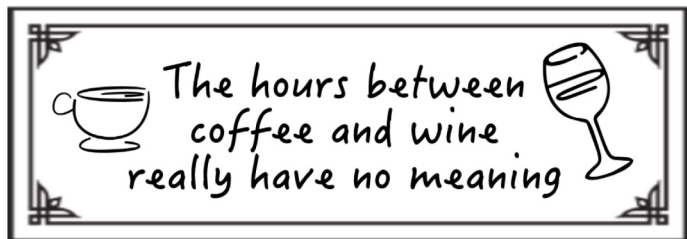




***A brief cultural
anthropology***



“Wine Mom” home decor has always both unsettled and fascinated me. As a queer and trans kid growing up in wine country, it became almost an anthropological curiosity, this strange collection of cultural paraphernalia for a world so close to me spatially and yet so separate from my experience.



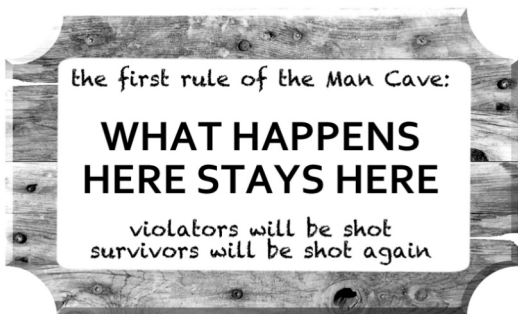
As an adult, I’ve started taking pictures of examples that I find as I go about my day, often in places like airports, department store sale racks, and the kinds of local pharmacies that have a home goods section.

I think of Wine Mom as a subset of a larger cultural phenomenon that I've recently started calling "cis core," because "the weird, kind of fatalistic relationship norms perpetuated by home decor design marketed towards straight, white, cisgender, and often middle class-ish people in the U.S." takes a lot longer to say.

Some hallmarks of Wine Mom decor (besides the obvious references to wine) are sweet, curlicued fonts, earthy or rustic color schemes, and fairly grim content folded into joke format - at their core, a lot of them are about marriage and parenting feeling like an exhausting trap for which the only socially acceptable management tool is alcohol.

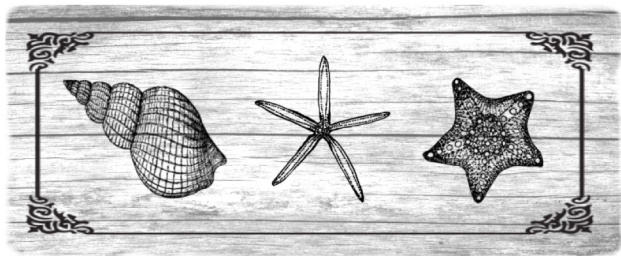


When I recently made a TikTok video talking about this phenomenon and my fascination with documenting it, the comments section blew up with people suggesting other subsets of cis core, and sharing items and slogans they've run into in their own lives.



Man Cave: a masculine parallel to Wine Mom, encouraging straight men to handle stresses by retreating to a private space with “the boys” to drink beer, watch sports, do mediocre home repair projects, and threaten to shoot anyone who disturbs that refuge from the rest of their lives.

Beach Mom: a lot of seashell and ocean-themed decor in a house over 100 miles from a beach. Potentially more benign than Wine Mom, because ocean aesthetics are enjoyed by many people for varied reasons, but still sometimes speaks to a sense of feeling stuck or disconnected from rest - a genuine break from the labor of marriage and parenting doesn't feel possible, so just bring the beach home and make do.



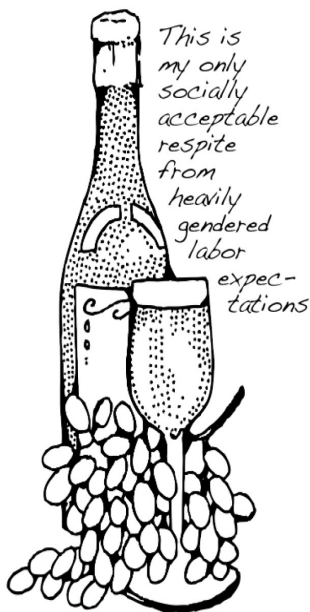
The Old Ball and Chain: wedding decorations and home decor that describe marriage as a stifling trap foisted upon reluctant straight men by nagging, needy straight women.

Blessed Mom, or Cross Mom: similar to Wine Mom, but with a lot more Jesus and sometimes less alcohol. Reclaimed barn wood crosses, framed Bible quotes, and very heavy gender roles.



Compulsory Heterosexuality - for Kids!™: this ranges from any infant onesie that asserts the small, cute blob wearing it is a “ladies’ man” or “heartbreaker,” all the way up to t-shirts for dads containing a list of the ways they’ll murder you if you try to date their daughter without their approval. Bonus points for that special glue designed to safely affix a bow to a (still-hairless) baby’s head because the parents want to make sure to broadcast their gender assignment.

I laugh about and document these things because I'm not always sure what else to do in the face of gender and sexuality messaging that's so grim and deterministic.



I'm angry at Wine Moms because they are often judgmental and dismissive of other people's struggles with marriage, parenting or addiction if those experiences don't make for a tidy piece of wall art, but I also worry for them, because they're bogged deep in cultural norms that leave them with a very limited set of possible life paths and ways to deal with the resulting stress.

I WANT BETTER FOR WINE MOMS, AND FOR ALL OF US.

Realizing I was queer and trans sent me through multiple cycles of questioning and redesigning my own life path, figuring out what I want things like work and love and (maybe) parenting to look like for me. Not everyone gets the space to question those options and find out what would actually serve them best, and most of those more custom options don't come with aggressively marketed wall art.

You can find this zine, along with many of my other writing and game design projects, online at

beatingthebinary.itch.io