

The Analyzation Of Halsey

Shahin Rafikian

About

Ashley Nicolette Frangipane is a 21 year old industrial-pop icon that dives into the depths of queer ideals, racial discrimination, and socially disclosed lifestyles within her music, both visually and musically. As an entertainer, she goes by the stage name Halsey (which is an anagram for Ashely). There are various ways that even as being Halsey/Ashley, a human being, in which she expresses her true identity. She has publicly came out to identify herself as “tri-bi;” bipolar, biracial, and bisexual. As a mental health condition, Halsey does suffer from bipolar disorder. She believes that it’s important to discuss her disorder because there is a lack of voice towards the bipolar spectrum of the world.¹ Regarding her identity, her father is black and her mother is white, which makes her biracial. In regards to her sexuality, she has gotten backlash for identifying as bisexual, which she expresses is irritating for her because it’s as if society doesn’t regard bisexuality as a legitimate sexuality.

Today’s society has seemed to set up sexuality as an antagonistic dualism or binary between heterosexuality and homosexuality, implying that there is no in between. Research indicates that women who identify as bisexual are slightly discriminated against from both heterosexual and homosexual communities. “Heterosexual or hetero-identified friends tended to view bisexuality with tolerant, sometimes condescending, curiosity... [on the other hand] the lesbian community expressed above all suspicion, even contempt, for women “who went back to men.” Although there is less of the idea of rejection from the hetero-community, the lesbian community views bisexuals as ‘flip-flopers’ that go from one side of the sexual spectrum to the other. Another discriminatory indication of the lesbian community’s disapproval of bisexuality is due to the threat of AIDS, which has led “many lesbians to view bisexual women as potential AIDS-carriers.”² By being a potential AIDS-carrier, the lesbian community views women of the bisexual nature to possibly taint the purity and sanctity of the lesbian community with their promiscuity³. Additionally, the lesbian community feels as though if one were to enjoy the privileged and socially accepted lifestyle of heterosexuality, then they are not morally allowed to accept the emotional and physical benefits of homosexuality, regardless of identity⁴. This ostracism is not only practiced by the larger society, but also by the lesbians as well. In Halsey’s case, she experiences ostracism from both the

¹ Hiatt, Brian. "Halsey on Duetting With Bieber, Hating 'Tri-Bi' Label." Rolling Stone. February 10, 2016. Accessed May 17, 2016. <http://www.rollingstone.com/music/features/halsey-on-duetting-with-bieber-hating-tri-bi-label-20160210?page=2>.

² Däumer, Elisabeth D.. 1992. “Queer Ethics; Or, the Challenge of Bisexuality to Lesbian Ethics”. *Hypatia* 7 (4). [Hypatia, Inc., Wiley]: 94. <http://www.jstor.org.proxy-um.researchport.umd.edu/stable/3810080>.

³ Däumer, Elisabeth D.. 1992. “Queer Ethics; Or, the Challenge of Bisexuality to Lesbian Ethics”. *Hypatia* 7 (4). [Hypatia, Inc., Wiley]: 94. <http://www.jstor.org.proxy-um.researchport.umd.edu/stable/3810080>.

⁴ Däumer, Elisabeth D.. 1992. “Queer Ethics; Or, the Challenge of Bisexuality to Lesbian Ethics”. *Hypatia* 7 (4). [Hypatia, Inc., Wiley]: 91. <http://www.jstor.org.proxy-um.researchport.umd.edu/stable/3810080>.

social community and the LGBT community for her declaration of being bisexual. She refuses for bisexuality to be a part of the sexual erasure of bisexuality.⁵ Relative to homosexuality, bisexuality is not invisible due to the incorporated elements of heterosexuality.⁶ However, the oddity of bisexuality being a mix of two interests makes the existence of bisexuality vulnerable to erasure.⁷ However, Halsey attempts to break the erasure of bisexuality through her music, visually and musically. The societal and homo-communal backlash she received for being opened about her identity has not stopped her from embracing what she feels is a part of her identity.

Ghost⁸

Halsey's first single, "Ghost," came out with lyrics reflecting nostalgia and infatuation towards a significant other from her past. Given a verse within one of the lyrics uses male-affiliated pronouns, there doesn't seem to be any sense of queer ideals within it. However, upon the release of a music video for the single, she released two versions which have no correlation between one another; one with a heteronormative plot line (featuring herself and a man, released as a teaser for her music) and a homosexual plot line (featuring herself and a woman, released as an official video for the single). In an interview with radio.com, she stated that she did this to show her fans, part of the queer-thinking, queer-accepting generation Z and X,⁹ that not only does she identify as bisexual, but also bisexuality is real.¹⁰ The shocking part about this is the backlash she had received from the media. With the first music video release featuring the heteronormative plot line, the media portrayed the video as nostalgic love between a man and woman. However, the release of the homosexual plot line brought reactions claiming that it was extremely pornographic and controversial. "i put out the same fucking video of me and the lead was a male. if anything, there was more sexual content like nails scratching down a back, orgasm faces, and being thrown up on a desk by my thighs, and people think "oh what a great love story this is 90's love". and then i

⁵ Däumer, Elisabeth D.. 1992. "Queer Ethics; Or, the Challenge of Bisexuality to Lesbian Ethics". *Hypatia* 7 (4). [Hypatia, Inc., Wiley]: 94. <http://www.jstor.org.proxy-um.researchport.umd.edu/stable/3810080>.

⁶ Yoshino, Kenji. 2000. "The Epistemic Contract of Bisexual Erasure". *Stanford Law Review* 52 (2). *Stanford Law Review*: 353. doi:10.2307/1229482.

⁷ Yoshino, Kenji. 2000. "The Epistemic Contract of Bisexual Erasure". *Stanford Law Review* 52 (2). *Stanford Law Review*: 358. doi:10.2307/1229482.

⁸ Halsey. "Ghost," *Badlands*, Halsey, Malia James, June 11, 2015, Youtube Video. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ao4o-XRU_KM.

⁹ Tsjeng, Zing. "Teens These Days Are Queer AF, New Study Says I Broadly." *Broadly*. Accessed May 17, 2016. https://broadly.vice.com/en_us/article/teens-these-days-are-queer-af-new-study-says.

¹⁰ Halsey. Interview by radio.com, "Halsey On Her Two "Ghost" Videos," Youtube video, 2:22, posted by "radio.com," September 24, 2015, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=twoquvQiO60>.

put out a video where I'm making out with a girl and then everyone starts saying "THIS IS PORNOGRAPHIC.""¹¹

Even though the heteronormative plot line displayed more sexual content than the heterosexual plot line, the general public still reacted harshly towards the heterosexual plot line. This might be due to the notion that homosexuality might be viewed as abnormal "not because it is immoral or sinful... but for a purely mechanical reason. It is a misuse of bodily parts."¹² Although many reasons point to why the homosexual plot line was frowned upon, such as homophobia and present societal difficulties with accepting queer ideals, the placement of homosexuality by social institutions and society in general sanctions such deviantly-considered acts due to deeply rooted ideals which may be influenced by media, religion, or other social institutions. Queer ideals have only fairly recently been accepted by society, and it's still taking a while for society and the media to grow accustomed to viewing the sexual and emotional desire of the same sexes to be equal to one another (meaning equal amongst heterosexuality and homosexuality).¹³ "Female-female relationships are always considered as pornographic in the media. We have fun and play games and do a whole lot more than just finger ourselves with giant acrylic nails."¹⁴ Since homosexuality is quite hidden, especially when 'in the act' of performing homosexual acts, the media lacks an appropriate and knowledgeable understanding of homosexual acts. Halsey's vague, and what I judge as appropriate, representation of love amongst a homosexual couple within her music video is a subtle way of educating the masses about the reality of homosexuality.¹⁵

The music video itself incorporates ideas of queer nostalgia, taking place in mystical, lit up, colorful, and adventurous Tokyo, Japan. The introduction of the music video starts with Halsey, wearing a pink wig, roaming the city streets of Tokyo surrounded by lights. A narration in Japanese begins, which translates into the following; "when me and her dwell on the past, she was gone. Maybe she has never existed." Taking notes from Padva's articulation of the protagonist in the story *Cinnamon Skin*, Halsey is also submerging herself into "cloud-propelled dreams of love: melting ecstasy,

¹¹ Halsey. Interview by Zara Golden, "Halsey - Everything You Need To Know," Youtube video, 4:20, posted by "The Fader," August 11, 2015, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nnpyCq3OLcU>

¹² Levin, Michael. 1984. "WHY HOMOSEXUALITY IS ABNORMAL". The Monist 67 (2). Oxford University Press: 251. <http://www.jstor.org.proxy-um.researchport.umd.edu/stable/27902859>.

¹³ Levin, Michael. 1984. "WHY HOMOSEXUALITY IS ABNORMAL". The Monist 67 (2). Oxford University Press: 253. <http://www.jstor.org.proxy-um.researchport.umd.edu/stable/27902859>.

¹⁴ Halsey. Interview by Zara Golden, "Halsey - Everything You Need To Know," Youtube video, 4:20, posted by "The Fader," August 11, 2015, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nnpyCq3OLcU>

¹⁵ Nijsten, Nina. Some Things We Need for a Feminist Revolution. PDF. Interface: a Journal for and about Social Movements. 215. <http://www.interfacejournal.net/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2011/12/Interface-3-2-Nijsten.pdf>

heavenly embraces, ethereal intimacy.”¹⁶ The nostalgia that Halsey experiences with the significant other is a sentimental, queer and love-filled space that is filled with emotion, past experiences, and fantasy-like feelings.¹⁷ She expresses how even when she “dwells on the past, she was gone,” which leads Halsey to the conclusion that she may have never existed in the first place. Is it ‘her’ she is looking for? Or the love of a significant other from the past? The lyrics of the song discuss the enamored feeling of how she was in love with someone from before, and that sleeping with other people can’t ever completely bring her back to the “ghost” that she is looking for. The opening lyrics “I’m searching for something that I can’t reach” emphasize on her feelings of the past that have carried on to her into the present, as she tries to move on and move forward in life. While reminiscing on the past, she is in the present, partaking in homoerotic acts and living life as it is with another woman. The acknowledgment of her past love brought into the nostalgic and fantasy-like space of Tokyo with the other woman presents the paradoxical situation of Halsey’s nostalgic melancholia.¹⁸ These queer nostalgic themes of the nostalgic past merging with the authentic yet fantasy-like present is seen when Halsey sings “saying that I love him but I know I’m gonna leave him. My ghost, where’d you go? I can’t find you in the body sleeping next to me.” She can’t escape the nostalgia and euphoria experienced in the previous lover. As the video progresses, it’s clear that Halsey has gone from the euphoric nostalgia, embracing herself within the city and looking up at the lights of Tokyo, to feeling trapped into the depression of never fully reaching and feeling the nostalgia she once had before, metaphorically channeled in the video as she leans against a high rise window by herself looking down at the city lights of Tokyo in a dark room. Halsey’s female love has left, and she has no way of experiencing the nostalgia of the “ghost” once more. Rather than submerging herself into a nostalgic environment, she’s taken back into only reminiscing it as a history rather than a feeling that is in the present. She’s unable to bring the past back into where she is now, bringing her back into the same point of thought, asking herself “what happened to the soul that you used to be.”

New Americana¹⁹

“New Americana,” one of her singles off her debut album *Badlands*, demonstrates an intersectionality of race, gender, and sexuality, as well as expressing the upper-power’s disapproval with anything queer (meaning different from the gender binary, predominantly white race, heteronormative society). The intro begins with a spoken narrative of Halsey stating; “we were a community. They made me their leader when I never asked to be. But the lightning in their eyes made me become whatever

¹⁶ Gilad Padva, “What Is Queer About Nostalgia?,” in *Queer Nostalgia in Cinema and Pop Culture*. 1. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014).

¹⁷ Gilad Padva, “What Is Queer About Nostalgia?,” in *Queer Nostalgia in Cinema and Pop Culture*. 3. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014).

¹⁸ Gilad Padva, “What Is Queer About Nostalgia?,” in *Queer Nostalgia in Cinema and Pop Culture*. 3-4. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014).

¹⁹ Halsey. “New Americana,” *Badlands*, Halsey, September 25, 2015, Youtube Video. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b-eYbUVZedY>

they wanted me to become. We were hopeful we would win, because nothing could scare us. We feared no city, and we feared no man.” Being biracial and bisexual herself, she feels as if she would be nominated as a leader for the outsiders of a post-apocalyptic world that disapproves of anyone different from the norm. Additionally, both in real life and in the video (although more magnified in the video), she goes against gendered scripts and is depicted as tough, masculine, and dirty with short hair, all of which are not only against feminine ideals, but also against societal ideals for how a woman should be.

Lyrics within her song challenge gendered scripts and the idea that women are incapable of rising up to power. However, the discussion of queer ideals is brought up when she compares herself to the “outsiders.” “Survival of the richest, the city’s ours until the fall. Their Monaco and Hamptons bound, but we don’t feel like outsiders at all.” She’s claiming that the richest of the rich are owning the city, playing by ‘the rules’ and conforming to binaries and antagonistic-dualistic powers, yet that doesn’t matter to her and the “outsiders” because the outsiders know who they are in terms of identity. Referencing to her bisexual identity, she knows that her sexuality and non-conforming gender binary personality may not be accepted in the ‘modern society.’ However, she is aware that she, as well as all the other people (who are considered the “outsiders” in the video) who are queer, are strong enough to fight against the higher powers to embrace their identity. She goes on to sing “We are the new Americana, high on legal marijuana,” which is an emphasis on the changing society that will soon enough accept her and the “outsiders” for who they are.

Halsey’s lack of performativity with her gender emphasizes on the confidence of the queer community (as well as her own) that makes them want to retaliate against the unfair ruling of the higher authority. As she is singing the chorus “we are the new Americana,” she is being taken away as captive from the self-made sanctuary that all the outsiders live in. This translates metaphorically to the way in which our society treats queer individuals unfairly. Political campaigns in the 1950’s and 60’s encouraged discrimination amongst queer folks, resulting in violence, oppression, discrimination, and even things such as enforcement of laws that go against the favor of queer people and loss of jobs just because of their sexual orientation.²⁰ Although legality and discrimination have been significantly reduced in today’s period of time, society still finds ways to enforce discriminatory rules on queer individuals and create conflict with them. If it’s not acceptance society has found for queer individuals, it’s tolerance that they have been left with, for queer individuals have fought for so long and hard to earn some sort of rights for their legitimacy that most of the extreme anti-queer rulings have been abolished.²¹ Laws are still in place to discriminate queer individuals (to deny them

²⁰ Sullivan, Gerard. 1990. “Discrimination and Self-concept of Homosexuals Before the Gay Liberation Movement: A Biographical Analysis Examining Social Context and Identity”. *Biography* 13 (3). University of Hawai’i Press: 203. <http://www.jstor.org.proxy-um.researchport.umd.edu/stable/23539517>.

²¹ McCreery, Patrick. 1999. “Beyond Gay: “deviant” Sex and the Politics of the ENDA Workplace”. *Social Text*, no. 61. Duke University Press: 41. <http://www.jstor.org.proxy-um.researchport.umd.edu/stable/488678>.

services), which blatantly implies that queer individuals are not only considered 'full humans,' but also not equal to the heteronormative-dominant society.²² The odds of a legislature or gay rights activist stepping forward to fight for the cause of something not mainstream and common is slim, considering that the reaction for them coming forward to fight for such rights could/would result in discrimination towards them.²³

The emphasis on a society discriminating against queer individuals continues as Halsey is dragged by officials to an area in which she would be burned alive for being an outsider. She screams "Help! Help please! What are you doing!? Why are you just standing there?!" as villagers in the area (the non-outsiders) just stand on their balconies and look at her begging to be saved. This is a representation for how not only does society take control of the legality that deals with queer individuals, but also how others who are not affiliated with an "outside" identity generally do nothing to help. She sings "we know very well who we are," emphasizing that her and the "outsiders" know who they are and they won't change for any form of enforcement that discriminates against who they are. Her facial expression goes from fearful to confident and expressionless, indicating that she would rather take pride in dying by the hands of an unfair Government, knowing her identity and who she is, than to die being a liar to herself. This idea of knowing who she is connects to lyrics to another song on *Badlands* entitled "Gasoline," where she sings "I think there's a flaw in my code." The discrimination and lack of acceptance towards queer individuals results in backlash not only towards themselves (emotionally and mentally) but to the higher authorities who discriminate against them. The final scene in "New Americana" shows the "outsiders" invading the base of the non-outsiders, attacking the higher officials and setting Halsey free from her death. They then run out of the woods and onto the distance, as a group, knowing that anything that is far away from there is better.

Conclusion

Halsey's use of queer ideals that are incorporated subtly within her music both audibly and visually metaphorically represent what queer individuals have to go through. The mental and emotional struggle that takes place for them is only the beginning of their queer experience of life, for society and life itself is also present to limit them from being human beings equal to the dominantly gender-binary conforming, heteronormative, performative individual.

²² McCreery, Patrick. 1999. "Beyond Gay: "deviant" Sex and the Politics of the ENDA Workplace". *Social Text*, no. 61. Duke University Press: 40. <http://www.jstor.org.proxy-um.researchport.umd.edu/stable/488678>.

²³ McCreery, Patrick. 1999. "Beyond Gay: "deviant" Sex and the Politics of the ENDA Workplace". *Social Text*, no. 61. Duke University Press: 40. <http://www.jstor.org.proxy-um.researchport.umd.edu/stable/488678>.