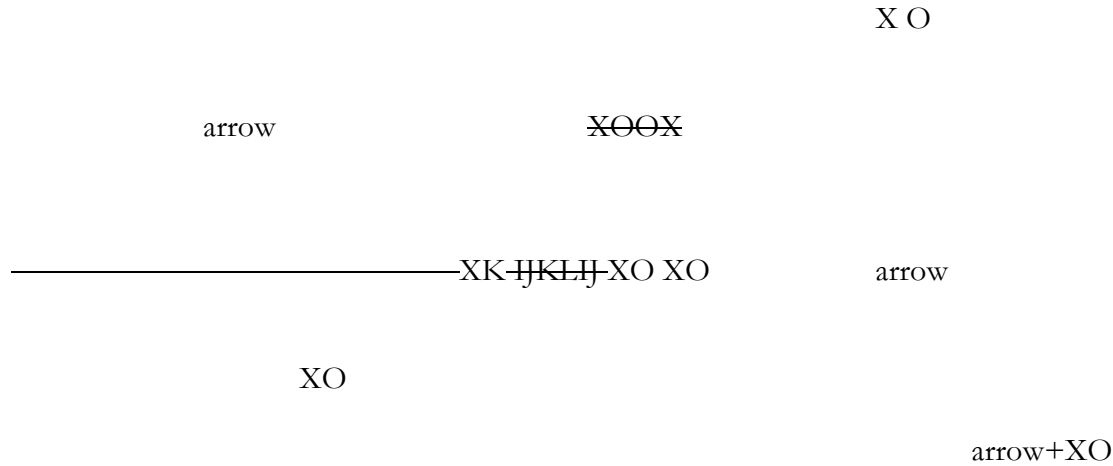


Please Forgive Me for Turning This in So Late

To show you, to explain where it started, I would need to make a graph; gather dozens of expo markers; memorize the football coach’s handbook, the *for dummies* edition that explains in simple terms what the circle and the square represent and how they come together to form X.

For example –



And the key would explain:

*In which the Xs represent the women in the author’s family and the Os stand for the number of orgasms they haven’t had and the arrows point in the direction (which is every direction) of intergenerational trauma.*

*For example: My mom X<sup>1</sup> married\* a woman O. O loves football, wears a Dallas Cowboys jersey to Thanksgiving dinner, curses when the team fumbles the ball, has a Grateful Dead tattoo on her ankle.*

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\*I never took statistics. Or economics. Or any practical math class on which I might rely to present this mounting evidence. No, instead, I took trigonometry, calculus, classes I barely passed and of which I remember little, only occasional vocabulary stripped of its original meaning: cotangent, parabola, derivative, limit, *sign* spelled like *sin*. As in, we all – each and every X above – have sinned. Our mothers were schoolchildren who couldn’t stay quiet; they counted Hail Mary’s as punishment. Our grandmothers were paintings in storefronts; drunk husbands ripped out their voice boxes, asked for discounts at the checkout. Our great-grandmothers were whales, thin from false starvation. They crossed empty oceans while sailors scooped the last remaining krill into their nets. A *sin* I should have seen it coming: *this has nothing to do*, my mother said to my father, *with O*.

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Our family tree is a finger-painting made by a child afraid of getting her hands dirty.



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*And the critic writes in the round up for the local paper.*

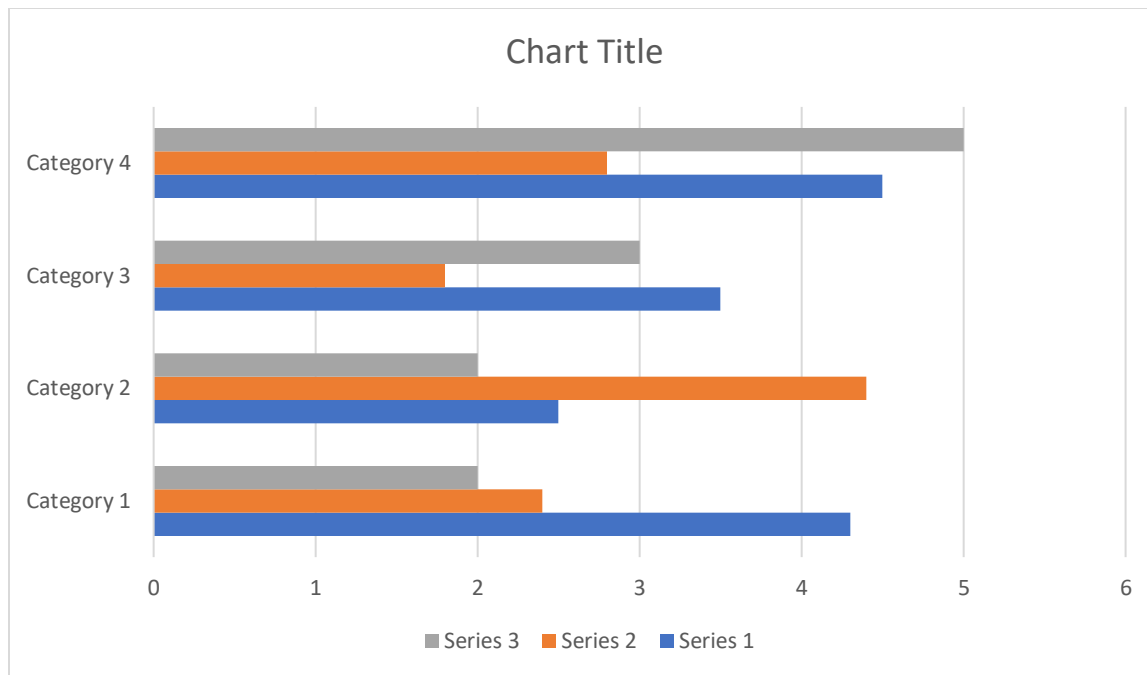
The artist, subverting the trope of the family tree, uses strict, self-constructed delineations to explain her origins. She (though I am presuming gender where none is known; for this please forgive me) uses green to represent leaves and purple for the flowers in which green implies the natural way of things, or perhaps that things should be left to be of their own natures, and purple implies the strength of the octopus-cum-goddess Ursula from Disney's *The Little Mermaid*. The X (here represented by the smallest arc) is clearly the artist weighed down by the act of creating.

*And the artist adds a statement:*

The artist must admit that she, in fact, did *not* want to get her fingers dirty and also that she has been called lazy before and so the submitted painting is a stock image off the internet because do you even know how many steps are involved in making a thing? The artist cannot count that high and when she tries the numbers grow fuzzy like cotton which makes her wonder if her brain is just pink cotton candy a racoon tried in vain to wash.

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If you enter no information, this is the default bar graph created by Microsoft Word™:



Having learned no software or data presentation skills, I remind myself of the one thing I'm sure of:

*ANYTHING can be a text.*

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### Textual Analysis of "Chart Title"

In the graph "Chart Title," Microsoft Word™ presents a holistic view of four data groups ("categories") across three different data points ("series"). Consider each category to be a member of a given generation of the family heretofore discussed, and similarly, consider each series to be a particular age at which the family member experienced a particular *event*. Because we are only interested in family members assigned female at birth, do not consider Category 2 (categories correspond to the birth order of the siblings in question and Category 2 was assigned male at birth).

In choosing not to label what is being tracked year over year, Microsoft Word™ creates a purposeful ambiguity. The title, the generic “Chart Title” centered above the graph itself in a nondescript font, adds to this sense of ambiguity. Perhaps this goes to show how little what is being measured matters. The siblings were always unhappy anyway, and this unhappiness is reflected clearly in the color choices of the graph-makers; the potato-sack orange and cornflower blue create a simultaneous sense of anger and joy in the viewer, and furthermore, the gray adds a somber tone, reflecting the genetically predisposed misery each “category” faces.

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Another way to explain: the family recipes all turned out to be different than I remember. For example, my grandmother made peach cobbler from what I thought was scratch: a tin of Pillsbury biscuits, peaches from a can, sugar and cinnamon sprinkled on top sometimes to make it fancy.

#### My Grandmother's Children

*3/4 completed stints in the psych ward*

*1/4 + 1/4 + 1/4 + 1/4 divorced*

*1/2 remarried*

*1/4 came out at 40*

*1/4 had zero children*

*1/4 had three (two girls and a boy)*

*1/4 had two (a girl and a boy)*

*1/4 had one\**

\*that one was me (a tomboy, a girly girl, a boy's girl, a girl's boy in her boyfriend's corduroy jacket)

---

In my generation, 6 of us in total: three teachers, a social worker, a marine biologist, a dancer, a baker, a stepmother, a mother, a(n adoptive)nother mother, (no fathers), a diver, a dental hygienist, a call center representative, a graduate student, a public health scientist, a professor, another graduate student, a suicide hotline worker, a stripper, a garage band singer, a bartender, a board member, a choreographer, a clerical worker, an underwater photographer specializing in sea slugs.

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What I'm really getting at is that I was celebrating my 37<sup>th</sup> birthday with my cousin at drag brunch inside a Los Angeles dispensary when I came upon the realization that 4 out of 4 of the women in our generation identify as bi or pansexual. 3 out of 4 also have ADHD and 1 out of 4 is autistic which means all of us are what is now referred to as *neurodivergent* (though only 2 out of 4 would apply that term to themselves). 3 out of 4 have earned master's degrees despite this (2 of which proved useful), and 3 out of 4 have been married to men (of which 2 also proved useful). 4 out of 4 have had at least one romantic or sexual relationships with a woman (and 4 out of 4 would do it again). 3 out of 4 grew up in Florida (you might consider it 4 out of 4 but I've always been bad at keeping track of time). 3 out of 4 have suffered from disordered eating. The 1 without that distinction is fat and no one calls it an eating disorder if you're fat, they just call it a diet, so 3 out of 4 have had an eating disorder and 1 out of 4 have been on diet since the fifth grade. Though 2 had children, only 1 out of 4 had a daughter. That daughter also developed an eating disorder which means for her generation of women the prevalence is 100 percent. I am only good at math when the answers don't matter, when the matters pertain to me, when I'm high on sequins and statistics (not to mention sativa), and some days I still can't remember which direction the alligator is supposed to face when the number on the right is higher than the number on the left and I remember now how I passed my math tests in school the same way I got through everything else: by apologizing.

My apology now: I'm sorry I'm not better at getting to the point.

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My therapist tells me there's a new term floating around in the psychology community: *neuroqueer*.

*neuroqueer* :: when my mom was a kid and she couldn't sit still in class, they called her a *spaz*. They would have called her a *dyke* too if she ever admitted to liking a girl; *dyke*, as in my mom standing in her closet, *this outfit makes me look like a big, fat dyke!*

My stepmom jokes, *you are what you eat!*

*neuroqueer* :: I get an undercut long before I come out as bisexual.

The first girl I slept with laughed when she saw it, *and you didn't know who you were??*

*neuroqueer*:: how far back does this lineage go and why am I the first to write it down?

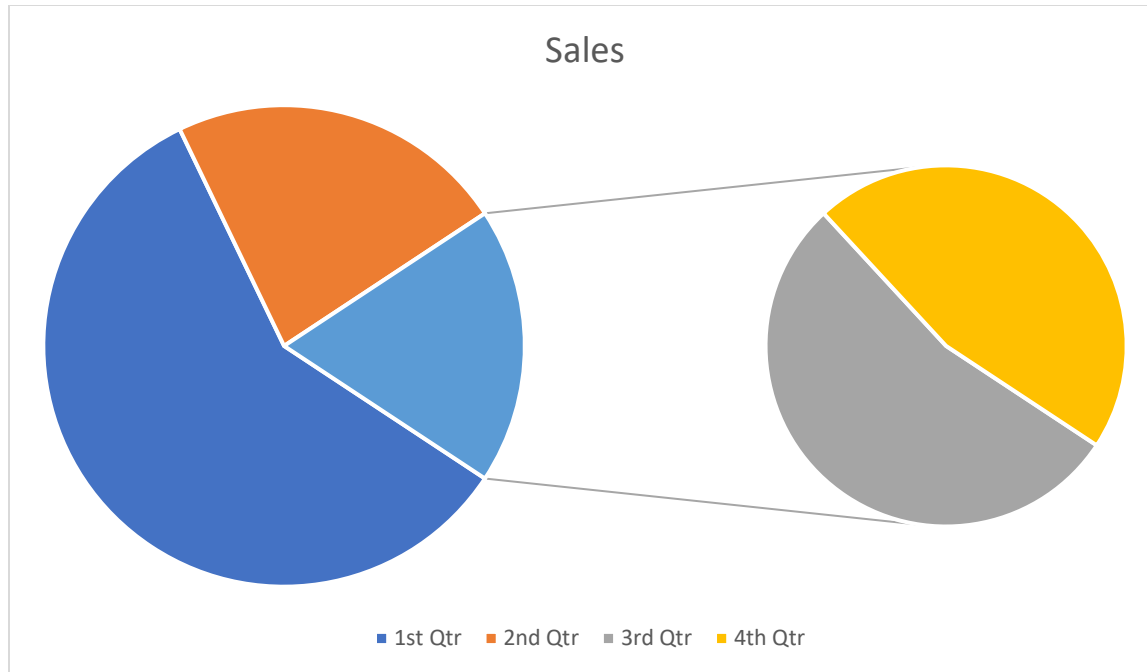
It's hard to keep records, I imagine, when you can find neither a mirror nor a pen.

*neuroqueer*:: in one of my son's favorite books, a unicorn grows up underwater believing he's a narwhal and only learns he's actually a unicorn when he travels to land for the first time.

Am I a land narwhal? Or a sea unicorn? What if I can never be sure?

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An illustration:



I was born on land that overlooked water. I couldn't finish the mile run at school but at meets, I swam the longest races: 250 yards, 500, once even the mile. To survive this electronic miswiring, I pretended to be gray, uncomplicated, sunny in disposition (see the pie below on the right) when in reality I was always more like Pacman frantically chasing a ghost or blueberry toast topped with orange slices or a murderous sunset tumbling over rocky ocean (see the pie on the left).

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I scan the yellow pages for reasons all this *is* what it *is*:

WANTED: present mother figures, figurines of present mothers. Prefer candidates with no previous institutionalizations or outpatient electroshock therapy. Some psych meds okay. Driver's license recommended but not required if you're willing to take the bus to the movies on Sundays.

NOW HIRING EXOTIC DANCERS, DANCING ATTORNEYS: I spend my paycheck at the strip club, become for a brief time what the house mom calls *a regular*. I become friends with one dancer, and she posts photos of us on her Instagram stories as if it's perfectly normal that I'm out to dinner with a woman I've tipped more than once to see naked. I want to lick her from head to toe even in her high heels and that must mean something because I don't usually like feet and because as the former co-president of my high school's Young Feminist Alliance, I don't want to seem like every other man who falls in love with her even though I am basically the same as every other man

even as a woman, and so I feel panicked and ashamed and lucky when she grabs my hand, swirls her pinky into mine as we walk together to the bar. I didn't even know pinkies could be sexy.

---

At brunch, my cousin seems annoyed when I ask about genetics. *No*, she says, *that's not how it works*, and I believe her because she's taken more than one science class and because she didn't pass that one science class by begging the hot captain of the girls' soccer team (of which she was not a member) to do the frog dissection for her.

*It's the X nerve*, my cousin explains. And I ask her to repeat herself because I am high and also because I am distracted by the queens' gowns, by their shimmers and feathers and glitter, by the sparkles sequined to everything. I can't focus with all the colors shining though really, I can't focus much in general and am usually just better at pretending, and I miss what my cousin says even the second time, the queens and the trees and the other kind of trees taking up all the space in my head, and so I think, at least for the next half-hour, that the *X nerve* makes us all queer.

*We've got the X Factor!* I joke and only later realize my cousin doesn't laugh.

---

I am sorry I still can't get this right. I hope you see how much I am trying, how I am always trying to try. Please let me try again. I'll scrub the board and start over, swipe a marker from the principal's secret stash. I can do it if I just try hard enough or at least that's what I've always been told: that it's my selfishness, my lack of effort, that keeps me from completing the work.

*Show your work!* my math teacher scribbled across my exam in red pen.

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The work I've done so far (please forgive me for turning it in so late):

*X takes the ball to O and they criss-crotch to the left side of the field.*

X \_\_\_\_\_ O -----> XO

And then XO hightails like a jet engine to the outfield.

Now O<sub>2</sub> and H<sub>2</sub>O and *X marks the spot* get off the bench for halftime.

O. O. O. O. O. O O O O O O O

*\*Remember X is the nerve to join the team in the first place. And O is a variable. Like in calculus.*

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In conclusion (why do I always rush to the conclusion?) maybe I've been bad at math all this time because my head was too full of numbers I was scared to let out.