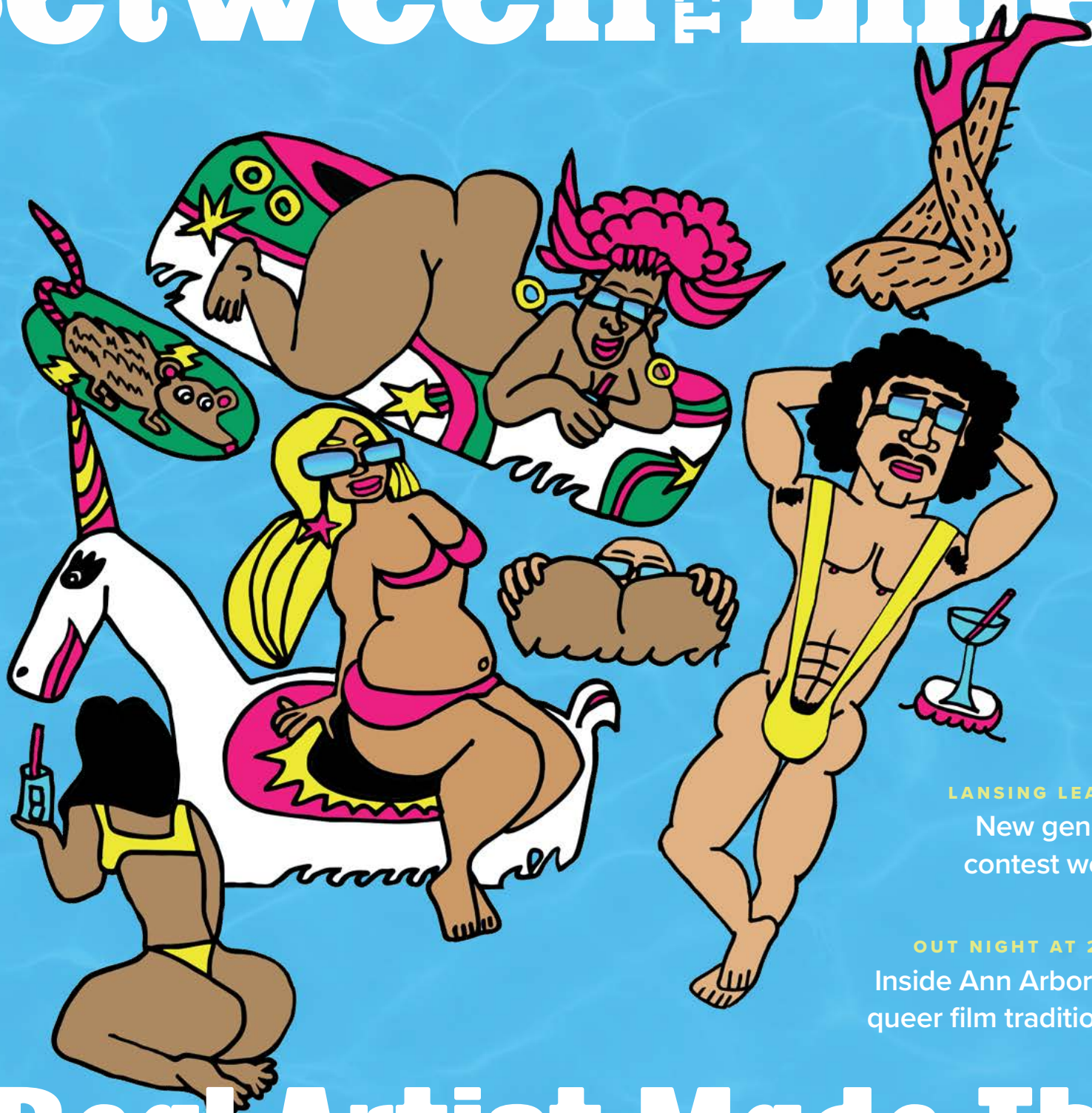


MICHIGAN'S LGBTQ+ NEWS SOURCE SINCE 1993

# Between THE Lines™



**LANSING LEATHER PRIDE**  
New gender-neutral  
contest welcomes all

**OUT NIGHT AT 25**  
Inside Ann Arbor's  
queer film tradition

## A Real Artist Made This

Those other party people? Just Al.

By Samuel Schwindt

Dr. Paul Benson's



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Dr. Benson and Dr. Bornstein



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Artwork by Harry Cross

**VOL. 3412 • MARCH 19, 2026**

**ISSUE 1297**

**PRIDE SOURCE MEDIA GROUP**

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# 5 Queer Things You Can Do Right Now-ish

BY KELLI DUNHAM

Late March in Michigan means one day you're scraping ice off the windshield, the next you're craving iced coffee and scouting outdoor seating to enjoy it. The queer calendar can feel a lot like that: equal parts reflection, celebration, organizing and, occasionally, watching a group of charismatic grown folks compete for the title of Hot Daddy. Here are five ways to find joy in the chaos.



Bakpak Durden. Photo: Instagram/@bakpakdurden

## Celebrate Trans Visibility

The Ann Arbor District Library is marking Trans Day of Visibility with a conversation featuring Detroit-based artist Bakpak Durden. Durden's work blends Baroque and Afro-Surrealist influences to create oil paintings and large-scale murals that depict subjects in transitional states, emphasizing connection with surrounding communities. Who, then, would be more perfect for an evening focused on trans visibility and storytelling?

March 31, 6:30–7:30 p.m., Downtown Ann Arbor District Library, Lower Level Program Room (343 S. Fifth Ave., Ann Arbor). [bit.ly/tdorAA](https://bit.ly/tdorAA).



## Reclaim Pride and Build Community in Lansing

If you've been feeling that mix of determination and "OK, but what do we actually do right now?" this gathering in Lansing is designed exactly for that moment. Reclaiming MI Pride is bringing people together for an evening of conversation, connection and organizing in response to the increasing political attacks on LGBTQ+ communities. Expect light appetizers, a drink ticket and a room full of people who believe community is still our strongest strategy.

March 26, 5:30–7:30 p.m., Midtown Brewing Co. (402 S. Washington Square, Lansing). [bit.ly/reclaimprideMI](https://bit.ly/reclaimprideMI).



Andrew Nichols, Hot Daddies winner, 2024. Photo: Ferndale Pride

## Salute Peak Daddy Energy in Ferndale

Ferndale Pride's Hot Daddies contest returns for another year of dancing, cheering and joyful daddiness. Contestants — all 35 or older in keeping with classic daddy tradition — can be of any gender and potential contestants can sign up all the way to 48 hours in advance or when they've reached 15 contestants. Ferndale Pride Event Director Julia Music thanked Carbliss for sponsoring the event, promising DJ Darryl G and Brando DJ will deliver "a night of dancing magic" while the daddies work the room for donations.

March 20, 9–11:30 p.m., 215 West (215 W. Nine Mile Road, Ferndale). [bit.ly/hotdaddies26](https://bit.ly/hotdaddies26).



## Hang Out With Queer Book Nerds at Queerdos

Queerdos, the Royal Oak Public Library's monthly literary and social club, is a low-key space where librarian Gillian Goldblatt pairs optional creative activities with conversation about books, graphic novels and whatever media people are loving lately.

Goldblatt told BTL, "Several people who come every month have said that Queerdos is their downtime when things are stressful in life, which is so wonderful because that's the goal. I want everyone to feel like this is a space they belong in and are welcome to come and relax."

April 6, 6:30–7:45 p.m., Royal Oak Public Library, Friends Auditorium (222 E. Eleven Mile Road, Royal Oak). [bit.ly/queerdosroyaloak](http://bit.ly/queerdosroyaloak).

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APR 2 - MAY 31



Artwork from the Ann Arbor District Library 2025 Trans Day of Visibility zine by mindxscape. Photo: AADL

## Read This Trans Day of Visibility Zine

Not every meaningful action requires leaving the house or finding parking. The Ann Arbor District Library's annual Trans Day of Visibility zine (part of their Trans Day of Visibility activities, see above) is a small but powerful reminder that queer and trans people continue to make art, tell stories and support one another even in difficult times. The zine features submissions from trans and nonbinary creators and their allies celebrating visibility, community and survival. You can request a free physical copy to be mailed to you or download the digital

version from the library catalog. Make some tea, read a few pages and remember: Visibility also happens quietly, one story at a time.

Find places to pick up the 2026 zine, download it or have it sent to you at [bit.ly/tdorAA](http://bit.ly/tdorAA).

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Lansing Leather Pride patch. Photo Brian Wells

# Lansing's First Leather Pride Contest Aims to Break Down Barriers

Organizers Derek James and Kenny Dollins III want the gender-neutral competition to be welcoming for newcomers and veterans alike

**BY SARAH BRICKER HUNT**

When Derek James got into the leather scene in 2018, he quickly found a community that felt more authentic than anything he'd experienced before. A former drag performer and the former Mr. Trans Michigan, James had spent years volunteering and producing events across the state. But leather was different.

"It's about family," James told BTL. "It's about helping each other out, raising each other up. It's not always about hooking up. That's such a small percentage of the things

that actually go on."

Now James and his boyfriend, Kenny Dollins III, are channeling that passion into something new. The couple — both board advisors for Lansing Pride — are producing the organization's first-ever leather contest, a two-day event set for April 3-4 at The Studio at 414 in downtown Lansing.

The event comes at a moment when Lansing's queer scene is thriving. A city that once offered few options for LGBTQ+ nightlife and community programming has become a growing hub — and James and Dollins want

leather to be part of that story.

"Any way that you can bring the community closer by having fun is just a great thing," James said. "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, and I want to give people the space to be able to do that."

The pair's path to Lansing started in Ferndale, where they met and where James had previously co-produced leather contests at Soho. Dollins, who is originally from the Lansing area, said

James introduced him to a world he didn't know existed.

"I had never experienced it before. I didn't know what it was," Dollins said. "But after going to a few events, I fell in love with it." He described the leather community as refreshingly genuine and accepting compared to other queer subcultures, calling the atmosphere a completely different vibe.

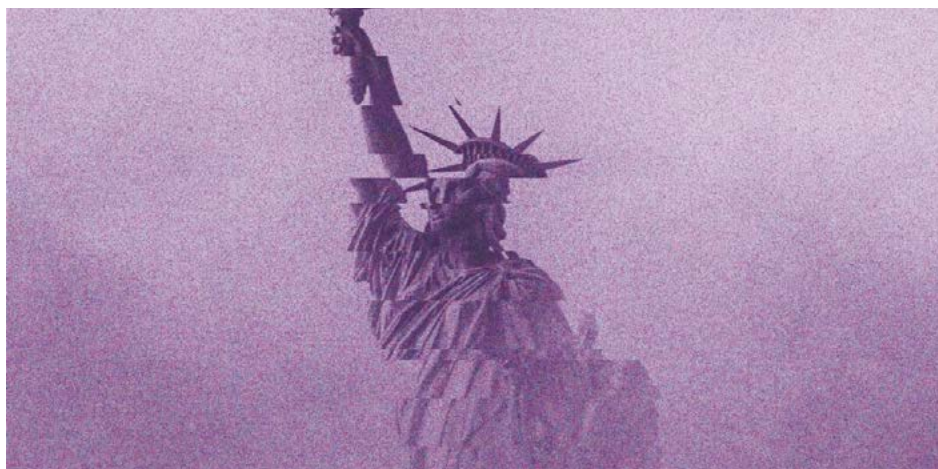
When the couple relocated to the Lansing

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See **Leather Pride**, page 19

# Does the American Dream Still Exist for People Like Me?

I am a Black. I am gay. I am an immigrant. I am a journalist. I am a woman. And I am scared.



BY ANONYMOUS

*This article was originally published by Uncloseted Media.*

“That’s fine dude. I’m not mad at you.” Those are the first and last words I heard Renee Good say, seconds before she was brutally murdered on Jan. 7 by ICE agent Jonathan Ross.

I came across the video as I watched my fiancée scroll through her social media feeds while sitting in our Brooklyn apartment. We proceeded to scour TikTok to gather more information. Overwhelmed by the sheer number of videos of the shooting — all from various angles — I asked her to put the phone down.

We sat in silence as I interrogated the pit forming in my stomach. I was sickened by the ease with which we just witnessed violence, and began questioning my decision to try and build a life in the U.S. with my soon-to-be wife.

I was born in London to Black parents who migrated from Nigeria in 1990. It was a classic immigrant story: They were in search of a better life overseas, desperate to give their unborn children the opportunities they never had growing up in a country that was rebuilding after centuries of British colonial rule.

My immigration journey, however, is a classic lesbian love story. My fiancée, an American citizen from Los Angeles, met me at a party while she was studying in Europe. She moved back to the U.S. soon after our first date, and serendipitously, I’d just been accepted to grad school to study journalism in New York City. So, after a year of long distance, I flew across the pond and she moved across the country,

and we started a life together.

I was ecstatic to embark on this journey. I was raised on Black television, music and film from the U.S., feeling a strong affinity to African-American culture from a young age. I was always watching “My Wife and Kids” and “That’s So Raven,” and was obsessed with listening to Beyoncé, Usher and gospel music.

Although I inherently knew that the American Dream was built on broken promises, my inner child still romanticized it. I watched women in New York City newsrooms and magazine offices build electric lives: Jenna Rink running through Manhattan in “13 Going on 30”; Andy Sachs surviving the chaos of “The Devil Wears Prada”; and Betty Suarez stubbornly proving she belonged in “Ugly Betty.”

I believed that I could be like them. That I could work in New York media and earn enough to live alone and write long, beautiful stories. The U.S. felt bigger than England. Like a place where a girl could arrive with nothing, but leverage her talent and hunger, and somehow make it.

But just three months after arriving in August 2024, Trump was elected for his second term. And a few months after that, my dream was punctured as he introduced a slew of executive orders attacking people like me: He ended diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) programs; he introduced harsh anti-trans policies; and he enacted some of the strictest immigration enforcement the country has ever seen.

Good’s murder was a consequence of Operation Metro Surge, which started in December 2025 as a supposed attack on illegal

See *American Dream*, page 9

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# Michigan's LGBTQ+ Commission Turns Community Stories Into State Policy

The 15-member advisory body connects voices to resources — here's how they're making an impact

BY SARAH BRICKER HUNT

The Michigan LGBTQ+ Commission doesn't have its own budget. Its 15 members work without pay. Yet over the past two years, they've helped shape some of the biggest policy wins for Michigan's queer community.

When Michigan made an unprecedented \$10 million investment to address LGBTQ+ health disparities in 2023 — the first allocation of its kind in state history — commissioners had spent months gathering stories from community members about gaps in healthcare access. When the Elliott-Larsen Civil Rights Act was expanded in 2023 to include protections for sexual orientation and gender identity, commissioners provided testimony about discrimination their communities face. When organizations like Affirmations, the Ruth Ellis Center and MiGen apply for state funding, commissioners have helped make the case for why those resources matter.

The commission doesn't write checks directly. Instead, funding flows through the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services to community organizations providing health services. But commissioners are the ones who gathered the data, shared our community's stories and made the case for why the investment needed to happen.

Gov. Gretchen Whitmer created the commission when she signed Executive Order 2023-5 at Detroit's Motor City Pride parade in June 2023. The executive order gave them three specific missions: improving and protecting the health, safety and well-being of Michigan's LGBTQ+ community; promoting LGBTQ+ culture, history and economic contributions to Michigan; and attracting potential future residents by ensuring Michigan is a safe place where queer people and their families can thrive.

The commission accomplishes this through direct community engagement. In 2025, they held four open public meetings with community mixers in Bay City, Marquette, Holland-Saugatuck and Hazel Park. They conducted nine listening sessions focused on LGBTQ+ identity, safety and rights. Commissioners showed up at more than 15 Pride events across Michigan. They partnered with Equality Michigan on Capitol Day in Lansing, presented at state conferences on LGBTQ+ issues, built



partnerships with community organizations statewide and conducted community needs assessments.

“The work of the commission is to be the voice of our LGBTQ+ community to the state government and vice versa,” Hernández-Guzmán told BTL. When Michigan is deciding where money goes or what policies to pursue, commissioners show up to make sure the state's roughly 400,000 LGBTQ+ residents are part of the conversation.

Take the August 2025 listening session at Affirmations in Ferndale, which focused specifically on small business owners and entrepreneurs. Commissioners partnered with Kevin Heard from the Detroit Regional LGBT Chamber of Commerce to hear directly from queer business owners about the barriers they face.

The sessions have explicit ground rules. Commissioners are there to listen, not offer solutions in the moment. The goal is to understand patterns: what challenges keep coming up, what resources are missing, what's actually working. Then they take that information back to the state government to shape policy and funding priorities.

The 15 commissioners represent different slices of Michigan's LGBTQ+ community by design. Anthony Williams is CEO of Corktown Health. Erin Knott serves as executive director of Equality Michigan. Danielle Woods recently retired after serving as the LGBTQ+ liaison officer at Detroit Police Department. Kevin Nguyen, a University of Michigan grad student, represents younger

LGBTQ+ folks aged 18-25.

The commission also includes Bishop Bonnie A. Perry from the Episcopal Diocese of Michigan, Lacey Mandoka representing Native communities, Audra Wilson representing the trans community and several others whose expertise ranges from mental health to business to elder care. They all serve volunteer terms through November 2027, meeting quarterly around the state and forming working groups between meetings to tackle specific issues.

For 2026, the commission is concentrating on four priorities. The first is protections: making sure anti-discrimination policies have enforcement mechanisms and LGBTQ+ Michiganders can live safely. Second is health: expanding access to culturally competent healthcare, including gender-affirming care and mental health services. Third is education: pushing for inclusive curricula in schools and creating environments where LGBTQ+ students feel safe. Finally, there's a focus on workforce equity, which will include addressing discrimination in hiring and creating pathways for LGBTQ+ entrepreneurs and workers.

These priorities translate into specific work like conducting community needs assessments, partnering with LGBTQ+ community centers around the state and developing relationships with state legislators.

Michigan's LGBTQ+ landscape looks dramatically different than it did just a few years ago. The Elliott-Larsen Civil Rights

Act now includes protections for sexual orientation and gender identity. Conversion therapy is banned. The state has made historic investments in LGBTQ+ health.

None of that happened in a vacuum. It happened because people showed up to listening sessions and talked about their lives. Commissioners took those stories and made them impossible for policymakers to ignore and connected the dots between a trans teenager in Marquette who can't find affirming healthcare and a budget line item for LGBTQ+ health services.

The commission does unglamorous, crucial work. They can't write legislation or force the state to fund specific programs. But they can make sure that when Michigan's government makes decisions, someone in the room is thinking about how those decisions affect queer people. In a state where we've gone from having no protections to being considered one of the most welcoming in the nation, that visibility matters.

## How you can get involved

The commission's 2026 public meetings are scheduled and anyone can attend either in person or virtually:

- March 20 in Flint
- May 15 in Lansing
- Aug. 7 in Kalamazoo
- Nov. 13 in Ypsilanti

The commission will also be at Capitol Day on May 13 in Lansing, working alongside Equality Michigan to bring community voices directly to state legislators.

If you can't make meetings in person, you can still engage. The commission maintains detailed meeting minutes on its website. You can also email commissioners directly at [LGBTQ-Commission@michigan.gov](mailto:LGBTQ-Commission@michigan.gov) with concerns, questions or to share your experience navigating state systems as an LGBTQ+ person.

“Community members can get help by connecting with the commission and attending our events so their voices can be heard,” Hernández-Guzmán says. “I'd like to extend an open invitation to stay informed, get involved and be an ally.”

## ◀ American Dream

Continued from page 7

immigration. Yet many — mostly Black and brown — lawful residents and U.S. citizens have been subject to violent attacks and unlawful detention.

In addition, Trump has arrested journalists in Minnesota. And days after completing my degree, I read that the U.S. press has suffered about as many violent assaults this year as in the previous three years combined.

This wasn't the diverse country that enamored me. Unlike the media I'd consumed growing up, I'm now the intersecting face of the identities the federal government is targeting.

I am a Black. I am gay. I am an immigrant. I am a journalist. I am a woman. And I am scared.

Renee Good's murder was a chilling development in an already dark time in the U.S. If white citizens are not safe, what chance do I really have to build a life here?

As a Black lesbian, my existence has always felt political. Wanting to exist on my own terms has required constant defense and justification. I left England because I could no longer handle living in the same country as my parents. After I came out to them at 22, they told me that I was a sinner in the eyes of their God. "She won't be joining me in heaven," my mom once told my sister.

Now, in the U.S., my resident status is under scrutiny too.

I'm working with an immigration lawyer, and will be submitting my supporting documents for a marriage-based green card in a few weeks. And even though I'm doing everything by the book, I'm still worried: ICE agents have shown up at court dates and immigration interviews.

My lawyer says I shouldn't worry, but she can't guarantee it won't happen to me. And experts agree. "People are trying to follow the rules and they're being arrested, detained and deported," Rachel Kafele, director of programs and advocacy at Oasis Legal Services, told me. "There's a sense that all the pathways for people are really closing, and that's just created a huge climate of fear."

I know that my situation isn't as dire as it is for the many LGBTQ asylum seekers who fled countries where identifying as LGBTQ is a crime.

"[The federal government] is doing whatever they can to not give asylum to anyone," Kafele says. "And that's what really worries me, because LGBTQ people need asylum. It's a human rights safety issue. People will die."

This unpredictability scares me too, and it's ramping up. In November 2025, a gay man was detained by ICE in New York during a green card application. That could have been me.

And on Jan. 29, former CNN journalist Don Lemon — who is Black and gay — was arrested. After that, my fiancée and I contemplated whether I should be honest about my journalism career in my green card application, in case this increases my likelihood of running into ICE.

That's why I decided to write this article

anonymously.

I've had thoughts of terminating my immigration application out of fear of being in contact with such a hostile administration. What will happen if I get caught by ICE, with no proof of legal residency? What if my Blackness betrays me when I'm running errands? What if my extensive digital footprint exposes me as a "traitor"?

In 2025, more than 100 judges with a history of showing favor to asylum seekers have been fired in the U.S.

It's terrifying for me to think that some of the judges who still have their jobs might be afraid of being let go and wanting to make the administration happy at my expense. We are all just in "survival mode," Noyola says.

"What worries me is that the courts may become complicit in the breaking of the law," says Aaron Morris, executive director at Immigration Equality. With less immigrant-friendly judges on the bench, those left behind might show more support of the government's illegal activities, including its use of detention centers. "Unfortunately, now we're seeing ... people getting caught up in the immigration detention and deportation machine who are not even undocumented."

Even as a New York resident, I've had to reckon with the possibility of being detained if I go through with the green card application. This isn't me being overly cautious, but realistic: ICE has been knocking on doors in neighborhoods close to me.

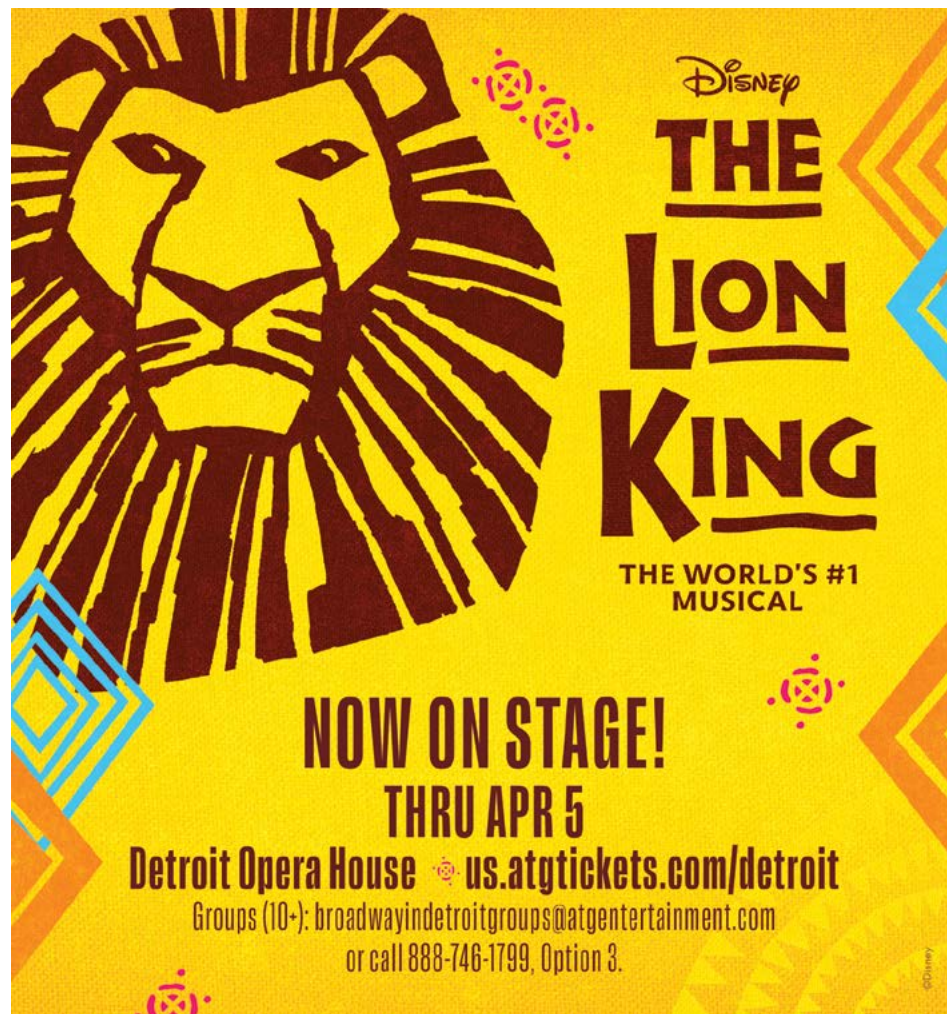
Brophy says most detainees whose immigration proceedings continue in detention don't have access to their files and are not informed of their hearings. "It's incredibly hard for lawyers to prepare a detained client," he says. "[The detainees] are not getting enough time and access for counsel to be able to effectively present their case."

As terrifying as this is for me to think about, Kafele says immigrants outside of big blue cities are arguably in greater danger. "In more rural areas and areas where the local government is very conservative and anti-immigrant and anti-LGBTQ, those people are more at risk. Their local governments, their police officers, the sheriffs, they're working with ICE and Border Patrol to help detain immigrants and deport people."

When I told Brophy I was afraid that my work as a journalist could put me at risk, he quickly responded, "Clearly your passion and your interest is in being a journalist. I wouldn't want to tell you to stop doing what you're doing any more than I would tell someone to change their gender identity or their sexual orientation." Then he said something that really stuck with me: "Because once you do that, we're all just giving into this."

I think about that often. About what it would mean to shrink myself in order to survive. I've done that with my parents, and I don't want to do it again. I will continue to follow the legal judicial process, not as a statement or act of defiance. Simply because, for now, I am choosing to stay for the woman I love.

But I'm very scared.



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# Avant-Garde and Proud: Ann Arbor Film Festival Celebrates 25 Years of Out Night

How two Ann Arbor advocates built a lasting queer film tradition

BY BRIDGETTE M. REDMAN

Long before queer stories found a home on streaming platforms, the Ann Arbor Film Festival was screening them. Its 64th edition runs March 24-29, and this year brings a landmark: the 25th anniversary of Out Night, the festival's dedicated LGBTQ+ program.

The festival, the oldest experimental film competition in the world, has served as an early launchpad for filmmakers including George Lucas, Brian De Palma and lesbian experimental cinema pioneer Barbara Hammer. Films that win certain awards become eligible for Oscar nominations, making it one of the few Academy Award-qualifying festivals in the country.

Pioneering LGBTQ+ advocates Keith Orr and his husband Martin Contreras have been part of Out Night since the beginning, when it was called Girls Out Night. Former owners of venerable Ann Arbor gay bar Aut, the pair sponsor the Aut Film Award for best LGBTQ+ film.

Contreras said the original Out Night was the brainchild of former executive director Christina Hamilton, who invited them to help get it off the ground. They recruited several members of the gay business community to raise money.

"Every director since has been really committed to making Out Night an important part of the festival," Orr told BTL. "By doing that, it means we're able to introduce a community to it that otherwise might not go to the film festival."

Now retired, Orr and Contreras are focused on making sure the Aut Film award outlasts them. They started an endowment in 2019 after selling the Aut Bar and reached their goal of \$15,000 this year to fund the annual award. Thanks to the endowment, Orr said, the award will continue in perpetuity.

"We would put in money when we could," Orr said. "We would get on stage and ask people to donate. We started telling our family members in lieu of gifts for Christmas and birthdays to send a check to the film festival instead."

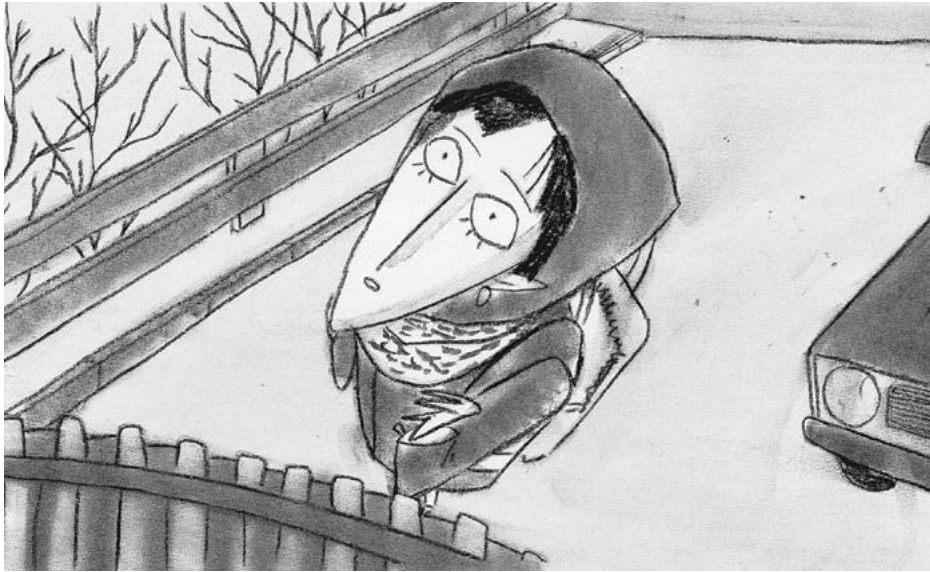
A special program on Sunday, March 29 celebrates the anniversary with a retrospective curated by Abigail Knox, who wrote her Columbia College thesis on LGBTQ+ experimental film. The program revisits six past award-winning films, including works



A still from the film "Tank Fairy" by Erich Rettstadt.



A scene from Lynne Sachs' "Every Contact Leaves a Trace."



A still from Anastasiia Falileieva's docu-drama "I Died in Irpin."



Martin Contreras (left) and Keith Orr at the Pride Source offices in 2025. Photo: Chris Azzopardi

by Deborah Strutt, Kristin Pepe, Monica Tullia Nolan and Barbara Hammer.

Thursday's Out Night competition features new work exploring identity, family expectations, chosen community, aging and grief. Highlights across the week include "Barbara Forever," Brydie O'Connor's documentary portrait of Barbara Hammer; "Adam's Apple," a documentary focused on a young adult trans person; and "TheyDream," a Sundance award-winning animated feature about family, loss and coming out.

"The films that are submitted always speak to the times we live in," Contreras said. "The films recently all speak to the attack on the trans community — and rightfully so — bringing attention to gender fluidity."

Festival director Leslie Raymond, who has led the organization since 2013, said

LGBTQ+ perspectives aren't limited to Out Night.

"We make sure there's representation across the other 12 shorts in competition programs," Raymond said. "What we don't want to do is sequester it off and say 'this is different.'"

Orr said the Aut Film award has created a lasting legacy in experimental film because no other festival focuses specifically on experimental LGBTQ+ work.

For Orr, though, that legacy is about more than funding.

"Nobody's getting rich in experimental film. Most are artists with a commitment to what they're doing. Whatever happens in the experimental world eventually becomes a part of our larger world."

Visit [aaiffilmfest.org](http://aaiffilmfest.org) for the complete schedule and detailed information.

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## Trump: Gays Should Be Grateful They're Not Being Thrown Off of Buildings in the U.S.



BY D'ANNE WITKOWSKI

A message to blood-thirsty, death-loving, human rights-hating conservatives: Stop using the gays to justify the war in Iran. Stop acting like we should be grateful or something.

It's long been a talking point of the anti-gay right that LGBTQ+ people have nothing to complain about when it comes to their rights in the United States because LGBTQ+ people in other countries have it much worse.

The most high-profile bearer of this nonsense is Donald Trump himself.

Trump recently sat down with YouTuber and boxer Jake Paul for a "Between Two Ferns"-style interview.

As one might expect, the subject of Iran came up. You know, the place where the U.S. incinerated a school full of girls because Pete Hegseth has a murder fetish.

Paul expressed bewilderment that there wasn't more feminist support for the war.

"I was a bit shocked that so many activists in America didn't like it," Paul says. "Meanwhile, they were like, 'Oh, well, we support women. We want women to have all these rights.' Meanwhile, you're liberating the women of Iran and then they have an issue with it. I thought it was very confusing."

*The ultra right-wing justices that Trump chose for the Supreme Court have both the inclination and the ability to strip LGBTQ+ people of every right we've fought for since Stonewall.*

The U.S. is liberating the women of Iran, huh? Apparently step one was to kill their daughters. Did I mention that Paul gets hit in the head for a living?

American women not getting murdered as much (debatable) and how lucky they are led Trump to think of the gays and how good gays have it here as opposed to those poor gays in Iran.

"We support gays," says Trump, "but they throw gays off the buildings."



I'm sorry, who is this WE he's talking about? Because Trump does not "support gays." The ultra right-wing justices that Trump chose for the Supreme Court have both the inclination and the ability to strip LGBTQ+ people of every right we've fought for since Stonewall.

Not to mention Trump's obsession with hurting trans people. If you are anti-trans, you can't call yourself a friend of the gays. If you're coming for transgender people, you're coming for the whole community (and for any members of the community who don't think trans people belong, you can unkindly fuck off).

Trump also supports ultra right-wing candidates for Congress and state offices who write and pass anti-LGBTQ+ legislation to make our lives as difficult as possible. That is not supporting gays.

Trump then strays to some other thought and says something about how great

the war is going, how much support he has and his amazing poll numbers (his poll numbers are actually very, very bad). The man is delusional.

They also talked about the future of young people. A future that Trump makes worse by the day. Paul asks Trump if he has advice for young people about how to succeed.

"The hot thing right now is AI. If you know the AI thing, you're going to get an unbelievable crazy job at ridiculous numbers, numbers you never thought of," he says. "So if you

like computers and all of that, it's not a bad thing."

Got that, kids? Yeah, you won't have, like, clean water or air you can breathe, but if you can get in on that AI thing, you're golden.

Trump and his administration love AI more than your weird aunt on Facebook. It is, quite frankly, embarrassing. Like the AI video of Trump flying an airplane over the country and literally shitting on people. Or the AI video of RFK Jr. in a wrestling ring beating the shit out of a guy in what looks like a Twinkie costume (not going to link to them. You can find them if you want). Truly the most cringe administration ever.

Trump also says of Iran, "We have to wipe out the evil. They're evil people."

In case it wasn't clear, Trump is very racist. Granted he's not the first racist president, but he is the only one in my lifetime that has been so open about it.

Trump is also incapable of seeing (or caring about) the "evil" that he and his administration are responsible for. I do not actually believe evil exists, but cruelty and violence sure do. His approach to immigration hurts a lot of people. Gays included.

"Earlier this year, immigration authorities sought to deport two gay Iranian men who are in a relationship back to Iran, where same-sex relationships are illegal and can be punishable by death under Iranian law," The Advocate reports. "The couple fled Iran after being arrested by morality police for alleged 'homosexual conduct,' according to their attorney. They eventually reached the United States seeking asylum, but remained detained for more than a year while facing removal proceedings that could have sent them back to Iran."

But hey, at least we're not the ones throwing them "off the buildings."

### Emmy-Winning Anchor Earns Broadcasting Honor

Two years after WNEM-TV5 pulled him off the air, Emmy-winning Flint anchor David Custer was inducted into the National Academy of Television Arts & Sciences Silver Circle on Feb. 28 at MotorCity Casino Hotel in Detroit. The honor recognizes 25 years of distinguished service in broadcasting.

Custer, a 12-time regional Emmy winner and three-time Edward R. Murrow Award recipient, was one of five inductees at this year's NATAS Michigan honors dinner. The recognition comes months after a Genesee County jury

unanimously found that WNEM-TV5 retaliated against him after he supported a coworker's complaint against the station. Former colleagues described a pattern of workplace homophobia during legal proceedings.

"That verdict wasn't just about me," Custer told BTL. "It was about accountability. It was about dignity in the workplace."

Fellow inductee Huel Perkins, the retired WJBK-TV anchor, thanked Custer during the ceremony for his fight for justice on behalf of everyone in the industry.

The legal battle continues. WNEM's insurance company has appealed the verdict, while Custer has filed a cross-appeal seeking a new trial that would include previously excluded evidence of workplace discrimination.



David Custer, center, with his Silver Circle induction plaque. Courtesy photo

### Ninth Circuit Judges Rebuke Colleague's Anti-Trans Rant in Spa Case

Twenty-seven judges on the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals have formally rebuked Trump-appointed Judge Lawrence VanDyke after he wrote that a transgender discrimination case was "about swinging dicks."

VanDyke's dissent came after the full court declined to rehear Olympus Spa v. Armstrong, leaving in place a 2025 ruling that a Washington state nude spa must admit trans women under state nondiscrimination laws. Judge M. Margaret McKeown, joined by colleagues, called VanDyke's language "vulgar barroom talk" that undermines public trust in the courts.

The spa's owners, represented by attorneys from the SPLC-designated hate group Pacific Justice Institute, are expected to petition the Supreme Court.

### Grand Rapids Pride Center Closed After Major Flooding

A major storm on March 10 flooded the Grand Rapids Pride Center's building at 343 Atlas Ave. SE, forcing the center to close its doors and pause all in-person services.

Insurance will not cover any of the damage.

The flooding destroyed carpets, furniture, electronics and merchandise used for fundraising. Poor air quality damaged clothing in the center's essential needs closet, which serves community members in need. Both the GR Pride Center and GR Trans Foundation have suspended critical in-person services until the building can be restored.

Staff said the closure is especially concerning with another winter storm approaching, as the center serves as an affirming warming space for community members who may have nowhere else to go.

The center is asking for financial support and volunteers to help with cleanup and restoration. Donations can be made at [givebutter.com/grpc-flood](https://givebutter.com/grpc-flood).

### All-Trans Variety Show Comes to Hamtramck

Ghost Light in Hamtramck (2314 Caniff Ave.) will host "No Cissies Allowed, an all-transgender edition of the Hamtramck Is Gay! variety show on March 30. The lineup will feature drag performer Leafy Green, transgender antifolk artist Dahmer's Breakfast and Blackbird, whose immersive "Flower Flogger" performance merges balloon art, kinetic sculpture and video into a sensorial experience. Doors open at 7 p.m.

### Mark Transgender Day of Visibility in Michigan

Transgender Michigan will host a rally at the state Capitol in Lansing on March 21 from 1 to 3 p.m., featuring speakers including State Rep. Laurie Pohutsky, Equality Michigan's Emme Zanotti and Rachel Crandall Crocker, who founded both Transgender Michigan and the International Transgender Day of Visibility holiday itself. On March 25, an open mic at The Dovetail in Warren will feature poetry, storytelling and music. Learn more at [transgendermichigan.org](https://transgendermichigan.org).

### Oscar-Winning Editor Goes Viral for Kissing Partner After Win

"One Battle After Another" editor Andy Jurgensen lit up social media Sunday night when he kissed his partner before accepting his Academy Award for best editing. Jurgensen thanked his partner Bill from the stage, saying he "brings so much joy to my life every day." The moment quickly went viral, with one viewer writing, "That's what we're talking about, visibility without fear."



Andy Jurgensen. Photo: Instagram

# Seven Fingers and a Six Pack: Is AI Selling Gay Parties?

Gay clubs, bathhouses and even 'RuPaul's Drag Race' face questions about AI-generated promo images — and what they cost queer artists

BY SAMUEL SCHWINDT

Fists clenched, nipples mirrored like identical twins — their bodies are practically carbon copies. You could call them “boyfriend twins” or, if you’re feeling cheeky, “doppelbangers.”

Or maybe it’s just AI. Because the next time you see an ad for your favorite gay club or bathhouse, that perfect pair might not even be real.

I recently spotted this kind of questionable couple on Instagram, posted by Body Zone, the longstanding Detroit bathhouse. I ran a screenshot through Sight Engine and other detection websites, the closest AI verification

we have, according to CNET and Popular Science. It flagged the pic as 99% AI. (BTL cannot authoritatively say this is AI, and Body Zone did not respond to our request for comment).

Body Zone isn’t the only one dabbling in “AI-generated” queer content — intentionally or not. Plenty of small businesses rely on stock photo sites for their visuals, which, not-so-coincidentally, are stuffed with AI fantasies of shirtless, smoldering dudes. Campit Outdoor Resort in Saugatuck posted a glorified

grandpa holding what one commenter called a “big old bowl of AI slop” to promote holiday events at their campgrounds. Beef Dip, the name of the themed week where gay Bears gather in Puerto Vallarta, posted an idealized daddy as Poseidon. Dads Of Love, a popular Chicago day-time party, repeatedly posts swirling, fantasy-like graphics that are seemingly AI. Even the new season of “RuPaul’s Drag Race” generated comments accusing the creators of using an AI-generated image. The image featured RuPaul in a sparkling night-sky, about to trapeze over buildings. Notably, the post was deleted from the show’s official page.

Distinguishing



AI-generated images from real ones can be challenging, as I discovered. Popular Science advises the use of online-detectors, such as NoteGPT, warning human-detection is slumping. In the article, David Nield wrote, “We may be past the point of six fingers on hands.” However, the online-detectors suggested by Popular Science have issues with 100% authentication of AI, according to The Global Investigative Journalism Network. They created a guide for

distinguishing human versus AI-generated work, remarking on online-verification failures. Their suggestions range from gut-reactions, to five-minute visual analysis, to deep detection that involves forensics and physics.

Scientific investigations of potentially fake hot bodies behind me, I took a deep dive into how AI has become an uneasy bedfellow for queer people and their community spaces. What harm is there with AI generated images of sexy gay men, beyond potentially upsetting some audience members? Plenty, as it turns out. First, the use of AI images can make people skeptical about the event being promoted. Ethical concerns also arise, particularly regarding how AI-generated art devalues the work of queer artists and designers.

Before I dove into Instagram and Reddit comments, interviewed a professor of internet culture and discussed the design behind event promotion with a prominent DJ in the scene, I needed concrete experience in AI image generation. I offered this prompt to ChatGPT: “Make me a poster for a gay party in Chicago. Lots of hairy men.” It created a packed image of white leathermen. I asked it to “make it more diverse.” It added a single



Artwork hand drawn by Harry Cross.

Black man. Then I prompted: “make it more gender diverse.” It added a few women. Blandness and stereotypes resulted, even with my evolving prompts.

I’m not the only one who has something to say about AI promotion in gay spaces. Instagram user @chrismascima commented on a post from Dads of Love about their flyer: “Love the concept,” he commented, “but the AI artwork not so much. So many talented gay designers who would love to design for this.” On the original Dads of Love post, the tell-tale signs of AI are there — one of the men had seven fingers. While Dads of Love did not respond to requests for comment, Chris Mascima reflected on his Dads of Love comment when asked by BTL. “I have a lot to say about that, especially since my company hosts queer art markets,” he wrote, “and we design all the graphics and support queer artists and makers.”

The stereotypes AI draws upon in generating images, coupled with audience skepticism — from daytime party imagery to references to “RuPaul’s Drag Race” — reflect broader patterns within the LGBTQ+ internet. First we need to understand what makes queer promotion actually work. “Artistic intention plays a big role in online event promotion these days, and creativity and uniqueness really matter,” commented Oliver Haimson, a University of Michigan associate professor in the School of Information and an expert on LGBTQ+ social encounters. “An exciting and artistic flyer that a person clearly puts effort into designing is likely going to be much more successful for event promotion than, say, a generic image that features the trans flag

or rainbow flag colors.”

The use of AI, however, showcases a lack of diversity and an oversimplification of the event: “When you ask an AI system to create a queer or trans visual, it tends to return a bland image that overly features things like the rainbow flag or the trans symbol — that very few people in the community actually use,” he said.

“AI systems are also fundamentally built on classifying things into categories, and nonbinary people resist being placed into categories,” he added. My own foray into image generation showcased that very lack of gender diversity.

Still, in the face of AI’s stereotypical categorizations, diversity issues, skewed facts and ever-growing power, there are queer artists working against AI’s troubling image classifications. I reached out to Harry Cross, a prominent queer community DJ and party promoter who uses real-life experience and an experimental nature to create artworks for his events: He is the counterpoint to image-generators. His inspired art that he creates for The Dunes Resort in Saugatuck unambiguously emphasizes the diverse queer community of the region. For the Loose Ends weekend at the resort every year, Cross creates new illustrations, drawing queer characters based on real people he’s met there, and others who have competed in the pageant. One of my “friends got in trouble for getting his ass eaten



in the pool,” Cross said in an interview with BTL. He included that moment in a poster the following year.

When it comes to what Cross sees online for event promotion, Cross said he’s “just biased” against AI. “If you take the time to get an artist to make [a flyer], or you make it yourself, it reflects that

something AI generated, Cross said, then “you’re just doing it to make money.”

AI versus custom art in promotions is a tale of two diverging paths. If you just need something to get the word out, you could generate it. But if you’re seeking seductive translations of dynamic, diverse queer events, hire an artist. Speculation aside, remember: that hairy Poseidon isn’t at Beef Dip’s pool parties, and no daddy in Chicago actually has seven fingers.



# Is It Ever Too Late? Geriatric Gender Transitioning and the Race Against Time

For trans people who come out after 65, obstacles multiply, but the peace of living authentically may be the only solution

BY ANNI ARBOUR

I know. The thought of getting old makes you uncomfortable. If you're young, you try not to think of it at all. Consequently, gender transitioning late in life doesn't usually pop up in conversation.

It hit home for me when I was messaging recently with an online friend. She is a very successful author, whom I recently found out is transitioning. I felt it incumbent on me to contact her and offer congratulations and support.

That fact in itself isn't remarkable. I meet people in some state of transition all the time. What made this egg-cracking notable was that the person transitioning is almost 75 years old.

Now, that is remarkable. There are quite a few septuagenarian transgender people, but very few who wait until that decade to come out.

Probably the best-known example of such geriatric transitioning came in the form of Caitlyn Jenner. When she announced her transition in 2015, she was 66 years old.

Despite how you may feel about her personally or about her politics, Jenner's reveal not only brought with it mainstream — i.e., cis media — trans visibility, but also the possibility of someone considering gender affirmation after retirement age.

Her coming out was met with shock and mixed reactions. While she naturally became the butt of jokes for comedians, she also was feted and honored by many in the media. ESPN gave her the Arthur Ashe Courage Award, Barbara Walters named her the Most Fascinating Person of 2015, and the July 2015 issue of "Vanity Fair" gave her the full-glam treatment with an Annie Leibovitz cover and interior photo layout accompanying a glowing interview.

News flash: Most elder trans people don't get that kind of attention, nor



that much support.

To begin with, most aging trans people who haven't yet outed themselves slam up against certain realities that hit them harder than they do younger trans people.

To start with, the sense of time is different for both.

A person who transitions at a young age may do so by means of "queer time." That is a concept explained in queer theorist J. Jack Halberstam's book, "In a Queer Time and Place," as "the potentiality of a life unscripted by the convention of family, inheritance and child rearing."

"Queer subcultures produce alternative temporalities by allowing their participants to believe that their futures can be imagined according to logics that lie outside of those paradigmatic markers of life experience — namely birth, marriage, reproduction and death."

Our cisgender-dominant society doesn't operate with those same parameters. Life events are hard-wired, thereby creating a subjective temporal structure that informs personal identity. Especially the concept of "blood family."

For a younger trans person in their teens or even 20s, estrangement from their biological family isn't unusual, no matter their gender. Often, time diminishes the pain of that break, and healing is always a possibility.

For older trans people, though, time is not on their side. My friend is experiencing the heart-wrenching problems created by decades of living by society's established concepts.

She told me how her spouse of more than four decades is "struggling" with her coming out, and her two children are torn between support by one and ostracization by the other. She had often written about her love for, and the closeness of, her biological family in her published work. Now, she avoids writing about them at all.

Compounding this tragedy is the inescapable fact that she has only a relatively short time to reconcile with her loved ones. Which necessarily brings up the matter of an elder trans person's overall health.

A 2014 study of geriatric trans people in the U.K., published in the May 2024 issue of International Journal of Transgender Health, noted that the older transgender

community experiences poorer physical health, disability, increased perceived stress and depressive symptomatology compared to their cisgender and LGB counterparts.

The study also found high reported rates of poor physical and mental health, including HIV, mental illness and issues associated with gender-affirming treatment. Older transgender people are also reported to be at an increased risk of dementia, which is partly due to high incidences of dementia-associated risk factors.

These obvious complications are countered by the generally accepted conclusion that gender-affirming medical treatments (i.e., hormonal and/or surgical), which align transgender individuals' outward physical appearance with their internal gender identity at any age, tend to lead to higher quality of life, according to a study published in an online issue of LGBT Health on Jan. 16, 2019.

Additionally, transgender elders may experience ageism when seeking treatment, as medical insurance plans place arbitrary limits on coverage for transgender elders. Some healthcare

providers discourage transgender elders from undergoing these treatments.

The Gender Confirmation Center also points out that such factors as Body Mass Index, smoking and drinking habits, blood pressure and a personal history of heart disease or strokes may inhibit medical clearance for gender-affirming care.

And finally, various drug interactions could hinder prescription of hormone replacement therapy.

An online check of health plan coverage by two of Michigan's largest medical providers — Blue Cross Blue Shield of Michigan and the University of Michigan's Michigan Care — do not specify any age limitations on gender-affirming health services, as long as they are deemed medically necessary. It is recommended that each transitioning individual check with their own insurance provider.

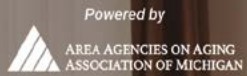
Unfortunately, there are few groups or organizations dedicated to helping elderly people with their gender affirmations. Locally, Transgender Michigan has a small group called TGMI Older Adults Chapter on Facebook. And MiGEN, which is an LGBTQ+ elder network, although not exclusively transgender-oriented, is of some help. But for the most part, gender transitioning after retirement age is a solitary, and often lonely, undertaking.

Yet, despite all the obstacles, gender transition may be the only solution for someone who has hidden their true gender for decades.

"If you're 25, you've got your whole life in front of you," stated one older trans woman in a BBC story from Oct. 11, 2015. "But at 67 do you want to spend three years in transition?"

"I felt I couldn't live with my body not matching my brain gender."

The journey for an elder trans person is not easy, but at the end, there is a peace like they have never known before. I hope my friend comes to the same conclusion.



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# Crying at a Biker Orgy

A conversation with Harry Melling and Harry Lighton on ‘Pillion,’ kink and first love

BY CHRIS AZZOPARDI

In the A24 film “Pillion,” kink is neither punchline nor provocation. Instead, writer-director Harry Lighton and stars Alexander Skarsgård of “True Blood” and Harry Melling, the English actor who played Dudley Dursley in the “Harry Potter” films, craft something far rarer: a tender story about desire set within London’s gay biker dom/sub scene.

What unfolds between Colin (Melling), a shy young man discovering himself, and the magnetic Ray (Skarsgård) is a shared journey that ultimately explores agency within the messy, moving process of defining what you want. That the film features butt plugs, bootlicking and a wooded orgy while still feeling like something you could maybe watch with your mom is part of its quiet magic.

As headlines roll in and queer audiences debate the balance between visibility and protecting community “secrets,” I spoke with Melling and Lighton about moms who didn’t run from the screening, why Tiffany’s “I Think We’re Alone Now” might be the most subversive needle drop of the year and making a film that refuses to water itself down for the mainstream.



Alexander Skarsgård (right) and Harry Melling in “Pillion.” Photo: A24

**It’s rare to see a film featuring butt plugs and singlets portrayed with such tenderness. I was thinking about how, if this film didn’t exist, we wouldn’t be seeing headlines like this one from the Boston Globe: “In ‘Pillion,’ a shy bloke’s heart belongs to daddy.” What have you loved most about the critical conversation surrounding the film?**

**Harry Lighton:** Journalists have quite squarely — in terms of directly, not in terms of them

being squares — addressed the film. There’s been lots of really interesting things written on the power dynamics in the film and journalists reaching out to people from the community to get their thoughts on it, and it feels like it has generated discussion. That was always the aim.

**Harry Melling:** One thing that I can’t help but feel is, just like Harry said: discussion. The discussion about this subculture, the fact that it’s now got a platform that people are talking about and people are engaging in what these dynamics are, and that’s just wonderful that a film can open up that conversation.

**Now that audiences are interpreting the film in their own ways, does it feel aligned with what you set out to create?**

**Lighton:** It does seem to be received in the way I set out. I wanted it to have room for contradictions. So when you began your interview by saying that, for a film about butt plugs and arseless singlets, it felt surprisingly tender, that means a lot to me. I was just doing an interview with some pups who were saying how it felt lovely that they’d seen their community represented in a way which felt like it had some honesty beyond stereotypes. So all

those things made me very happy, for sure.

**There’s often a tension in queer culture between visibility and privacy — wanting representation, but not wanting every “secret” exposed. How do you respond to that mix of excitement and caution from within the community?**

**Melling:** Well, certainly when I started hanging out with GBMCC, the Gay Bikers Motorcycle Club, just to get to know these guys, that was exactly what I thought. As an outside actor coming to this group,

I really wanted to make sure that they felt comfortable in discussing this subculture and their world with me. They were so generous with their time, with volunteering stories about how to do a decent bootlick and so forth. Then they ended up being in the movie, which is incredible, and the fact that they went to Cannes and got to have that experience was just a full circle moment.

**Lighton:** I agree with what Harry said, and I think that, listen, it’s still a film about one very specific

See [Pillion](#), page 20

## ◀ Leather Pride

Continued from page 6

area, the idea came naturally. “If Derek can do that in Ferndale, then let’s do that in Lansing,” Dollins said.

They connected with the Lansing Pride board, began helping with events and eventually earned the go-ahead to create their own.

The gender-neutral competition is open to anyone 21 and older, regardless of gender identity. The winner will earn the title of Lansing Pride Leather and represent the community at future events. James stressed that the judging criteria are designed to be fair across the board, focused on presentation and how contestants carry themselves rather than favoring any particular identity or expression.

While many leather contests require full sets of leather attire, it’s not a requirement for Lansing Leather Pride. “I know that leather is very expensive. I know not everyone has it,” James explained. “So I want it to be known that you are not required to wear full leather for this contest. It’s just expected that the main components of your look are leather and that they be the focus.”

The weekend kicks off Friday, April 3 with a meet and greet beginning at 8 p.m. where attendees can mingle with contestants and judges. Each contestant will assemble a raffle basket reflecting their personality, with proceeds going to Lansing Pride.

Events include free exploration classes covering topics including Kink 101 and flogging and whips, with additional sessions to be announced. The Lansing

Area AIDS Network will offer free testing and a gear swap will run alongside the afternoon programming. Boot blacks, professionals skilled in leather care, will be on hand both nights.

Lansing Leather Pride was made

competent, nonjudgmental care.

Wert said self-disclosure to medical and mental health providers is already difficult for many in the LGBTQ+ community and adding an aspect of BDSM or kink makes the ability to get



Kenny Dollins III (left) and Derek James. Photo: That Gay Photographer

possible in part by a \$2,000 donation from a local Lansing physician, Dr. Erik Wert. Wert said the BDSM and kink community is a marginalized population whose members often avoid seeking medical and mental health treatment out of fear of being judged, leading to social isolation and negative health outcomes.

“Events like this allow individuals to find a community and decrease this isolation,” Wert told BTL. “It also allows for individuals to exchange knowledge, discuss how to help each other, and discuss both physical and mental health” with providers who offer culturally

appropriate care even harder.

“Most providers have little experience understanding the unique aspects found within the BDSM/kink community,” he explained.

James said the goal is bigger than one night of competition. He wants to bridge gaps between leather, kink, drag and the broader queer community across the state.

“We’re the capital city, so it’s for everyone.”

Applications are open at [lansingpride.org/leatherpride](http://lansingpride.org/leatherpride).

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Strayhorn Standards  
Puzzle can be found on page 21

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Alexander Skarsgård in "Pillion." Photo: A24

#### ◀ Pillion

Continued from page 18

relationship. It's not meant to be a depiction of the blueprint of this community. So there's still plenty of room for secrets.

#### What was the most valuable lesson that you learned from people who are living this life so that you could portray Colin?

**Melling:** One of the things that really attracted me to this role was just how courageous he is in deciding to jump into this new territory, to maybe not at all times knowing exactly what he's chasing, but knowing that it's right for him. And certainly talking to the other guys from GBMCC and others from the London kink scene — there are a couple of those guys in the movie — the common thread between all those narratives was just how brave they are to decide that's the life they want to live. I found that very moving, and it all felt that there was a similar narrative in terms of jumping off something into something that to a lot of people will be different. That bravery was something that I really realized as I was going through the journey of Colin.

**Despite its explicit elements, it feels accessible. I kept thinking, "My mom might like this movie."**

**Lighton:** We both did show our moms and they didn't run a mile. They laughed at it!

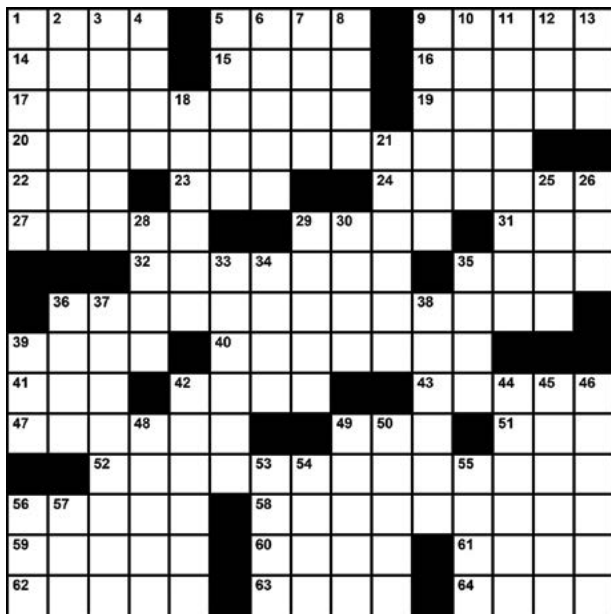
#### Was there ever pressure — internal or external — to make the story more palatable?

**Lighton:** Not at all. When the book was brought to me by Eva Yates, who ended up being an executive on it, it was very clear from the book that telling a version of this story where it felt too diluted would mean pulling the material in the opposite direction. When I was writing, I had conversations with myself and others about how to make sure that, without diluting the extremity of the material, we were also creating a world which felt inviting and felt like it had warmth in it, so it didn't just feel like we were holding an uninitiated audience member at length. But it was never a pressure in terms of trying to hit that mainstream.

**Melling:** I also think because you are with Colin, who doesn't have prior knowledge about this world, [you are] so up for it. It's just a useful gateway in terms of allowing those people access to something because you're seeing it through someone's eyes who's taking it all on. And also just the fact that it's a first love story, which I think is hopefully a very common thing for a lot of people. The way that Harry found that tone is just really excellent and wonderful.

**The wrestling scene set to Tiffany's "I Think We're Alone Now" is such**

See *Pillion*, page 22



## Strayhorn Standards

### Across

- 1 One of the three bears
- 5 Shortens leaves of grass
- 9 Ellen's wife Portia de \_\_\_\_
- 14 John, in Wales
- 15 Pearl Harbor locale
- 16 Cary of "Robin Hood: Men in Tights"

- 17 "Hollywood Squares" basis
- 19 Aubrey of "Honey Don't!"
- 20 Billy Strayhorn standard that became the theme of the Duke Ellington Orchestra
- 22 Eur. nation
- 23 Trireme tool
- 24 It protects one of your balls
- 27 Mountainous area of Austria
- 29 Card spots
- 31 Did an encore of "Food, Glorious Food"?
- 32 "Goosebumps" series author
- 35 Distort, as data

- 36 Strayhorn standard that was a jazz ballad
- 39 Game played astride stallions
- 40 Get a job "In the Navy"
- 41 Metrosexual
- 42 Knowledgeable about
- 43 Flip over
- 47 Latin dance
- 49 Dallas cager, for short
- 51 Here-there connection
- 52 Strayhorn standard known for its atmospheric sound
- 56 One from Uranus, e.g.
- 58 Ready for your partner
- 59 Error or erection
- 60 Dorothy's dog
- 61 Govt. initiative
- 62 "West Side \_\_\_\_"
- 63 Widemouthed pitcher
- 64 Marquis name?

### Down

- 1 Former cager Bob
- 2 Home for the birds
- 3 Green Bay athlete
- 4 Fork over, with "up"
- 5 Coffee flavor
- 6 Movie like Rock Hudson's "Gun Fury"
- 7 Shout to Nellie
- 8 Bird feeder food
- 9 Gets even with
- 10 Stan's straight man
- 11 "A chicken or a duck is a mistake, when you do \_\_\_\_"
- 12 Remarks, in slang
- 13 Part of a Stein line

- 18 Coral islands
- 21 Drives back
- 25 Caesar's way
- 26 Morning drops
- 28 Roughly
- 29 Bicolor mount
- 30 The lowdown
- 33 Traffic light
- 34 Warn with the horn
- 35 What kissers do with spit
- 36 Honey-pot lover
- 37 Star of "Dog Day Afternoon"
- 38 Body of work
- 39 Gomer's USMC rank
- 42 William S. Porter's pen name
- 44 Agnes Moorehead role
- 45 Missed field goal call
- 46 Super scooper
- 48 "Lesbians ignite!" for example
- 49 Dull finish
- 50 Can't bear
- 53 Construction area
- 54 Plenty, to Shakespeare
- 55 Naughty kids
- 56 Muscle Mary's pride
- 57 Place to park

See p. 19 for answers

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## ◀ Pillion

Continued from page 20

a brilliant tonal choice — sexy, irreverent and unexpectedly tender all at once. What inspired that music choice, and what were you hoping it would bring to the scene?

**Lighton:** I actually hadn't planned to have a needle drop over that scene, but when it was just thud, grunt, carpet, that scene felt a bit cold. So I wanted to warm it up with something which also gave us some insight into Ray's character. Because the song's playing on the speaker, it's diegetic in the scene, and I thought it'd be a nice moment to provide some juxtaposition. Because Ray on the surface seems like this epitome of masculinity. He embodies that kind of gay fantasy, but I also wanted him to be gay, and Tiffany to me is gay with a capital G. And so the idea that Ray would unabashedly wrestle to Tiffany, I thought it was also a nice way of showing the mischief in Ray and the fact that he refuses to neatly fit into these categories.

Was that song playing for you while you were shooting that scene?

**Melling:** No, it wasn't. It was just us grunting and huffing and puffing. One whole sequence.

**Lighton:** Initially I planned to have that be a one-er and I made the actors do it all in one take. It was very exhausting. So I remember they were being real troopers, but after about eight takes, Alexander said, "I'm running out of energy."

Can you take me behind the scenes of shooting the woods orgy sequence? It's not something we

often see handled this way by a major studio film.

**Melling:** I remember the opening shot, which is the biker coming in. It follows him around and then you get the reveal of them playing cards, and then you get the reveal of the trestle table. Obviously I'm just on the trestle table

“Talking to [members of] the London kink scene — there are a couple of those guys in the movie — the common thread between all those narratives was just how brave they are to decide that's the life they want to live.”

— Harry Melling, on playing Colin in “Pillion”

bent over, and it was like, “Action.” And I had no idea where the camera was. I just hear this bike go around, my ass is out, and because it's a good 10-minute shot, I was like, “I have no idea what we just shot.” I didn't know where the camera was. That was certainly the initial orgy moment: me just being confused.

**Lighton:** I just remember we were losing the light, so I was fairly stressed. I think it was probably the most stressed I was in the entire shoot, but I'm very happy with how it turned out.

How did you approach directing that orgy scene?

**Melling:** Quit asking questions, Melling!

**Lighton:** Yeah, we don't have time for your questions. [Laughs.]

**Melling:** You're a sub! [Laughs.]

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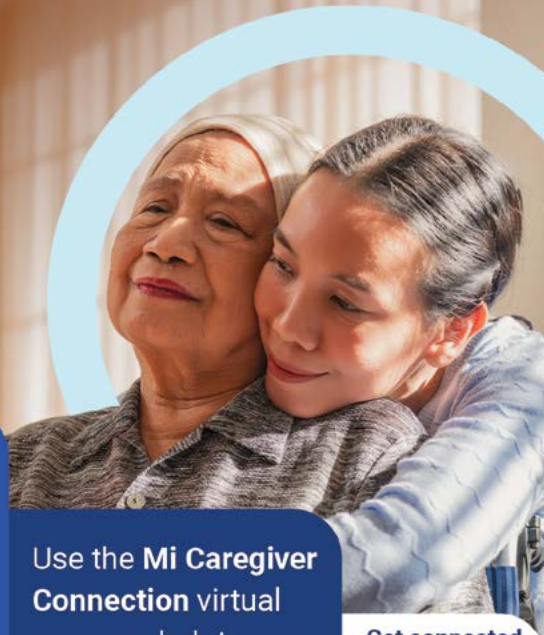


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