

Love Is Love Study Guide

Love Is Love by Various

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Plot Summary

The following version of this book was used to create this study guide: *Love is Love*, by various creators: edited by Sarah Gaydos and Jamie S. Rich. IDW Publishing, 2016.

This book is a collection of visual and textual responses to the shooting at the Pulse nightclub in Florida in June of 2016. The collection consists of single-page or double-page layouts, sometimes with text and sometimes without, and sometimes offering tributes to those killed in the shooting. There are also frequent representations of comic book characters, but most of the comics portray what might be described as everyday people, those who might be referred to as non-super heroes. There are no page numbers in this book: entries in this analysis are identified solely by the order in which they appear in the collection.

The book begins with an introduction from film-maker Patty Jenkins, who describes her reaction to the Pulse shooting in terms of her experience making a film about a woman who, in Jenkins' opinion, was a victim of the same sort of hatred and discriminatory attitudes that led to the shooting.

At that point, the tributes begin, and continue for roughly 130 pages. They fall into six main categories, but it must be noted there are no formal divisions: comics that might fall into any of the following categories are scattered throughout the collection.

There are several comics that feature super-heroes, comics in which characters like Batman, Superman, and Wonder Woman contemplate the Pulse shooting; the socio-cultural circumstances that defined the context of both the shooter and his victims; and the book's central thematic consideration, the oft-repeated idea that "love is love." Of these, perhaps the most notable is a series of pages that include the character of Batwoman, one of the first openly lesbian characters in comic books. A related sub-category has to do with pages that include references to other comic book characters, such as those in the "Archie" series of comic books, or other literary characters, such as those in the "Harry Potter" books.

There are several comics that feature personal stories, mini-memoirs or autobiographies of the creators who recall their reactions to the shooting, or their own history of growing up as members of one or the other of the communities that suffered most in the attack (i.e. the LGBTQ and / or Latinx communities). A third category of comics within the collection features mini-fictions that explore the experience of being in the club; explore thematic, personal, or metaphoric reactions to the shooting; or respond to socio-political issues raised by the shooting, its triggers, and its aftermath. An important sub-category here is defined by a collection of narratives in which children react to the shooting with questions of how it was possible, why those communities were targeted, and where the desire to kill comes from.

There are also the comics that explore the shooting, its causes and its aftermath, from a more purely poetic perspective. These pages contain evocative text and imagery that



are more metaphoric and/or symbolic than literal in their explorations. A related category is that which encompasses the purely visual representations of reaction – that is, without narrative. The pages in this category evoke thematic elements such as courage, fear, joy, and the enduring power of love.

Finally, there are several pages that pay individual tribute to those who were killed in the shooting, celebrating their lives and their passing with visuals (portraits) and/or text.

Introduction / Comics 1 through 5

Summary

Introduction – The introduction is written by film writer and director Patty Jenkins, who speaks of her reaction to the 2016 Pulse nightclub shootings in terms of her experience writing and directing the film “Monster.” That film, she writes was the story of Aileen Wuornos, a serial killer of men convicted of her crimes and executed in 2002. Jenkins describes Wuornos as having a deeply troubled childhood and adolescence, with part of that trouble being considered, and treated, as an outcast because of her same-gender sexual orientation. Jenkins comments that the Pulse shooting reminded her of Wuornos for two reasons. The first was that the LGBT community in Orlando “was one of the first and only communities to ever finally embrace Aileen and give her shelter from her lonely existence (Intro, 2): the second, she writes, was because the apparent perpetrator of the Pulse shooting (Omar Mateen) was himself struggling with issues associated with same-gender orientation, and was experiencing “the same kind of homophobia, xenophobia, and cycle of violence that created Aileen Wuornos (Intro, 2). Jenkins comments that the work of the various creators of “Love is Love” took the horrors of the massacre itself, and of the horrors of being caught up in the world of suffering that she says triggered Wuornos and Mateen, and used them as a springboard to continue “the tradition of turning darkness into light through art” (Intro, 2).

Comic 1 – In a single-page, symmetrical, grid style layout, darkly colorful images (some of which cross a number of panels) portray violence (of guns and voices), and of grief resulting from violence. The final images are of a candle; the light of that candle converting into what looks like doves, or butterflies, all flying into an image of the sun, with the word “FLY” at its center. Poetic language in text boxes refers to an ember of light that glows in the midst of darkness, that ember eventually igniting into flight and joy and flying.

Comic 2 – A single-page, single image layout with no text portrays the superhero Batwoman (a lesbian) holding an American flag which, as it flies, morphs into the rainbow flag of the LGBT Community.

Comic 3 – A single-page, symmetrical, grid-style layout in muted colors portrays two young gay men on a date in an Asian restaurant. When they emerge onto the street, it is raining, but they drop their umbrella and kiss. The text speaks of not knowing the future but knowing the truth of feeling and connection in the moment, and suggesting “that’s all that matters” (Comic 3).

Comic 4 – A single-page, symmetrical, grid-style layout drawn in the style of romance comics portrays the female villains Harley Quinn and Poison Ivy as they express their love for each other through gestures of tolerance and acknowledgements of each other’s joys and tastes. In the final panel, Ivy and Harley are dancing on a rooftop,



Batman having been captured: the text reads “love is always dancing, come what may” (Comic 4).

Comic 5 – On a single-page, two large water-color-style panels show first, one of the now-grounded NASA space shuttles; and second, a young girl clutching a stuffed toy talking to her parents. The text is written in the first person narrative voice of a father, describing his daughter’s love of science, his and his wife’s horrified reaction at the news of the Pulse shooting, and how they explained what happened to their daughter. He also writes of his daughter’s response, initiated by seeing (on television) the paramedics and police helping in the aftermath of the shooting – a response that essentially suggested it was going to be okay because there were more people helping than hurting. The writer suggests that just maybe his daughter is right.

Analysis

Introduction – Here, Jenkins raises an issue that many readers, and indeed those directly affected by the Pulse shooting, might have difficulty accepting, or understanding: the possibility that Wuornos (a serial killer) and Mateen (a mass killer) are ultimately deserving of compassion and understanding, not anger. The point must be made that nowhere in her introduction does she excuse their behavior, but rather suggests that big picture, socio-cultural-political hatred towards members of the LGBTQ communities contributed in both cases to, first, an inwardly-directed self-hatred that, second, led to outwardly-directed destruction. There is a sense, in fact, that Jenkins is asking members of the community most affected by the Pulse shooting to have the same sort of compassion for both killers as they (the members of the community) are seeking for themselves. Meanwhile, and as the introduction concludes, she celebrates the capacity of the artistic community to transform an evil act into an opportunity for awareness, hope, and transcendent possibility: as the reader will see, in many cases, this is exactly what the creators of the various works of art in the book have attempted to do. Ultimately, Jenkins seems to be saying that in spite of the darkness of what Wuornos and Mateen did, they and their actions are nevertheless to be looked at in the light of compassion.

Comic 1 – This comic, like what Jenkins in her introduction, suggests that the book as a whole is discovering opportunities for light and hope and possibility in a circumstance of darkness. Doves have long been an image of peace, and butterflies have long been an image of transformation. The choice of subject matter here reinforces the comic’s thematic intent.

Comic 2 – This comic is the first of several to feature the character of Batwoman, and also the first of many to feature the rainbow flag. The fact that the American flag morphs into the rainbow flag makes the visual suggestion that the celebration of freedom and individuality that is so much a part of America’s image of itself is also at the heart of the LGBTQ communities image of itself – or, at least, that it can / should be.



Comic 3 – The hope and possibility for the future evoked by this comic is very much at the thematic and textual core of several other comics in the collection, and as such is at the core of the book's overall thematic perspective. It is important to note that this is also one of the comics that contains no literal reference to the Pulse shooting: it is, rather, an exploration of an experience (i.e. being young and gay and male) very much associated with that event.

Comic 4 – This is one of two comics in the collection that feature Poison Ivy; one of the very few comics that has an element of humor (the courtship of Ivy and Harley is expressed in somewhat joking terms); and one of several in the collection that equates experiences of joy and possibility with dancing. In this and many other references to dancing in the collection, there is a sense of defiance, that the freedom and celebration of dancing is a direct rebuttal, or challenge, to hatred, to prejudice, and the drive to enforce conformity. Meanwhile, the cameo appearance of Batman is the first of several appearances, throughout the collection, of this iconic character.

Comic 5 – This is the first of several comics in the collection in which the innocent questions of children lead to contemplations of not-so-innocent hatred and destruction. It also contains a different sort of contemplation of the book's thematic exploration of hope and possibility: there is a sense here that the creators of this comic (and others focusing on children) see children's openness and optimism as a positive indication of the kind of tolerant, compassionate adults they will grow into.

Discussion Question 1

In what ways do the comics and writings in this section (Introduction and Comics 1 - 5) explore the book's thematic consideration of acceptance and respect?

Discussion Question 2

In terms of the introduction, how do you respond to Jenkins' comments relating the experience of the shooter at the club with that of a serial killer? Do you think her commentary on the parallels is valid? Why or why not?

Discussion Question 3

How do you respond to the image in Comic 2? The American flag is a very potent symbol: how do you respond to its being utilized in this way?

Vocabulary

homophobia, xenophobia, surly, cacophonous, grotesque, propulsion, dumbfounded

Comics 6 - 12

Summary

Comic 6 – This is a single-page layout, with panels on the top and bottom in neon-style colors. The top few panels depict a father and a young son at a vigil outside the Pulse nightclub; the son asking questions about why two men might be kissing; and the father suggesting that that kind of love is hated. Next, a series of small black and white panels depicts different sources of hatred. In the final two panels, the son calls the kind of love shown by the people there as “super love” (Comic 6). The final panel shows people at the vigil wearing Superman-style capes.

Comic 7 – This comic is a single-page, single image: a rainbow flag flying at half-mast.

Comic 8 – This is a two-page spread, with the majority of panels in page-width, horizontal orientation. The coloring is in somewhat lurid reds and greens, showing a young man’s reaction to the news of the shooting, but the activities of the day taking him away from that news. Text reveals that the day in question was Sunday; that the activities included going to church; and that the young man spent much of the day imagining the things he could do to support the victims, the survivors, and his friends. But then he says, in narration, that all he could do was turn everything over to God. The final image is of the young man lying alone in bed, his arms spread, in a large empty space, light coming in from his window. “And I leave it there” (Comic 8).

Comic 9 – This single-page comic is drawn primarily in pen and ink, and shows a young woman who seems to be African-American receiving texts from a friend about the shooting. The dialogue of these first texts is in green and blue, but the second half of the page has the pen-and-ink drawings increasingly overwhelmed by multi-colored squares of various sizes representing a flurry of texts asking for information, seeking friends, and offering support.

Comic 10 – This single-page, black-and-white drawing shows a young boy, seemingly African-American, clutching the lower body of a faceless woman. In the background, a sign indicating a men’s room, with bullet holes in the door. A single caption reads “Mommy I love you” and a time – 2:06 a.m.

Comic 11 – This two-page spread, drawn in what looks like pencil with shades of blue pencil crayon (and occasional yellow), is a series of panels in varied formats (some regularly shaped with borders, some irregular and without). The images are of a group of people preparing for a party; a spaceman first flying through space and then bathing in a lake, and then of a man in a restaurant outside a protest. The text, written in what looks like longhand, sets the date as June 12th, 2016, the day of the shooting. It narrates the young man’s thoughts as he fantasizes about escaping into the future (i.e. as a spaceman), and wondering what that future would reveal to be the outcomes of the shooting, and the events around it (including the 2016 presidential election). The comic



concludes with his declaration that being in the present is, at the moment, the only way to make a better future.

Comic 12 – In this single-page comic, with dark blues on one side and dark reds on the other, is the story of two young male friends, called into their respective homes for dinner. Events on both sides of the page are linked by a representation of what looks like a large TV showing the protests in the aftermath of the shooting. On the left, dark-blue side of the page, one of the friends hears his parents talk about how it was time something like that happened to the “faggots” ... on the dark red side of the page, the other friend hears his parents describe two men kissing as loving each other just like his parents.

Analysis

Comic 6 – This comic develops the collection’s thematic interest in the innocence and unquestioning acceptance of same-sex love by children, and visually integrates the motif of super-heroes, which here reiterates the collection’s thematic emphasis on the enduring power of love. The shift in color tone echoes similar content, throughout the collection, connecting darkness to hatred and destruction. An intriguing point to note here is while there are a great many references throughout the collection to the sight of two men kissing triggering anger or violence, there are no references to the sight of two women kissing having the same effect.

Comic 7 – This visual combines two key images – the rainbow flag, representative of LGBTQ equality and freedom; and a flag flying at half-mast, a traditional response to an important or particularly troubling death. The combination of the two presents an image of mourning, an evocation of a community-sized death.

Comic 8 – This comic is one of the few in the collection that places tensions around the acceptance of individual LGBTQ’s within a religious (not spiritual) context. An interesting element here is the visual movement from crowdedness in the panels to the wide openness in the final panel, both of the space in which the young man lies and his arms. The suggestion here is of openness to possibility, and particularly of new ways of thinking. Meanwhile, the latter image (the young man’s open arms) is also evocative of Christ on the Cross, an image of suffering as precursor to freedom: that image, in turn, can be seen as evoking a common theme throughout the collection, that of possibility arising from adversity.

Comic 9 – This is one of several comics in the collection that feature images and characters that are not Caucasian, but which nevertheless evoke not only diversity, but universality of experience: in other words, the idea everyone is human, and everyone is worthy of love. In the bottom half of the image, the multi-colored squares effectively evoke the panic, the desperation for assurance, and the offerings of that assurance, that flurried through thousands of cell phones in the aftermath of the shooting. Here it is important to member that one of the enduring, most poignant images associated with the actual shooting is one reported by investigators and survivors: the sound of cell



phones ringing among the dead and injured, with no-one to answer them. It may be that the evocations of the cell phones here are intended to represent some of those unanswered calls. The cell phone motif appears repeatedly throughout the collection.

Comic 10 – This image is an evocation of a deeply poignant text message released to the public in the aftermath of the shooting. The text of the comic is the content of that text message, released by the mother to whom it was addressed. It must be remembered that in the actual incident, the text came from an adult male, perhaps in the same location as the child in this picture (in front of a door with bullet holes in it). This image, then, can be seen as visually evoking the child-like fear and love from which the adult sender's text emerged.

Comic 11 – As this comic develops the collection's thematic exploration of hope for the future, it does so with a poignant reference to the need to be strong in the present. Meanwhile, the visuals, in their irregularity, clearly evoke the experience of an act of imagination – the freedom and unbounded possibility of the mind.

Comic 12 – This comic explores the repeated visual and symbolic motif of children, and their interactions with the idea of non-hetero-normative relationships. This comic, however, takes a perspective that looks at how children can be influenced by both positive and negative sides of the equation. The coloring of the comic represents these divisions visually, and shows how one incident (both sides, as noted, are linked by a single visual – that of a television reporting the shooting) can lead people of different perspectives down different paths of reaction.

Discussion Question 1

In what ways do comics in this section (Comics 6 - 12) evoke the book's thematic exploration of parent - child relationships?

Discussion Question 2

Comic 8 contains one of the few references in the collection to the idea of religion and/or faith, presented in an ambivalent way (i.e. neither fully positive nor fully negative). What is your sense of the relationship between religion and the various events / experiences portrayed in the collection?

Discussion Question 3

Comic 12 contains an evocation of bullying. What are your responses to experiences of bullying, either lived or observed? What, do you think, are the common characteristics of the bullied? Of the person doing the bullying?

Vocabulary

vindicate

Comics 13 – 19

Summary

Comic 13 – In this single-page layout colored mostly in dark tones, a tearful young man (possibly Latinx) watching coverage of the shootings receives a supportive phone call from his parents, his mother telling him to be careful, his father telling him to go out to a gay bar and be brave. In the final panel, the young man clutches his phone to his chest. There is a caption: “based on a real conversation” (Comic 13).

Comic 14 – In this single-page layout in darker tones in the first two thirds of the page, a young woman in a family home watches coverage of the shooting and confronts her seemingly homophobic father about the possibility that she might be gay. She then confesses that she is, and runs upstairs, her father watching on television statements of defiance and support. In the latter third of the page, in coloring that is brighter and lighter, the father asks to go with his daughter to a memorial, saying that he will never feel anything other than love for his daughter.

Comic 15 – This single-page layout in dark visual tones is titled “Helpless / Not Helpless.” A man watches coverage of the shootings on a television, then turns it off. He sees a teddy bear on the floor, and in images infused with light, takes it upstairs. He places it next to his son (saying “I love you”) and then sits on the side of the bed, father and son lit by the glow from a night-light.

Comic 16 – In this two-page, dark-toned spread laid out in a fairly formal grid, Batman (referred to by police, in the comic, as “the greatest detective in the world”) (Comic 16) walks through the nightclub in the aftermath of the shooting. He sees bodies, hears cell phones ringing, and contemplates (in text) what he knows about what happened: that the shooter spoke with police responders, that he claimed terrorist connections (but there was no evidence of such connections), and that he had had homosexual relationships. A large panel in the middle of the second page shows Batman standing in the middle of a group of bodies scattered over the floor, text showing comments from the police department and from 911 calls. The comic concludes with a single frame of a somber Batman, and the comment in text “If he can’t find the answers to why this happened, NO ONE CAN” (Comic 16).

Comic 17 – In this two-page spread, the background consists of medieval-aged images of people dancing with skeletons (i.e. death). In the foreground are six panels, each painted in one of the colors of the rainbow flag, showing the lower legs and feet of people dancing. Overlaid on these images is the image of a beating heart on a heart monitor – a pulse.

Comic 18 – In this single-page layout, regularly shaped panels are placed in alternating irregularity on the page as a young boy packs up to move to live with an aunt. As he does, the boy (Caucasian or Latinx) reveals his worry to his father (African-American)



that people are going to come after him, and that he does not want to have to hide: he likes the parades. In the final panel, the boy hugs the man, both saying they miss the boy's daddy. A small section of text comments that "Hate crimes hurt more than who the bullets hit" (Comic 18).

Comic 19 – In this single-page layout, a bloodied hand holds a letter, the text of which is a love letter of loss. At the bottom of the page, uniformed policemen pull a sheet over the bodies of two bloodied men in an embrace, the hand of one of the men holding a letter. The central image, then, is a magnification of part of the image at the bottom of the page.

Analysis

Comic 13 – The dark tones of this comic evoke a sense of grief and loss, a vivid contrast to the message of love and support associated with the text and story. The implied irony is that many members of the LGBTQ community (particularly those who are also Latinx, which tends to be Roman Catholic in religious orientation and, therefore, quite conservative), are disowned or cut off by their parents. This irony is particularly apparent when juxtaposed with Comic 12 on the previous page (in which a child hears older, male family members speak disparagingly of gay men), and reinforced in the comic on the following page (14), in which a young woman comes into conflict with her father about her orientation.

Comic 14 – This comic visually reinforces the text's movement from an experience of darkness (i.e. the daughter's fear) to an experience of light (her father's acceptance).

Comic 15 – This is the fourth comic in a row to deal directly with parent/child relationships. This comic is noteworthy for two main things. First, there is no reference, direct or indirect, to any kind of same sex attraction: the whole thing is an evocation of love and concern of a parent for a child. A second noteworthy point is how light is used: the teddy bear, for example, is a pale yellow; the father moves upstairs into light; and there is light at the head of the child's bed.

Comic 16 – This comic marks the first of several significant appearances of Batman in the collection. It also includes a reference to a particular circumstance referred to several times in media coverage of the shooting and its aftermath: how investigators were struck, as they worked through the scene, by the constant and repeated ringing of cell phones scattered amongst the bodies of the dead and injured. In other words, people were trying to make contact with those who were dead or injured, and having no success. Also, this comic is one of the few in the collection to reference the background and story of the shooter, Omar Mateen. The comic ends on a note of irony, both visual and narrative: Batman, referred to as someone likely to have all the answers, or at least someone able to find them, appears to be at a loss.

Comic 17 – This is another of several images in the collection in which meaning is implied through image, rather than through text. That meaning has to do with the ironic



juxtaposition of a trio of contrasting images. Those in the background evoke what was referred to, in medieval times, as the dance of death (that is: the dance with the inevitable that every living person experiences). Those in the middle ground evoke an experience evoked by several similar comics in the collection: dancing as an expression of joy and freedom. The colors in the middle ground of the layout evoke the specific experience of joy and freedom celebrated by those in the LGBTQ community. The irony, of course, is that those images celebrate those things even in the presence of death. Those images in the foreground (the heart monitor) evokes both ongoing life, and the name of the nightclub where the shooting took place – the Pulse.

Comic 18 - Several important elements of this comic's meaning can be inferred, rather than understood through direct explanation. These include the idea that the boy's second father was killed in the shooting, and is being sent away in the name of safety; that the family was / is mixed race; and that the parades referred to by the boy are gay pride parades.

Comic 19 – This comic is essentially a single metaphor. The letter is not meant to be perceived as having been written by the man portrayed as holding it, but is, in fact, an evocation of that man's feeling for the man he is also holding, who is colored with a darker skin tone (probably representative of Latinx background). There is the possibility that the comic was created in response to a specific death at the nightclub, but there is no specific indication of such.

Discussion Question 1

How do the comics in this section (Comics 13 – 19) evoke the theme of "love is love"?

Discussion Question 2

Consider the images and story of Comic 15. What do you think is the meaning of the title "Helpless / Not Helpless"?

Discussion Question 3

Text at the end of Comic 18 suggests that "Hate crimes hurt more than those who the bullets hit". What does this mean? How does it relate to the visual and narrative content of the comic?

Vocabulary

quirk, crave, furious

Comics 20 - 25

Summary

Comic 20 – At the center of this two-page spread, is an image, drawn in ink on what seems to be broadly brushed paint, of a male head; in the center of this head is a mythical creature with a patch of red, half of a yin/yang symbol, within which a same-sex couple (female?) embraces. The page is titled “Furious Orlando,” and features a seven-stanza poem that frames the central visual. The poem portrays “Orlando” as wondering “Could it be that inside the face of Death sometimes madness was the only bet?” It calls on a hippogriff to save those “who [follow] their passion”; calls out those who attack those who are different; and concludes with an image of Orlando praying “for the souls/of those/who wanted/and briefly grasped/a love/not allowed to live/in peace” (Comic 20).

Comic 21 – A single-page spread of irregularly laid-out panels portrays a bearded man. First person narrative text describes the experience of the narrator (the bearded man?) finding happiness and freedom in the Orlando gay community. Images associated with this part of the text are colored quite brightly. The text then shifts to the narrator’s discussions of first feeling relieved as he got news of the shooting because nobody he knew was a victim; and then shifts again, to his feelings of guilt because so many other people did not get to feel the same relief. These latter images are colored in much darker tones. The narrator ends his commentary by saying “For those who are grieving” (Comic 21).

Comic 22 – In this single-page, irregularly laid out, dark-toned series of panels, Batwoman discovers a grieving young person on a rooftop, telling the person (gender is unclear) to be proud of the person’s mom because she was brave for being herself. The final panel shows Batwoman and the person looking out over a crowd around the Pulse nightclub. A rainbow flag is prominent in the image.

Comic 23 – In this two-page comic, the left side consists of a single image – a young man going through what appears to be a doorway of light. The right side consists of text, in which a first person narrator describes tensions between two types of employees at Disney World near Orlando – the rough-around-the-edges Custodial (i.e. janitors) and the more playful Characters (i.e. those playing Disney characters). He describes how some in Characters invited Custodial to join them for regular Thursday parties, and how some from Custodial behaved judgmentally, particularly because many in Characters were gay. He likens this experience to how the shooter at Pulse was invited in, and how, in the aftermath of the shooting, he (the narrator) felt that there should be no more welcomings. But then he realized, he writes, that places like Pulse had to stay open “because the people in that club ... are the strongest of us, the heroes. The door is open to walk through and show support” (Comic 23).



Comic 24 – In a single-page, irregular-panel series of drawings, done in mostly black and white with glimpses of color, a same sex couple (young, female, non-Caucasian) hold hands as they engage in a number of activities – include going to Pulse. Following a single, all-black panel, one member of the couple grieves, with the final panel showing that person supported by the hands of others. The only text on the panel: “To those left empty-handed ... let all our hands support” (Comic 24).

Comic 25 – In this single-page, regularly-paneled layout, a young man receives gestures of support from various super-hero sorts (including Batwoman and Catwoman) as he joins a man in a tuxedo and dances. In the text, his dialogue comments on how negatively he and others like him are viewed, reviled, threatened, and lied about – but that no matter what, there will be no end to the dancing.

Analysis

Comic 20 – This complex combination of images and text has several possible layers of meaning and resonance. In terms of the components of the image, the clawed hippogriff (familiar to both readers of mythology and readers of the Harry Potter novels) represents a powerful combination of freedom and fierceness, suggesting that those who feel victimized must fight to retain their right to be who they are. The halved yin-yang seems to be missing the yin (quieter, calmer, cooler) side of its usual visual whole, while the color red and the image of sexual passion suggesting more yang (more excited, more vibrant, hotter). The text is an adaptation of the famous Medieval poem “Orlando Furioso” about a soldier caught up in a long standing war: aside from being the name of the city in which the Pulse nightclub is located, Orlando is also the name of the inter-gender central / title character of a fantasy novel by Virginia Woolf, herself a known bisexual. Taken together, the poem and imagery are an ode and celebration of courage, and of fighting for those who are themselves fighting to be free, a clear evocation of the situation and vulnerabilities of those killed in the Pulse shooting.

Comic 21 – This is one of several autobiographical entries in the collection: there is a clear sense that the visuals of the man in question are, in fact, portraits. The comic raises the complex issue of survivor guilt – that is, the guilt of those belonging to a certain persecuted group that they survived while many others did not. Meanwhile, the color component of this comic is, again, an evocation of the light / dark motif, only in this case the usual transition (light emerging from dark) is reversed: in this case, dark overwhelms light.

Comic 22 – Another appearance of the lesbian Batwoman, this time playing a more active role in the narrative as she comforts the unnamed child of an unidentified victim of the Pulse shooting. Aside from the reference to the heroism of the child’s mother (an evocation of the repeated theme of acceptance and respect, this time expressed in terms of the self), the most powerful element in this comic is visual – specifically, the juxtaposition of the brightly colored rainbow flag with the crowd of people attending the vigil.



Comic 23 – The references to everyday heroes in this section (that is: non-superhero types who were heroic simply by being themselves) echo the comments made by Batwoman in Comic 22. At the same time, the piece's structure (extensive text paired with a substantial visual) echoes the structure of Comic 20, albeit with the division of text and image manifesting in a more formal way. The image has at least two key layers of meaning. The first suggests the experience of someone entering the light of a welcoming community (as evoked in the text) – in this case, the specific light and joy of a gay club. The second suggests someone entering the light that awaits after death (this is not referred to in the text). The text, meanwhile, can be seen as offering a metaphoric consideration of the differences, and tension, between those who experience, and are comfortable with, a freer, non-traditional sense of self, and those who have a conservative, somewhat narrow experience of what is right, or what should be considered right. In more literal and more specific terms, this is the tension between those from the LGBTQ community, and those who hate, and want to destroy / devalue, that community.

Comic 24 – This wordless, text-less panel is powerfully evocative – of experiences of death and love, and of experiences of support for those suffering bereavement. There is a sense of community about the final image: what is interesting to note is that in that final panel, while the hands support the central figure, there are no faces. The suggestion here is the idea that “it doesn't matter who you are, it doesn't matter who we are: you are human and you are suffering and you are worthy of compassion.”

Comic 25 – The visual and textual evocations of support in this comic echo those of the previous one. Interesting elements include another appearance of Batwoman; the appearance of Catwoman who, in many ways, is one of the ultimate outsiders in superhero / comic book literature; and the possibility that the man in the tuxedo is dead, and that the narrator is experiencing an act of imagination. Meanwhile, the narration includes a sense of defiance that has been present in several other comics, and will be present in several more – and also includes another repeated reference. This is to the experience of dancing as a manifestation of both that defiance and of the joy of being both defiantly and happily oneself.

Discussion Question 1

Discuss the various layers of meaning, both implied and literal, in the use of the poem “Furious Orlando.”

Discussion Question 2

In Comic 21, what are the emotional / psychological implications of the light / darkness relationship – that is, the lightness of a few images transitioning into the darkness of many more.



Discussion Question 3

What are the implications of the fact that, in Comic 22, the person conversing with Batwoman is unidentified in terms of gender?

Vocabulary

damnation, seethe, radiant, ancestral, birthright, brutality, disdain, transgressor, custodial, differentiate, withering, fortitude, defiant, celebratory



Comics 26 – 33

Summary

Comic 26 – In a single-page layout titled “Still,” the top half of the page is a three-panel image in pale colors lit with shafts of light, showing people dancing. In the third panel, is a closeup of one young man with worried eyes. There follows a single panel of all black, then images of a young man coming closer in black and white. The final panel is all white. There is no text.

Comic 27 – In this single-page, irregularly-paneled layout, a man in a “Weapons Emporium” (the name is on the shop window) and speaks with the proprietor about purchasing something that is “really only designed for taking care of a bunch of people at once,” and the young man saying he “won’t feel safe” until he has one (Comic 27). The sense is of the young man purchasing a firearm, but the visual reveals that he is in fact purchasing a golden heart. As he puts it into his chest, the salesman gives him his ammunition – a newspaper headline announcing the Pulse attack.

Comic 28 – This two-page spread is in a series of horizontal panels, each in a particular color tone and the first five commenting on how different things that can be perceived as weapons (knives, rope, cyanide, explosives, and human hands) can be used for positive purposes. The final three panels, however, suggest that “a gun has just ONE use,” and comments that “the United States has THREE HUNDRED MILLION of them” (Comic 28). The final image is a map of the United States shaped entirely by guns.

Comic 29 – This single-page image with white background shows an abstracted representation of a rainbow flag, each of its colors broken up into a series of 49 stripes, one for each fatality in the shooting. The text refers to different aspects of those who died at Pulse (“different birthdays ... people ... plans ... dreams” but “one kind of bullet / one kind of gun / one kind of loneliness” (Comic 29).

Comic 30 – This single-page layout, in a variety of regularly shaped panels, is set in a bar in “Just About Anywhere, USA” (Comic 30). Text consists of news-style information about the shooting (the patrons seem to be watching the bar’s televisions); of negative, homophobic reactions to that news; and of one customer’s nervous reaction. “Like they know what it’s like to be hated. Or vulnerable” (Comic 30).

Comic 31 - This single-page panel seems to have been drawn in pencil, or charcoal. A blindfolded woman with wings (an angel?) casts a black shadow on a circular white background. The text is a poem, referring to those who hate and fear, but suggests that “when you love / you laugh / you dance / you remember / the reason / you were born / to live” (Comic 31).

Comic 32 – There are three panels in this single-page layout: a night-time city-scape, with lit windows in office buildings; a hand, holding a cell-phone on which there is an



incoming call; and a bullet-tattered rainbow flag, hanging in front of a lit candle. In the background, are barely lit shadowy figures. The text refers to the power of darkness to extinguish “forty nine lights,” but how later, fifty thousand lights were lit, and how light (powered by love) will always be more powerful.

Comic 33 – This single page of irregular, virtually text-less panels features images of a relationship between a young man and the close relationship he has with his dog. The first panel is of the dog, as a puppy, in a cage waiting for adoption; after a series of panels (the first playful, the last showing the dog waiting in an abandoned apartment), the final panel is of the dog, head bowed in sadness, again in a cage waiting for adoption.

Analysis

Comic 26 – There is a clear sense here that the wordless narrative is one of an experience of death – specifically, a death at Pulse. The layout communicates this narrative as much as the actual images within that layout: dancing, concern, death (as represented by the blackness) ... arrival in whatever comes after death (as represented by the movement into white). Here it is also important to note that in the set of black and white panels, there is a hint of a smile on the face of the young man, whose collar shape indicates that he is the same young man as in the first set of panels.

Comic 27 – As the narrative of this comic deploys the classic technique of misdirection (i.e. making a reader think one thing is happening when, in fact, the opposite is taking place), it also makes an ironic (if unspoken) comment on the prevalence of gun / weapons culture in America, and its role in the shooting (that is: the ease with which the shooter, like many other shooters in America, was able to obtain the weapon he used). Meanwhile, the irony of suggesting that a heart is like a gun, in that both can “take care of a bunch of people at once” is huge, and is echoed throughout the narrative. This reference, this irony, is developed further in the following comic.

Comic 28 – This comic develops an idea introduced in the previous one – the destructive power of weapons contrasted with the compassionate power of caring. This comic adds a layer of meaning, in that things used as weapons can, in the right hands, be used to create and heal and nurture. The final image, of America composed entirely of guns, is arguably one of the most powerful in the entire collection.

Comic 29 – This variation on the motif of the rainbow flag, which appears throughout the book, is particularly poignant because of how the usual single stripes of each color are replaced by a number of stripes equaling those killed. What the comic does not explore, for whatever reason, is the one other experience that the victims of Pulse had in common – that they were at Pulse to celebrate, in the manner of celebrating self, identity, and freedom advocated so many times elsewhere in the collection.

Comic 30 – This comic vividly, and quite starkly, pinpoints what it feels like to be gay in a homophobic environment, arguably not just Anywhere, USA but anywhere in the world



where homophobic philosophies and values are predominant. The bartender and the customer are portrayed as being literally surrounded by those with violent and judgmental reactions to the story of the Pulse shooting.

Comic 31 – On one level, this comic is a celebration of positivity, hope and independence and freedom and joy, common to many comics in the collection. Two things darken this particular version of that message, literally and metaphorically. First is the shadow of the angel, which is, in fact, bigger than the white angel, looming over it. The second is the blindfold. Because of both these aspects to the image, there is a sense that the hope of the poem and of the white angel is overwhelmed by darkness and pain, perhaps associated with an angel of death (i.e. the shadow angel).

Comic 32 – The images and the text metaphorically explore the way the darkness of violence and hatred that triggered and inhabited the Pulse shooter temporarily overcame the light of those dancing freely inside, and indeed attempted to do damage to the light of freedom in general. In making its point, this comic again makes use of the image of the cell phone, here as elsewhere in the collection, evocative of the many cellphones that both sent messages from the club at the time of the shooting, and were unable to receive messages in its aftermath. Other repeated images are those of the rainbow flag (here tattered with bullet holes) and the candle (emblematic of hope, light, and possibility). Interestingly, the shadowy figures in the background evoke a vigil, or the lives and/or spirits of those who died, or both.

Comic 33 – For the dog lovers in the crowd, or the animal lovers in general, this comic is perhaps among the more heartbreaking in the collection. There is the clear suggestion here that the dog's owner is / was one of the men killed at Pulse. On a metaphoric level, it can be seen as representing a death of joy, like so many deaths at Pulse and, arguably, any deaths in attacks motivated by hatred and prejudice.

Discussion Question 1

In what ways, ironically or directly, do the comics in this section (Comics 26 – 33) explore the book's central themes of celebration and hope (remember that positive themes can also be explored through explorations of their opposites)?

Discussion Question 2

In Comic 27, what does the proprietor mean when he holds up the paper and describes it as "ammo" (ammunition)?

Discussion Question 3

What do you think are the metaphoric / thematic implications of the angel and its shadow in Comic 31?

Vocabulary

fumigate, vascular, defiance, extinguish

Comics 34 - 41

Summary

Comic 34 – This single-page, regular grid layout, colored in dark blue, black, and white, shows images of a man first using a remote control to flip through news channels covering the shooting and talking about issues arising from the shooting (gun rights, assaults against young black men). Images then switch to the man loading a gun and putting on a uniform, and then to the man, a police officer, in front of protestors. The final panel is of the man's pained, troubled face.

Comic 35 – This single-page, irregularly laid out, darkly colored comic has images of racks of guns and weaponry. The comic book character Deathstroke sits, surrounded by these weapons as he watches news coverage of gun violence, following the shooting. The final image is of Deathstroke's weapons in a bin, and of him walking away, saying that from now on he will only use martial arts.

Comic 36 – This single-page, brightly colored, irregularly paneled layout features an image of faces superimposed over a rainbow flag; an image of a bouquet of orchids; and a row of men and women, hands linked, pink triangles on their black t-shirts. The text refers to the need to balance death (which cuts the threads that keeps society and individuals together) with action, to knit those threads together.

Comic 37 – This comic, in vivid, saturated colors in a single-page, irregular layout, is the story of a young straight man, narrating in first person how he became an activist in response to the deaths of his mother's friends from AIDS. In the first panel, he visits a man with AIDS in hospital, while in middle panels he puts up posters with pink triangles ("silence = death") (Comic 37), referring in text to how difficult it is to be a straight ally. The final panel echoes the first: the young man weeping over the body of the now-dead man from the first panel.

Comic 38 – This comic is titled "Uncle Kevin." In a single-page layout with irregular but defined panels, and coloring in primarily shades of turquoise blue, a young African-American boy is walking with his mother the day after the Pulse shooting. When he asks what happened, she tells him that people like his Uncle Kevin and Uncle David were shot. "Uncle Kevin," she says, "always calls it another kind of racism but towards sexual orientation instead of skin color" (Comic 38). The boy comments that his uncles are great. The mother tells him to hold on to that.

Comic 39 – This comic is titled "2000 Characters." The visual is of a charcoal-drawn African American, hands to (his? her?) head as streams of blackness that look something like a factory-scape, or city scape, come up from (his? her?) face. The text is poetic, with the rhyming and rhythmic cadences of rap music. Highlights include "YOU divided by ME equals WE" and the refrain "I – have – a brain ... I – have – a brain ... I – have – a heart ... I – am human" (Comic 39).



Comic 40 - In this single-page, brightly colored, regularly paneled layout, a boy in large glasses grows, in a series of horizontal panels, into a man. First person text narrates his growth from being lectured on what to believe about the world, through making up his own mind, to a post-Pulse shooting contemplation of the value of listening, and learning to accept. The comic's title is at the bottom of the page – "Change."

Comic 41 – The top half of this single-page cartoon is a series of regular panels drawn in newspaper comic strip style. They show a boy being bullied, and other young people arriving and facing down the bully. The final visual is of the bully standing in solidarity with the multi-racial, boy girl mix. The text, printed below the cartoon, urges people to fight against injustice.

Analysis

Comic 34 – The powerful images of a clearly male uniformed officer preparing for duty, eventually revealed as police duty defending against equal rights protestors, are made even more so by the coloring: police officers are traditionally dressed in blue uniforms, a circumstance evoked by the dominant blue color tone of the comic. The final panel is also noteworthy, in that it seems to portray the man / officer in question as being troubled by what he is being asked to do.

Comic 35 – In the world of comic books, Deathstroke is an assassin, who makes his living from killing people. The narrative and images suggest that he is giving up the use of his vast arsenal of weapons (such as the weapon used in the Pulse shooting) which are potentially useful in killing large numbers of people, in favor of the more limited, and more focused, martial arts.

Comic 36 – The rainbow flag appears again in this section, combining with the images of a variety of individuals to evoke the power and value of freedom and community in the face of violence. The orchids evoke beauty, while the image of the people with their linked hands again evokes community. Meanwhile, this page contains the first reference, in the collection so far, to the pink triangle, long a symbol of the gay rights movement. During World War II, at a time when the Nazis forced Jews to identify themselves by wearing yellow stars, the Nazis also forced homosexuals to identify themselves by wearing pink triangles. The claiming of the symbol by the gay rights movement is an attempt to turn a symbol of hatred into a symbol of pride, and of courage.

Comic 37 – The pink triangle makes another appearance in this comic, which also makes the first reference in the collection to the AIDS epidemic of the 1980's and 90's, which killed thousands of gay men. The slogan "silence = death" was one used by participants in the gay rights movement who actively opposed, and strove to break, the silence around AIDS imposed by governments and health organizations. Meanwhile, the images of death and grief in this panel, connected to experiences of AIDS, can be seen as evoking or reflecting experiences of death and grief associated with the Pulse shootings.



Comic 38 – This comic contains another example of the motif, present throughout the collection, of children asking why hatred of, and violence towards, same sex relationships exist. As such, it is another evocation of the book’s thematic interest in parent / child relationships. This comic takes a different angle towards this idea, however, by equating hatred and violence towards gays with hatred and violence towards non-whites. The idea is a controversial one, particularly with more conservative members of the African-American community. Meanwhile, the boy’s reference to how he feels about his Uncle Kevin and Uncle David can be seen as a metaphoric evocation of the book’s thematic emphasis on the idea that “love is love.”

Comic 39 – While there is no clear explanation of what the title means, there is a sense from the text of the poem that it refers to the number of characters (letters, spaces, numbers, other elements) that is the maximum that can be included in the text for an individual layout in this project. Meanwhile, there is a sense here that the image evokes several things – explosions of ideas, explosions of grief, an industrial city, death (i.e. the soul streaming from the body), a scream of frustration (that is: a visual echo of the frustrated, anguished cries of the poem). Ultimately, there is a sense here of a call (scream?) for all humanity to be respected, in spite of apparent differences.

Comic 40 – This comic is another of the few comics in the collection that make direct reference to the role played by religion in inciting homophobia, and other negative reactions towards same sex relationships. At the same time, its visuals and narrative evoke both physical and moral change, a maturation of perspective. Here it is important to note the emphasis placed by the visual narrative on the central character’s eyes, framed by his glasses. The metaphoric implication here is that as he is growing, the central character is learning to see, and not only in the literal sense. Finally, the comic is also a further evocation of the book’s thematically central cry for tolerance and respect.

Comic 41 – This comic is one of several in the narrative that calls for solidarity and community in the face of attack. The message here is primarily acquainted with bullying, and while there is no overt reference to any kind of same sex relationship, within the context of the collection as a whole, this comic can be seen as referencing the book’s call for compassion, tolerance, and affirming resistance in the face of prejudice, violence, and anger.

Discussion Question 1

In what ways do the comics in this section (Comics 34 - 41) evoke the power of celebration and hope?

Discussion Question 2

In its final images, Comic 34 evokes, or suggests, a sense of compassion for police officers. What is your reaction to the police? How do you respond to the portrayal of this officer’s apparent compassion?



Discussion Question 3

Conservative religion of almost every denomination suggests that any kind of non-heterosexual, non-marriage sexuality is at the very least inappropriate, at most sinful. How do you respond to these contentions, or arguments, or perspectives?

Vocabulary

capacity, isolate



Comics 42 – 49

Summary

Comic 42 – In this single-page, brightly colored and irregularly laid out drawing. The first three panels portray incidents of non-heterosexuals being verbally abused. The fourth panel encourages dancing. The fifth panel shows two women kissing in front of a caricature of Donald Trump. The final panel shows those from the previous panels dancing, with the over-layed text “Everybody’s free” (Comic 42).

Comic 43 – This single-page is laid out in three horizontal panels, brightly colored. They show a trio of older gay men, with text and dialogue referring to the history of violence against gay men. Specifically, conversation refers to a deliberately set fire at a gay club in New Orleans, in which people were buried in unmarked graves because some families were too ashamed to claim the bodies of those killed. Conversation and visuals point out the difference between that occasion and the aftermath of the Pulse shooting – “the outpouring of love ... genuine support and public grieving” (Comic 43). The final panel shows a memorial to the victims of the shooting in San Francisco, and a quote from early gay activist Harvey Milk: “if a bullet should enter my brain, let that bullet shatter every closet door” (Comic 43 / Harvey Milk).

Comic 44 – This single-page layout, in a pen and ink style, colored in pink and blue, celebrates the value of places like the Pulse club, “where societal norms are temporarily suspended ... the spaces that nurture and protect us, like Pulse and innumerable others, teach us to hold on to who we are ...” even at times when society is rejecting and violent (Comic 44).

Comic 45 – This two page spread, colored brightly, shows a crowd of mixed-gendered, multi-racial couples dancing. There is no text, or dialogue. In the top right hand corner, a figure colored in black (the only figure so colored) comes in the door ...

Comic 46 – This single-page, irregularly paneled layout illustrates a situation described in the first person narration of a gay man who attended a post-Pulse pride parade. He describes a particular moment in that parade: forty-nine people, one for each person killed in the shooting, carrying memorials of those persons. Narration comments on the capacity for simultaneous sadness and joy (in the sense of community) that infused that moment.

Comic 47 – A single-page, single panel illustration of two men dancing is the background for a series of irregular, white framed panels and text boxes, the latter describing the moment when one man asked the other to marry him, with his grandparents’ ring; the former showing images of an arriving shooter. The final text: “til death do us part” (Comic 47).



Comic 48 – In this two-page, brightly colored, irregularly laid out spread, several comic book characters talk, drink, and discuss how much – and how little – things have changed for gay people. Characters include out-of-the-closet lesbian police detective Maggie; Batwoman; and a character from the 80's known as Extrano, who bemoans having been a gay stereotype never referred to as gay, and as being “compliant in diminishing [the impact of AIDS] by making it a plot device” (Comic 48). As Maggie and her girlfriend dance, Batwoman and Extrano drink a toast: “We’ve come a great distance, but we still have a long way to go” (Comic 48). This last dialogue is drawn over an image of the Pulse nightclub.

Comic 49 – In this single-page, regularly laid out series of horizontal panels, a straight narrator describes his teenaged use of gay slurs; his discovery of what a jerk he had been; and his discovery of love (with a woman), friendship and community at gay bars. “Nothing,” he says, “will ever stop us for looking for love or being ourselves” (Comic 49).

Analysis

Comic 42 – This comic is the only one in the collection to visually reference Donald Trump who was, at the time of the Pulse shooting, candidate for president and perceived as the leading voice of the discrimination-oriented conservative right wing in America. His appearance here can be seen as the ultimate representation of the verbal abuse perpetrated in the first three panels, while the image of the two women kissing in front of the image of Trump can be seen as a vivid repudiation of that conservative perspective. So can the final panel.

Comic 43 – This comic is notable for being one of a very few comics in the collection representing the experience of elder members of the LGBTQ community, many of whom remember (as the text suggests) the history of struggle experienced by the members of that community. In terms of theme and intention, this comic makes a double edged point: on the one hand, enough has changed in society to allow public displays of grief like the one portrayed at the comic’s conclusion; on the other hand, so much has NOT changed in terms of hatred, intolerance, and violence towards LGBTQ and other minority groups. The quote from Harvey Milk (one of the most vocal, and renowned advocates for gay rights in the early days of the movement) ties the past and the present together, as well as tying the two sides of the above referenced thematic considerations. The assassination of Harvey Milk in the 1970's did, indeed, push the gay rights movement forward, in the same way as the shootings at Pulse pushed the LGBTQ rights movement even further forward.

Comic 44 – Once again, a comic in the collection celebrates diversity and the value of places like Pulse and other gay clubs as a place where diversity is welcome. The color choices are particularly interesting, in that blue has traditionally been a color “for boys,” while pink has traditionally been a color “for girls.” The coloring, along with the visual imagery, suggests a crossing and / or intersection of those traditional ideas.



Comic 45 – This comic is one of the most powerful in the collection, its impact emerging after layered consideration. The dominant imagery is that of celebration, with couples of mixed generations, genders, and ethnicities filling the two-page layout. There are also representations of cell-phones, repeating the frequently used motif referring to the unanswered cellphones at Pulse in the aftermath of the shooting. But eventually, the eye is drawn to the image of the silhouetted man: there is a very clear sense that this figure represents the shooter at Pulse, Omar Mateen. It is important to note that the figure holds no apparent weapon, but then it is also important to note that its right hand is hidden: there may be a weapon in that unseen hand. On another (and related) level, the figure being colored black represents death (as black and darkness so often do throughout the collection).

Comic 46 – This comic, with its flashes of rainbow-flag color in the midst of the generally two-tone color scheme (blues and whites) and its image of the white clad mourners, is a powerful contrast to both the comic that preceded it (i.e. light, in the form of the mourners, following the darkness of the shooter in the previous comic) and the comic that follows. Meanwhile, the text suggests that it is possible to appropriately memorialize those who were killed while, at the same time, celebrate the defiantly free, or freely defiant, lives that were both lost and continue to be lived.

Comic 47 – There is a clear echo of Comic 45 in this comic, focusing on the specific experience of a particular couple in the moments before the shooting. There is deep, painful irony in the images and the story. What is visually interesting about this comic is that the image of the two men in love and celebrating is dominant: images of the shooter are smaller, almost incidental to the visual. There is a sense here that the theme of celebration and hope, and of “love is love” are being emphasized visually – that death and destruction and hatred cannot overcome such joy.

Comic 48 – The lesbian Batwoman appears again, this time inside an LGBTQ club and in the company of other, same-sex oriented characters. In the same way as Comic 43 draws connections between past and present experiences of being gay, the presence of Batwoman and Extrano draws similar connections, essentially making the same thematic comment as the earlier comic. This comic, however, takes the comparison to a different level, drawing a direct correlation between the experience of the community’s living through AIDS and society’s stigmatization of those who suffered it. It further suggests that there are parallels between those experiences and those at Pulse, proposing that that attack coming from the same place of intolerance and hatred as the response to AIDS three decades earlier.

Comic 49 – This comic is one of only a few in the collection in which the perspectives and experiences of so-called “straight allies” are explored. This comic expands the boundaries of the inclusiveness celebrated by so many of the other comics, expanding that sense of openness to all to include someone (a straight white man) who, in other circumstances, might be considered an enemy.



Discussion Question 1

In what ways do the comics in this section (Comics 42 – 49) develop and explore the book's thematic interest in acceptance and respect?

Discussion Question 2

What is your response to the visual contention, in Comic 42, that Donald Trump and his politics / philosophies are somehow connected to the incident at Pulse?

Discussion Question 3

How do you respond to the ideas of “pink for girls, blue for boys”?

Vocabulary

liminal, societal, innumerable, ambergris, spillage



Comics 50 – 57

Summary

Comic 50 – This single-page layout is primarily drawn in charcoal shades of gray and black, but there is also red, drawn in as blood from the hand of a wounded man being held up by another. Both are naked and well-muscled, as are all the men in the bottom panel, swimming in the blood that falls from the first man's hand. Poetic, rhyming text describes the preciousness of blood, the value of life, and the anticipation of something better. "You'll see what grows out of this grave" (Comic 50).

Comic 51 – In this single-page, irregularly laid out, vividly colored set of drawings, a pair of super-hero types (one dark and violent, one bright and peaceful) reach for each other and embrace. The bright one has what looks like a halo of light around his head: the dark one has a representation of an eclipsed moon as an emblem on his chest. The two men kiss, the text reading "there will always be somewhere we feel safe" (Comic 51).

Comic 52 – The top half of this one-page layout is a painting of a large, older man surrounded by animals. A poem refers to Old Daddy and how, if someone messes with nature, he will lose that person in the woods. The bottom half of the page is upside down in relationship to the picture of Old Daddy: if the book is turned over, the picture shows an African-American woman, combing her hair as it turns into snakes. Poetry suggests that the woman, if someone damages nature, will never lose sight of the criminal or the crime.

Comic 53 – In this single-page, single image layout- a large central illustration of the galaxy (complete with stars, identified by number) is framed on top by layers of different shades of pink, and on the bottom, shades of gray and brown. There is a clear border between the pink and the gray, but no border between the gray and the brown, which shade into one another. The text "Love is Love" is repeated several times in a vertical line along the right hand side of the page.

Comic 54 – A series of text boxes narrates, in first person, the struggles of the writer to figure out what to say after being invited to participate in this project. A series of images illustrates his struggles, with the final panel showing what he finally came up with. A white screen, with the caption "I love you" (Comic 54).

Comic 55 – This single-page, symmetrically laid out comic, illustrated in what seems to be (otherworldly?) water colors, has, as its backdrop, an outer space-ish layout of a floating planet. A pair of humanoid aliens in a kind of space rowboat fly through the sky. The son asks the father what the father would do if the son was gay. The father says he would love the son just the same.

Comic 56 – In this single-page, symmetrical, very vividly colored layout, a being in a space suit near a space station captures energy / matter from what appears to be an



exploding star, or a nebula. The being fills storage containers, takes them back to its space station, and appears to refuel a life support system for another alien. There is an explosion of color, and in the final panel, the word "love."

Comic 57 – This two-page spread is drawn in three, roughly equal-sized panels that blend one into the other. The first panel shows four figures walking out of a dark green forest and into white light: text describes the journey out of the forest of four good friends, all young women. In the second panel, one of them – blonde and tall – makes another (shorter, dark – perhaps Latinx) promise to keep an important secret. The other girl promises, and the first girl (Amanda) reveals that she likes girls. The second girl is very accepting, and then makes plans to get together the next day – to jump off a cliff. Text narrates what Amanda remembers most from that memorable summer: “the feeling of being who she really was for the first time ever” (Comic 57).

Analysis

Comic 50 – The stark images of this comic interact with the poetry of the text to suggest, perhaps more viscerally than anywhere else in the collection, the idea that there is the possibility that positive change and transformation, or at least awareness, can emerge from the tragedy and suffering associated with the massacre. It is interesting to note that there are no references to women in this comic: there is an eroticism about the male bodies portrayed here that suggest the triumph referred to in the text has at least some degree of sexuality to it – which, in turn, awakens echoes of the AIDS activism in the 1980’s and 90’s among the gay male community.

Comic 51 – Another evocation of the connection / relationship between darkness and light, between hope and despair – this time, in the portrayal of a pair of gay male super heroes. Here, that connection is made explicitly yin/yang (that is: a representation of balanced forces) in the embrace in the final panel. Meanwhile, the reference to feeling safe, here as in other comics, suggests that that safety is possible in the embrace of a beloved, a concept metaphorically suggested in comics portraying, or referring to, safety within the “embrace” of a community of like-minded, like-experienced individuals.

Comic 52 – This comic is densely packed with imagery and meaning. The figure of Old Daddy is an intriguing reversal of the concept of Mother Earth, portraying the powerful, nurturing energy of the earth as more of a stealth warrior who, interestingly, could be living within the physical appearance of a street person. The figure of the woman is clearly a reversal of the concept of Medusa, a beautiful woman with hair of snakes that transformed those with whom she was angry into stone. Medusa, however, was generally destructive for its own sake: this woman, who also has aspects of Mother Earth about her, seems more interested in justice rather than vindictiveness. Interestingly, both figures are painted with non-Caucasian skin tones.

Comic 53 – This comic is perhaps one of the more abstract (non-literal) in the collection, one in which meaning is not easily apparent. There is a sense of earth / sky / heaven about the layout (i.e. heaven being a place that exists beyond the sky, beyond physical



reality); and, because “heaven” is pink, and because pink is often viewed as a color representative of the LGBTQ community (because of the pink triangle, worn by homosexuals by the decree of the Nazis in World War II), there is the sense of some connection being drawn between the spiritual, “heaven-sent” courage to be open about non-hetero-normativity. The white border seems to suggest a clear division between that which is both earthly (the brown) and perceivable (the sky) and that which is heaven. Finally, the repetition of “love is love” in all three layers suggests that the value of love is universal: however, the fact that the phrase is repeated most frequently in the brown, earthly layer suggests that love is needed more on earth than anywhere else ... which, in the context of the collection as a whole, would seem to be a perfectly valid point.

Comic 54 – This is another of the autobiographical comics in the collection, one in which the text and visuals combine to tell what seems to be a very personal story. One particularly noteworthy image shows (once again) two men kissing in the foreground, while judgmental faces (including that of a man wearing a priest’s collar) loom darkly in the background. A particularly significant point to note about this comic is that the first-person text is extremely angry, including several curse words in a way that many of the other texts in the collection do not. The presence of the curse words, and of the anger, provide a telling and important contrast to the simple visual and text in the final panel.

Comic 55 – This comic puts an intriguing twist on the thematically central motif of parent/child relationships, presenting an aspect of the “child asking about same-sex attraction” motif that appears throughout the collection. Here, as elsewhere in the collection, the father compassionately responds to the son’s question, and the rowboat sails on past the floating planet.

Comic 56 – This comic, like Comic 53, seems to be somewhat abstract in its meaning ... at least until the reader gets to the very final moment in the bottom right hand corner: the word “love.” Back-spacing the final moment into the rest of the comic, its meaning then seems quite simple: the suggestion that love is a universal, powerful life sustaining force, sometimes a challenge to access but necessary, no matter what kind of life form actually taps into it.

Comic 57 – The visual idea of moving from darkness into light is very clearly developed, and just as clearly reinforced in the narrative, as the central character (Amanda) moves from nervousness and fear to a feeling of joy and acceptance. There are also references, in the early part of the text, to the ideas of transformation, of adventurousness, and of larger life inside that the outside life was perhaps not fully representing. Again, the hopefulness and optimism of the story’s conclusion are an evocation of the collection’s core thematic interest in the power of acceptance and hope.

Discussion Question 1

In what ways do the comics in this section (Comics 50 – 57) explore the thematic idea of the power of community?



Discussion Question 2

Comic 55 is one of several comics in the collection in which a parent assures a same-sex oriented child of unconditional love. Do you think this perspective is idealistic? Realistic? A lie? Explain your answer.

Discussion Question 3

In Comic 57, a young girl shares what she thinks is a frightening secret, with a positive result. What experiences have you had of sharing an important secret that resulted in either positive or negative consequences?

Vocabulary

n/a



Comics 58 – 65

Summary

Comic 58 – The center of this single-page layout focuses on Supergirl, flying above earth with a newspaper in her hand, frozen tears falling from her eyes. A series of text boxes contains first person narration describing how she and Superman came to earth; how they have spent their lives trying to make the world better, and helping those who need it; and how sometimes, they are too late. She flies into the air, the newspaper falls to earth, and the text boxes ask “This world is so, so beautiful, why would anyone want to hurt it?” (Comic 58). At the bottom of the page is the Super logo (the S in a modified triangle) with the word “Why” in red, dripping blood.

Comic 59 – In this brightly colored, single-page layout, two non-Caucasian boys play in a sandbox. As they make plans to get together the next day, conversation reveals that one of the boys has two dads. The other boy simply says that is “cool,” and they continue to make plans (Comic 59). The final image is of the sandcastle constructed by the boys.

Comic 60 – This single-page, single-image layout is in tones of red and pink, features a door at its centre (with the number 69 on it), and a do not disturb sign on the handle. There is also lettering, in white – laughter, sighs, and moans. The text describes how those sounds could be coming from anyone, or any number of anyones, and that it does not matter who is inside the room, of what gender, or how many. “They are adults doing whatever they want under consent ... so please, do not disturb” (Comic 60).

Comic 61 – In this single-page, irregularly laid out comic saturated with light from a window, two teenaged girls talk about their comic books. They confess which characters they had crushes on, with one girl admitting that her strongest crush was on a woman. The other girl says she has always known, and that she is glad the other girl told her. Their embrace is framed by the light from the window.

Comic 62 – In this two-page spread, similarly saturated with light, a young, female super hero with a resemblance to Supergirl flies above a sepia-tinted city. Below her are protests between those who love dogs, and those who love cats. Text of the young woman’s first person narration has echoes of the American Declaration of Independence (“up here, we live by the precepts of self-evident truth”) (Comic 62), and then goes on to suggest that that truth essentially refers to the right to live free, safe, and accepted. The text also refers to how ridiculous and ultimately irrelevant, the protestors are, suggesting that all the anger is simply jealousy of those who believe in love and respect, and how free they are – free enough to fly. The final image is of the young woman flying into the sun.

Comic 63 – This single-page comic features Wonder Woman, and shows her during the day, and in the night, alone in a ruined temple. The final panel shows her full on, asking



whether those who make assumptions about her because she lives in a community of only women – whether they know what it is to die for love.

Comic 64 – This comic is titled “A Swan Song.” Visuals and text tell the story of the Greek God Zeus, renowned for loving many people, men and women and even the gods of Egypt. Narration suggests he was ready to “love with his brothers in Orlando” (the visual is of the outside of Pulse) “but the hate stayed his heart ... for the first time, hate had defeated his love” (Comic 64). So he left, with the narrative suggesting that there is love, even in the teasing glance of a swan.

Comic 65 – This comic is titled “Get Up.” In its single-page, purple-toned irregular visuals, a female warrior appears to ask a mourning male warrior whether he is going to stay in his grief. In text, the male warrior describes how much he valued a friend who recently died, one who very easily made new friends. The female warrior asks who is going to help the world, the way he did, if they do not? In visuals, she helps her friend up, and they walk off.

Analysis

Comic 58 – Initially, the images are of grief. Later, when Supergirl throws away the newspaper (The Daily Planet, where Superman works in his secret identity of reporter Clark Kent), the images are of frustration and helplessness, perhaps of anger. In that sense, the visuals can be seen as echoing, or embodying, the reactions of many others to the news of the shooting: Supergirl (and Superman), in their reactions, seem to be no different than many other people. The text can be seen as referencing the idea that many of the people killed at Pulse (i.e. members of the LGBT and/or Latinx communities) were perceived and treated as outsiders, but with more hatred and resentment than Superman or Supergirl, who were also outsiders, in their way.

Comic 59 – Once again, children are portrayed as being open and accepting - once again, that acceptance is revealed through their asking of questions and their easy absorption of the answers. The final image, of a fortress that is in reality small but which is drawn from a perspective that makes it look huge, suggests that that kind of acceptance is itself a fortress that can withstand and defend against prejudice.

Comic 60 – This comic contains one of the very few overt references to sexuality in the collection. Its contention is that whatever happens, in sexual terms, between two individuals is nobody’s business but the individuals involved. The final lines of the text can therefore be seen as having two meanings: do not disturb, as in do not interrupt; but also do not disturb, as in do not judge, no matter what your personal experiences or beliefs about sexuality are.

Comic 61 – Once again, a young woman confesses a same-sex orientation to another young woman. Once again, the second young woman is accepting. Once again, the final image, associated with that acceptance, is suffused with light.



Comic 62 – This darkly funny comic satirizes hatred and intolerance by showing how ridiculous it is. The comic suggests that arguments (to the point of violence) about the appropriateness, or naturalness, of alternative sexualities is as ridiculous as arguing, to the point of violence (as the protestors in this comic do), about the relative merits of cats and dogs. There is anger in the text at that ridiculousness, along with very clear and very pointed references to the Declaration of Independence, which suggests that the arguments of those who practice intolerance and hatred are, in fact, speaking and acting and reacting in defiance of that document. The final image once again equates the positive values of freedom, individuality, and compassion with light.

Comic 63 – Interestingly, this is the only comic in the collection that features Wonder Woman, one of the most popular and powerful female heroes in comic books. An important note about Wonder Woman is that she comes from a community composed entirely of women – specifically, an island of female warriors. The implication of the comic's text is that Wonder Woman is often perceived, because of her origins, as being a lesbian.

Comic 64 – There is an interesting connection between this comic and the previous one, in that Wonder Woman, according to her origin story, received her special powers as the result of a gift from the Greek Gods, including Zeus (the god featured in this comic). Meanwhile, Zeus is the only Greek god who appears, in myths, to love freely (much to the angry dismay of his monogamous wife Hera) and bisexually (having loved both beautiful women and beautiful young men). In this sense, he is something of an embodiment for, and of, what might be described as non-traditional loving and non-traditional relationships. The final text and panel suggests that love, or at least connection of some sort, is possible even in a glance from an animal: the choice of a swan is particularly interesting, is that according to myth, Zeus at one point transformed himself into a swan in order to seduce a woman to whom he was attracted.

Comic 65 – The idea of Wonder Woman as warrior (from Comic 63) is echoed in this comic, which features a strong female warrior encouraging and motivating a bereaved male comrade. A particularly intriguing element of this comic is the reference to the possibility of doing good in the face, or the aftermath, of a tragic act – of an experience of grief. Here again, a single comic echoes the book-wide motif of finding courage to create positive change or celebrate life in the aftermath of an invasion from the darkness.

Discussion Question 1

How do the comics in this part of the collection (Comics 58 – 65) celebrate the power of community?



Discussion Question 2

Comic 62 contains a clear, if indirect, reference to the American Declaration of Independence. What is your response to the idea of the Declaration being used in this way, and the specific way in which it IS used?

Discussion Question 3

What do you think Wonder Woman means when, at the end of Comic 63, she wonders whether those who would judge her, merely on the assumption that she is a lesbian, know what it means to die for love?

Vocabulary

heteronormative, precept



Comics 66 – 74

Summary

Comic 66 – In this single-page layout a woman, her body outlined in black but her skeleton revealed, sits on an ornate chair and speaks of how “haters” do not think of themselves as villains, but create hate and destruction out of self-righteousness. As lightly-colored bodies float past her in the sky, she urges the haters to not hate – they will live longer - and happier.

Comic 67 – In this two-page spread, characters from the Archie Comics – Archie, Betty, Veronica, and their gay friend Kevin – react to the Pulse shooting. Kevin tells a story of how, when he and his father lived in Orlando, he tried to get into Pulse with his first boyfriend, but they were turned away for being under-age. He also describes how the boyfriend used to go to Pulse, but was not there on the night of the shooting, as well as how, even though Riverdale is a small town, he has never felt safer. The group makes plans to help in whatever way they can, and the layout ends with the four friends expressing love and support for each other.

Comic 68 – In this single-page, single-image layout, a man in black, but with rainbow flag colors running across his clothes and across the page, takes central focus. Printed in red on the black of his sweater is a quote from William Shakespeare’s “As You Like It,” which contains the words “Sweet are the uses of adversity ... these are counsellors that feelingly persuade me what I am” (Comic 68).

Comic 69. This single-page, single-image layout shows an elderly man in the arms of a male angel, a cat in his lap, a typewriter and books and a skull and an inkwell named “Soul” on the ground beside them. The man holds in one hand a bright red heart with a keyhole in its centre, while he holds a key in the other. There is a quote at the top of the page: the last words of author William S. Burroughs, that says love is “the most natural painkiller” there is (Comic 69).

Comic 70 – In this single-page, single image layout, two male figures (Love and Unity) and a female figure (Peace) hold up a representation of the earth, with the continents shaped like hearts. Beneath them, chained and violent red, are blends of faces and weaponry, identified as Hate, Intolerance, and Fear.

Comic 71 – In this single-page, single-image layout, members of the comic book hero team The Green Lantern Corps are drawn in pen and ink, while behind them are the colors of the rainbow flag. The text: “Diversity makes us stronger. Embracing it makes us more human” (Comic 71).

Comic 72 – In this single-page, symmetrically laid out, nine-panel grid, the repeated image of a downcast Batman is colored with his cape and cowl (his uniform) in the colors of the rainbow flag. The first panel is all black, with the words “I’m tired” (Comic



72). In the rest of the panels, Batman speaks of how tired he is, how close he is to breaking ... but then he says that he will get up and fight one more day.

Comic 73 – In this single-page, brightly colored layout, a young girl watches television and reads while an older male figure checks his phone. Text describes how the narrator came to realize that in childhood stories, no matter the kinds of beings that loved each other, love could be recognized. The narrator speaks of not knowing what happens to people to make them lose the capacity to love, but adds that childhood imaginings had it right: “Love is the thing to fight for. To help flourish. Love is what wins in the end” (Comic 73). The final image is of the young woman curled up next to the man, both seemingly asleep, while another darker complexioned man (Latinx?) covers them with a blanket.

Comic 74 – In this two-page, irregularly laid out spread, the drawings are all in shades of black and gray, except where the colors of the rainbow flag appear – in flags, in jewelry, in t-shirt emblems. First person narration describes how the 15-year-old male narrator walked nervously into his high school with a strange weight on his wrist. He recalls going to a Pride festival in Milwaukee, buying himself a souvenir, and imagining the freedom and joy of his older self. Narration then returns to his entry into the school, narration revealing he was walking into a Roman Catholic school, the final panel revealing he is wearing a rainbow bracelet, and that he feels like himself. The title appears at the end of the drawing: Pride.

Analysis

Comic 66 – This is another comic that is more abstracted in its meaning than some of the other, more literal comics. It could be that the woman is a representation of death; it could be that her skeleton, visible except for her skull, can be seen as ironically representing how “haters,” as she calls them, make their inner hypocrisy visible when they speak or act; it could be that the images of those floating past her, probable representations of the dead, suggest the freedom that inevitably can exist in spite of hatred. There is no clear answer to the questions of meaning this image represents - all the above, and more, are possible.

Comic 67 – In the last several years, the Archie comics (which seemed, for decades, to be both somewhat conservative and overly innocent) have taken on a bit more of a contemporary edge. As part of that movement, the comics introduced a gay character, Kevin, who was both out to his father and accepted by him. With all that in mind, the text and visuals of this narrative portray a response connected to two of the collection’s central themes – its exploration of acceptance and support, and its celebration of the value of community.

Comic 68 – The visual motif of the rainbow flag reappears in in this comic, its placement (essentially and apparently moving through the head of the man who takes the center of the image) suggesting the possibility that the compassion, freedom, and capacity for celebration represented by the flag might be considered part of a universal consciousness. The text suggests, as do many of the other comics in the collection, that



there is value, hope, and joy in learning to reach for new triumph, new hope, and new wisdom in the aftermath of tragedy.

Comic 69 – It seems quite clear that the image of the elderly man is intended to be a representation of Burroughs, a renowned American literary figure who, among other things, experimented with heavy drugs; experimented with various expressions of sexuality; and spent most, if not all, his literary career satirizing and attacking traditional American mores, traditions, and values. The quote is a variation, and an echo, of a sentiment that appears several times throughout the narrative: the idea that the power of love is transcendent of pain and suffering. The visual image of the key and the heart with a key raises a question: did the man die before he unlocked the love in the heart, or after?

Comic 70 – This is one of only a few comics in the collection in which meaning emerges solely from a visual image, rather than from any sort of extended, developed text. The images suggest that the world is elevated, above the destructive powers of hate, intolerance, and fear, by the strength and teamwork of the three more positive emotions or values at the center of the image - they are literally rising above the more angry, more intensely colored images at the bottom of the page

Comic 71 – In terms of the visual, it is interesting to note that the figures of the members of the Corps are drawn in black and white, while the colors of the rainbow flag are in color. Because the flag represents freedom and unity in diversity (i.e. diversity of colors, unified into a flag), the visual reinforces the contentions of the text. An interesting point to note is that in comic books, the Green Lantern Corps is an organization with members from a galaxy's worth of inhabited planets – humanoids, animal-oids, males, females, aliens – all sorts of beings wear the ring of the Green Lanterns. In other words, the Corps is an embodiment of diversity, and of the power of a community of the diverse.

Comic 72 – Batman is a notable super-hero because he has no true super powers. He is a superb athlete and has a brilliant mind, but ultimately he is a normal human being. This comic demonstrates how even someone as physically and emotionally and mentally conditioned as Batman can become tired – and then, somehow, find the strength to carry on and do what has to be done, in this case the hatred that seems to be continually becoming increasingly destructive. What is particularly interesting about the blend of visual and text in this comic is that as Batman digs deep to find more courage and more strength, his image is colored in the shades of the rainbow flag. In other words, the graphic is saying that the pride, courage, and joy implied by the flag and its colors can be a source of strength. In this sense, the comic is yet another reiteration of the book's emphasis on the transformation of darkness and isolation into light.

Comic 73 – Another exploration of childhood reactions to adult situations takes an interesting turn in this comic, in which the visuals are of a child but the narration is in the adult voice of that child, one who was apparently raised by a male, same-sex couple. There is, in fact, the sense that in the text of this comic, there is an explanation for all of



the other references to the innocent wisdom and compassion of children throughout the book. Children get it, this comic seems to say: they get that love is everything, and that if only adults could re-connect with that understanding and insight, the world would be a much better place.

Comic 74 – The appearance of the colors of the rainbow flag against the consistent shades of gray that make up the background of this comic is one of the more vivid examples in the collection of how color is used to emphasize theme and story. As is the case throughout the collection, the colors of the flag represent joy in diversity, diversity in community, and community as safety. In this particular coming, they also represent knowledge and self-acceptance, aspects of the colors that echo throughout the rainbow's other appearances but which are the primary point of focus here.

Discussion Question 1

How do the comics and narratives in this section (Comics 66 – 74) develop the theme of “love is love”?

Discussion Question 2

Given the context and themes of the collection as a whole, what do you think is the answer to the question posed by Comic 69? Was the man unable to unlock the heart before he died?

Discussion Question 3

Comic 73 seems to argue that adults need to remember what they learned about love when they were children. What else would you say the collection suggests that adults need to learn from children?

Vocabulary

n/a



Comics 75 - 83

Summary

Comic 75 – The top panel in this single-page, brightly colored, formal layout features three literary “beauties” and three literary “beasts” (Belle and The Beast from “Beauty and the Beast”; Christine and The Phantom from “Phantom of the Opera”; and Esmeralda and Quasimodo from “The Hunchback of Notre Dame”). In the visual narrative, each trio merges into a single entity – beauties with beauties, beasts with beasts - with the resulting single beauty kissing the resulting single beast. The text features a narrator who refers to seeing beauty and the beast narratives from the beast’s point of view, and to waiting for “the girl with the song and the book and the rose ... to break the curse, the one to see behind the mask” (Comic 75). The visuals show a kiss, and a transformation of the beast into a beautiful blonde woman.

Comic 76 – This comic presents another take on the “children asking about the shooting” trope, or motif, that appears throughout the collection. It also offers another example of how a child’s reaction to, the compassion evident in the event’s aftermath seems to transcend the more obviously affecting power of destruction. In other words, and to quote a hashtag in the final panel, “#lovewins.”

Comic 77 – In this single-page, regularly laid out series of panels, a bi-racial female couple stand in the middle of a crowd of equal rights protestors, and in the final panel, hold hands. Text refers to love being bravery, defiance, and a revolution.

Comic 78. This single-page, single-image layout features the rainbow flag in the background, colored silhouettes of male and female dancers, and layered text referring to places where love and freedom are celebrated, how places “where we dance and laugh and find one another” have become “sacred spaces.” This, text suggests, means that “we have already won” (Comic 78).

Comic 79 – This single-page, formally laid out comic, colored in dark, saturated acrylic-style tones, is titled “Flutter.” A woman dresses for her prom while her date transforms into a variety of different possible dates. The woman says she wants to go with her real date – another woman, who worries what might happen. The first woman says there is only one way to find out. The final panel is wordless, and shows the two women dancing together at their prom as pink balloons fall and other couples watch them smiling.

Comic 80 – In this vividly colored single-page layout, two women from the silhouettes of club-wielding attackers. Images show them taking each other’s hand, an action that results in a burst of bright color. Other people join them, and the bottom panel shows a crowd of people, colored in the shades of the rainbow flag. The text refers to strength in being together, and in people who support each other never being alone.



Comic 81 – In this single-page, single-image layout in the style of Archie comic books, a male same sex couple wearing matching purple tuxedos and positioned in front of a pink heart, hold hands. The caption: Love Wins.

Comic 82 – In another single page, single-image layout, a mixed race female couple sits on a porch swing at what seems to be sunset, holding hands. In front of them – what appears to be some kind of dog sleeps, its teeth bared. One member of the couple is the comic book character Slash from “Hack and Slash”: the dog is her dog Pooch.

Comic 83 – This single-page grid comic is called “Centurion,” is drawn in a style that resembles a comic strip, and is quite text heavy. The images show Superman fighting to protect a child from a figure that looks like a warrior (centurion) from Ancient Rome. The text, in first person narration, describes an experience of hearing about the Pulse massacre in a gay-friendly church, and how the narrator looked for a Bible story for comfort. The story he found involved Jesus being asked to heal someone important to one of his enemies, narration commenting that the term in the original Greek for that “someone” translated into same-sex partner. In the story, Jesus commented that he had never seen such faith, and that the “partner” was healed.

Analysis

Comic 75 – The textual references to what “the girl” brings represent a symbol of each different “beauty” – the book represents Belle, the song represents Christine, and the rose represents Esmeralda. The final image of transformation evokes the climactic transformation in the Disney film of “Beauty and the Beast,” with the transformation of the Beast into a beautiful woman instead of a man suggesting an experience of many people who exist outside what might be called a heterosexual “norm.” This is the idea, both internalized into an individual’s sense of personal identity and reflected externally in socio-cultural attitudes, that experiencing non-heterosexual attraction makes people unnatural, or beast-like. The overall suggestion of the comic suggests that a true love – that is, true in the sense of existing within a true gender orientation – can heal and transform that self-loathing ... in other words, that love is love.

Comic 76 – This comic presents another take on the “children asking about the shooting” trope, or motif, that appears throughout the collection. It also offers another example of how a child’s reaction to, or commentary on, the compassion evident in the event’s aftermath seems to transcend the more obviously affecting power of destruction. In other words, and to quote a hashtag in the final panel, “#lovewins.”

Comic 77 – This comic takes one of the collection’s central themes – the idea that “love is love” – and pushes it one step further, making an overt textual statement that has appeared in several visuals throughout the collection. This is the idea that an act of same-sex, or inter-sex, love is an act of revolution. The concept of revolution is one that is explored sub-textually, or through implication, in several of the book’s comics.



Comic 78 – This brightly colored comic makes a claim that might, within the context of the event that triggered the existence of the collection (i.e. a mass shooting at an LGBTQ nightclub), be seen as ironic, fantastic, or at worst even delusional. This is the idea that in the union of individuals within community, and that community's continuing capacity for support and celebration in spite of such acts of destruction, both individuals and community "have already won." The statement is as vivid in its defiance and courage as the colors of the illustration, with the first line of the text ("our love is rebellion") echoing the sentiments of the comic immediately prior.

Comic 79 – The title seems to be connected to the experience of feeling explored by the characters in this comic – the emotional "flutters" of excitement, attraction, and nervousness. The final image is notable for the first woman's pink dress being in the same color tones as the balloons at the prom and for both manifestations of pink are a clear contrast to the general dark blues of the dance, evoking the book's overall celebration of individuality and courage. It is also important to note that pink is also emblematic of the LGBTQ community – see the references, throughout the collection, to the pink triangle. Finally, the image of the prom also evokes the frequently deployed technique of dancing as celebration in the LGBTQ community.

Comic 80 – The joy of the female same-sex couple at the conclusion of Comic 79 is vividly contrasted with the fear of the female same sex couple at the beginning of Comic 80. However, the final image of safety in numbers and community is common to both comics, with the dancers at the prom in 79 as safe as the two women in 80 become. The text of 80 adds a further layer of meaning, in its comment that "together we are more. You are me. I am you."

Comic 83 – This comic is one of only a very few in the collection that uses elements from an actual religious text as the basis for its story. In this case, the New Testament narrative of Jesus and the Centurion is one that is commonly referenced in Christian churches to evoke the transcendence of Christ's compassion and power. The translation of the story from Greek into English, however, often omits what the text here claims is the meaning of the Greek word used to describe the man for whom the Centurion sought help. The suggestion here is a commonly made one: that translators and editors of the Bible often undertake their work with a particular moral agenda or perspective. Meanwhile, it is also interesting to note that over the years since Superman first appeared, several commentators have referenced the parallels between his story and that of Jesus: sent to earth to save / lead mankind, gifted with extraordinary abilities, regarded as something more than, and better than, human.

Discussion Question 1

In what ways do comics in this section (Comics 75 - 83) evoke the book's thematic celebration of the power of community?



Discussion Question 2

Comic 77 suggests that attractions and relationships other than those which fall into mixed-gender, same race "norms" are acts of revolution. There is the sense throughout the narrative that celebrating such relationships are also acts of revolution. Do you agree or disagree with this concept?

Discussion Question 3

Comic 78 suggests that the very existence of the LGBTQ community, and the fact that it is still able to celebrate individuality and freedom even in the face of destructive acts like the Pulse shooting, means that the struggle for freedom and respect has already been won. Do you agree or disagree with this contention?

Vocabulary

reiterate, orientation, denomination, demonize



Comics 84 – 91

Summary

Comic 84 – This single-page, regularly paneled layout is titled “Blair and Cyn on the Dance Floor.” It shows a mixed-race, female couple, with one trying to convince the other to go out onto the dance floor. Eventually, the first woman simply pulls the second woman out, and it’s in that late panel that illustrations reveal the second woman is in a wheelchair. They go out onto the dance floor, and express their love for each other.

Comic 85 – This single-page, irregularly laid out comic features a conversation between two gay male friends, one Asian one Caucasian who, in vividly colored images, reminisce about their friendship: scenes from their memories appear in fragmented, pastel colored images. They discuss how young many of the victims of the massacre were; how lucky they (the men) are that they have had such long lives; and that they have the friendship they do.

Comic 86 – In this brightly colored, single-page, irregularly laid out comic, a red-headed woman reads newspaper coverage of the shooting as two men behind her have a conversation. Images show the woman having a fit of temper and shouting at the men to “FLIRT LOUDER! THERE’S NOT ENOUGH TIME!” Illustrations in the next panels show plants growing to entwine the men with each other, revealing that the woman is the plant-controlling comic book villain Poison Ivy. As the men kiss, Ivy comments “We have to show who we are and not be afraid. We only grow in the sun” (Comic 86).

Comic 87 – This single-page, regularly paneled ink-and-color layout is called “Kyle’s Bed and Breakfast.” Images show two gay men talking in their kitchen, with dialogue balloons that American Kyle is concerned about public displays of affection (specifically: two men kissing) possibly triggering attacks the way that such a display might have triggered the shooter at Pulse, while Breyer (who comes from Canada, where Kyle thinks attitudes are more relaxed) says there is no reason to be scared, only cautious. In the last panel, they embrace, and reassure each other.

Comic 88 – In this single-page, single image layout titled “Orlando Skyline,” hearts fly into the sky, leaving trails behind them as they rise above buildings. In the bottom half of the panel, shadows of the flying hearts cross the bodies of a group of partyers. One of the partyers, perhaps a drag queen, prominently displays a clear white – something – in her hand.

Comic 89 – This single-page, regularly laid out series of panels is titled “Super Friends,” the name of a super-hero TV show in the 1970’s: the top panel of the layout is the logo from that show. Text and illustrations narrate how a pair of friends grew from childhood (when they play with Superman and Batman dolls) through a shared love of drawing, through college, through one coming out to the other, to the friendship that resolves and continues to evolve even now, 50 years later.



Comic 90 – In this single-page, irregularly laid out series of panels, first person narration describes a woman’s experience coming to terms with the lack of drama in her story of how her parents easily accepted her same-sex orientation, how she discovered the value of a variety of different stories, and expresses her hope that someday, there will be no need to fear “declaring who we are to those we love” (Comic 90). Illustrations show that the narrator is a mixed-race woman, and her parents are of different races.

Comic 91 – In this two-page, regularly laid out and brightly colored spread, text and images tell the story of Bob Page, born gay into a poor and religious family who made a success of his life in business, in a relationship (with the same man for 26 years), as a father (he and his partner adopting several children) and as an activist. As a result of the efforts of Bob and other activists, “the law,” narration comments, “had finally caught up to love” (Comic 91).

Analysis

Comic 84 – While the essential story of this comic repeats a motif seen frequently throughout the collection (dancing as a metaphor for joy and freedom), and while there are frequent depictions of both female same-sex couples and mixed race couples throughout the collection, this is the only comic that prominently features a character who is differently abled. It is an example of the breadth of the spirit of inclusion practiced by the LGBTQ community that such a character is included: it is, however, interesting to note that there are no other representations of what might be described as this community within a community.

Comic 85 – Again, this comic features a somewhat different take on themes, visual and narrative, that appear throughout the collection – two men in a close relationship, the men being of mixed races, and reminiscences about childhood and other aspects of the past. What makes this comic different is its explicit celebration of friendship, a kind of relationship that is perhaps a sub-set of a sort of relationship celebrated throughout the narrative: while many other comics celebrate the value of being part of a large community of the like-minded, this comic celebrates being a community of two. This is one of only a few celebrations of that kind of relationship in the collection.

Comic 86 – This comic features the second appearance in the collection of plant-controlling villain Poison Ivy, revealed in her first appearance (Section 1) as being a lesbian. Her argument, expressed with an intensity that is part comic and part frightening, is that where it is possible to express desire and / or pleasure in another’s company, particularly if those involved are of the same gender, then that opportunity should be seized. The final lines of the comic referencing the sun again develop the metaphor, present throughout the narrative, that light equals joy and freedom. One last point to note is that the two men Ivy brings together are of different races – again, a repeated visual and narrative motif.

Comic 87 – Once again, a comic makes reference to the idea that the sight of two men kissing might trigger violence or hatred: once again, it is significant that nowhere in the



collection that the sight of two women kissing might have the same consequence. Other than that, the main point to note about this comic is its reference, unique in the collection, to the specific circumstances of same-sex couples in Canada, the northern neighbor of the United States where same-sex marriage has been legal since 2005.

Comic 88 – This is one of the image-defined comics in the collection where meaning and intention seem somewhat difficult to define. Some elements are fairly clear: the image of the flying hearts, for example, can be seen as representing either the power of love to raise people up, or the loving souls of those killed in the Pulse shooting (flying to heaven?) – or perhaps both. There are also other images of hearts evident in the comic, as well as a pride flag and a pride t-shirt. The most significant element of the comic is also the most enigmatic: the white “something” in the virtual center of the comic is the only non-colored element in the frame, and as such it stands out, but its shape and design are such that it is unclear just what it is intended to be. It looks like a joined row of white discs, almost igloo-like in appearance. What it is intended to represent, however, is something of a mystery.

Comic 89 – In this comic, superheroes (Batman and Superman) play supporting roles in a narrative that has clear echoes of Comic 85 in its celebration of friendship. What makes this comic different from other explorations of friendship is that it celebrates the relationship between a gay man and a straight man. What makes this comic particularly powerful is its reference to the friendship having lasted 50 years, a reference of particular poignancy when the reader remembers that many people killed in the Pulse shooting were around half as old, or even less.

Comic 90 – The narrative of this comic makes a pair of interesting points, one visually and one textually. In terms of the former, visuals indicate the narrator’s parents are in a mixed-race marriage, a fact that is never discussed in the text but which, it seems, might have something to do with their acceptance of their daughter and the people she dates. In terms of important textual points, the story of a family’s unquestioning, easy acceptance of a child’s non-heterosexual romantic relationships is a vivid contrast to the many stories of childhood fear and concern about being gay, but is also an interesting, moving counterpoint to the many stories of untroubled, accepting children in the collection.

Comic 91 – This comic is drawn fairly realistically, which can be seen as a visual reflection of the textual narrative – the story, told in both first and third person voice, of a man who was simply trying to live his life honestly and truthfully.

Discussion Question 1

In what ways do the narratives in this section (Comics 84 – 91) of the collection explore and develop the theme of “love is love”?



Discussion Question 2

Comic 87 makes reference to the fact that same-sex marriage has been legal in Canada for several years - in actual fact, since 2005. What point do you think is being made by inserting this reference into the book's overall narrative on the situation of LGBTQ people in America?

Discussion Question 3

Comic 90 makes a clear, visual point that the parents of a sexually fluid young woman are mixed race: the text makes no explicit reference to this aspect of her circumstances. What do you think is the connection between this aspect of the young woman's circumstances and her narrative of how accepting her parents were of the different types of partners she brought home?

Vocabulary

physique, comedic, interaction, pivotal, brimstone



Comics 92 – 98

Summary

Comic 92 – In this single-panel, single-image comic in strong, acrylic-style colors, the focal point is Superman, holding a rainbow flag waving in the wind. In the foreground are three couples: two men with wedding rings; two women; and a mixed-gender couple (the woman may be a drag queen). Each member of the couple wears a t-shirt with a super-hero emblem on the chest: visible are those of The Flash, Batman, Wonder Woman, Harley Quinn, and Green Lantern.

Comic 93 – In this single-page, irregularly laid out drawing, the first images are of an older man, frowning and contemplative, cleaning his glasses. First person narration in text boxes describes a conflict between a man and his son over the son's sexuality, one that ended with the man saying he no longer had a son. The son is quoted as saying "Love will draw an elephant through a keyhole" (Comic 93). The final image is of an elephant in the man's living room, its trunk wrapped around the man in what seems to be a gesture of comfort.

Comic 94 – In this single-page, symmetrically laid-out comic colored in muted, dark tones, there are images of pairs of men kissing, a pair of men embracing, and a pair of men apparently engaged in sex. First person narration describes the oppression faced by gay men, with one panel all in black with the text "... it's better to hold a gun in public than it is to hold hands" (Comic 94). The narrator then speaks of learning a different lesson – how beautiful two men kissing could be.

Comic 95 – This single page is symmetrically laid out, brightly colored (mostly in reds), and features two male football players for opposing teams kissing each other before a game. As they run off to join their teammates on the opposing sides, a poster is revealed with the phrases "Homecoming" "Run'em Rebs" (Rebels), and "Warriors."

Comic 96 – This comic is titled "Jane's World," and features an androgynous character narrating her uncomfortable journey from being gay in a small town to being gay in a larger city where, she says, she found comfort and safety in gay clubs – places where, after the shooting, she no longer feels safe. Her girlfriend says she knows a place where Jane can feel safe. The last panel shows the two women embracing.

Comic 97 – This brightly-colored, single-page layout shows Superboy visiting the future, where he is taken on a tour of 30th Century Metropolis by Saturn Girl, his teammate from the Legion of Super Heroes. She shows him a memorial to the Pulse shooting, which she describes as having been a turning point for humanity: "People finally faced the fact that our differences are minuscule compared to something we all have in common" (Comic 97). As Superboy and Saturn Girl fly off, Saturn Girl reveals that the author of the writing on the memorial is her inspiration, saying only that the author, a woman, is "a future co-worker of [his]" and that he's "just going to love her." In a final



caption, Saturn Girl says that “the best part of your history is right around the corner” (Comic 97).

Comic 98 – In this two-page spread, colored primarily in pink, the images depict a wedding reception, at which the guests are mostly men. The images focus on the speaker, the blunt talking ex-marine father-of-the-groom, and on the newly married couple. The father’s speech reveals that the bride is transgender, and that he (the father) was not accepting at first. But then, he says, he saw how his long-unhappy son smiled whenever he was around Jane, and that that made him realize that love is love. He concludes by asking his new daughter-in-law to keep his son smiling.

Analysis

Comic 92 – Superman is at the center of the image in this comic, a powerful figure (as he usually is) representing strength, heroism, and courage. Putting him in the company of a group of couples who are clearly intended to be perceived as both non-heterosexual makes a clear statement that those who live such un-closeted lives are heroes in their own way (hence the hero logos on their shirts). What is particularly powerful about this comic, and arguably quite subversive and potentially controversial, is the way Superman is holding a rainbow flag. Most of the time, Superman (and his alter ego Clark Kent) are perceived and portrayed as being All-American, promoting so-called American values; very often, in fact, and to emphasize that point, in “traditional” comic books his image is often juxtaposed with the American flag. The substitution of the rainbow flag here, as in other cases in the collection where it is substituted for the American flag, suggests that true justice (as opposed to the reality of American justice, as opposed to the patriotic ideal) involves equality and freedom for all.

Comic 93 – On one level, this comic can be seen as a wry take on the phrase “the elephant in the room” – a reference to a secret that everybody knows but nobody is talking about. It could be argued, in that context, that this comic is making the point that the elephant in this particular room is the idea that love is love. What is particularly moving about this comic is its implication that perhaps the man is grieving someone who died in the Pulse shooting ... meaning that the reference to love pulling an elephant through a keyhole might actually be referring to love triggered, or fueled, by grief.

Comics 94 / 95 – Five times in two pages, these comics show two men kissing. This is an interesting, and ironic, counterpoint to the frequent references throughout the collection to how the sight of two men kissing is often perceived, by members of the LGBTQ community and non-members alike, as potentially triggering of violence. In fact, the images in these two panels might almost be considered something of a dare to those with that belief. Comic 94, meanwhile, contains one of the very, very few references to actual same-sex sexual activity: Comic 95 makes a comically playful comment on how opposing “teams” can, in fact, bond and make positive connections.

Comic 96 – This comic takes a pair of motifs that occurs frequently throughout the collection and puts them together. These are the idea of safety in community (i.e. a



community of outsiders) and in the arms of a beloved. It also contains echoes of a frequently referred to narrative motif: the idea of growing up in a small town and finding safety, community, and sanctuary in a big, more cosmopolitan city.

Comic 97 – This comic develops the motif, frequently glimpsed in this section, that change and positive transformation is possible even in the aftermath of deep tragedy, such as the Pulse shooting. Meanwhile, fans and followers of the Superman story, in comics or in popular culture, will easily recognize Saturn Girl's hint that the woman who wrote the text on the memorial is Lois Lane, Superman's long-time girlfriend. What is interesting here is that Saturn Girl coyly keeps the name of his future beloved a secret, even as she delivers one of the key lines in the collection: the idea that the best part of the future (that is: Superboy's future, her history) is yet to come.

Comic 98 – Interestingly, and perhaps surprisingly, this comic is the only one in the collection to portray an actual wedding. There are references to engagements and to same-sex relationships that functioned as a marriage, but this is the only narrative in which a wedding plays a significant role. This fact becomes even more noteworthy because the newly married couple is also the only couple in the collection where one partner is explicitly transgender. All that aside, the basic elements of the story – a parent's struggle to accept his child's relationship orientation and choice – is a repetition of other similar narratives in the collection, while the primary visual motif – of the wedding being decorated in pink – is a reiteration of the motif, also repeated throughout the collection, that references the fact that pink has long been a color emblematic of both oppression towards the LGBTQ community, and the struggle against that oppression.

Discussion Question 1

In what ways do the comics in this collection develop the book's thematic interest in, and emphasis on, the process and prospect of triumph emerging from tragedy?

Discussion Question 2

In Comic 95, the opposing football teams are called the Warriors and the Rebels: the game they are playing is the Homecoming Game. Consider these names and terms within the context of the collection's themes and intentions. What are their metaphoric values and implications? How do these names and terms interact with the comic's narrative - that members of opposing teams are, in fact, lovers?

Discussion Question 3

At the end of Comic 97, a futuristic super-hero named Saturn Girl tells Superboy that "the best part of [his] history is right around the corner." How, do you think, does this relate to the collection's other narratives, and its overall themes?

Vocabulary

insidious, osmotic, dominant, watershed, minuscule



Comics 99 – 106

Summary

Comic 99 – In this single-page, brightly colored, symmetrical layout in a childlike style, two female figures start as friends; realize their love for each other, which they say makes them gay; and then, when one transitions from female to male, they say they are straight again. Throughout, they reiterate their love for each other. The final panel has the rainbow flag in the background, and the caption “A True Story” (Comic 99).

Comic 100 – This single-page layout, symmetrically laid out and brightly colored, shows different sets of hands, of a variety of genders, races, and ages, looking through scrapbooks. The pictures in the scrapbook are of a variety of couple and/or family relationships. On the final page is a word balloon that refers to “Pages to Fill.” At the bottom of the page is the comic’s title: Scrapbook.

Comic 101- In this somber, night-time toned single-page layout, a car drives along a highway: a caption indicates it is the summer of 1981. The young woman driving the car confesses to her brother, the passenger, and that she is in love with a woman. The brother gives her an eye-roll as he says he knows. The young woman smiles. Text boxes in the last panel dedicate the drawing to the young woman and the woman who has been her partner for 35 years. “Love is love. Always has been. Always will be” (Comic 101).

Comic 102 – The center of this single-page, single image layout is a drawing of a nursery in a hospital. On one side of the window: babies wrapped in blankets, some pink, some blue. On the other side of the window, a mixture of adults, some clearly parents, some grandparents, several races and gender combinations, and a female, African doctor. At the top of the page is a caption: “We aren’t born with hate in our hearts. We teach it.” At the bottom of the page: “We have to stop” (Comic 102).

Comic 103 – This single-page, sepia-toned, irregular layout is titled “One Light.” Images suggest a period in history, perhaps the 1930’s, or 40’s. First person narration in text-boxes describes the narrator’s father as having made responsible and stable choices, and having made his son promise to be different. Images show what seems to be the son arriving home after some time away, nervous about the welcome he will receive. In the final panel, he arrives home and is embraced, the text reading “While music takes me far from this place, one light always guides me home” (Comic 103). The person welcoming him appears to be female, perhaps an elderly mother.

Comic 104 – This single-page layout, in generally dark tones, shows Batman and his protégé / colleague Nightwing on a rooftop, watching a vigil outside the Pulse nightclub. Batman speaks of how similar he, Nightwing, and those at the Pulse were: “heroes ... ostracized ... had to create other identities in order to protect themselves and those



they love ... their greatest strengths are found in what they sometimes felt they needed to conceal” (Comic 104).

Comic 105 – In this single-page, regularly laid out, brightly colored comic, a series of marchers in a pride parade quotes a series of lines from Walt Whitman’s poem “Song of Myself,” celebrating freedom and individuality. Marchers include people of color, women, a Sikh man, and a Muslim woman in a hijab. Rainbow flags and the pink triangle also appear.

Comic 106 – In the center of this vibrantly colored, single-page layout drawn in a 1940’s style, a man and a woman celebrate a bouquet of flowers the woman gave the man. The image is framed by visual representations of different kinds of love: a mixed gender African-American couple and a mixed gender Caucasian couple each in love; a man expressing his love for his city; and another man expressing his love for a baseball team. The characters are those from the alternative comic “The Spirit.”

Analysis

Comic 99 – This comic is one of only a few in the collection that makes direct reference to the experience of being transgender, and is the only one that does so within the context of a relationship in which one of its members is portrayed as transitioning – in this case, from female to male. The childlike simplicity of the visuals and the narrative are almost story-book in quality, with the actual experience of transitioning defined by a single panel that portrays the transition as an almost magical “ka-boom.” In that context, it could be argued that the real magic comes in the final panel, another reference to the idea that “love is love.”

Comic 100 – In this comic, the thematic and narrative premise is relatively simple – couples and relationships come in a variety of shapes, sizes, and configurations. The final line suggests that in the same way as there are pages to fill in a scrapbook, there are even more ways in which relationships might develop, more ways for people to make lasting, loving connections.

Comic 101 – This comic combines two of the collection’s more utilized ideas – the confession of same-sex orientation, and the memoir. It is also one of only a few in the collection to feature a reference to a multi-decade relationship. Key points to reference include the teenaged eye-roll of the younger, brother, captured perfectly in the illustration, and the wordless portrayal of the sister’s peaceful, grateful reaction to her brother’s reaction.

Comic 102 – The primary element of interest about this comic is that there are no clear indications, in the picture, of which baby belongs to which parents. There are several dark-skinned babies and one Asian baby, and there is clearly one set of Asian grandparents, but other than that, there are no indications whatsoever of which baby belongs to which adult(s). Meanwhile, the lesson here is one not reiterated elsewhere in



the collection, but has been reiterated in popular culture on several occasions: the idea that hatred and intolerance are not innate, but learned.

Comic 103 – The narrative and the visuals of this comic are somewhat ambiguous. There is a definite air of another time and place about the piece – the men portrayed, for example, all wear hats. Ultimately, the takeaway from this particular story has to do with a celebration of freedom, and of individual identity: in many instances, comics celebrating this theme throughout the collection reference the idea that to live a life on those terms is an individual's choice. This is the only comic in the collection to reference the idea that to do so can be passed on from one generation to the next – from the false, constrained life of a parent who wants his, or her, child to live differently. Meanwhile, the textual reference to light reiterates the motif, evident throughout the collection, that celebrates life as a guiding, supporting, nurturing force in the face of challenge and difficulty.

Comic 104 – Earlier in the collection, the lesbian Batwoman celebrated the life of a woman ostensibly killed in the Pulse shooting for living a heroic life as herself. In this comic, Batman takes an opposite tack: celebrating people who were unable to be outwardly themselves, having to find contentment and happiness while living within a kind of mask, in the same way as he and Nightwing live their lives behind masks. There is a darkness of vision here, echoed by the overall darkness in coloring. The final panel, meanwhile, creates an intriguing and ironic echo: in Batman comic books, Batman is famously summoned by the projection of the Bat-signal, a spotlight with the figure of a bat shone onto the clouds. In this comic's final panel, the Bat-signal is replaced by a projected version of the Pulse nightclub, the Pulse-signal that summons the spirit and courage of the Pulse heroes in the same way as the spirit and courage of Batman is summoned.

Comic 105 – Aside from the powerfully effective visual array of ethnicities, cultures, ages, and genders portrayed in this comic, and aside from its being anchored in the central thematic exploration of celebration and diversity, the main point to note about this comic is the source of the quotes. Walt Whitman famously celebrated individuality within the larger community of humanity and the even larger world of nature, and did so as a quietly un-closeted gay man in an era when being openly gay was simply not possible for a great many people. There is here an echo of the sentiments expressed by Batman in Comic 104, in that Whitman was exactly the sort of person to which Batman refers, one who, like the dancers in the club that appear in 104, found a way to express and celebrate the secret side of himself, but unlike those dancers, managed to do so in a more public way.

Comic 106 – While the romantic relationships portrayed in this comic are all heterosexual, the comic's key point remains connected to the collection's overall theme – that everybody has the right to develop connection with, and passion for, some kind of experience of love, affection, and pride in / celebration of both.



Discussion Question 1

In what ways do comics in this section (Comics 99 – 106) explore both the light and dark sides of the book's thematic interest in acceptance and respect?

Discussion Question 2

Comic 100 refers to a scrapbook with pictures of different sorts of relationships, and to empty pages that have yet to be filled. What important relationships would be in your scrapbook?

Discussion Question 3

In Comic 23, Batwoman eulogizes a woman killed in the Pulse shooting as being heroic for being openly herself. In Comic 104, Batman comments on both the victims and those who memorialize them as being heroic for living well while keeping parts of themselves secret. Discuss this contradiction in perception. Which is true? Both? Neither?

Vocabulary

forbade, ostracize



Comics 107 - 114

Summary

Comic 107 – This single-page, vividly colored, irregularly laid out comic is titled “Rainbow Boy.” Illustrations and text show Rainbow Boy, with his rainbow-colored Mohawk haircut, soaring over New York City, coming to the rescue of a rock band called the Dorothys as they are being assaulted by some insect-like monsters. Text describes how he defeats the monsters, saying that “looks like ol’ Doc Drumpf whipped a new batch of spider-haters.” Text comments that “charged by the power of the sun, Rainbow Boy blasts the deplorable demons with his prismatic light of love.” He then embraces the band, saying that this makes him an official “friend of the Dorothys” (Comic 107).

Comic 108 - In this single-page, single-image layout, drawn in the style of the “Archie” comics, Kevin Keller (the only out, gay, regular character in the Archie group of characters) speaks of the importance to have courage, to keep fighting, and to keep dancing, living, and loving. At the bottom of the page, individual figures colored in the tones of the rainbow flag, dance around Caucasian Kevin and his (Latinx?) boyfriend.

Comic 109 - In this single-image charcoal or pencil drawing, several characters from the Harry Potter books – Harry, Ron, Hermione, and Dumbledore – raise their wands to the sky. Behind them, a rainbow flag flies. At the bottom of the page is a quote of Dumbledore’s from “Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire”: “Differences of habit and language are nothing at all if our aims are identical and our hearts are open” (Comic 109).

Comic 110 – In this single-page, single-image layout, the colors of the rainbow flag make up the background as a pair of hands (one Caucasian, one non) clasp over a representation of the sign outside the Pulse nightclub.

Comic 111 – This single-page layout is titled “Know One Another.” A Caucasian, gay male couple walks down an urban street, arms round each other. Text boxes quote what seems to be religious scripture referring to how people have been “created from male and female and made you into nations and tribes so that you may know one another.” The couple encounters a seemingly Muslim man, and they stare at each other. As the three men embrace, text reads “the noblest among you in the sight of God is the most righteous” (Comic 111). A textbox indicates the quote is from the Quran.

Comic 112 – In this single-page, single image layout, a naturalistically drawn and colored face is the central image, memorializing a young man (Christopher Andrew ‘Drew’ Leinonen, 22 years old) killed in the Pulse shooting. Pink flowers and blossoms frame his face, some in the shape of hearts. While at the bottom of the layout, his sweater seems covered with images of variously gendered, happy people.



Comic 113 – The layout of this page consists of three equal-sized horizontal panels showing people in lineups. The background is tropical, the drawing is in blacks and grays, except for one item of clothing on each of the people in line, which is colored in one of the colors from the rainbow flag. The first drawing is from a distance and shows a large number of people; the second is closer, and shows a smaller number; the third picture is quite close, and shows a sandwich board on the ground, calling on people to donate blood.

Comic 114 – This single-page layout features a series of naked, well-muscled, mostly male angels, their respective wings colored a different shade of the rainbow flag. One lies on the ground, the others rise to increasing heights in the air. Text to one side quotes “The Rainbow,” by Christina Rossetti, which speaks of the rainbow’s beauty, its lasting power, and of its providing “a road from earth to sky” (Comic 114).

Analysis

Comic 107 – This comic book is packed with both color and cleverness. Rainbow Boy is clearly an evocation of the rainbow flag, here and throughout the collection a reference to the freedom, individuality, and inclusivity of the LGBTQ community. Then there is the reference to the Dorothys, and being a Friend of the Dorothys: “friend of Dorothy” has, for decades, been a euphemism for being a male homosexual, a euphemism derived from the fact that many closeted gay men in the middle part of the twentieth Century worshiped the singer and actress Judy Garland, who played Dorothy in “The Wizard of Oz.” Finally, there are the references to the American political situation at the time of the Pulse shooting and of the collection’s creation. “Doc Drumpf” is a reference to then-presidential candidate Donald Trump, whose divisiveness and prejudiced rhetoric were, at the time, becoming notorious: the reference to the demons being “deplorable” is a reference to a term used by Trump’s Democratic opponent, Hillary Clinton, to describe the racist and discriminatory attitudes of Trump’s supporters.

Comic 108 – This comic is one of two in the collection that features the character of Kevin Keller who was the first openly gay character to appear in Archie Comics (2010). The comments made by both the images and the text in this comic reinforce the thematically central idea, appearing throughout the collection, that it is important to both grieve those who died in the Pulse shooting (and, by implication, any who suffer as a result of the kind of hatred and discrimination that led to the shooting) and continue celebrating diversity, freedom, and courage. The use of the colors of the rainbow flag visually reinforces this idea.

Comic 109 – This comic is the only one in the collection to feature characters from the Harry Potter universe of character, narrative, circumstance, and theme. There are several points to note here. The first is that the struggle of Harry and his friends against the oppression and evil of Lord Voldemort echoes the struggle faced by gay people against the oppression and evil of conservative, anti-LGBTQ, racist hatred and oppression. The second is that the visual image integrates a powerful image from one of the films: the characters raising their wands to the sky in tribute to a death. The third

is that in the aftermath of the publication of the final book in the series, author J.K. Rowling revealed that teacher and mentor Albus Dumbledore, pictured here in the center of the image, was gay. A fourth is, again, the presence of the rainbow flag that, as drawn here, flies over the characters as a kind of inspiration and/or source of strength. A fifth is that in their respective ways, the characters Harry, Ron, and Hermione (the characters portrayed here) were all outsiders in the way that members of the LGBTQ community in general were / are. A last, and related, point is that for these three characters in particular and the wizarding world in general, the sense of both keeping their secret publicly but being able to celebrate themselves privately was / is likewise an echo of the experience of being LGBTQ.

Comic 110 – This image communicates a feeling of unity in diversity. The hands, while seemingly belonging to individuals of the same gender (male), are of different ethnicities, their firm grasp of each other placed in front of a background portraying the rainbow flag (emblematic of diversity throughout the collection). The fact that the handclasp and the flag are both positioned above a representation of the pulse logo suggests that strength, courage, and celebration will rise up from, or above, the tragedy of the attack.

Comic 111 – This comic is notable for two reasons. The first is that it is only one of two in the collection that features a quote from a religious text: the first is from the Bible (Comic 83): interestingly, this comic features a quote from the Q’uran, the holy book of Islam. The quote echoes the visual of the encounter between a pair of Caucasian men and a man who seems to be a follower of that faith, which leads to the second primary point of consideration about this comic: the depiction of the possibility of unity, respect, and compassion even in diversity. What is particularly interesting about this comic is that it portrays two communities that, in contemporary America, might be described as suffering as a result of intolerance: Muslims and those of the LGBT community.

Comic 112 – This is one of only a few tributes, in the collection, to individuals killed in the Pulse shooting. Important elements to note include the appearance of pink in the visual narrative (a color representative throughout the collection of the LGBTQ community); the fact that several of the blossoms in the picture are shaped like hearts; and that one heart is positioned just below the left eye in the central image, a possible evocation of a teardrop.

Comic 113 – This comic references two important images, one of which appears throughout the collection and one of which references an important actual circumstance related to the shooting. The first is the reference to the colors of the rainbow flag, here as always in the collection referencing a celebration of unity in diversity. Meanwhile, the images also reference a noteworthy aspect of the public response to the shooting: in its aftermath, hospital reported long, long lines of people waiting to donate blood for the survivors. There is an echo here of Comic 5, which referred to the large numbers of people offering help and support in the aftermath of the shooting.

Comic 114 – This comic celebrates a particular perspective on physical beauty, and the transcendent power of joy and freedom as evoked by the colors of the rainbow flag.



These two representations of different kinds of beauty are further evoked in the text of the poem, which suggests that consideration, appreciation, and celebration of both sorts of beauty are, in a way, a path to heaven.

Discussion Question 1

How do the different comics in this grouping from the collection evoke the book's thematic interest in celebrations of community?

Discussion Question 2

Comic 109 draws visual and narrative connections between the Harry Potter narratives and the events and circumstances surrounding the events at Pulse? What do you see as those connections?

Discussion Question 3

Comic 114 portrays an aspect of the actual historical reaction to the Pulse shooting: the large numbers of people who gave blood in order to help the victims. What situation or circumstance might inspire you to make that sort of gesture of support?

Vocabulary

deplorable, prismatic



Comics 114 – Afterword

Summary

Comic 114 – This single-page, single-image layout is captioned “In loving memory of Amanda Alvear,” one of the victims of the shooting, and shows a woman in her thirties, non-caucasian, wearing glasses and with a water-color cloud of dark hair around her face.

Comic 115 – In this single-page, single-image, no text layout, gender-neutral couples embrace. They are drawn as though they have unzipped their skins and are half out of them, their former faces part of the skins and hanging behind them. Those faces are replaced with bright red hearts. The top of the layout is filled with dark clouds, the coloring merging into light and brightness further down the page. On the ground, the feet of the figures are concealed by a field of small red hearts.

Comic 116 – This single-image layout is drawn in the style of 1970’s romance comics. It features a male-female couple in the centre, walking down a path in the park. The path is lined with different sorts of couples in various positions of romance – same gender/same race; mixed gender/same race; same gender/mixed race; and puppies. Dialogue in balloons celebrates how great it is to see everyone so happy, and how love is love.

Comic 117 – This single-image, single-page layout shows a male same-sex couple lying on a hillside. Above them are billowing clouds with heart shapes in them and doves flying past them. The only color in this otherwise sepia-toned drawing is the rainbow background to a magazine one of the men is reading.

Comic 118 – This single-page, multi-image layout is titled Bizarro, and shows the comic book character Bizarro Superman (a sort of destructive, anti-Superman) flying through the sky. Surrounding him are repetitions of the word hate arranged and colored in various configurations so that they sound like words Bizarro, who cannot really speak English, might say. So highlighted letters spell things like “heat the tea” “hee hee” and “eat that hat.” At one point, though, he stops in mid-air. Letters in “hate hate hate hate hate hate” have been colored in the colors of the rainbow flag, so they read “hate that hate.” Bizarro flies away, the final “hate hate hate” with colored letters that spell “eat that” (Comic 118).

Comic 119 – This single-page, symmetrically laid out comic shows a beautiful, red, parrot like bird being joined first by one, then others of different colors, then more, and more, all becoming white. In the final panel, there are no birds: only an eruption of white light.

Comic 120 – This single-page layout, with black and white ink drawings of couples dancing, scatters pink hearts over the images and rainbow-colored references to dance



music. Text comments that “my heart looks the same. Pumps the same. Loves the same” (comic 120).

Comic 121 - This single-image panel shows an older woman dancing in a nightclub with a younger man. Text in boxes describes how, at Pulse, a woman who had beaten cancer was dancing with her son, got shot, and urged her son to run. He lived: she did not. Text then comments that somewhere, in an alternate reality, the mother and son were still dancing.

Comic 122 – This single page, symmetrical layout feature nine repetitions of the same image – a red, realistically depicted, human heart. Each one is captioned with a different word: “gay – black – white – straight – trans – Asian – Hispanic – you – me” (Comic 122).

Comic 123 – This comic is titled “Wuvable Oaf,” and features a character from a regularly published comic series of the same name. It shows a large, hairy, bearded man embracing, and being embraced by, a variety of friends. Text urges that people keep creating their art, tell their stories, and celebrate life “because that’s how we beat this thing.”

Afterword – The afterword is written by Mark Andreyko, a comic book writer who organized the creation and publication of the Love is Love project. He describes having the idea for the project, being overwhelmed by the generosity of people who wanted to contribute, and being similarly overwhelmed by the gratitude he feels to anyone who supports it. “Know that your support,” he writes, “is going to make a difference in the lives of those who survived, those who lost someone, and those who still need help. In a world that seems so divided, the unity and love shown here is what we should all be about every day” (Afterword).

Analysis

Comic 114 – This comic commemorates one of the victims of the pulse shooting. The image of her face is clear and more delineated, while the image of her hair becomes paler and less defined – in other words, the outer borders of the image are softer, fading into white. There is an evocation here of physical life passing into spirit.

Comic 115 – This visually complex image – dark shading into light, images of external characteristics having been shed, of all the experiences of the visual narrative being grounded in representations of love – are all unified by a single contention – the idea that in the midst of everything, human connection is defined by a connection and valuing that is transcendent of the external ... by recognition of every human need for love and light in the face of darkness.

Comics 116 / 117 – Couple-hood is the visual theme of both these single-image comics, different kinds of couple-hood in 116, and a single kind of couple-hood in 117. Both comics also feature the visual motif of the heart, which appears in the title of 116 and in the clouds of 117. What is interesting to note is how the various images of couple-hood



in these two pages carry with them the echoes of the connection / love-defined couplehood in 115. In other words, the more metaphorically-rendered evocation of love-in-connection of 115 is given more literal portrayal in 116 and 117.

Comic 118 – Bizarro Superman is easily one of the more intriguing comic book characters, in that he is simultaneously ridiculous and deadly. The deadly side of his character is more vividly on display here, but the comic is more notable for the way in which it is lettered – specifically, for the different ways in which the word “hate” is configured and its letters colored, to create a series of evocations of Bizarro’s hateful destructiveness, juxtaposed with a rainbow flag-colored expression of hope and courage “hate that hate.” Bizarro literally stops in mid-air when confronted with that particular representation, an idea that hatred itself can be stopped in its tracks by the power and strength of unity and love.

Comic 119 – This comic, presented late in the collection, carries a clear echo of the very first comic, with its portrayal of an explosion of light (here evocative of hope, possibility, and joy in the same way as it is throughout the collection) emerging from diversity. The fact that the collection of multi-colored birds eventually becomes a collection of white doves which, in turn, becomes a unified glow of white appears to once again, and in a new way, celebrate the value of unity in diversity. It also evokes the passing of life, this time portrayed as being glorious and colorful, into death – white, bright, free, clean, and joyful.

Comic 120 – This comic integrates several visual and thematic elements seen throughout the collection: hearts as an evocation of love and connection, pink as a reference to both the historical oppression and contemporary courage and struggle of the LGBTQ community, dancing as celebration of freedom and joy, and the colors of the rainbow flag as a reiteration of that freedom. What is unique about this take on all these elements is the initial image of a dancing couple, drawn in basic black and white outline with no indication of gender. This evokes the universality of all the above-defined experiences.

Comic 121 – In this tribute comic, the faces of mother and son are joyful, evocative of the narration that concludes the text associated with this comic: the alternate reality of eternal joy and freedom, in which the mother was not killed. Interestingly, there is an echo of an earlier, somewhat more abstract tribute comic: Comic 10, which references a text sent from the nightclub during the shooting, a text expressing a son’s love for his mother. In that comic, the son died and the mother lived. This comic, however, celebrates parent/child love, whereas the earlier comic grieves the loss of that love. Meanwhile, and on another level, this comic celebrates parent/child love and connection as do many others in the collection, but does so from an entirely different perspective.

Comic 122 – This simple but powerfully vivid comic makes a powerful thematic comment about how, in spite of apparent external diversity in identity, everyone is essentially the same – that everyone has the same beating heart and, on a metaphorical level (in which the heart is seen as the organ associated with emotion), has the same longing for love.



Comic 123 – This comic is a celebration of community and of diversity; it is a celebration of courage in both life and the creation of art; and is a celebration of both history and the future. Interesting visual elements include the comic's three horizontal frames being drawn to resemble the pulse of a heart monitor, that pulse becoming more and more pronounced as the visual and textual narratives progress; and the presence of the color pink, which forms the background of the comic's text boxes.

Afterward – The words of the editor evoke and celebrate the commitment and generosity of those who worked with him to create the collection; the grief and loss of life associated with the massacre; and the value of the former in transcending the suffering associated with the latter. The afterword also thanks the reader for purchasing the collection, and expressing the same sort of commitment to support, recovery, and transcendence.

Discussion Question 1

How do the comics in this section (Comics 114 – Afterword) evoke the collection's thematic emphasis on celebration and hope?

Discussion Question 2

In Comic 118, the text is laid out in such a way that the phrase "hate that hate" is highlighted. What does that mean? Why, do you think, that the visuals portray the destructive Bizarro as being stopped in mid-air when he encounters that phrase?

Discussion Question 3

The Afterword references a particular way that the community at large can support celebrations of diversity and triumph. In what ways can you, in your daily life, work towards transcending the kind of hatred and discrimination that led to the Pulse shooting? How can you help people survive other sorts of similar attacks, like bullying or abuse that might not actually involve shootings?

Vocabulary

fleeting, contributor



Characters

The People at Pulse

On the night of June 12th, 2016, a gunman armed with assault weapons entered the Pulse Nightclub in Orlando, Florida, and started shooting. Forty-nine people were killed, and dozens of others were injured. Many of the people in the club were members of the L(esbian), G(gay), B(isexual), T(ransgender), and Q(ueer) community; many were members of the Latinx community; many were members of both simultaneously. There were also friends, family, and allies of those belonging to other communities at the club that night. Only a handful are commemorated by individual name and / or image in this collection, but the presence of all those killed and injured suffuses every comic. Grief over their loss and suffering is juxtaposed, sometimes within the same comic, with celebration of individual lives; with the power and value of the communities within which those individual lives were lived; and with what the collection claims are the sources of that power and that value. That source is defined, variously, as love; as compassion; as respect; and as joy.

One of the key points made by the collection as a whole is that the victims of the shootings can be perceived as representative not only of any member of the above identified communities who has faced hatred and discrimination, but of any member of any community who has those experiences. While the focus of a great many comics in the collection is on issues associated with being LGBTQ in particular, there are enough comics that create resonances with other discriminated-against communities to suggest that the issues of both discrimination-defined violence and joy in both individuality and community are transcendent of any one label or situation. In many ways, the collection suggests that what happened at Pulse could happen in any community where those who are hated and discriminated against by the so-called American main stream (white, generally male, generally conservative, generally Christian) could be attacked simply for being who they are. On the other hand, the collection also suggests that the courage of those who attended Pulse to live freely and celebrate themselves is likewise transcendent of any one label or situation.

In short, the collection makes the thematically essential claim that while the people at Pulse that night might be perceived as victims, they died (or were injured) as heroes, of the sort that anyone, not just those who belong to so-called disadvantaged communities could aspire to be.

Gay Men and Lesbians

The vast majority of comics in the collection feature characters who are neither super-heroes nor established comic book characters. For the most part, the central characters in the collection's various narratives are, for lack of a better term, regular human beings who just happen to exist on the spectrum of straight through questioning into gay, from



cis-gender through questioning into trans-gender. Several comics feature autobiographical, first person narratives of such people; others are imagined creations. They are both representations and embodiments of the idea that everyday people can live quietly heroic lives simply being who they are.

Children

Throughout the collection, children are portrayed as a source of innocent questions about difficult subjects (such as why something like the Pulse shooting could happen) and as a source of deeply wise insights (such as the reference of one child to how many people seemed to be helping in the aftermath of the shooting). Perhaps most significantly, they are also portrayed as a source of unconditional love and acceptance: there are several comics in the collection in which children are told truths about the Pulse shooting (particularly those associated with the sexual orientation of so many of the victims) and respond with pure, unquestioning compassion. The comics in which these circumstances emerge, and perhaps the collection as a whole, seem to suggest that that sort of openness is the best, and perhaps only, way to ensure that there are no more such shootings.

Super Heroes

Throughout the collection, there are frequent appearances of super-heroes, both recognizable mainstream heroes like Superman, Wonder Woman, and Batman, but also a few heroes who have been created for the collection. These super-heroes are portrayed in several ways: as grieving those who died, as celebrating lives lived, and as embodying the challenge of living courageously, freely, and hopefully. Several of them, however, make the point that there is little or nothing different between who they are as people and those who live lives similar to those of the people at Pulse. These references suggest, some of them outright, that people who live lives of courage and freedom are as heroic, if not more heroic than, those who wear capes, costumes, and masks.

Batwoman

Batwoman is the super-hero who makes the most appearances in the collection. This is perhaps because she is one of the very few openly homosexual super-heroes in comics. In several of her appearances, she evokes the above-referenced contention that those who live their lives freely, openly, and fully themselves are as heroic, if not more so, than those who are super powered.

Batman

Batman makes a number of appearances in the collection, the dark moodiness of his reputation and character providing an evocation of the mysteries associated with both



what happened at Pulse and why. At the same time, the tortured-soul aspect of Batman also appears, suggesting that in spite of his reputation for, and experience of, cynicism and anger, he is capable of grief, of compassion, and of vulnerability.

Superman

Arguably the most famous of all super-heroes appears only a couple of times in the collection, once as his younger self (Superboy). What is interesting about his appearances is that as a character and as an icon, he has the reputation of essentially embodying the so-called American Way - life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. His appearance in this collection, in support of its ideals of acceptance and respect for those outside the so-called "American Norm," reinforces the actual core values of that ideal - that the American Way includes, among others, the LGBTQ community and their allies.

Wonder Woman

This iconic super-hero only appears once in the collection, but it is a powerful and meaningful appearance. Her origin as a member of a female-only community, and the discrimination-defined assumptions about that origin, are both referenced in the comic in which she appears, again drawing the connection between the super-heroic and the human-heroic and, in addition, both challenging assumptions and encouraging their repudiation.

Kevin Keller

Kevin Keller is a character in the Archie series of comic books. He, like Batwoman, is openly gay, the first such character in the history of that particular type of comic book, where he is accepted for who he is by his friends and his family. He appears twice in the collection: once in a situation in which he is grieving what happened, once in a situation in which he advocates the continuance of celebration even in the face of attacks and fear.

Omar Mateen

Omar Mateen was the man who attacked the Pulse nightclub, killing and injuring so many people and eventually being killed himself. Subsequent investigations revealed a history of both having same-sex attractions and for being attacked / bullied for both those attractions and for being Muslim. His literal name and presence appear in only a few comics, but the consequences of his actions (as well as the possible causes, triggers, and motivations for those actions) infuse many of the comics in the collection.



Patty Jenkins

Filmmaker Patty Jenkins wrote the introduction to the collection. She describes her experiences in reaction to the shooting, in particular her empathetic perceptions of both Mateen and serial killer Aileen Wuornos who, Jenkins says, experienced similar circumstances of hatred and rejection that, in turn, led to similar acts of murderous violence. Jenkins concludes her introduction with a tribute to how the artists who created the collection have engaged in the age-old practice of turning tragedy into art, into beauty, and into inspiration.

Mark Andreyko

Mark Andreyko wrote the Afterword for the collection, and is the editor who both originated the idea and supervised its development. He writes of being overwhelmed by the support and creativity of those with whom he worked on the project, and celebrates both the lives of those at Pulse and the courage, hope, and determination that the deaths of those people have inspired.



Symbols and Symbolism

The Pulse Nightclub

To many people in general, and to many artists who contributed to this collection, Pulse and the incident that took place there have come to represent a turning point in the history of the fight for LGBTQ rights in America, a fight that had resulted in some victories, but in which there were, and are, more battles to be fought.

On June 12th 2016, a lone gunman (Omar Mateen) entered the Pulse Nightclub, where a large number of men and women (many members of the LGBTQ and Latinx communities, or both) were dancing. Forty nine people were killed and many others were injured in what was the largest mass shooting on American soil in history (unless one counts the American Civil War, which was arguably triggered by much the same sort of intolerance as triggered the shooting at Pulse).

Cell Phones

The poignancy, hopelessness, fear, and grief associated with the image of cell phones ringing and unanswered in the aftermath of the shooting at the Pulse is echoed several times in the collection, in which cellphones appear and invariably, in this context, evoke the horrors experienced by so many, victims and loved ones alike, at the time of the shooting and in the hours and days that followed.

Dancing

Several times in the collection, comics refer to dancing as a way of celebrating life and freedom. These references occur in both text and visuals, and also often occur in specific reference to the dancing at LGBTQ-oriented clubs like Pulse. In the context and aftermath of the shooting, and several times throughout the collection, dancing takes on an attitude of defiance and courage in the face of death, destruction, and hatred.

Darkness

From the very first comic in the collection and in many of the comics that follow, darkness becomes a symbol of death, specifically the deaths at the Pulse nightclub. It also becomes a symbol of experiences, feelings, or perspectives that gave rise to the violence that caused those deaths - hatred, fear, disgust, and despair.



Light

In almost every comic that references darkness in the above mentioned metaphorical ways, there are also references to light, which represents not literal, physical life, but emotional and psychological life. It represents hope, joy, love, pride, individuality, independence, courage - anything and everything that can (and will, many of the individual comics claim) bush back and transcend the many aspects of darkness.

The Rainbow Flag

For decades, the rainbow flag (colored in the stripes of the rainbow) has been a symbol of what was once the gay rights movement, now referred to as the L(esbian), G(ay), B(isexual), T(ransgender), Q(ueer) movement. The stripes represent individuality and the right to self-identify as whatever and whoever one chooses: the combination of stripes in the flag represents diversity in community, those who experience being on the outside or the fringes of society because of their gender and/or sexual orientations working together to create safety, foster pride and courage, and express joy and celebration.

The American Flag

To many, the American Flag (with its stars and stripes) is the ultimate patriotic symbol of the ultimate expression of freedom and individuality in the world - the United States of America. At the same time, and also to many, the American Flag is seen as the ultimate symbol of a kind of hypocrisy, representing a country that claims to be a bastion of freedom but which has, for years, engaged in systematic oppressions - of indigenous peoples, of Africans, of women, of non-heterosexuals, of non-Christians. There is, therefore deep irony in the fact that the rainbow flag, with its own multi-colored stripes, bears a significant resemblance to the American flag; and an even deeper irony in the way that several of the comics in this collection conflate the two, images of one blending into images of the other.

The Pink Triangle

As the gay rights movement (now the LGBTQ movement) developed, the pink triangle was adopted as a symbol of defiance and courage, as well as a symbol of remembrance and respect.

During World War II (the late 1930's - early to mid 1940's), homosexuals were publicly identified and shamed by the Nazis by having to wear a pink triangle, in the same way that Jews were publicly identified and shamed by having to wear a yellow star.



Two Men Kissing

Several comics in the collection reference the sight of two men kissing as a trigger for anti-LGBTQ hatred and violence: nowhere in the collection is there a reference to the sight of two women kissing having the same effect. This is a reflection of common socio-cultural responses to the LGBTQ community. Because society in general has difficulty accepting or acknowledging affection between men in virtually any circumstance, open physical (sexual?) affection in men is seen, by the dominant, white hetero-normative culture, as sick and/or going against traditional norms and expectations - as something to be hated and vilified, and in extreme cases, as something to destroy.

Super Heroes

Socio-culturally, artistically, and psychologically, super-heroes like Superman, Batman, Batwoman, and Wonder Woman represent ideals of humanity: strong, powerful, courageous. They are more than human: they are, on all levels, ideals of humanity. Many have flaws, but what makes them special, in the minds of those who read their stories and absorb the meanings of those stories, is the fact that no matter what evil they face, whether from within or without, they have the power to transcend it.

This is perhaps why so many super-heroes appear in the comics in this collection: their power to transcend is a reminder, or an encouragement, or a support, for so-called "normal" people to find extraordinary courage in and for themselves in the face of evil such as that in evidence before, during, and after the Pulse shooting.

What is fascinating about the appearances of heroes in the collection is that almost without exception, they reveal themselves to be just as vulnerable to emotional pain as "normal" people. There is a sense of empathy in how the super-heroes are portrayed, a sense that in their own experience of being outside, because they're "super," they can empathize with the experience of being outside that leads so many to places like Pulse, pride parades, and the arms of those who love them, intimately, or sexually or as friends, but ultimately unconditionally.

Settings

America

The United States of America, with its long history of socio-culturally entrenched violence and increasingly wide gap between conservatives and liberals, is the broad strokes setting for the narrative. In more literal terms, there is the sense that virtually all the comics in the collection are set within the geo-political boundaries of the U.S.

Orlando, FL

This is the city where the Pulse nightclub is located. Several pieces of text within several of the comics suggest that it was / is a place of safety, refuge, and freedom for members of both the LGBTQ and Latinx communities, both deeply affected (if not outright targeted) by shooter Omar Mateen.

The Pulse Nightclub

This is the gay-and-lesbian community bar where the shooting took place. It, like bars and LGBTQ clubs in general, was viewed as a place of sanctuary, safety, joy, and freedom. Several comics in the collection profess that all those celebratory aspects of gay club life will continue, even in the aftermath of their being attacked at Pulse.

Different Narrative Realities

Several comics in the collection are set purely within the realm of what might be described as comic book reality - that is, the reality in which heroes like Superman, Batman, Batwoman, and Wonder Woman exist. Others are set in what might be described as real world reality - that is, the non-fiction reality of memoir, or or biography. Still others are set in what might be described as blended reality - that is, a narrative perspective in which the reality-experienced events of the shooting and its aftermath interact with comic book realities and characters. Finally, there are those comics which are set in what might be described as the reality of metaphor, in which meaning is meant to be inferred from juxtapositions or manipulations of imagery, as opposed to any kind of realistic, literal, or even comic-book realities.

The Present

Virtually all the comics in the collection are set in the present day - that is, in the recent contemporary year of 2016. The social, political, and cultural circumstances of that / this time (the deep divisions between liberals and conservatives in the United States, the impending American presidential election) are evoked in several of the comics, with

several making reference to / being set in and around the specific date of the Pulse shooting - June 12, 2016.



Themes and Motifs

“Love is Love”

In its essence, the dominant theme of Love is Love suggests that no matter what its origins or no matter to whom it is given, love is exactly that – love, worthy of being given, worthy of being received, and worthy of being acknowledged, respected and celebrated. The primary manifestation of this theme in the collection is in how several comics portray relationships between same-sex couples, but there are a variety of different sorts of relationships that present echoes of it. Parent/child relationships, opposite-gender relationships, relationships in which one person is differently abled or transgender – all are evocations of this essential thematic contention.

A key component of this theme is how love is presented as transcendent of, and enabling transcendence, of that which would deny its worth to those who seem, or are, different from what is perceived as normal. In many ways, in fact, “love is love” is presented as a rebuttal, or an argument against the kind of discrimination-defined hatred that, in the first place, seems to have motivated the Pulse shooting and which, in the second (and larger place) seems to motivate so many of the confrontations between the so-called American main stream and those outside that stream. In general, those inhabiting the mainstream, or at least espousing its values, are mostly white, predominantly male, generally heterosexual – or pretending to be – and frequently Christian, or belonging to another conservative religion. What the book and its component comics suggest, over and over, is that life outside the mainstream is not only worthy of respect and compassion, but actually broadly worthy of the kind of celebration that exists within communities outside that stream. That celebration is, at its core, a celebration of the idea that love is in fact, in practice, and intention transcendent of all difference, and as such is the one and only truly universal value.

The Power of Community

Love is Love celebrates of the power of community – how community can support those who experience and explore love in different ways than are “acceptable” to the so-called “mainstream.” The most commonly portrayed community in the collection is the L(esbian), G(ay), B(isexual), T(ransgender), Q(ueer) community.

While there have been private (even secret) clubs and organizations for both male and female members of the LGBTQ community for decades, arguably even centuries, it is only within the last 50 years that experiences and awareness of that community have begun to emerge into the public consciousness. There is an interesting dichotomy here, one that is explored in at least one of the comics in the collection: while that emergence has enabled a degree of freedom (not to mention legal protections), there are nevertheless several aspects of contemporary, “mainstream” society that make it necessary for the continued existence of private, secret clubs such as those referenced



above. This is because that such clubs (of which Pulse was one) provide safety, a place where individuals can find relief, freedom, and safety within a community of the like-minded. The collection is filled with powerful visual representations of that community, from images of crowded LGBTQ-oriented dance clubs to representations of LGBTQ Pride parades, and from images of the rainbow flag to images of the pink triangle (both culturally widespread representatives of that community).

Other representations of the power, safety, and freedom within community are defined by images and/or narratives of the community of family, and even communities of two (i.e. relationships). The point here is that community, large or small, is a place of refuge, a place of support, and a place to which the vulnerable can retreat when there is fear, loss, or danger. Community is, throughout the narrative, a place where individuals can find the courage to be free, and the freedom to find courage.

Celebration and Hope

A sub-theme that both evokes and connects with both the above themes has to do with representations of celebration and hope, both of which manifest in relation to different forms of love and the idea of community. What is particularly poignant, or significant, about the development of this theme is the fact that it is presented as a vivid, empowering, triumphant, and transcendent contrast to hatred, discrimination, and the danger of attack. Several comics in the narrative urge both those outside the mainstream and those within the mainstream who consider themselves allies to continue to celebrate diversity, love, and freedom. Celebrations, all these visual and textual narratives suggest, prevent anger and hatred from winning, from eating away at the courage of both individuals and community to be themselves, to take pride in themselves, and to thrive.

Various comics portray celebration and hope in various ways: intimate celebrations of hope between members of a couple, ceremonial celebrations such as weddings, and larger-scale community celebrations such as Pride. But the most frequently portrayed evocation of celebration, one that just as frequently ties in with the above two themes, are portrayals of dancing, and urgings to keep dancing, in the face of fear and confrontation and death. In many cultures, dancing is a release of individual and community feeling, and throughout the collection, it is viewed and portrayed in a similar way – as a celebration of individuality and uniqueness, of freedom (within community) to experience those celebrations, and as an opportunity to both experience and release joy. What makes the combination of dancing and celebration so poignant, so significant, and so powerful in this collection is that the assault that the collection commemorates took place at a dance club – in the midst of celebrations of the sort described above. This context, then, makes the book's urgings towards dancing as a manifestation of celebration and hope an act of defiance as well as an act of freedom.



Parent / Child Relationships

While many comics in the collection celebrate love, community, and hope with the visually dynamic motif of dancing, a significant number of comics engage in celebration of all those experiences in a way that might be described as somewhat quieter and more narrative in its origins, or orientation. This is the motif of parent / child relationships, stories and portraits of situations in which the questions of innocent children lead to revelations of important truths about compassion and acceptance; how open-hearted choices and transformations of parents can lead to a breaking down of fear-defined barriers and walls; and how the joy that can emerge from such breakings-down can be seen as yet another manifestation of the collection's overall contention that love is love.

Several comics in the collection are anchored in visual and textual narratives of children learning about the Pulse massacre and asking questions about why such an attack might take place, with parents answering as honestly as possible and those honest answers leading to comments, from the children, that suggest it does not matter who people love, they should be allowed the joy of that no matter what. The stories of other comics are anchored in narratives of parents expressing love for their children, manifesting as worry, joy, and in several cases, the need to develop broader understanding and acceptance.

All that said, there are two particularly powerful evocations of the parent-child bond, both of which emerge from actual narratives and experiences of the shooting. One is a representation of an actual text sent by an actual victim to his mother, one that consisted of three simple words, the last known words of the victim: "Mommy, I love you." The other is a portrait, late in the narrative, of a mother-and-son couple dancing at the club on the night of the shooting: the mother died, but the son survived, at least in part because the mother urged him to run, to leave her and save himself. No matter what the specific manifestation of the parent-child relationship, though, the collection makes the point several times that such relationships are, arguably, among the most significant, and potentially positive / affirming, of the life of someone outside the mainstream.

Acceptance and Respect

Tied to the novel's main message of "love is love," is the idea that no matter what form love takes or how / where it manifests, it is worthy of acceptance and respect – within community, within parent child relationships – and, as such, worthy of celebration.

Many, if not all, of the parent-child relationships in the narrative would not be the models or evocations of positivity that they are without an experience of acceptance and respect. At the same time, the air of defiance that marks and infuses so many of the representations of celebration in the collection is likewise connected to a demand for acceptance and respect. Arguably, the subtext of the claims throughout the collection that "love is love" contain the unspoken subtext that identities and manifestations of love



are inherently worthy not just of acknowledgement but of being recognized and valued. The phrase “agree to disagree” comes to mind in this context, given that the communities from whom respect and acceptance are being demanded (the so-called “main-stream”) seem, in many ways, to be determined to not only deny respect and acceptance but actively destroy opportunities for them to be experienced, both by those who seek it and for those in government, socio-cultural agencies of change, and the general public to give it.

Perhaps the ultimate expression of this in the collection as a whole is in the collection’s very existence. It came into being as a response to what might be described as the ultimate expression of DIS-respect – the violent, murderous assault on people at the Pulse nightclub who were simply being themselves, celebrating love being love. In that context, the collection can be seen as what filmmaker Patty Jenkins, in her introduction, suggests is the only real, forward-moving response to such disrespect – making the case for greater respect through the transformation of darkness into beauty, light, transcendent hope, and a call to recognize the common humanity in all, those who hate but especially those who love, in whatever form.

Styles

Point of View

At first glance, the collection may seem to have no single, clear point of view. This is because each comic tells a different story in a different way, and therefore each has a different visual and narrative point of view from the other. That said, there are certain stylistic, narrative, and thematic commonalities within certain thematic groupings that amount to similar points of view: the several stories of children questioning parents, for example, share commonalities of structure and content; the several tributes to specific victims share commonalities of perspective; and both the celebrations of freedom and explorations of grief and loss share commonalities of tone, focusing on emotion rather than narrative. Ultimately, though, the content of the book, in general, is defined by the individualized work and perspectives of the many artists involved, giving each comic, even with whatever commonalities it might have, its own unique point of view.

But when one considers both the collection's origins (as outlined in the Afterword) and its content (as manifest in its individual components), there does appear to be a single, unifying perspective – a celebration of unity in the face of tragedy. This concept shows up in several individual comics, both directly and by implication: more importantly, though, it shows up in the story of how the collection came together – how a single comment by a single individual in response to a single event brought people together to express themselves as a community, of the grieving, outraged, and bewildered. What that community expresses, in the collection's overall form, individualized content, and unique origins, is arguably the worthiness of ANY oppressed, devalued community to live freely, joyfully, fearlessly, and safely, AS a community and as individuals WITHIN that community. It could even be argued that this book is not a collection so much as it is a community of artistic creations, existing with (and because of) a uniting point of view celebrating common humanity in difference, and the inevitability of difference being a fundamental aspect of being human.

Language and Meaning

There are two different types of language at work in this collection. The first is visual, which has several components. Perhaps most noticeably, there is the component of color, or lack thereof: specifically, the frequently used colors of the rainbow flag (long a symbol of the gay rights movement), and the contrasting shades of light and dark (evoking life and death, hope and despair, joy and sorrow). Then there is the language of image, including repeated images of flags, of super-heroes, of celebration, and of grief, as well as individualized and individual images associated with the individual stories and styles of each comic. There is also the language of layout, which refers to how the images appear on the page: within the parameters of a carefully structured, comic-book style grid; as images layered one on top of the other; or as a single image, either standing on its own or with elements of text. Finally, there is the component of



style, which is frequently unique and individualized but which, just as frequently, refers to established styles such as those of comic strips, of various comic books (super-hero / romance / “Archie”), or of art of the sort that might be found in a gallery or museum.

The second type of language in the collection is the language of words, and again there are different components. There is the language of narration (in which the meaning and/or context of the comic’s images are described; the language of dialogue (the words spoken by the characters in the comic); and the language of poetry. This last is deployed less frequently than the other two word-oriented components, but does so with consistent potency, tying the two types of language together (i.e. the visual image and the verbal image) in a more metaphorical way than the more literal text and dialogue.

Here it is important to note that meaning is communicated, throughout the collection, using both types of language in almost equal measure. There are a few comics in which meaning is communicated entirely through visual imagery without words: there are no comics in which there are only words and no images. Ultimately, though, the collection’s power rests securely in the blend of the two different sorts of artistic expression, which can be seen as an echo, in terms of both style and substance, of its core point of view: the “community,” as it were of communicative techniques (note the similarity between the beginnings of the two words).

Structure

The book’s structure is tied closely to both its point of view and its use of two different, yet often entwined, forms of language. There are no chapters, no formal sections, and no groupings according to content, either narrative or visual. There are sections in which two or three juxtaposed comics seem to have common thematic elements: for example, what seems to be an informal grouping of comics looking at ambiguities and issues associated with firearms. But in general terms, there is no real beginning, no real ending, no real climax – there is a first comic and a last comic, but in the book as a whole, there is no overall story or structure, as such.

Often, though, there is a sense of structure, both visual and narrative, within each individual comic. Sometimes, in the comics where there is only one image, that image is structured to pull the reader’s attention towards a particular detail: in most instances, the structure is that of the image as a whole. In most of the comics in the collection, however, structure is defined by layout: how the story, groups of images, or individual images are broken into individual panels. Layout defines how the reader perceives the narrative, how the eye follows the visual story and the mental ear hears the textual story. Within that context, there is often what might be described as traditional, linear structure in these comics: a beginning, a middle, an end, and a climax. What is important to note, though, is that many of the comics with this structure have no falling action, or denouement (the structural element that in most linear narrative follows the climax – the phase of the story that, for example, ties up loose ends and answers lingering questions). In cases where this somewhat open-ended technique is deployed, the creators have allowed the final image and/or text to sit, or rest, with the reader,

allowing the emotions, ideas, questions, and implications associated with the story's final images and words to grow and resonate with the reader's own experiences, perceptions, and perspectives.



Quotes

I could be the love of Jesus in Action. I could do the whole 'be the change you want to see in the world' that I think about all the time. But the day gets away from me, as it always does. And so all I do is bring it before the lord. And I leave it there.

-- Young Man (Comic 8)

Importance: This quote, taken from a comic in which a young man struggles to define for himself the right (Christian?) reaction to the shootings at Pulse, can be seen as referencing what might be described as the chosen inaction of those in the Christian community towards those who their faith says are sinners.

... being in the present is the only way I can make a better future.

-- A Young Man (Comic 11)

Importance: This quote, taken from a comic in which the narrator fantasizes about leaving present day suffering and going into a future free of such suffering, suggests that the only way to make that kind of future a reality is to face the reality of the present and make the effort to change both.

Different cultures have much dark brutality in / common: / The disdain and destructive impulses. / Against those who are 'different.' / Against those who are 'other.' / Against those who are against the pack / inhaling nothing but fear. / 'We have no place for transgressors here,' they murmur between their teeth."

-- Narrator of Furious Orlando (Comic 20)

Importance: This quote, taken from a comic that features a translation / adaptation of a famous Medieval Italian poem, describes in vivid, visceral terms the kind of hatred and violence associated with anti-LGBTQ sentiments, suggesting that such sentiments have in fact been around for centuries.

Another round, Freddy?' 'I really hope not.

-- Bartender / Customer (Comic 30)

Importance: This very brief dialogue, taken from the conclusion of a comic in which a man sympathetic to the suffering of those caught up in the Pulse shooting, finds himself surrounded by a group of people sympathetic to the hatred-and-prejudice fueled goals of the shooter. In that context, the quote can be seen as having a double meaning: the bartender's question is a reference to another round of drinks, but the customer's answer is a reference to another round of shootings. Round in this sense can also be seen as referring to a "round" of bullets or other projectiles in weapons of violence.

The injustices you feel / the failures you make / create a course / a pathway / that makes you so blind / you could look upon a flight of angels / and be afraid.

-- Narrator (Comic 31)



Importance: This poetic quote (a "/" indicates where lines are separated) comes from the text of a comic which features, as its central image, a blindfolded white angel backed by a black, angel-shaped shadow. The quote and the image combine to imply that the dark path of prejudice leads to destruction, of both the self and the "other."

I love bank-branded rubber bracelets and burrito coupons as much as the next gay, but the collective experience of grief and loss – and our ability to keep dancing – is what makes our increasingly diverse community a big, gay family.”

-- Narration (Comic 40)

Importance: This quote is taken from a comic in which text and visual narration portray a memorial to the victims of the Pulse shooting that appeared as part of a gay pride parade. The narrator's comments can be seen as evoking a frequent motif in the collection - the idea that it is possible to move past grief, loss, and despair by continuing to connect with the spirit of celebration that lives and thrives, or at least has the potential to, in the heart of the LGBTQ community.

...I'm painfully aware that as a straight, white, male writer I'm taking up space in a conversation about violence in the LGBTQ and Latinx communities. I am wracking my brain trying to think what value my perspective brings.”

-- Narration (Comic 54)

Importance: This quote, taken from a comic in which a straight artist and writer struggles to discover what he can, and has the right to, say in response to the Pulse shooting. What he is really talking about is the currently hot topic of straight white male privilege: he, like many other straight white men, seems to be struggling with the question of what, if any, of his opinions are valid any more, and what is the best way to express them.

Up here, we live by the precepts of self-evident truth that our little ones should be loved, our beautiful young people should be safe and accepted, not shot at by shitbags with fear in their hearts. Fact is, you're just a distant hum, desperate for attention. You're misery and pollution, and the occasional loud bang.”

-- Narration (Comic 62)

Importance: This quote comes from a comic in which a young female superhero, similar in appearance and attitude to Supergirl, muses on the hatred and violence associated with the words and actions of quarreling people on the ground below her as she flies. "Up here" refers to the sky, while "self-evident truth" is a reworking of a famous phrase in the American Declaration of Independence. The quote's final lines refer to the capacity for pettiness and destruction in the "shitbag ... haters" below.

Self-hate is isolating. You close yourself off, piece by piece, afraid that somebody else might see exactly who you are and hate you for it. Because you know some of them will. But opening yourself up means that people see you for what you are. It means that when they lovey you, when they care about you, they're caring about something REAL. Not just a mask.



-- Narration (Comic 74)

Importance: The narrator of the comic from which this quote is taken is a man recalling his school days - specifically, his first day wearing a rainbow bracelet (i.e. an apparent, visual representation of his alternative sexuality) to high school. The quote refers to that bracelet as representing something real about him, a secret he feels he can no longer keep hidden and is, in fact, proud to release into freedom.

In all my travels as a journalist, I have never met a single soul who did not desire to be loved. It IS possible for everyone to be loved. And because it is possible, we must do it to make it a reality. It sounds simple, even naïve: LOVE EVERYONE. It is not simple. It's the hardest thing we will ever do. But we WILL do it, because we MUST. Our future depends on it."

-- A Woman from History (Lois Lane?) (Comic 97)

Importance: This quote is taken from a comic in which the young Superman (referred to as Superboy) visits the future and is taken to a memorial to the Pulse shooting, an event which his guide (a super-hero named Saturn Girl) says was a trigger for deep and lasting societal change. The quote is the text carved into that memorial, which Saturn Girl says was written by a woman that Superboy, in his future, would come to love. To followers of the Superman story, either in comic books or in popular culture, this is a very very strong hint that the woman in question is journalist Lois Lane, Superman's girlfriend ever since the character was first created in the 1950's.

The Rainbow, by Christina Rossetti. 'There are bridges on the rivers / As pretty as you please / but the bow that bridges heaven / And overtops the trees / And builds a road from earth to sky / Is prettier far than these.'"

-- Text (Comic 114)

Importance: This poem and poet were not created for the purposes of this collection, but actually exist. The poem is a reference to the rainbow, which has for years been widely regarded as a symbol of the LGBTQ community. The transcendent beauty of the "bow" referred to in this quote, in the context of the contemporary meaning of the rainbow and of the collection as a whole, can be seen as referencing the transcendent beauty of the kind of love (i.e. same-gender, non-heterosexual) love evoked by contemporary, LGBTQ-affiliated representations of rainbows.

I believe that artists creating art to raise money and assist in healing is what we are supposed to do ... these brilliant devoted contributors transformed my fleeting idea into a powerful, beautiful reality in four busy, crazy, inspiring, and maddening months.

-- Mark Andreyko (Afterword)

Importance: This quote is taken from the collection's afterword, written by its editor, Mark Andreyko. The afterword describes the outpouring of positive responses he received in the aftermath of suggesting that something be done to commemorate the Pulse shooting, with this particular quote paying tribute to both the contributions of the

artists who created the collection and the time and effort it took to put the collection together.