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Epistemology of the Werewolf

Epistemology of the Closet and the Queer Agency of *One Night Ultimate Werewolf*

ABSTRACT

In recent years, hidden identity party games have become popular with games such as *One Night Ultimate Werewolf* (Bézier Games, 2014) gaining attention among players and designers. Within these games, players are assigned a hidden identity and they must uncover who is “really” who. Taking *One Night* as its primary example, this article proposes that queer theory can bring the dynamics of agency within hidden identity games into sharper focus. Drawing on Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick’s concepts of sex and knowledge and José Esteban Muñoz’ experience of closeted performances of heterogender, this article shows how playing *One Night* offers a space where social habits that support (or undermine) attitudes to non-straight sexuality are actively reinscribed. Beginning with a retelling of Muñoz’ childhood experience of “butching up,” this article highlights the shared affordances of the closet and playing *One Night*. Akin to Muñoz’ experience, Werewolf players must know the system, they must act as villagers; they must be a spy within the game, fearful that their actions may cause them to be outed. As such, a close reading of Sedgwick’s *Epistemology of the Closet* and *One Night* presents a window into society to illuminate the experience of agency and the closet. Sedgwick asserts that i) sex and knowledge have become conceptually inseparable; ii) attempts to uncover knowledge/sex are prolific; iii) the homo/heterosexual divide is imperative to all; and iv) the closet is performative. Following in the footsteps of Bonnie Ruberg and D.A. Miller such a reading of *One Night*’s gameplay and systems makes Sedgwick’s assertions all too evident. When the player’s assigned hidden role become an extrapolation of sex (and therein knowledge), the game’s system and play become a mimesis of society.

From this, the implications of asserting agency in concealing one’s identity within a system constructed to expose that knowledge can be expanded. Such an expansion proves to betray a degree of nostalgia for the high rhetoric of the Gay Liberation Movement of the 1970s, where notions of passing, deception,

and subcultural modes of knowing are invoked, mirroring the sentiments of secrecy and survival read connotatively in *One Night's* systems and play. However, such an inference does not wholly depict *One Night's* queer monstrous Werewolf. As such, this article turns to the horror genre to construct a more contemporary take on werewolves, one that represents today's positive approach to queerness and monstrosity. Within this queer frame of mind, *One Night's* Werewolves become another incarnation of those found in horror films and literature (Benshoff, 1997, Bernhardt-House, 2008). Indeed, Werewolves, with their shapeshifting nature, represent a transgression of boundaries and an intrinsic fluidity of identity that more aptly portrays today's queer culture. This more recent attitude toward sexuality, its fluidity and playfulness, is too evident in the switching of roles encoded in *One Night's* game mechanics and play. All of this presents an innovative and richly suggestive understanding of agency, monsters, and the closet from the world of games, all while presenting the propensity of Sedgwick's theories of the complexities of the closet and sexuality in a system of knowledge seeking.

KEYWORDS: *queer theory, games, agency, the closet, monsters*

INTRODUCTION

One Night Ultimate Werewolf (Bézier Games, 2014) is a hidden-identity party game where players are organised into two opposing factions: Werewolves, who must conceal their identities, and Villagers, who must identify the Werewolves. With the game's system and play being centred around social deduction and concealment of identity, this article constructs *One Night* as a mimesis of the lived experience of the closet and its correlated performance of passing as "straight". Drawing on Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's concepts of sex and knowledge and José Esteban Muñoz' experience of closeted performances of heterogender, it shows how playing *One Night* offers a space where social habits that support (or undermine) attitudes to non-straight sexuality are actively reinscribed. Complex negotiations of secrecy and disclosure can be seen when Villager players utilise tactics of social deduction while Werewolf players perform their closeted state. A parallel reading of Sedgwick's *Epistemology of the Closet* and *One Night* illuminate the complexities of exerting agency within the paradigm of the closet, so as to highlight the ingenuity and resilience of queer people in such a site of tension. Following in the footsteps of Bonnie Ruberg (2019) and D.A. Miller (1990), such a close reading of *One Night's* gameplay and its underlying systems makes Sedgwick's assertions all too evident. When the player's assigned hidden role becomes a mimesis of sex (and therein knowledge), the game's system and play become a mirror of society whereby "sexuality is fruit – apparently the only fruit – to be plucked from the tree of knowledge" (Sedgwick, 1990, p. 73).

RULES AND PLAY

A game of *One Night* is comprised of the setup, the “Night Phase,” the “Day Phase,” and the “Voting Phase.” During the setup, each player is given an identity role card face-down. This card will then designate their faction for the game, either Villager or Werewolf. At this point, a player may only look at their own role card. Three identity role cards will be left face-down in the centre, which may be used during the next phase of play. After the setup, all players close their eyes and the Night Phase begins. During the Night Phase, some players will have a special role which allows them to interact with the cards placed face-down during the setup of the game. These players may be able to swap a player’s role card or interact with the centre cards. Also during the Night Phase, Werewolf players will open their eyes and locate each other while the Villager players’ eyes are closed, they will be able to see who the Villager players are too. After this, the game moves into the Day Phase whereby all players open their eyes and begin the process of uncovering each other’s hidden roles. There will be arguments and discussions during this phase as the Werewolf players attempt to conceal their identity. Concurrently, the Villager players must deduce who the Werewolf players are, as well as affirm their own role. Once the players have decided who they think is a Werewolf, the Voting Phase begins. Players will vote by pointing a metaphorical gun (their finger) at a player, and at the end of a five second countdown they will “shoot”. If a Werewolf is shot, the Villager players will win and if a Villager player is shot the Werewolf players win.

During the Night Phase, there are several roles that take turns to “wake up” and perform an action, often interacting with other role cards. For instance, within the Villager faction, a Troublemaker will be able to exchange role cards between two other players or a Robber may exchange their card for another player’s card, whether it be a Werewolf role card or another Villager. The Day Phase is the most active phase of *One Night*. It is when players argue, debate, lie, and manipulate each other in the efforts of outing the Werewolf players as well as affirming the Villager players. During this phase, Werewolf players must conceal their identity from the Villager players while Villager players must use tools of social deduction to uncover the Werewolf players. Geoffrey Engelstein and Isaac Shalev (2019) note that Werewolf players, “know who all the villagers are, and as such, the werewolves are playing a role-playing game whose win condition is to successfully deceive the villagers for long enough to devour them” (p. 220). While the Villager players, “are playing a deduction game where the evidence is mostly in the social interactions at the table rather than the almost non-existent mechanical interactions” (Engelstein and Shalev, 2019, p. 220).

QUEER CONNOTATIONS: D.A. MILLER AND BONNIE RUBERG

Queer themes have already been hinted at in this article, and although *One Night*’s queerness is not explicitly denoted, queerness can be readily read through connotations. Queer studies has a history of revealing the queerness

that is veiled between the lines of nonsexual (heterosexual by default) texts or more denotable heterosexual texts. D. A. Miller, in his formative article, “Anal Rope,” explores the potential for queer connotations to be read within Alfred Hitchcock’s film, *Rope*. Miller laments the analysis of formalist elements that surrounds the film’s discourse, and instead calls for a close interrogative queer reading to look past denotation and instead into connotation. He quotes Roland Barthes for whom connotation is a secondary meaning, “whose signifier is itself constituted by a sign or system of primary signification, which is denotation” (Barthes, quoted in Miller, 1990, p. 116). To Barthes (1974), denotation is the relatively fixed and limited meaning ascribed to a “sign”. Indeed, signs accrue a range of connotative (secondary) meanings, but this order of signification is just as culturally determined as first order denotation. As such, most connotations are not queer, hidden, or otherwise surprising, subversive meanings; rather, they are agreed by cultural assent. However, connotative meanings are unconstrained, and since signs of queerness are rarely denoted and only found secondarily, as closeted, or perhaps suppressed, connotations, it often is in this area where they are found. Miller (1990) explains that because homosexual representation in American mass culture is “appertained exclusively to the shadow kingdom of connotations,” at once able to be developed or denied, we must read between the lines to see the queerness beneath (p. 119). The same is true for the world of games, wherein industry, praxis, culture, and product are seemingly heterosexual. For some games, queerness is there to be recognised within the signifying system of the text, such as Mattie Brice’s *Maimichi* (2012) and Robert Yang’s *The Tearoom* (2017). However, for most games, we must look past what is denotable and into the game world’s ‘shadow kingdom’ of connotation for queerness to manifest.

Queer readings are not new to mass media and games (Harper, 2017, Sundén 2009), however Bonnie Ruberg has brought Miller’s particular queer interrogation of formalist elements to the study of games with their reading of Valve’s *Portal* (2007). *Portal* is a first-person shooter and puzzle game in which the player must navigate through a research facility by means of portals. Within the game, the player has a portal gun which creates portals through the walls of the research facility. Each level of the research facility is a puzzle and portals must be made and travelled through to complete the levels. The levels are controlled by the robot antagonist GLaDOS. With all characters within *Portal* being coded as female, Ruberg reads queer intimate relationships between the player-avatar and GLaDOS. One of the many queer connotations they read is a recognition of Miller’s equation of the imagery of holes in *Rope* and the anus. They quote GLaDOS who says to the player-avatar, “I know you’re here somewhere. I can feel you,” suggesting that the research facility the player is within is GLaDOS’s body (Ruberg, 2019, p. 74). For Ruberg (2019) the portals of *Portal* too signify holes which, read queerly, represent a homoerotic entering of player-avatar into GLaDOS’s body (pp. 73–74). As mentioned above, Miller

begins his essay by illustrating his frustration at the scholarship around Hitchcock's *Rope*, that interrogated the technical elements of the film while ignoring its cultural and social implications. From these frustrations, Miller (2013) derived his methodological form of close reading, a process which he latterly came to describe as "too-close reading" (p. 1). Too-close readings forgo the denotable and instead delve into that which is "too small, or too fleeting, or too peripheral" (Miller, 2013, p. 12). For Ruberg (2019) too, the technical elements of game studies scholarship have overshadowed issues of cultural significance (pp. 65–66). As such, this article's approach to *One Night* invites in Miller's queer theoretical approach of the too-close reading to find the queer affect and agency in *One Night*'s shadowy kingdom of connotation.

ONE NIGHT ULTIMATE WEREWOLF AND CRUISING UTOPIA

At a connotative level, we can begin to establish how playing as a Werewolf in *One Night* mimics the lived experience of the closet and, concomitantly, of passing as straight. José Esteban Muñoz' *Cruising Utopia* is a useful point of reference to see the specific affordances of the closet within the game's systems and gameplay. Muñoz (2009) recalls a childhood experience of "butching up" following a proto-homophobic attack by male members of his family after they noticed his effeminate walk. Pained by the incident, Muñoz began a project of studying movement, namely the way assumed heterosexual people walked and applied what he had learned to his own bodily performances. This situated experience was described by him as "playing the game" (Muñoz, 2009, p. 68). The "game" was set within a rigid system of gender normativity, the rules entail an unnatural performance of heterogender, while losing elicited "mockery and palpable contempt" (Muñoz, 2009, p. 68). Muñoz states, "I was a spy in the house of gender normativity, and like any spy, I was extremely careful and worried that my cover would be blown" (p. 68). So, to "win" the game, Muñoz (2009) learned the rules of heterogender and applied this to his own body to "ape" a conception of heterosexuality. The system of constant policing regulated the efficacy of Muñoz' performance and, unlike other boys, his performance was deemed authentic and so he was safe from homophobic degradation.

Twinned with Muñoz, connotations can be readily recognised between the closet and playing as a Werewolf. Indeed, in a game of *One Night* when a player is assigned the role of a Werewolf, once the Day Phase begins the player must conceal their identity and perform as a Villager. Like Muñoz, who recognises he is different from his heterosexual male family, Werewolf players must begin their own project of "Villager-ing" up. Muñoz begins his process of butching up by observing performances of heterogender, particularly noting the way people moved, and then applying that to his own body. In *One Night*, the Werewolf players must learn how to perform as Villagers, by observing the rules, system, and play of Villager players and then applying that to their own performance. Such a performance can be understood as a performance of "pass-

ing” within the rubric of poststructuralist theories of performative gender and sexuality. Gender, as theorised by Judith Butler (1998), is a “stylized repetition of acts” and is “instituted through the stylization of the body, and hence must be understood as the mundane way in which bodily gestures, movements, and enactments of various kinds constitute the illusion of an abiding gendered self” (p. 519). From this theoretical conception, gender and sexuality is shifted away from previous taxonomised discrete (essentialist) categories of identity. Bodily gestures, movements, and enactments emerge as constituents of the illusion of an abiding identity. For Butler, gender is a both performance and performative, meaning it is a role to be played while it also produces a series of affects. All of this consolidates an impression of identity that is produced and reproduced through and in relation to time. Should there be a dissonance between gender expression and assigned historical category of gender of a person, it may also elicit assumptions a nonnormative sexuality identity. A pertinent example of this can be observed in Muñoz’ proto-homophobic attack, when his nonnormative gender expression signified a nonnormative sexual identity to his family.

The acts of passing as straight and passing as a Villager share many aspects of performative gender and sexuality but differ in crucial ways. For Butler’s (1998) theory of gender, performativity is the “appearance of substance,” or those mundane and repetitious constitutive acts that elicit gender’s seeming essential nature (p. 520). She states that gender is a “constructed identity, a performative accomplishment which the mundane social audience, including the actors themselves, come to believe and to perform in the mode of belief” (Butler, 1998, p. 520, emphasis added). The pivotal distinction between Butler’s theory of gender performativity and passing, is the mode of belief of the actors. As Ruberg (2019) illustrates, “To pass for straight is not the same thing as to be straight. Rather, to pass is to succeed at being in a certain way, to be glimpsed for an instance and deemed ‘authentic’” (p. 101). From this, passing must begin with the prerequisite that the actor recognises that their actions are a performance, a mimesis of the identity. Muñoz’ assertion that he was outside the space of heterogender, calling himself a spy in the house of gender normativity exemplifies this distinction. Jack Babuscio also wrote of how gay men (in particular) have learned to perform heterogender through the withholding of knowledge. He states, “This crucial fact of our existence is called passing for straight, a phenomenon generally defined in the metaphor of theater, that is, playing a role: pretending to be something that one is not” (Babuscio, 1993, p. 24).

Reading between the lines to the connotations of the gameplay of *One Night*, playing as a Werewolf is a mimesis of Muñoz’ lived experience of the closet and learning to perform heterogender. Mirroring Muñoz, playing as a Werewolf then purports your outsider status in the house of the Villager players. The Werewolf players must perform as Villager players, similar to Butler’s theory of performativity, by way of language, gesture, and acts to constitute the illusion of a Villager. However, unlike Butler, the Werewolf player is aware that

they are an actor thus there is no “appearance of substance” to the Werewolf player. Instead, the Werewolf must focus on what the Villagers perceive, so as to be glimpsed at and pass as a Villager. Furthermore, as alluded to by Muñoz, there is the potential for passing to succeed and/or fail. By performing hetero-gender, Muñoz is safe from abuse, while a Werewolf passing as a Villager is safe from being shot and losing the game. Of course, Villager players do know that this is a role they have been given, but within the diegetic system of a game, an extra level of role-playing is required of the Werewolf players who are conscious of the demands made on them to masquerade as Villagers and hide their “true” identities. With this, the term most often used for this lived queer experience is being “in the closet”. Being “in” the closet is a recognition that you may be unsafe if you were “out”, and so, like Muñoz, a queer person may attempt to conceal that part of their identity. Reading the connotations of *One Night*, the experience of the closet can be extrapolated with the experience of playing as a Werewolf. Indeed, both must actively perform as normative to pass and remain safe from losing the “game”.

EPISTEMOLOGY OF THE WEREWOLF

Once we begin to read too-close, a world of queer affect is sequestered within the gameplay of *One Night*. Most notably, werewolves are, in their shapeshifting quality, their association with nocturnal deviance, and in the way they are deemed to threaten “normality”, distinctly queer beasts. Indeed, for the part human and part wolf werewolf, a transgression of boundaries is evoked that, for Philip A. Bernardt-House (2008), is explicitly queer as it “actively disrupts normativity, transgresses the boundaries of propriety, and interferes with the status quo in closed social sexual systems” (p. 159). Such a proposition also enlivens Jack Halberstam’s (1993) assertions on monsters, when he states, “the monster, in its otherworldly form, its supernatural shape, wears the traces of its own construction” (p. 349). When considered with the uniquely monstrous quality of lycanthropy, a disease to be spread to innocents (Bernardt-House, 2008, p. 173), the Werewolf of *One Night* is but another incarnation of those found in the horror genres of film and literature (Benshoff, 1997, Bernhardt-House, 2008). As such, the queer subtext of *One Night* is readily established, with reference to the indiscriminate spread of disease mirrored in the game’s rules and mechanics. With this, a move towards theorisations of the closet, something already instrumental to the biology of the Werewolf, proves poignant. So far, this article has shown how playing as a Werewolf reflects Muñoz’ lived experience of the closet. There is, however, room to read much closer. Reading the connotations in the gameplay, rules, and systems of *One Night*’s, we can see the game as a microcosm of Sedgwick’s postulations on sexuality and society, wherein it is a knowledge seeking system that interrogates nonnormative sexual identities.

The Day Phase of a game of *One Night* is centred around hidden identities and social deduction. During this phase, all knowledge equates to the knowl-

edge of who is a Werewolf. This implication twinned with the extrapolation of the lived queer experience of the closet and playing as a Werewolf readily invites us to draw on Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's theorisation of knowledge, sexual identity, and the closet. Sedgwick's thesis in *Epistemology of the Closet* is that in the late nineteenth-century, a historical turn led sexuality to become an, if not the, integral definer of a person's identity. This led her to argue that "virtually any aspect of modern Western culture, must be, not merely incomplete, but damaged in its central substance to the degree that it does not incorporate a critical analysis of modern homo/heterosexual definition" (Sedgwick, 1990, p. 1). There are four integral components to Sedgwick's argument that lead her to this conclusion regarding homo/heterosexuality and the closet. Namely, i) sex and knowledge have become conceptually inseparable; ii) attempts to uncover knowledge/sex are prolific; iii) the homo/heterosexual divide is imperative to all; and iv) the closet is performative (Sedgwick, 1990, pp. 1-3, 67-73). When read too closely, *One Night* reflect Sedgwick's paradigm of habits that construct a space wherein nonnormative identities are actively reinscribed. Gameplay then becomes a mimesis of Sedgwick's theorisations, a microcosm that will present the difficulties when negotiating agency in a system of the perceived binarisms of homo/heterosexuality, secrecy/disclosure, silence/speech, and Werewolf/Villager.

For Sedgwick (1990), so touched is Western culture by the permeative demarcation of the homosexual/heterosexual definition that a wider structure of secrecy/disclosure and other "contestations of meaning" [private/public masculine/feminine, majority/minority, same/different] have been indelibly shaped by it (p. 72). After demonstrating the extensive and pervasive attention centred on homosexuality since the end of the nineteenth century, she states:

The process, narrowly bordered at first in European culture but sharply broadened and accelerated after the late eighteenth century, by which "knowledge" and "sex" become conceptually inseparable from one another – so that knowledge means in the first place sexual knowledge; ignorance, sexual ignorance; and epistemological pressure of any sort seems a force increasingly saturated with sexual impulsion – was sketched in Volume 1 of Foucault's *History of Sexuality* (Sedgwick, 1990, p. 73).

With the discursive conflation of "sex" and "knowledge", we can begin to see the connotations within *One Night*, where "Werewolf" and "knowledge" are also conceptually inseparable. Indeed, during a game of *One Night*, from the moment the Day Phase begins, all knowledge is equated to the Werewolf. While Villager players will seek to find who the Villager players are too, that knowledge is only relevant to uncover the Werewolf players. For instance, during the Day Phase players will ask each other what role they were assigned from the setup of the game. Villager players must affirm their Villager status by presenting the information they have learned during the Night Phase then use tools of social deduction, and perhaps manipulation, to uncover who the Were-

wolf players are. Meanwhile, Werewolf players, like Muñoz, must learn this information too so as to create an “authentic” performance to pass as a Villager. By replacing the concept of “sex” with “Werewolf” in these binarisms, non-normative sex being linked to the unregulated, the beastly, the nocturnal, and the shameful becomes explicit and hence its delineation to the closet. Moreover, as Sedgwick (1990) states, by building on Michel Foucault, it is the permeative heterosexist gaze that began the process of the homo/heterosexual demarcation. The interrogation of non-straight identities taxonomised them, and in turn actively reinscribed straight identities as well (Sedgwick, 1990, p. 9). With this discursive implication, knowledge within a game of *One Night*, means in the first place knowledge of the Werewolf players; ignorance, ignorance of who the Werewolf players are. The propensity for Werewolves to be read connotatively as nonnormative sexualities has been readily shown above but here we see the indicative consequences of such. Now this implication can be seen to effect both Werewolf and Villagers players as analysis of their play within the systems of the game exposes the active reinscribing of their identities.

Sedgwick argues that with the emergence of the conceptual inseparability of sex/knowledge, attempts to uncover nonnormative sexualities became prolific. She claims that after the events of Stonewall in 1969, the “fine antennae of public attention” became energised in its interest in the “love that is famous for daring not speak its name” (Sedgwick, 1990, p. 67). For Sedgwick, it is the secrecy of non-straight identities which excites the heterosexist gaze for involuntary non-straight exposures. Indeed, with attempts to uncover sex/knowledge being so prolific, the supposed binary of in/out of the closet becomes erroneous. For queer people, the closet is in flux, constantly built and broken, while the heterosexist gaze strives to fix and declare nonnormative identities, despite the apparent disguise and safety that the closet was meant to afford. For Sedgwick:

the deadly elasticity or heterosexist presumption means that, like Wendy in *Peter Pan*, people find new walls springing up around them even as they drowse: every encounter with a new classful of students, to say nothing of a new boss, social worker, loan officer, landlord, doctor, erects new closets whose fraught and characteristic laws of optics and physics exact from at least gay people new surveys, new calculations, new draughts and requisitions of secrecy or disclosure (Sedgwick, 1990, p. 68).

As *One Night* is a hidden identity party game, gameplay is defined by secrecy and disclosure and indeed it is that secrecy and the interrogative social deduction of the Villagers that work to define Werewolf players. As such, with, and within, each instance of playing *One Night*, the Werewolf player’s closet will fluctuate depending on each Villager player. For the Werewolf players, the deadly elasticity of the Villager player presumption means that their performance as Villager players is in flux too, and so every encounter with every Villager player is an individual closet and performance.

So pervasive is the heterosexist/Villager gaze that not only will it interrogate their respective nonnormative subjects, the lens will also be turned on themselves. Within this system of secrecy/disclosure while a queer person/Werewolf player is performing the closet there may be few distinctive permeations between them and straight identities/Villager players. Within this system, the homo/heterosexual and Werewolf/Villager divide becomes imperative to all as straight/Villager identities are defined and scrutinised. Recognising this, we can elaborate on Sedgwick's most significant assertion:

I want to argue that a lot of the energy of attention and demarcation that has swirled around issues of homosexuality since the end of the nineteenth century, [...] has been impelled by the distinctly indicative relation of homosexuality to wider mappings of secrecy and disclosure, and of the private and the public, that were and are critically problematic for the gender, sexual, and economic structures of the heterosexist culture at large, mappings whose enabling but dangerous incoherence has become oppressively, durably condensed in certain figures of homosexuality (Sedgwick, 1990, pp. 70-71).

Here the supposed binarisms of secrecy/disclosure, sex/knowledge, and homo/heterosexual are broken down while the active reinscription of non-straight and straight identities is evident. For Muñoz (2009), and other non-straight individuals, constant policing is an incarnation of the heterosexist gaze which the aegis providing performance of the closets seeks to avert, while the behaviour of heterosexual individuals too is policed by that same gaze. Straight individuals must constantly negotiate their normative identity as antithetical to the non-straight identities they have demarcated. Here, *One Night's* aptness as an imitation of the closet is perhaps most pertinent. The interrogative gaze, which seeks only Werewolf/knowledge, will interrogate Werewolf and Villager alike. Once the game begins, to the Villagers, everyone is at once Villager and Werewolf all of whom need be interrogated. If the gaze is upon a Villager player, they must prove their Villager identity with their own knowledge and/or by shifting the lens onto someone they believe is a Werewolf. If they fail to prove their Villager identity, if to the rest of the Villager players they are perceived to be performing too much like a Werewolf, they will be treated as such and potentially be shot. It is here we see the culmination of *One Night* as mimicking the lived experience of the closet. The closet, for non-straight individuals and Werewolf players, can be a place of safety. For all players the system will always be a place of intense interrogation.

MONSTERS, CLOSETS, AND AGENCY

In this paradigm of secrecy/disclosure, sex/knowledge, Werewolf/Villager, it is difficult to discern where agency may be exerted. As illustrated, the closet and its effects are performances of identity, whether they be passing or not. Closetedness, for Sedgwick, is a specific performance of speech that instigated by a

silence. She explains that it is not, however, a “particular silence” but instead a silence that is distinct in its fluidity and that it accrues significance in relation to the discourse that “surrounds and differentially constitutes it” (Sedgwick, 1990, p. 3). She quotes Foucault who states:

there is no binary division to be made between what one says and what one does not say; we must try to determine the different ways of not saying such things. . . . There is not one but many silences, and they are an integral part of the strategies that underlie and permeate discourses (Foucault, quoted in Sedgwick, 1990, p. 3).

Indeed, the binary distinction of in/out the closet is a misnomer, for the speech act of coming out of the closet can mean little if someone is already perceived as non-straight. Perhaps then, agency is exerted in a closeted person’s ability to subvert the heterosexist gaze. In the frequently asked questions section on Bézier Games’ website, they are asked, “I’m always a werewolf [sic], and I always lose. How do I win?” to which they reply, “We suggest that you lie occasionally. Or even better, all the time. . . . But say it with a straight face” (Bézier Games). From this, it could be discerned that agency lies in the Werewolf player’s performance of the Villager identity, literally, to keep a “straight face.” Much akin to Muñoz’ project of butching up, he actively learned and applied heterogender to his body as a tactic to subvert the heterosexist leer. Such a claim rests on the predication that the objective of the game, for Werewolf players, is to win, to be undetected by the Villager/heterosexist gaze. The conditions which construct LGBTQ+ lives are always historically and geographically determined and with *One Night’s* gameplay depending on secrecy and survival, it perpetuates a mentality that is premised on identity politics and affirmation. Today, despite strong community support mechanisms, greater acceptance by the mainstream and forms of legal protection, queer people even in the most liberal and metropolitan parts of the West may still have to hide. So, as long as the metaphorical violence of that heterosexist/Villager gaze is reinforced with the real violence of a finger that is really a gun, exercising agency by way of the tactics of the closet is not only a queer subversion of society’s will to monitor and police, but also a necessary (if sophisticated) survival tactic. However, little resolution is garnered here for those who “cannot or will not straighten their gesture” (Muñoz, 2009, p. 69).

As stated, the lives of queer people are historically and geographical contingent and such a proposal, with its fixed binary distinction between homo/heterosexuality, is reminiscent of classic historical accounts of the 1970s Gay Liberation Movement, particularly the high rhetoric of Gay Pride. In his remembrance essay on Karla Jay and Allen Young’s anthology, *Out of Closets* (1972), John D’Emilio illustrates the radical reconceptualisation of sexual identity seen in many of its essays. D’Emilio (2002) states “gay liberationists inverted the terms in which homosexuality was understood. Instead of being sick, sinful, or

criminal, gay was now defined as good” (pg. 57). With this, “coming out” and “pride” became goals and tactics for the movement, and they became the markers of Stonewall as the turning point of not only “our history as a community, but in Western history itself” (D’Emilio, 2002, pg. 63). This would suggest why, in *One Night*, the system is entirely lycanthro-phobic, and there is no space for Werewolf Pride. However, while *One Night* relies on the systemic rule of Werewolf/Villager, the game’s invocation of monsters can offer resolutions representing more positive constructions of queerness, monsters, and agency.

One Night’s reliance on tropes of the horror genre too betrays a degree of nostalgia, where notions of passing, deception, and secret queer subcultural codes of knowing are all invoked, mirroring the sentiments of secrecy and survival read connotatively in its gameplay. For Harry M. Benshoff (1997), “Both movie monsters and homosexuals have existed chiefly in shadowy closets” (p. 2). For queer people, monsters, and queer monsters, the site of tension that is the closet, while systemically fraught with prejudice, can highlight how the queer community ingeniously and resiliently exerts agency. For instance, when Engelstein and Shalev’s (2019) observation that *One Night* has “almost non-existent mechanical interactions” (p. 220) is considered, codes of knowing and communication are roused. From this, connotations emerge between the Night Phase (when Werewolves locate each other while the Villagers’ eyes are closed) and queer means of communicating through secret networks of subcultural knowledges and signals. Also, should another player become a Werewolf, a subtle wink, look, or gesture from other Werewolves can establish covert codes of knowing under the gaze of the Villagers. Such an inference can be read as an analogue to Muñoz’ (1996) notion of queerness, which exists “as innuendo, gossip, fleeting moments, and performances that are meant to be interacted with by those within its epistemological sphere” (p. 6). So, like queer people who locate(d) each other with coded language, hand gestures, and clothing, when around a table for a game of *One Night*, an ephemeral gesture exists as a mirroring form of agency.

The horror tropes of *One Night* too exhibit Butlerian theories of performative gender which are premised on the absence of underlying “true” identity. As such, a further dissonance between gameplay and tropes is seen, as *One Night*’s queer monstrous portrays today’s more shifting and fluid lived experience of sexuality. For Benshoff (1997), homosexuality enters the horror film genre, like in *One Night*, “through subtextual or connotative avenues [...] homosexuality becomes a subtle but undoubtedly present signifier which usually serves to characterize the villain or monster” and “works to bolster the equally constructed idea of a normative heterosexuality” (pg. 15). Barbara Creed (2015) reads werewolves alongside the equally abject (and queer) vampire, zombie, and ghoul, as the werewolf’s body “signifies a collapse of the boundaries between human and animal” (p. 41). Additionally, for Bernhardt-House (2008), the werewolf’s “hybridity and transgression of species bounda-

ries in a unified figure [...] might be seen as a natural signifier for queerness in its myriad forms” (p. 159). So, unlike the 1970s Gay Liberation Movement which opposed such connotative expansions, today’s queer culture accepts monstrosity into its identity. Indeed, when a “true” identity is eschewed a more fluid identity emerges, one that represents *One Night’s* Werewolves who not only transgress the boundaries between human and wolf but, within the game, shift between Villager and Werewolf. As such, *One Night’s* Werewolves prove analogous to today’s queer identity that forgoes rigid binaries while adding to a positive narrative where agency lies in the fluidity of identity.

One Night’s emergent mimesis of society enables us to locate, as Benshoff (1997) does by building upon Foucault, a recuperation of a paradigm that recognises more positive mechanisms when constructing a history of sexuality. *One Night* was at once a denotable heterosexual text; *One Night* is now a game that mirrors the construction of the closet while highlighting the historic and continued resilience of queer people in such a site of tension. A multiplicity of connotative expansions exists within *One Night*, with this article presenting just one of many that might be found when we look too-close.

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