Missing Bridges: The Invisible (and Hypervisible) Lesbian of Color in Theory, Publishing, and Media

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Abstract

“Missing Bridges: The Invisible (and Hypervisible) Lesbian of Color in Theory, Publishing, and Media”

While moving from theory, through the Women in Print Movement, and up to the current images of lesbians this dissertation considers how the figure of the lesbian of color has been erased and highlighted at different times and in different spaces. Chapter one, "What Does Invisibility Look Like?" examines how and where the figure of the lesbian of color is overlooked, squeezed out, or tokenized. In chapter 2: "Rhetorically irreverent, politically radical, and deeply personal: Lesbians of Color Organize," the work of the Azalea Collective in Brooklyn, NY, the Combahee River Collective in Boston, MA, Cherríe Moraga and Gloria Anzaldua’s planning for *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color,* and the work of Kitchen Table Press are explored. Chapter three, "Publishing and Perishing: The Women in Print Movement from 1980-2002," compares the climate in 1981 when *This Bridge Called my Back: Radical Women of Color Speak Out* was published to the climate for *Sing, Whisper, Shout, Pray: Feminist Visions for a Just World* in 2002. Chapter four, "What’s visible now? The Creation of [White] Lesbian Celebrities" examines the classed and racialized messages embedded in the media figures of Rachel Maddow, Suze Orman, and Ellen DeGeneres.

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spaces of invisibility, bodies of invisibility, moments of silence and reverence

> The dissolution of cultural imperialism thus requires a cultural revolution which also entails a revolution in subjectivity. Rather than seeking a wholeness of the self, we who are the subjects of this plural and complex society should affirm the otherness within ourselves, acknowledging that as subjects we are heterogeneous and multiple in our affiliations and desires. Iris Marion Young, *Justice and the Politics of Difference* 124

> For those of us who write, it is necessary to scrutinize not only the truth of what we speak, but the truth of that language by which we speak it. Audre Lorde, "The Transformation of Silence into Language and Action" 43

Within Young's yearning for a shifting and fluid theory of the self and Lorde's critique of language lies the problem of overlapping discourses, and the communities which make these identities possible. Language constructs one's understanding of the self as lesbian, black, gay, white, or queer, yet language also frames and constricts the possibilities for the representations of those identities. Within society the individual may also be contextualized through one cultural construct and then also speak (or remain silent about) the other terms of her identity. The matrix of these privileges and oppressions repeated within black feminist theory and queer theory too often renders the figure of the lesbian of color invisible when she is not being tokenized. While black feminist theory foregrounds race and gender and queer theory focuses on sexuality, both discourses simplify the lived experiences of lesbians of color and other queer women.

This project began with a science-fiction novel that chafed against a work of queer theory. Nalo Hopkinson's *The Salt Roads* entwines women living in several time periods and explores the fluidity of sexuality, history, and power. In the novel three women live in different historical time-frames: Jeanne Duval, a dancer who is

also Baudelaire's mistress; Meritet, an enslaved sex worker, and Mer, a field slave in Saint Domingue. Each character's life is marked by a society that withholds racial and class privilege from her for the benefit of other bodies, although their stories entwine in a spiritual or immaterial space that connects them beyond a colonial version of linear history. In many ways, this space could be marked as queer, although this connection stretches the usual definition of this term.

Judith Halberstam's *In a Queer Time and Space: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives* examines how queerness revises bourgeois or conventional constructions of personal associations, time, and space. Halberstam's theory silently centers bodies that are marked by racial privilege and class privilege. The queer, white, middle-class bodies that are explained by this theory have benefited from capitalist and colonialist inequities that in turn depend on the marginal status of the lives of women such as Jeanne, Meritet, and Mer. In this way, the figure of the lesbian of color does not appear within the framework of *In a Queer Time and Space*, because she cannot be conjured within the assumptions of race and class within the text. However, her absence highlights the privileges of the middle-class, white, queer body used to frame this theory. Halberstam defines queer time as:

> specific models of temporality that emerge within postmodernism once one leaves the temporal frames of bourgeois reproduction and family, longevity, risk/safety, and inheritance. 'Queer space' refers to the place-making practices within postmodernism in which queer people engage and it also describes the new understandings of space enabled by the production of queer counterpublics (6).

This concept of queer time and space explains the phenomena when lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) people move into specific urban

neighborhoods. Queer time also makes many LGBT people question the assumption that women have a "biological clock" that urges reproduction, the common wisdom that values living until 90 years old, and the legal narrative that connects wealth or property inheritance to a biological family tree. Queer time and space accounts for the critical space within which LGBT people make choices that critique the heteronormative and bourgeois narratives of family, aging, and gender roles. By naming these counter-narratives as queer, Halberstam shows how mainstream culture continues to privilege male-female relationships and middle-class lives through its norms and unspoken frameworks.

The creation of a separate time frame echoes in both the Halberstam's theory and Hopkinson's novel, but the values of "family, longevity, risk/safety, and inheritance" which are intentionally skewed by people living in the queer spaces figure differently for the characters of Jeanne, Meritet, and Mer, who are marked within their societies by several layers of marginalization. For example, a woman's ability to control her fertility is vital to do the work of a dancer in a theater or a sex worker in a bar, but the likelihood of rape and sexual violence in the gendered and racialized spaces where she must work makes the task even more difficult. Although a visibly-pregnant body might get Jeanne fired from the theater, if she succeeds in marrying the poet Charles Baudelaire then she can benefit from some of the class and race privilege that he enjoys. Yet, a hypothetical mixed-race heir of Baudelaire might not be acknowledged as an heir at all, and structural racism could trump the mother-trope and leave Jeanne destitute. In a colonial society class and race privilege mark Jeanne's body as other, so her freedom to "queer" time and space is

somewhat fractured as well. In addition, Jeanne, Meritet, and Mer have sexual relationships with women as well as men, and their lives exceed not only their gendered, racialized, and classed bodies, but do not neatly fit the queer (white, middle-class) classification described by *In a Queer Time and Place*.

The "politics of visibility" is complicated by the conceptualization of visibility and passing for both texts and bodies. In queer studies the questions have been: How does a queer body "look queer" or pass as straight? In what spaces does an individual choose to do one or the other? These questions are followed closely by: Where can one be safe? As the murders of Mathew Shepard and Brandon Teena have shown, white GLBT people who are "found out" as queer in public or private spaces in the United States may be targeted for violence.

Yet, the less-widely publicized stories of violence against black lesbians, queer women of color, and transgender women of color reveal the physical danger wrought on their bodies while obscuring the connections to white privilege, masculine privilege, and colonialism. Two examples from 2012 illuminate the mainstream media's differential and conflicted treatment of queer women of color.

In "Violated Hopes," an article published in *The New Yorker* on May 28, 2012, Charlayne Hunter-Gault documents the rape and murder of black lesbians in South Africa, at a rate of about ten reported incidents a week. In December of 2005 South Africa's Constitutional Court ruled that same-sex partnerships should be granted the same status as common-law opposite sex marriages, yet this ruling did not end the violence against black lesbians as well as queer and transgender women (Hunter-Gault 42). Dipika Nath, the researcher who wrote the report, "We'll Show You You're

a Woman" for Human Rights Watch notes, " 'There are real gaps in just information of what sexual orientation is, what gender is, what gender identity is…Coupled with that is a history of violence in the country'" (qtd. in Hunter Gault 43). Throughout *The New Yorker* article there is no analysis of how white or lighter-skinned lesbians are treated in post-apartheid South Africa, even though this monumental change in governmental policy now does not require everyone to carry an identification card listing their skin color. In contrast, descriptions of the lesbians in the article, along with the photo of Lungile Cleopatra Dladla, detail the victims' masculine physical characteristics. Since lesbians are twice as likely as heterosexual women to be attacked in South Africa, then the markers of masculinity (or butchness) seem to make these women more visible to potential male attackers.

In Minneapolis, the case of CeCe McDonald polarized the media in June of 2011. McDonald, a transgender black woman, was walking to the grocery store with her friends when Dean Schmitz and two female friends were smoking outside the Schooner Bar and started yelling racist and homophobic slurs at them from the sidewalk. The confrontation escalated and McDonald stabbed Schmitz, a white man with a swastika tattooed on his chest. Although many of McDonald's supporters called for her release under self-defense claims, the case went to trial. The judge ruled that the swastika tattoo and Schmitz's criminal history could not be used by the defense lawyers to build their case (Mannix 8-16). McDonald's case was widely discussed on the Huffington Post, *The Advocate*, and later on Melissa Harris-Perry's show and in the *Los Angeles Times*. The coverage from June of 2012 questions

whether McDonald will be safe in a men's facility during her 41-month sentence, a concern that highlights the high-stakes gender lines within and between prisons.

Racial passing also involves the fear of violence. In Black feminist studies, the visibility questions have been: How does the color of a person's skin impact her politics and her racial oppression? How does someone control how she is seen in a society bombarded with racist and sexist stereotypes? Who can be an ally? Where can one be safe? Black feminist theory and queer theory take up these issues of visibility and passing with varied and sometimes troubling results, while maintaining the importance of doing confrontational and transformative work. The translation and visibility problems between black feminist theory and queer theory energize this dissertation.

Black feminist theory: Community work and scholarship

Black feminist theory consciously speaks from the knot of interlocking oppressions that control Black women's bodies and lives. However, theorists within black feminism have addressed the politics of visibility using different tactics. Some of the questions raised involve what kind of alliances are necessary for black feminist theory to do work in communities, the assertion that which bodies are studied leads to particular kinds of knowledge, and the ongoing concern of who gets credit for doing black feminist scholarship. The writing within black feminist theory by bell hooks, Patricia Williams, and Audre Lorde weaves together personal narratives and theoretical/traditionally academic ruminations, which creates a complicated ethos and makes the reader feel personally addressed while calling into question how a "scholar" should sound in her writing.

One branch of black feminist theory is focused on political coalition as a means of unification and community action. The Combahee River Collective Statement, written in 1977, explains that this group of Black feminists came together to support each other's academic work, work through the personal-political feminist doctrine, and define actual projects that they could accomplish in Boston—such as creating a battered women's shelter. In the first paragraph, the collective grapples with the complexities of oppression by stating, "...we are actively committed to struggling against racial, sexual, heterosexual, and class oppression and see as our task the development of integrated analysis and practice based upon the fact that the major systems of oppression are interlocking" (Combahee 13). This collective statement coheres many kinds of women and men in battle against many kinds of oppression; some that impact them individually and some that they see as part of a larger collective struggle. This moment in black feminism examines traditionally-hidden privileges in scholarship and has inspired writing in feminist studies that works to untangle the knot of interlocking oppressions.

A statement written by a collective dances with the issue of visibility because a collective author can increase the importance of the ideas in a written document while it shields the specific names of each writer. In this case, specific anonymity can protect individuals who may prefer not to identify publicly as Black feminists, or a writer who may have been nervous about being seen (or mislabeled) as a lesbian, particularly if she had a tenure-track or adjunct position in 1977. The collective also addressed the complexity of working together within a capitalist system: "A combined antiracist and antisexist position drew us together initially and as we

developed politically we addressed ourselves to heterosexism and economic oppression under capitalism" (Combahee 15). Fighting oppressive structures and assumptions led them to fight against social class and capitalism.

The collective was acutely aware of how it wanted to be seen, and planned to publish an anthology of black feminist writing in order to reach more Black feminists. "The fact that individual Black feminists are living in isolation all over the country, that our own numbers are small, and that we have some skills in writing, printing, and publishing makes us want to carry out these kinds of projects...(Combahee 20-1). The Combahee River Collective organized themselves for their own support and hoped to help other presumably academic Black feminists who could not organize because of their geographical placement. In this case, their document was overtly about reaching out to a sisterhood of likeminded women.

In *Black Feminist Theory: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment,* Patricia Hill Collins analyzes how Black women's societal oppression builds a theoretical stance, and reiterating Black working-class women's stories throughout the academic text. Like the Combahee statement, Collins addresses both racism and classism with the stories that she has lived and been told: "...although all African-American women encounter racism, social class differences among African-American women influence how racism is experienced" (24). Weaving together the specific and the systematic, *Black Feminist Theory* holds many strands of oppression together in its analysis. Collins defines three dimensions of African American women's oppression:

1. Exploitation of "labor essential to U.S. capitalism"

2. “[P]olitical subordination of Black women” [including educational access]

3. Ideological dimension of Black women’s oppression (“controlling images”) (6-7).

In the oppression of workers mandatory uniforms construct an invisibility of individuals doing service jobs—then and now. “Domestics were confined to one area of the house, usually the kitchen, and were expected to make themselves invisible when caught in other parts of the house by members of the employer’s family” (57). Political and educational oppression allows educational institutions to ignore the literacies of black women while using racist and elitist filters like SAT or ACT scores. In addition, if only a few black women are allowed into a university, perhaps only a few students will question the racist and sexist classroom practices of many professors. The absence of a representative sample of black women in academia allows for a continued normalization of white supremacy in feminist thought, as well. In another example, Collins points out how feminist scholars like Carol Gilligan and Nancy Chodorow have published studies and pronounced their results as universal to women, even though they have studied primarily white middle-class women (7-8). By limiting their study samples, these scholars write racism and classism into their work, and gain academic prestige in the process.

The third kind of oppression examines the controlling images of Black women that Collins describes which link together slavery, the Bible, and stereotypes about urban life: Aunt Jemima, mammy, Jezebel, Black prostitutes, welfare mothers. Collins does not presume that black feminist theory can fashion a world entirely

outside of these oppressive images, but writes within the oppressive system marked by racist, sexist, and classist stereotypes about black women's bodies.

Ann duCille, a scholar in black feminist theory, regards all the attention for black feminism and scholarship warily, even though she welcomes greater attention and visibility for black women authors. In "The Occult of True Black Womanhood: Critical Demeanor and Black Feminist Studies," duCille describes the struggle to become an accepted part of academia (and becoming privileged by that acceptability), and then the worm turned and her struggle changed into a question about whether this exchange is personally and politically worth it. DuCille says, "...the question of who speaks for me, who can write my sacred text, is as emotionally and politically charged as it is enduring and controversial" (600). At the moment that duCille writes, she has not been granted full access to the university's authorizing power (and perhaps a related question is whether she may ever be allowed into the back rooms). DuCille contends that the scholars writing in Black feminist theory or studies are neither black, nor feminist, nor (in some cases) women. They are leveraging their other privileges (racial, social class, gender, etc.) while writing themselves into a field that has only recently become "worth doing." Once the battle for black feminist studies turns, everyone wants a piece of the spoils for themselves, and the presumption of agency comes with the compiling of privileges. The privilege to pick up a pen and join any conversation (with the certainty that you will be heard) is inherently white and middle-class, if not entirely masculine. It reveals the deep-seated elitism of university culture, where with enough schooling one can be authorized to analyze any text or situation objectively.

What silent violence happens in this educational exchange? As Patricia Williams writes, "There is great power in being able to see the world as one will and then to have that vision enacted. But if being is seeing for the subject, then being seen is the precise measure of existence for the object" (28). The corollary, "How does an object become a subject without objectifying herself?" concerns Williams as well as duCille. The trouble with being seen or studied involves being translated, accessed, and commodified. Becoming the sexy subject in academia involves losing control over one's political and personal project, so in this case, extreme visibility leads to a loss of power. The defensive impulse to assert some kind of internal authority skates on deconstructive thin ice, and overlooks the complex layers of power and privilege that envelop us all. However, this vulnerability comes when seeking an academic place for a personal and political identity.

To become visible is one step, but to be invited or accepted for entrance involves something uncontrollable within the matrix of privileges and oppressions. In *The Alchemy of Race and Justice*, Patricia Williams tells the infuriating story of being refused entrance by a white male teenager at a Benetton store in Manhattan (51). He assumes that she will not buy anything and might physically threaten him, therefore his translation of her body marks her as a troublemaker. In this case, the visibility of race (and its concurrent fear of blackness) trumps any class privilege, and here even capitalism breaks down in the service of racial injustice.

Queer Theory: Closets and Performances

While black feminist theory originates from/centers on black women's lives and how interlocking oppressions impact those lives, queer theory originates from/centers on how texts have been read and produced to construct a heterosexual norm. Queer theory emerged around 1990 as several academic conversations emerged: 1) some GLBT academics reexamined their reading practices for canonical writers who may have had same-sex partners in their lives, and 2) deconstructionist scholars examined and rethought the gender binary. This strand of theory emerged primarily from the humanities in the United States, and was supported by Women's Studies departments springing up in various research institutions.

Audre Lorde spoke at the National Association for Women's Studies conference in 1988, and notes that there were 503 women's studies departments in the United States. At this time, while women's studies studied (among other things) the naturalization of gender roles, queer theory began to examine the constructions of gender and sexuality. The argument for women's studies presumed that women's voices and stories were not being adequately studied in the university, and queer theory inherited this oppositional stance to more traditional (masculinist) scholarship. Although many of the scholars working in queer theory may identify as GLBT or queer, many scholars write from an omniscient narrative and, particulary in the cases of Judith Butler and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, personal narrative hovers on the edges of their writing. This stands in contrast with the texts in black feminist theory that centered experience. Queer theory's seemingly objective and scientific

writing by an invisible hand leads to disjunctive moments when queer theory attempts to interact with or support queer activism.

In *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity,* Judith Butler works with French feminist theory to define gender as a verb, not a noun. If, as Simone Beauvoir said, one is not born, but becomes a woman, then "Gender is the repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the apparance of substance, of a natural sort of being" (43-4). In this text, Butler analyzes gender by dissecting language, speech act theory, French feminism, Lacan, and Foucault. Butler's theory activates Foucault to take women's studies and queer studies out of an essentialist model and into a social/performative one, where gender can be critiqued as an aspect of language and the social order. This performative move also lays the groundwork for a space and place analysis of gender, which Judith Halberstam explores later in *In a Queer Time and Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives.* Butler's book is often credited with creating a "performative" notion of gender and, later, destabilizing "women's" studies. Today the department of Gender, Women, and Sexuality Studies at the University of Minnesota exists partly because of the academic destabilization of the term woman and the expansion of women's studies into the discourses of gender and sexuality.

Butler acknowledges the problem of a performative notion of gender (in a socialized sphere) in conjunction with the agency of the subject, but does not reinstate the myth of an essential self, "There is no self that is prior to the convergence or who maintains 'integrity' prior to its entrance into this conflicted

cultural field. There is only a taking up of the tools where they lie, where the very 'taking up' is enabled by the tool lying there" (145).

On one hand, if gender is performative, and drag is an act of profound destabilization, then Butler might say queer activists need to make their parody of the heterosexual norms more overt in order to eventually dismantle them. However, if two women try to register for a marriage license, are they really destabilizing the institution of marriage and creating a way to rewrite the influence of the state on all of our bodies and families, or are they just trying to redraw the borders of an institution in order to harness additional visibility and power? Same-sex weddings do not perform the constructedness of all marriage for the sake of dismantling the link between the government and the family. Instead same-sex marriages use the master's tools to join the master's house (with apologies to Audre Lorde). And who is watching these same-sex unions? The straight, white, male subject—or a subject performing these identities unconsciously? How frustrating to be continually stuck within a subject/object divide, as Williams' quote above notes, yet queer performativity does not deconstruct this divide.

The assumption of agency to make oneself visible is also socially constructed (and learned) through intersections of privilege. Although the audience presumably always watches the multiply-privileged subject, the working-class or female or black or aging body (or all of these) may not have access to the same fascinated audience. Or, as in Williams's story of being turned away at Benetton, visibility for a black middle-aged female body in Manhattan connects that body to the ubiquitous racist narratives of poverty and crime.

Queer subtexts are already powerful, according to Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick in *Epistemologies of the Closet*, but scholars do not study them because of the homophobia embedded in their disciplines. Sedgwick states, "The closet is the defining structure for gay oppression in this century" (71). If the binary of private and public life splits and the latent power of unspoken assumptions ruptures when the gay or lesbian person "comes out," then personal visibility allows for life and breath. Kosofsky Sedgewick argues that the metaphor of the closet resonates with gay identity in a particular way:

> Racism, for instance, is based on a stigma that is visible in all but exceptional cases (cases that are neither rare nor irrelevant, but that delineate the outlines rather than coloring in the center of racial experience); so are the oppressions based on gender, age, size, physical handicap (75).

Sedgwick highlights gay identity in order to make this point, but elevates it above the other oppressions in this passage. The person who finds herself oppressed by various layers of identification and oppression reads that coming out is primary to her sexual identity, even if her experience as a lesbian of color draws her to the rhetorical flourish of the parenthetical outlines of this quote. Yet, Sedgwick goes on to describe ethnic and religious oppressions while remaining silent on social class—perhaps because of its very invisibility, or perhaps because the bodies and experiences encompassed by this theory are all middle to upper-class.

Authorship and visibility issues are tied together in another queer theory text published in 1993. The Social Text collective and Michael Warner share credit as the editors of *Fear of a Queer Planet*--an act of both subterfuge and visibility. The

importance of visibility permeates the publication and tenure system, where tenure depends on some sense that a scholar produces world-class publications. Publishing is one thing, being read and studied is another. Yet, if a scholar works (or dabbles) in a politically dangerous field, working through a collective process allows for some invisibility. Like the members of the Combahee River Collective, some people were willing to put their faces on the work of the collective and some were content to remain unknown. This anthology speaks to an academic heterosexual audience and the writings are broken into separate sections for theory and politics. "Section one: Get Over it: Heterotheory," and "Section two: Get Used to It: The New Queer Politics," both adopt a confrontational attitude toward the reader and the university, while writers hope that scholars buy and discuss the text.

In the introduction to *Fear of a Queer Planet,* Warner examines the potential of using the term "queer" in an academic space, "For academics, being interested in queer theory is a way to mess up the desexualized spaces of the academy, exude some rut, re-imagine the publics from and for which academic intellectuals write, dress, and perform" (xxvi). Yet, in some spaces proclaiming oneself a queer can also be a good way to "mess up" a tenure-track career. Warner does not mention how the tenure system may police the queer academic (who may be publishing in queer theory and "out" on his or her CV), sometimes voting them out of an institution just as they make connections and publish in their field. The newly-minted PhD may be read as even more dangerous if he or she looks too different from the rest of a department (too black, too female, too gay, or too many of these). The need to join

an institution for monetary and personal stability may find itself in tension with the desire to contribute to the field of queer theory.

Within many texts in queer theory, white privilege rarely points to its racial construction, and class privilege often assumes its central role without a whisper. Within much of queer theory, the notable invisibility of whiteness allows for the construction of queerness as a space of otherness within which racialization and gender take on marginal status, when they are mentioned at all. As Steve Garner notes,

> …the argument is not that whiteness is actually invisible. A better word would be 'unmarked.' Whiteness for the majority of 'white' people is so unmarked that in their eyes, it does not actually function as a racial or ethnic identity…Whiteness is rendered invisible under the weight of accumulated privileges (34-5).

The discussion of GLBT oppression in queer theory calls on a slight-of-hand when it comes to the issue of white privilege--rendering it unmarked and undertheorized. Yet, race theory and postcolonial theory grapple with otherness, the subject/object binary and the theorization of silence, so queer theorists sometimes draw on these discourses in small doses.

In "How Gay Stays White and What Kind of White it Stays" Allan Berubé considers who benefits from and perpetuates the stereotype of the wealthy gay white man. He identifies "Whitening practices" that converge to disappear all other GLBT people:

> making *race analogies*
> *mirroring* the whiteness of men [in power]
> *excluding* people of color from gay institutions
> *selling* gay as white to raise money, make a profit, and gain economic power and daily wearing the *pale protective coloring* that camoflages the

unquestioned assumptions and unearned privileges of gay whiteness (246).

Through the grasping of whiteness and class privilege, wealthy white gays (joined somewhat loosely) with wealthy white lesbians make their sexuality exceptional while turning away from people of color who are also lesbian, gay, bisexual, and/or transgender. In addition, the same-sex marriage debate shapes itself through the rhetoric of white privilege and neoliberalism while it attempts to trace its lineage to the Civil-Rights Movement. According to Berubé, the term "our" in gay liberal circles (as in "our George Wallace") often presumes a wealthy, white, gay audience. This separation continues the disappearance of LGBT people of color and narrows the focus of gay-rights groups. Berubé asks, "If the Gay Rights Movement is not already part of the Civil Rights Movement, then what is it?" (246). He argues that if the gay rights movement attached itself to the legacy of Martin Luther King, Jr., then GLBT activists would fight for welfare reform, housing reform, immigrants' rights, and other social issues that address complex layers of racial, ethnic, and class issues. Instead the Human Rights Campaign asks upper-class queers for donations to fight for same-sex marriage across the nation.

Although queer theory continues to broaden its base, I have yet to find an article in queer theory that echoes duCille's heartfelt frustration about black feminist theory—that outsiders are writing their way into the discipline. However, I have talked to heterosexual colleagues who have used ideas from queer studies to reexamine central tenets of composition studies and American studies. The matrix of privileges and oppressions in higher education encourages the seemingly unraced,

unsexualized, and ungendered scholar to write black feminist theory, borrow from queer theory, and enact the norms of white male privilege in their scholarship while living in bodies that may or may not reflect the experiences that these theories represent. Simultaneously, the post-racial and post-identity politics strains of academic thought serve to make the most multiply-oppressed figures the least likely to be heard from or represented.

Early queer theory extolled the need to "queer" academia, and scholars working in queer of color studies have seeded and continue to write and support radical scholarship, many institutions harbor conservative and heteronormative values supported by government and corporate interests. In addition, scholars at research institutions work within different institutional constraints and feel pressured to become nationally and internationally known, while scholars at liberal arts schools and community colleges are often told to focus on pedagogy over scholarship. Although higher education generally exists to replicate knowledge and police the boundaries of what can be known, there are several tiers within this category with different levels of institutional surveillance and access to funding. In addition, the students at research one institutions are markedly more privileged than those at community colleges.

As one anonymous faculty member in Toni McNaron's book *Poisoned Ivy: Lesbian and Gay Academics Confronting Homophobia* explains,

> 'The fact remains that civic and campus communities are fundamentally conservative, with great emphasis on consensus. There is an evenness to life here which can be appealing, a kind of idyllic quality; nosiness and unseemly behavior are not part of the scene. To come out strongly on social justice issues is rare (196).'

An obsession with smooth narratives and congeniality distracts from the personal importance of some fields for minority scholars, and continues to disappear the privileges embedded in texts and institutions. Not all institutions of higher education are built on smooth narratives, though.

I have taught in several realms, but the work of this dissertation is closely aligned with my current position teaching first- year writing at Minneapolis Community and Technical College. Information from the "MCTC 2011-2012 Fact Sheet" illustrates how unique this campus is. Over 53% of the students are people of color, 26% of them are first-generation college students, and the average age is 28 years old. Although the general education credits cost $173.06 each, 75% of students receive financial aid. There are many students who identify as both LGBTQ and of color, so this student body has a space for queers of color. Scholars who do not teach at community colleges may overlook the importance of race, class, and sexuality issues at institutions like this one, but those of us who do teach here realize that issues of embodiment, visibility, and political clout are always already the work of teaching traditionally-marginalized students how to craft their voices, and their writing is also scholarship. In this space, students have little patience for classrooms that center whiteness, masculinity, class privilege, and heterosexism, so my job is to be attentive and responsive within my classes. By performing close readings on the power dynamics in my classrooms I have learned to pay attention to lacunae.

This dissertation creates a jagged and uncongenial narrative that explores how the figure of the lesbian of color has been treated within academic thought and in mainstream pop culture. While the lesbian of color has been tokenized in academic thought, she has also been sidelined by pop culture in favor of the more-palatable white lesbian. In the 21st century sources of media arrive on iPads, laptops, TV screens, and smart phones, and commercials coerce consumers to choose what to watch along with where and when. While consumers are allied to the myth that everything can be contained on a screen, the figure of the lesbian in movies, TV shows, and in print and many online formats is unquestionably white, wealthy, educated, and physically fit. This palatable white lesbian continues to smooth over the forced absence of the lesbian of color, whose image is as absent as the least-desirable qualities of the democratic project: poverty, violence, sloth, ignorance, obesity and gender bending. These attributes are antithetical to the American capitalist narrative, unlike the construction of same-sex marriage that relies on the trope of equality. This disarmingly-simple civil rights issue seduces white middle-class queers with the dream of respectability in the form of inherited wealth, income tax relief, and government-enforced property rights. In the process, white middle-class lesbians and gays move toward the altar and away from their more-marginalized queer and heterosexual friends of color.

The conservative National Organization of Marriage's [NOM] campaign against same-sex marriage reinforced the whiteness and middle-class privilege of the gay marriage issue in order to court striving middle-class and working-class black and Latino voters. In the Human Rights Campaign's analysis of the 2008-09

report, "National Strategy for Winning the Marriage Battle," Kevin Nix quotes NOM's strategy to enlist the assistance of Black leaders:

> The strategic goal of this project is to drive a wedge between gays and blacks—two key Democratic constituencies. Find, equip, energize and connect African American spokespeople for marriage, develop a media campaign around their objections to gay marriage as a civil right; provoke the gay marriage base into responding by denouncing these spokesmen and women as bigots… (qtd. in Nix)

This argument posits that if the (white) same-sex marriage proponents could be painted as appropriating (racialized) civil rights language, and NOM then encouraged African American leaders to separate themselves from same-sex marriage supporters, white LGBT people and their supporters would be forced to call Black leaders on their intolerance. As Berubé also noted, the Black heroes of the Civil Rights movement are held up as heroes for African Americans to emulate, and NOM's wedge is crafted from the identification with this historical meme. In NOM's report, Latino voters are also presumed to be vulnerable because of their identification with the American Dream and its importance for their (heteronormative) families.

> The Latino vote in America is a key swing vote, and will be so even more so in the future, both because of demographic growth and inherent uncertainty: Will the process of assimilation to the dominant Anglo culture lead Hispanics to abandon traditional family values? We must interrupt this process of assimilation by making support for marriage a key badge of Latino identity - a symbol of resistance to inappropriate assimilation. (qtd. in Nix)

The notion of "inappropriate assimilation" indicates that an underlying anxiety about a Latino voter's connection to the United States could be leveraged to the benefit of this campaign, even though he or she might feel more politically allied with the Democratic Party's initiatives. In the wake of the second inauguration of

President Barack Obama, it may look as though this vote-splitting tactic did not work in favor of the Republican Party. However, the ongoing separation of LGBT issues and the issues of people of color in many realms continues to hamper the transformative work that a widespread coalition could undertake.

Plan for the Dissertation

Chapter 1: "What Does Invisibility Look Like?: Focusing on theory" moves between texts in queer theory, black feminist theory, and queer of color theory to examine where and when the perspectives of lesbians of color matter and to consider how theoretical texts obscure and spotlight particular bodies.

In chapter 2: "Rhetorically irreverent, politically radical, and deeply personal: Moments of Visibility for Lesbians of Color, 1973-1997" the work of small coalitions is foregrounded. From 1973-1997 community-based groups, small presses, and scholars brought together women of color and made lesbians of color visible to mainstream audiences and themselves. Projects and collectives such as the Combahee River Collective, Kitchen Table Press, *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color*, and *Azalea: A Magazine by Third-World Lesbians* brought together writers and activists, published many emerging writers, and critiqued mainstream publishing policies as they worked through the narratives of visibility and invisibility.

In 1981 *This Bridge Called my Back: Radical Women of Color Speak Out* was published by Persephone Press, and the white feminist movement in the United States was encouraging women to publish their own texts and to buy books at independent feminist bookstores. Chapter 3: "Publishing and Perishing: The Women

in Print Movement from 1980-2000" discusses how women of color started their own publishers and joined feminist bookstore collectives as part of this trend, and why the Women in Print movement flourished through the 1980s and mid-1990s. However, near the end of the 1990s feminist publishers and bookstores disbanded as bookstore chains opened many new stores and publishing moved into digital formats. This chapter compares the cultural challenges for two feminist anthologies edited by lesbians of color: *This Bridge Called my Back: Radical Women of Color Speak Out* in 1981 and *Sing, Whisper, Shout, Pray: Feminist Visions for a Just World* in 2003.

Chapter 4 "What's Visible Now? The Great [White] Lesbians" focuses on the current constructions of lesbianism in pop culture. While celebrities such as Ellen DeGeneres and Rachel Maddow present a whitewashed lesbian image to the public (fit, stylish, coiffed, and smart), lesbians of color rarely appear in the public eye. This chapter considers the figure of the visible lesbian and the raced, classed, and gendered narratives that shape her.

Visibility, Haunting, and Becoming Untrained

> The ghost or the apparition is one form by which something lost, or barely visible, or seemingly not there to our supposedly well-trained eyes, makes itself known or apparent to us, in its own way, of course. The way of the ghost is haunting, and haunting is a very particular way of knowing that has happened or is happening. Being haunted draws us affectively, sometimes against our will and always a bit magically, into the structure of feeling of a reality we come to experience, not as cold knowledge, but as a transformative recognition (Gordon 8).

There are many "well-trained eyes" that just cannot see the most important things that must be seen, and there are ways in which visibility not only lets us down, but

tricks us into thinking that we grasp something. However, the ways in which racism, sexism, heterosexism, and classism support and sustain each other-- the very most important bit--has been trained out of our sight. In addition, sometimes education refocuses us to not see this vital thing by building its narratives on the importance of individual freedom. What must be known and what must be examined needs to be approached in another way. By taking up the Combahee River Collective's call to confront the intersections of racism, classism, sexism and homophobia this dissertation traces the academic and popular narratives that discipline the figure of the lesbian of color.

Chapter 1: What Does Invisibility Look Like?

> The shadow of repression has concealed the black lesbians in literature in direct proportion to her invisibility in American society. Women of color, as a whole, have long been perceived as the least valuable component in our social and economic system—the group with the least economic power and the smallest political influence. Not surprisingly, we are the least visible group not only in the fine arts, but also in the popular media, where the message conveyed about lesbians of color is that she does not even *exist*, let alone use soap, drive cars, drink Coke, go on vacations or do much of anything else (Jewelle Gomez qtd. in Gomez, "But some of us are Brave Lesbians: The Absence of Black Lesbian Fiction" 290-1*).*

Gomez, writing in 2005, quotes her article from an anthology published in 1983. The original text is from "A Cultural Legacy Denied and Discovered: Black Lesbians in Fiction by Women" published in *Home Girls: A Black Feminist Anthology*. When a writer goes back to an earlier article, she might hope to laugh at her naiveté or to philosophize about how much the discussion has changed since then. What happens when a time capsule contains a mirror, and the writer realizes that the liberal progressive narrative has tricked her again? As Gomez explains, between 1983 and 2005 lesbians of color did not become more visible in literature, the fine arts, or the media.

In 1983, Judith Butler and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick had not yet coined the term "queer theory," but feminist and women's studies programs were organizing and writing syllabi. Multiculturalism was being discussed, AIDS was being isolated (and discussed in small circles), and Ronald Reagan was in the White House. Twenty-seven years later, queer theory and queer studies have reached into various disciplines and departments, women's studies has morphed into gender and sexuality studies, the terms globalism and neoliberalism enflame debates in college

classrooms, retroviral drugs can control AIDS and HIV (for those who have financial and geographical access to them), and Barack Obama lives in the White House. So much seems to have changed, yet Gomez's comment about black lesbian invisibility holds firm.

Gomez's article was published in an anthology of Queer of Color studies in 2005, a field of inquiry that did not exist in 1983. This area of study foregrounds the intersections of race and sexuality in order to examine discourses in conjunction with each other. While the tectonic plates of visibility, politics, and justice have been shifting and merging in higher education, very little has been written recently about the literatures and perspectives of lesbians of color. Do sexual and racial visibility matter in a post-racial, anti-essentialist, postmodern world? On the streets of New York and other large cities in the United States, Act Up fought for the needs of HIV+ people using the slogans visibility=power and silence=death. However, if it is too simplistic to translate street slogans into theory then why not go boldly into a queer future? Yet if the term "queer" sounds theoretically inclusive, in practice it seldom takes into account men of color, and even more rarely women of color. The rare exceptions have produced exciting discussions of how a lesbian of color critique can intervene in nationalist and capitalist discourses.

In *Aberrations in Black: Toward a Queer of Color Critique*, Roderick Ferguson discusses Audre Lorde's and Barbara Smith's black lesbian feminist readings of *Sula*, that simultaneously critique the dependence of American capitalism upon the heteronormative family structure. Ferguson notes, "Contrary to national liberation's preservation of national identity, women of color feminism negated both Western

nationalism and national liberation by working to theorize the limits of subaltern identity" (129). Even while incorporating the experiences of queer of color performers into his theory of disidentification, Jose Esteban Muñoz critiques queer studies as decidedly white. "[Audre] Lorde, Barbara Smith, [Gloria] Anzaldúa, and [Cherrie] Morága…are barely ever critically engaged and instead are, like the disco divas…merely adored from a distance" (11). However, black feminist critique has often averted its eyes from the lesbian divas. In "Black (W)holes and the Geometry of Black Female Sexuality" Evelynn Hammonds notes that, with the exception of Gomez, Barbara Smith, Audre Lorde, and Cheryl Clarke, "The historical narrative that dominates discussion of black female sexuality does not address even the possibility of a black lesbian sexuality, or of a lesbian or queer subject" (308). While all of the theorists discussed in this chapter admit that all bodies are racialized, sexualized, gendered, and classed in particular spaces and places, the complexities of these intersectionalities make large pronouncements difficult. Unfortunately, the hopeful theorist wants to make a large footprint on the philosophical earth. However, by focusing on the figure of the lesbian of color, this dissertation hopes to weigh the strengths and limitations of the latest work in sexuality theory and critical race theory.

Chapter one addresses the question: Where, when, how, and why does the invisible lesbian of color become visible? By moving between texts in queer theory, black feminist theory, and queer of color theory this chapter will examine where and when the perspective of lesbians of color matter and why. The following texts will provide the points of conversation: Judith Butler's book, *Bodies that Matter: On*

the Discursive Limits of Sex (Routledge 1993), Patricia Hill Collins' books, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment* (Routledge 2008) and *Black Sexual Politics*: *African Americans, Gender, and the New Racism* (Routledge 2005), as well as Dwight McBride's article "Can the Queen Speak? Racial Essentialism, Sexuality and the Problem of Authority." (Callaloo 21:2 (Spring 1998) pp. 363-379). Butler speaks from queer theory, Hill Collins works from a black feminist perspective, and McBride writes from queer of color studies. Each of these texts encounters glimpses of how and why lesbians of color matter within these discourses, but each snapshot of a lesbian of color (mostly black lesbian) figure adds stability to a theory that continues to privilege the experiences of other bodies.

In *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, Butler interrogates how queer bodies perform non-binary gender constructions, which had not been accounted for in feminist theory. This book became one of the canonical works of queer theory and its analysis has impacted many fields of study. When the first edition of Butler's theory was published in 1990, this line of questioning grew out of tensions and conversations between poststructuralist theory and French feminist theory within the emerging field of women's studies. In the third chapter, "Subversive Bodily Acts," Butler centers drag queens, who parody the cultural and political performativity of gender through the matrix of heteronormativity. Linking performativity and repetition, and the assumption of an audience, this analysis of gender split open the naturalized male/female binary.

At a moment when the university was being challenged to account for women's bodies and perspectives in curricular form, Butler was pushing back on scholars to reexamine the construction of gender through sexuality. In the 1999 Preface to *Gender Trouble*, Butler explains that her project was rooted in the political discussions of 1990. "Poststructuralist theory was brought to bear on U.S. theories of gender and the political predicaments of feminism…my point was not to 'apply' poststructuralism to feminism, but to subject those theories to a specifically feminist reformulation" (ix). Later in the 1999 Preface, Butler muses on how examining gender through performance also can be examined in tandem with race:

> I would note here not only that racial presumptions invariably underwrite the discourse on gender in ways that need to be made explicit, but that race and gender ought not to be treated as simple analogies. I would therefore suggest that the question to ask is not whether the theory of performativity is transposable onto race, but what happens to the theory when it tries to come to grips with race (xvi).

In this explanation of her own theory, Butler separates discourses of gender from discourses of race, which presumes that bodies exist which are gendered but not already racialized—white ones. This reflexive separation between gender and race appears regularly in theoretical discussions of race, gender, and sexuality.

Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex, revisits the scene of Butler's previous work in queer theory and examines how race matters to bodies participating in a performative field of gender. Butler's text acknowledges the spaces in queer theory when she focuses exclusively on gender, but does not rewrite a place where multiple identities are centered. While citing Freud, Lacan, and Irigiray does not necessitate a primary focus on gender (presumably a theoretical

gender unmarked by race or class), Butler's reverential style does force this text to accommodate the assumptions of the other theorists. If the form of discourse that this text continues already overlooks race and class, in the spirit of collegial conversation Butler's text also analyzes a subject without multiple racial, sexual, and class identities.

> To prescribe an exclusive identification for a multiply constituted subject, as every subject is, is to enforce an reduction and a paralysis, and some feminist positions, including my own, have problematically prioritized gender as the identificatory site of political mobilization at the expense of race or sexuality or class or geopolitical positioning/displacement (116).

In other words, perhaps it was expedient to force gender as the primary category at that time and in that moment. Perhaps gender was the category that carried the privilege to be considered first, particularly with a white, female coterie of feminist theorists. While this quote admits that every subject is multiply constructed, yet this "continual enumeration" of identities and positions overwhelms the theoretical work of the "Phantasmatic Identification" chapter. After four pages of quotes on intersections of identities from theorists such as Chandra Talpade Mohanty and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak the chapter ends.

Another consideration when reading Butler is that most texts in queer theory presume a reader and writer within the United States, and this nation-space silently naturalizes race, gender, and class privileges in the service of marking its borders. Therefore, the "Bodies that Matter" in this text are continually white, female, and middle or upper-class. Although sometimes the perspective is queer, or lesbian in the case of chapter 2's title "The Lesbian Phallus and the Morphological Imaginary,"

the default white heterosexual body haunts the places in the text where "other" bodies serve as examples.

Chapter two employs lesbian sex practices (in which a phallus can be a hand, a piece of silicone, etc.) to argue against Lacan and Freud, an irreverent move that forces the reader to imagine two women's bodies together. The lesbian that Butler describes is in the process of having sex with another woman—as either a top or bottom. This body, which would become racialized in the process of being seen within a society, need not appear racialized in textual form. The textual body without a defined race is assumed to be white if Butler does not racialize it otherwise. This, then, is the crux of the problem: if a white theorist in an American university writes in English about anything but race, white readers assume that the bodies she describes must be white. Only when the argument of the text concerns race overtly is the reader (white or of color) likely to visualize bodies of color. Because of the white bias of American universities, even the race of the author rarely impacts the reader's assumption of whiteness. In this case, silence = white, an equation that serves to further write out people of color within many branches of theory.

Butler cites Gloria Anzaldúa on identities that cannot all be fulfilled at once--an account of identities that exist in time and space (117). Anzaldúa's work unpacks the notion that not all identities carry the same kinds of privileges, yet this hierarchy of unearned privileges and unearned oppressions shudders but remains stable after the analysis of *Bodies that Matter*. Are Chicana-ness, queerness, femaleness, and a working-classed identity more at odds with each other than whiteness, queerness,

femaleness and a middle-classed identity? Calling on Anzaldúa to school the reader on intersections of identities foregrounds this question. This relative privilege quotient undergirds the prose of this chapter and some more-privileged identities trump less-privileged identities. Butler considers how these identities might work on and through each other:

> What appear within such an enumerative framework as separable categories are, rather, the conditions of articulation *for* each other: How is race lived in the modality of sexuality? How is gender lived in the modality of race? How do colonial and neo-colonial nation-states rehearse gender relations in the consolidation of state power? (117)

The notion of a framework seems like it could be generative of new scholarship, and indeed much of the queer scholarship that was published after 1993 did work through the considerations of identities that worked together, and theorists such as Muñoz (*Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics)* and Gayatri Gopinath (*Impossible Desires: Queer Diasporas and South Asian Public Cultures*) created a more situated queer theory and analysis than Butler's "enumerative framework." However, magic wands had to be waved to detangle race from sexuality and gender so that *Gender Trouble* (and the queer theory that grew from that analysis) was able to work from the assumption of an unraced (a.k.a. white) body—a body outside of racialization. In a sense, if bodies do matter differently within different spaces and because of different kinds of markers (gender, race, class, sexuality, etc.), then to continually center gender is illogical and politically troubling. In other words, centering gender means that white racial privilege, by its very silence on race, continues to be written into the theory. An additive model of queer and feminist scholarship where Anzaldúa, Mohanty, and Muñoz are quoted with a flourish, but which does not concede

the central trope while still admitting its (privileged) limitations also continues to patronize these scholars.

> And how is it that available discursive possibilities meet the limit in a 'subaltern feminine,' understood as a catachresis, whose exclusion from representation has become the condition of representation itself (Spivak)? To ask such questions is still to continue to pose the question of 'identity,' but no longer as a preestablished position or a uniform entity; rather, as part of a dynamic map of power in which identities are constituted and/or erased, deployed and/or paralyzed (117).

Butler leads us to Gayatri Spivak with a question that has no answer, but does concern this discussion. When exclusion = representation for Spivak's 'subaltern feminine' then the haunt must become the space for feminist work, which seems to be problematic within the argument of *Bodies that Matter*. Yet, the assumption of identities in movement—identity as a verb, identity as a situated space—echoes the performative gender theory of *Gender Trouble*. The description of identity as a "dynamic map of power" holds two-dimensional (and postcolonial) overtones and continues to presume that the mapmaker holds the power to present herself.

As Spivak explains in "Subaltern Talk: Interview with the Editors," to say that the subaltern cannot speak, "means that even when the subaltern makes an effort to the death to speak, she is not able to be heard, and speaking and hearing complete the speech act" (292). But she must not just be heard, she must join in the conversation within one's neighborhood and government as an equal partner with all other participants, with all the privileges and responsibilities of that position. This hierarchy in the act of speaking and listening is assumed in Spivak's statement, yet the privileged reader presumes that no such hierarchy exists—much like in the rhetoric of *Bodies that Matter*. In many ways, the figure of the lesbian of color, and the theorists and scholars who have focused on how

race, class, and sexuality are already always woven into the concerns and viewpoints of heteronormativity, continue to speak without being heard by many (white) queer theorists—a situation that Spivak calls "belittling befriending" (292).

> It seems to me that finding the subaltern is not so hard, but actually entering into a responsibility structure with the subaltern, with responses flowing both ways: learning to learn without this quick-fix frenzy of doing good with an implicit assumption of cultural supremacy which is legitimized by unexamined romanticization, that's the hard part (293).

The responsibility of the more privileged subject is to listen and reexamine one's assumptions while learning to see and understand how this linear and additive model of identity (and language) has racialized, gendered, and classed all bodies (even the white ones) within a heteronormative and capitalist superstructure. For example, if all subjects are racialized in particular places or times, how do scholars analyze the privileges that particular subjectivities may carry, or the people that inhabit them? Is performance theory too dependent on a middle-class white body—a body that matters most in a matrix of privileges? This may be a problem with the rhetoric of *Bodies that Matter*. Bodies do not exist without people, yet this text evacuates them into subjects who exist in matrices. It sounds so clinical, and so silently violent. Subjects, Bodies, People—these terms are not equal, and the rhetoric carries meaning as well.

In *When and Where I Enter: The Impact of Black Women on Race and Sex in America*, Paula Giddings cites primary texts to argue that Black women have organized and agitated for social change around issues of lynching, voting rights, and pregnancy rights in the United States for centuries. However, their contributions have often been marginalized by the writers of mainstream history. Through meticulous research and analysis Giddings challenges the widely-held belief that Black women were excluded

from influencing political leaders and leading movements. For example, the published poet and Black slave Phillis Wheatley met with President Washington three days before he officially conscripted Black men into the army (Giddings 41). In another key example, Giddings describes how Lugenia Burns Hope organized other Black wives of faculty members to influence educational and health policies in Atlanta in 1908 (135-6). In both of these examples Giddings produces examples of Black women who directly influenced measurable political and social change—women who have been marginalized by mainstream historians.

Giddings's analysis also emphasizes how troubling Black women's bodies were to the founders and beneficiaries of the American project. The ongoing surveillance and subjugation of Black female bodies began long before the colonies came together to form a country or the U.S. Constitution was written. In 1668 the laws of the colony of Virginia noted that not only were Black female slaves "tithable"—suitable for field work—but so were free Black women, who would not be granted all of the privileges and responsibilities associated with being English (Giddings 37). Black women's bodies were also policed using laws that criminalized interracial sex (consensual or not) and benefited white male slaveowners, who could "reproduce one's own labor force" for the price of a fine (Giddings 37). This criminal marginalization served to strengthen capitalism, harden stratified racial categories, and enshrine both rape and the gender binary.

These parallel readings of Giddings illustrate how the figure of the Black woman has been both invisible and hypervisible in the histories of the United States—a problem within which the figure of the Black lesbian also participates. For while Giddings focused on race and sex in her book published in 1984, and although she analyzes how marriage

laws controlled Black bodies, sexuality exceeds the discussion of the text. The Black woman, who has been overlooked by history while she was influencing it, and who has been policed by unjust laws, appears in Gidding's work as a heterosexual woman.

In both of Patricia Hill Collins's books, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment* and later in *Black Sexual Politics*: *African Americans, Gender, and the New Racism*, Collins works from a black and heterosexual feminist perspective and writes out to the limits of this vision before addressing a black lesbian perspective. This rhetorical approach serves to marginalize the lives and experiences of black lesbians.

In *Black Feminist Theory: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment,* Collins analyzes how Black women's societal oppression constructs a unique theoretical stance, and reiterates Black working-class women's stories throughout the academic text. Collins addresses both racism and classism with the stories that she has lived and been told: "...although all African-American women encounter racism, social class differences among African-American women influence how racism is experienced" (24). Weaving together the specific and the systematic, *Black Feminist Theory* analyzes many strands of oppression.

The section titled, "Relationships with Whites" explains how the [hetero]sexual racial hierarchy looks: white men are on top, white women get to share their beds and power, then black men, then black women at the very bottom. By using a discourse that weaves together racial politics and heteronormativity, the text effectively writes out queers of every color and reduces even straight people

(Black or white) to narrowly-defined sexual animals. This heterocentric racial hierarchy owes much to Freud, without even a nod to the sexual deviants.

This hierarchy of race and gender does more than just keep Black women at the bottom of the ladder of power, according to Collins, it keeps them emotionally separated from whites.

> In spite of the powerful restrictions imposed by the sex/gender hierarchy on interpersonal relationships, many African-American women refuse to 'protect themselves and love small,' and manage to form close, loving relationships with whites. But given the legacy of the sexual politics of Black womanhood, for large numbers of African-Americans, fully human relationships with whites remain out of reach (Collins *Black Feminist Thought* 192).

This notion that black women will not "love small," but are manipulated by white people reinforces the separation of people by race and gender by reinscribing heteronormativity, and glances at the violence perpetuated against heterosexual couples who crossed racial boundaries. Violence, often orchestrated or tacitly supported by local and federal governments, has taken the forms of lynchings, beatings, rapes, and arson. This section ends by proclaiming that "fully human relationships" across racial lines seem to be "out of reach," a provocative and certain statement of the "natural" split (discretely bounded) based on the construct of race. This insistence on the impossibility of interracial and multiracial "fully human relationships" also denies the centuries of interracial heterosexual families in the United States—created by means of biology or adoption. Biracial or multiracial children exist nowhere in this hierarchy, and their attachments to their biological or adopted parents come under racial suspicion.

Joshua Rothman examines how interracial couples were sometimes tolerated, sometimes ignored, and other times beaten or prosecuted, in *Notorious in the Neighborhood: Sex and Families across the Color Line in Virginia, 1787-1861*. Factors such as social standing, social class, visual skin color, and racial association all contributed to the question of how the courts and law enforcement might proceed in different cases. In Charleston, Virginia in the early 1800s David Isaacs, a Jewish business owner, and Nancy West, a free woman of color who owned a bakery, maintained separate households for over twenty years while raising their seven children. It was only after the couple moved their eleven family members under one roof, according to the 1820 census, and without marrying, that law enforcement moved to punish them. Before the whole family moved in together,

> West was a free woman of color who owned property and a business, and who carried on a sexual relationship with a white man, but at least she was peripheral to the public gaze…After that year, however, she not only lived openly as the wife of a white man, but she was accumulating capital and occupying valuable, centrally located real estate alongside other whites (65-66).

Flouting convention may have been annoying to white neighbors, but Isaacs was Jewish ("white under Virginia law" but still not Christian) and the couple was relatively discreet (62). However, once they lived together the attachment was clear and this was far too much for white residents of Charlottesville to bear. Fortunately for West and Isaacs, the courts could not decide whether to charge them with interracial marriage, thereby granting that they were parties in a common-law marriage, or charge them with statutory fornication (Rothman 57-67). The state control of marriage, as defined by laws controlling race and sexual behavior, could not account for nor punish the behavior of West and Isaacs.

Although behavior may be controlled using government legislation, Collins argues that, in black communities, cultural norms serve to reinforce homophobia. Her *Black Feminist Thought* grants four pages to black lesbians and homophobia in black communities in a section that relies heavily on Barbara Smith, Barbara Christian, Audre Lorde, Ann Allen Shockley and June Jordan. Barbara Smith discusses the effects of homophobia on black lesbians and Cheryl Clarke talks about the homophobia of black people and its impact on communities (192). Unlike other sections of the book, Collins tells no personal stories about homophobia or black lesbians in her community, but instead cites texts by black lesbians. This rhetorical calling on the experts in a text that commonly uses the author's personal embodied experience to make its points indicates a rupture. Perhaps the topic of Black lesbians must be discussed but has only been partially theorized in juxtaposition with the entire arc of the text's message.

> Barbara Smith raises a critical point that can best be seen through the outsider-within standpoint available to Black lesbians—namely, that within a system of interlocking race, gender, class, and sexual oppression, there are few pure oppressors or victims (Collins *Black Feminist Thought* 194).

Smith calls on all people, with their different privileges and oppressions, to take responsibility within this web. Yet, Collins's text turns away from this cry in order to situate black heterosexual women at the center of this book. Collins' rhetorical move is similar to Butler's nod to the notion that all bodies are situated in a variety of ways, right before the end of the chapter. The next chapter marches on with no trace of Smith's privilege web, the long-ranging implications of this vision, or the potential alliances that could be formed in a non-hierarchical system.

The add-on approach to black lesbianism in Collins's *Black Feminist Thought* is similar to the end of chapter three in Butler's *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex,"* "Phantasmatic Identification and the Assumption of Sex." Lesbians of color appear in each text for only a few pages, which indicates that other women represented or quoted are not lesbians of color. While the wrestling match between essentialism and constructivism has been discarded (as a passé issue in feminist and queer studies), the problem of representation and language continues to haunt the theoretical text, and that is the particular rhetorical and cultural problem of unmarked and marked bodies. Tokenizing a few bodies at key moments, or using disembodied voices in the majority of the text, allows the visibility and hypervisibility problems to continue to be exploited while going unexamined.

Collins's later book, *Black Sexual Politics*: *African Americans, Gender, and the New Racism*, occasionally adds gay and lesbian perspectives to the discussion of a social issue or uses black feminist analysis to examine a particularly queer incident. As the introduction notes, "The need for a progressive Black sexual politics has always existed, yet the gender-specific social problems of today make this need even more pressing" (7). The list of social problems in the preceeding paragraph includes "poverty, unemployment, rape, HIV/AIDS, incarceration, substance abuse, adolescent pregnancy, high rates of Black children in foster care, [and] intraracial violence (especially by young Black males as both victims and perpetrators)" (7). Several of the issues in this list have been constructed by mainstream media or right-wing politicians as social "punishments" for people with non-normative sexual or gender presentations: rape, and HIV/AIDS. In addition, mainstream allusions to

people living in prison (assumed to be male unless marked otherwise) are often tied to sly jokes about anal rape—alluding to the latent male fear of being overpowered and physically violated by another man behind bars. As Gopnik points out in "The Caging of America," "The subject [of prison rape] is standard fodder for comedy, and an uncoöperative suspect being threatened with rape in prison is now represented, every night on television, as an ordinary and rather lovable bit of policing." Masculinity foregrounds femininity in this list of troubling issues—and is reinforced by the parenthetical comment on violence of the state against black males.

Taking a different tack on social problems, the Collins text analyzes what black people seem to be reading:

> Take, for example, the cottage industry of Black self-help books that sprang up in the 1990s, all designed to help African Americans cope with strained love relationships. These books populate local bookstores, crowding out more thoughtful, scholarly treatments, and yet come as close as many African Americans get to serious discussions of gender and sexuality. (*Black Sexual Politics* 9)

At a moment when the text could point out how this kind of self-help book narrates black partnerships as solely heteronormative and marginalizes gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender people of color, the text entreats African Americans to go deeper and think more carefully about their partnerships. In keeping with self-help values, the text returns to the narrative of self-empowerment. After reading *Black Sexual Politics*, a more scholarly book, empowered black men and women will "think for ourselves and mak[e] decisions that are in our best interests" (9). In the absence of any note to the contrary, these empowered black male and black female readers will make individual (and limited) choices regarding opposite-sex partners.

While the introduction to the second book promises that the interplay between sexuality and racial identity in *Black Sexual Politics* is formulated much differently from the hierarchy in *Black Feminist Thought*, the second book overpromises a deep analysis of sexuality. The second book states:

> Societal norms that install heterosexuality as the only way to be normal still hold sway. For example, the term *sexuality* itself is used so synonymously with *hetero*sexuality that schools, churches, and other social institutions treat heterosexuality as natural, normal, and inevitable. (Collins *Black Sexual Politics* 37)

This text denounces the connection between heterosexuality and normativity while setting *Black Sexual Politics* apart from these social institutions—social institutions that have been historically touted as gateways to respectability in African American narratives about raising oneself up in mainstream white society. This paradox holds many possibilities for the critical analysis of racial, sexual, and heteronormative webs of deceit and privilege. However, the text moves away from theory and out to pop culture by discussing the sexual norms on TV talk shows such as *The Montel Williams Show* and *The Maury Povitch Show*.

Mentioning how heteronormativity and social institutions reinforce each other also allies this text with Queer of Color Studies, a field that was emerging when *Black Sexual Politics* was published in 2004. When the book engages with the notion of interconnectivity, the language runs up against its own limitations.

> This project breaks with earlier gender scholarship (including my own) that equates sex with male and female biology and gender with socially constructed ideas of masculinity and femininity. Rather, as presented here, biological sex, the social construction of gender, and sexual orientation constitute distinct yet interconnected phenomena that, in turn, interconnect with race. (Collins *Black Sexual Politics* 11)

In this section Collins interjects her desire to rethink her earlier modes of thinking—to address the inequities in her scholarship before this moment. Yet, it seems that the language of the text wants to maintain a small separation between the categories of race, sexuality, and biology. According to this quote, the categories do not write each other, and are not visible through and in conjunction with each other; they exist as discrete units that "interconnect with race," which holds more gravitational power than sexuality or biology. What does the argument gain from maintaining these spaces? Perhaps the full understanding of these categories is hampered by the linearity of language—and the notion of each concept contained in its own discrete meme.

Jacques Derrida assesses how metaphysical terms must be used to call on and consider the weight of their historical and discursive meanings and use the term "under erasure". One concept concerns the analysis of the figure of the lesbian of color:

> " 'Experience' has always designated the relationship with a presence, whether that relationship had the form of consciousness or not. At any rate, we must, according to this sort of contortion and contention which the discourse is obligated to undergo, exhaust the resources of the concept of experience before attaining and in order to attain, by deconstruction, its ultimate foundation. It is the only way to escape 'empiricism' and the 'naïve' critiques of experience at the same time" (*On Grammatology* 60).

Yet, the relationship between the experience of the lesbian of color and the texts which call on or theorize that experience (in the first or third person) can only operate in a linear language system, which prioritizes which descriptive word comes first: the black lesbian writer, the lesbian black writer, or the writer who identifies as a black lesbian. In all of these examples, the most cumbersome sentence

construction (in English) indicates a choice of separation by the objectified figure—which allows the text to reprioritize her consciousness. Linguistic analysis leads to several important considerations in queer of color studies in several of these texts. In another example, the narrative of the "race man," as McBride analyzes it below, is raced, gendered, and (hetero)sexualized within a matrix of heterosexual privilege.

In this light, the consideration of where each text invokes the term "queer" seems pertinent. In *Black Sexual Politics* the term "queer" appears in the text after the description of a typical gay pride event:

> Gay pride marches that embrace drag queens, cross-dressers, gay men who are flamboyantly dressed, individuals with indeterminate gender identities, and mannish lesbians push the envelope beyond accepting the LGBT people who are indistinguishable from everyone else, save for this one area of sexual orientation. Through public, visible, and often outrageous acts, 'queering' normal sexuality became another hallmark of LGBT politics. (Collins *Black Sexual Politics* 94-5)

This public display of LGBT difference in the (urban) gay pride march exists within and beyond the cordial voice of the text--with the men dressed as women and the women dressed as men and many people who cannot be gendered. The people in the parade are acting queer by not conforming to norms of gender or sexuality. As the text says, they're "pushing the envelope," unlike the LGBT people who blend in with the rest of society. This queer vs LGBT construction could be analyzed as another outside/inside binary that benefits heteronormativity while casting out the extreme other, yet the text looks askance on this public queerness. Queerness might be too unmanagable for this academic, populist, yet progressive text and its presumed audience of black heterosexuals. This section on the gay pride march does

not describe the skin tones nor presumed racial or ethnic identifications of these marchers, a notable absence in a book concerned with race and society.

This analysis of otherness questions the raced and sexualized construction of authenticity:

> If authentic Black people (according to the legacy of scientific racism) are heterosexual, then LGBT Black people are less authentically Black because they engage in allegedly "White" sexual practices. This entire system of sexual regulation is turned on its head when heterosexual African Americans reject promiscuity yet advocate for a Black eroticism (Collins *Black Sexual Politics* 106).

This section of the book preaches to a black heterosexual audience who needs to hear how their homophobia hurts their "brothers and sisters." Yet, the larger and more complex problem goes unexplored: How does homophobia hurt individuals and make it impossible to dismantle racism while continuing to overlook the sexual, racial, classed, and gendered complexity in each human being? That diminution increases fear and re-entrenches racism, homophobia, sexism, and classism. The project of the book may be to create a progressive black sexual politics, yet the surface-level analysis of sexuality remains troubling.

"A situation in which White men view Black male bodies as sexual objects potentially creates a homoerotic space that is incompatible with ideas of straight White masculinity" (Collins 31). Yet how discordant is the space of a Mapplethorpe photo when the controlling artist is white and male and the controlled object is black and male? In the section on "Sexual Dominance," the text quotes James Baldwin's explanation that the black man is seen as a "walking phallic symbol," a quote that Mapplethorpe seems to take to the pixellated extreme (qtd. in *Black*

Sexual Politics 207). Black men as sexual objects are actually "seen" in one sense. The black man in the photo "Derrick Cross, 1983" is turned away from the camera and has his fingers entwined over his right shoulder and the muscles of his well-oiled torso, arms, and buttocks fill the center of the frame. Unseen are the many other dimensions of this man—his childhood, his desires, his story of why he took off his clothes for this photo shoot, and perhaps how he benefited from it. Also unseen but hyper visible in the Mapplethorpe black nude photos is the power that this white photographer exerted over his models—the power of the artist creating photography that he would reproduce and sell. This links back to the notion that photography (and video) are consumable media, which are interpreted by viewers through their own identifications and disidentifications. The plethora of interpretations are woven into the consumption of these images—through the production and purchase of calendars, greeting cards, and prints of what has become a Mapplethorpe industry and its adjacent mythology. Although the queerness of Mapplethorpe's images extends to his subjects, the objects and poses, the racialized desire is part of the controversy and its longstanding commercial success. Queerness in Mapplethorpe's photos is gendered, racialized, and fetishized, but the abbreviated discussion of the photos in *Black Sexual Politics,* which could use these images as a prologue to examine the power of white (or black) homosexual masculinity. By providing only a racial analysis the nuances of colonialism and homoeroticism go unspoken.

There are two moments in *Black Sexual Politics* when queer women appear, and they illustrate moments of national controversy and personal violence. When

the text discusses Marlon Riggs' documentary *Tongues Untied* (scheduled to air on PBS in 1991) and Cheryl Dunye's feature film *Watermelon Woman* (1997) it focuses on how each film was censored or interpreted by politicians and the media. Riggs' film was pulled from the *P.O.V.* television series and United States Senators questioned the NEA about its partial funding of the project: "...critics of *Tongues Untied* questioned whether government funding should support art that many found to be obscene" for its depiction of men kissing and a drawing of a penis (Collins 268). Dunye film and its "depiction of lesbian sexuality sparked another NEA funding debate" (Collins 269). Although both films were produced with NEA money, and both center queers of color, these films approached their subjects differently and sustained dissimilar linguistic attacks. Riggs' artsy documentary short with no linear narrative structure was labeled obscene, while Dunye's full-length feature film with a linear storyline and characters that fall in love and discover truths about themselves was called "pornographic" (Moss 55). In other words, the sex between women (of different skin colors) was labeled as porn and the sex between black men was labeled obscene. The term porn contains the notion of titillation, or the attraction to and abhorrence of the film. However, obscenity is a word used for that which should be cast out of society entirely—the very thing that could poison the nation.

Black Sexual Politics sets up the contrast between these films but does not interrogate the classed and gendered differences between the terms obscenity and pornography, nor the ways in which the senators on the NEA funding committee make the distinction between the two and what that might say about the how desire

laces together the discourses of race and sexuality on Capitol Hill. Kevin Thomas, a reviewer for the *Los Angeles Times*, noted that the cross-racial sexual encounter in *Watermelon Woman* was the real tipping point in the controversy (*Black Sexual Politics* 269). This text drops the question of why black-white lesbian sex may have been interpreted by white male senators as pornography and refocuses on black LGBT people who "are certainly more visible than ever before, especially regarding the process of coming out" (270). Although Dunye's movie made lesbians of color visible in popular culture for a brief moment, that visibility was punished with the label of porn. In "The NEA Gets Gay-Bashed," Rep. Peter Hoekstra, a Republican from Michigan, called Dunye's film and several other queer film projects part of a "taxpayer-funded peep show" (Moss 55). To recap: peeping is abhorrent, visibility is powerful, and queer filmmakers continue to be disciplined for showing queers of color on screen.

A second queer woman appears at the end of the chapter "Prisons for our Bodies, Closets for our Minds" as an example of someone marked by multiple oppressions—all of which contributed to her social vulnerability and subsequent murder. Sakia Gunn, a black queer teenager, was stabbed to death by a black male in New York City in 2003. As the text explains, "Sakia Gunn's murder illustrates the connections among class, race, gender, sexuality, and age" and the ways in which these identities contributed to her vulnerability (*Black Sexual Politics* 115). In the retelling of her story Gunn's multiple oppressions played out: the working-class young women were waiting for a bus after dark when several black men began to sexually harass them. Gunn told them that she was a lesbian and one of the men

stabbed her. The text agonizes over whether she was killed because of her gender, class, race, age, or sexuality, or a combination of all these factors. "Her death illustrates how deeply entrenched homophobia can be among many African American men and women, in this case, beliefs that resulted in an attack on a teenaged girl" (*Black Sexual Politics* 115). Gunn's tragic story makes the lesbian of color figure visible, but only as a Polaroid in a morgue. Another danger in the retelling of Gunn's story is that the tight focus on one girl's experience does not interrogate the larger society's biases or the histories of the biases that led to this violent outcome. The end of the chapter in fact uses Gunn's story to point to the vulnerability of all black women in society, which erases her class, age, and sexuality.

Black Sexual Politics depicts two black lesbians, a Liberian filmmaker and a New Jersey teenager, being punished by white men in Senate hearings or black men in street violence. Retelling their stories does not vindicate their experiences nor cause the reader to reflect on his or her complicity in a homosexist system, but exposes their images again to a textual violence; one inflicted by a doctrine of black unity that privileges heterosexuality and masculinity while purporting to advance the understanding of a variety of black sexual identities and practices.

In the article "Can the Queen Speak? Racial Essentialism, Sexuality and the Problem of Authority," Dwight McBride wrestles with the problem of who should speak about race and sexuality together and how this should look. This question concerns authenticity—of the racial and political variety. Yet when questions of authenticity are raised, this often passes as a veiled reference to masculinist versions of the truth. McBride's impetus for this scholarship reminds the reader of

how black GLBT experiences have been erased from African American studies in universities:

> ...as a community of scholars who are serious about political change, healing black people, and speaking truth to black people, we must begin the important process of undertaking a truly inclusive vision of 'black community' and of race discourse (McBride 365).

This call for inclusion suggests that this text will bring queers of color into a larger analysis of race and sexuality. McBride is invested in working from a version of "black community" that has a common mission [often linked to heterocentric narratives about family], and also includes gays and lesbians. However, this presumes a kind of racial essentialism he may need to wriggle out of, and McBride fears that the term community "is always a term in danger of presuming too much" (366). On the other hand, this supplemental approach could make the visibility of lesbians of color nearly impossible.

After criticizing bell hooks' apology for black homophobia on the basis of racist power relations, McBride examines black psychiatrist Frances Cress Welsing's heteronormative brand of racism. According to Welsing, Africa is the authentic center of blackness, and white people are afraid of the black man's ability to have sex with white women and annihilate whiteness through reproduction (McBride 370). To combat this genetic perpetuation of whiteness, McBride interprets Welsing as saying, "the only way to be really black is to resist homosexuality" (370). Yet, to attack Welsing's illogic means that black male bodies, which apparently are the most dangerous bodies in this paradigm, become also the greatest concern for McBride, and he sees this trap.

> These [race] conventions often include, especially in cases involving—though not exclusive to—black cultural nationalism, the denegration of homosexuality and the accompanying peripheralization of women. Underlying much of race discourse, then, is always the implication that all 'real' black subjects are male and heterosexual. Therefore, in partial response to the query with which I began this essay, only these such subjects are best qualified to speak for or to represent the race" (McBride 371).

This quote starts out by talking through the heterocentric and masculinist troubles with discussions of "race" and problematizes the black = male and straight equation. Yet, by separating homosexuality and women in this sentence, he seems to equate homosexual with male and women with heterosexual. For all of this careful analysis, it seems that the homo is still male.

As McBride points out, both poet Essex Hemphill and Welsing make essentializing moves in constructing their ethos. Hemphill cites his high school experience as a black gay man, and Welsing cites her experience as a black woman in a black community (373). His point is that essentializing (or retelling a race narrative from childhood) does not help the writer examine race or sexuality, but it does provide a place from which a writer has the authority to speak. Perhaps this rhetorical move is part of the reason that so many white academics seem to shy away from figuring out how race impacts their scholarship, and why so many heterosexual academics will not touch queer theory—although not talking about race already always is racialized, and the absence of queerness already seems a bit queer. McBride asserts, "...if I am thinking about race, I should already be thinking about gender, class and sexuality" (377). In addition, if I am thinking about sexuality, I should already be thinking about race, gender, and class. But what if sexuality =

men to this writer? Then when McBride thinks about gender, he is already centered on male bodies, not female ones.

> And what of women? They would appear, in the confines of race discourse, to be ever the passive players. They are rhetorically useful in that they lend legitimacy to the black male's responsibility for their care and protection, but they cannot speak any more than the gay or lesbian brother or sister can (McBride 376).

Consider the rhetorical gymnastics in this section, which comes just after a description of Baldwin playing the part of a race man. McBride glances on the problem of voice for women in race discourse, while balancing the assumption that women are straight with the sudden emergence at the end of the sentence of lesbians. The syntax in this section: "...the gay or lesbian brother or sister..." mixes gender, sexuality, and race while emphasizing lesbian brothers and sisters. While [straight] black women are lumped with black gays and lesbians here, there could be some acknowledgement of how black lesbian experience is impacted by the intersecting discourses of femininity, masculinity, blackness, and heterosexuality. What this means in conjunction with an experience of "community" has even more to do with space (and neighborhoods), movement, and the intersections of privilege.

McBride uses a quote by Hemphill to decry the absence of gay men in his education: "I can't become a whole man simply on what is fed to me: watered-down versions of Black life in America. I need the ass-splitting truth to be told, so I will have something pure to emulate, a reason to remain loyal" (qtd. in McBride 364). Although Hemphill was writing about his life and needs, by using this quote McBride masculinizes "Black life in America." If the vital truth of black queer life is said to be "ass-splitting," the figure of the black lesbian has already been sent from the room.

From Butler to Collins to McBride a decidedly inclusive approach continues to overwrite the figure of the lesbian of color. Once examined, the disturbing silences in these theoretical texts are not quiet at all. Voices in the empty spaces seem to whisper that there is something off-kilter within the entire structure of each theoretical project—the hierarchical and self-centered language that must be used to create theory limits exactly what can be said, whose bodies are considered, and who might be listening. As Trinh T. Minh-ha concludes:

> The other is never to be known unless one arrives at a *suspension* of language, where the reign of codes yields to a state of constant non-knowledge, always understanding that…one arrives without having taken a single step…unless one understands the necessity of a practice of language which remains, through its signifying operations, a process constantly unsettling the identity of meaning and speaking/writing subject, a process never allowing I to fare without non-I (76).

Yet the writer must continue to wonder which non-Is can be considered in the scope of her theoretical project, because it is not enough to mean well, acknowledge ignorance, unsettle meaning and meet a deadline. With an awareness of the faults of language itself, and an eye toward writing a more just society, the figure of the lesbian of color must become one of the visible invisible figures woven into the center of critical race theory and queer theory.

Chapter 2: Rhetorically irreverent, politically radical, and deeply personal: Lesbians of Color Organize

> *So, not subscribing to the ever-present myths of 'invisibility', 'incompetence' or 'born poets with natural rhythm', we decided to do a flyer calling for fiction by dark lesbians—and waited to see what would happen.* (Linda Jean Brown, introduction to *Azalea: A Magazine for Third World Lesbians*, Fall 1980 vol. 3, no. 3 Short story issue)
>
> "Queer archival material constitutes a precarious historical record."
>
> Polly J. Thistlethwaite

In the late 1970s and early 1980s lesbians of color organized the Azalea Collective to publish a magazine for themselves, created the Combahee River Collective to effect social change in their community, and published *This Bridge Called my Back: Radical Women of Color Speak Out* to speak back to the white feminist movement. Although only a few copies of *Azalea: A Magazine for Third World Lesbians* have survived in library archives, and the manifesto written by the Combahee River Collective has been reprinted in several collections of feminist writing, *This Bridge Called my Back* reached mainstream audiences in the early 1980s and continues to be quoted by authors today. Although most of these writings were targeted to other lesbians of color and were not presented as academic theory, these texts critique mainstream culture and the writers leverage their experiences against the master narratives that sustain heterocentric white privilege. In this way, these rarely-examined texts, movements, and authors wrote and enacted theory that influenced later writers in queer theory, black feminism, and critical race theory. However, the ongoing tangle of visibility, invisibility, and hypervisibility for lesbians of color maintain the abbreviated and under-theorized conversations about

these writers and publications from the 1970s-1980s. One thread of this tangle is connected to the development of queer studies.

Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick linked courage, "coming out," and the public eye in her analysis of homosexuality in *Epistemology of the Closet*. However, the impact of queer visibility changes in relation to the racial, ethnic, and class-based markings of one's body, and the space in which that body is recognized as queer. In the introduction to *Home Girls: A Black Feminist Anthology* Barbara Smith explains how being "out" as a black lesbian was dangerous, and she notes that she never stood on her doorstep to tell her neighbors that she was a lesbian. They figured out her sexuality after seeing her with her girlfriend and another lesbian couple in their neighborhood and then someone burned her car (xlviii). For the sake of her safety, Smith would have been better off invisible to her neighbors, but her black lesbian body was invisible in that working-class black neighborhood until it became hyper visible and then her apartment was vandalized and her car was destroyed. To be recognized as a black lesbian was dangerous in this neighborhood, and Smith did not have control over how her body was seen and interpreted. This story stands in contrast with the traditional (white) coming out narrative that presumes the speaker gains additional political power by announcing his or her homosexuality to a heterosexual audience. Much of the early work in queer theory described bodies which were white, male, American, and middle-to-upper class, and Smith's queer body existed outside of these privileges.

At the time of these attacks Smith had already been organizing with other lesbians of color and writing from her experiences. From 1973-1997 community-

based groups, small presses, and activist scholars such as Smith, Gloria Anzaldúa, Cherríe Moraga, and Audre Lorde brought together lesbians of color and other activist women of color. Within these spaces and through the hard work of these collectives lesbians of color wrote and published alternative discourses.

This chapter works on several contradictory levels, and perhaps it is a chapter at war with its own terms. On one hand, these organizations and collectives were visible and important to the women working in them during this time period and later to the women and men who read and quoted the texts they published. In the 1980s and 1990s, classes in racial and ethnic studies and women's studies assigned texts such as *This Bridge Called my Back: Radical Women of Color Speak Out* and *Zami: A New Spelling of my Name* and encouraged many white middle-class college students to examine how privileges connected to race, class, and sexuality have contributed to their constructions of the world. In 2012 this work continues by discussing anthologies published in the 2000s or examining writing by current queer of color writers or distributing shorter pieces written in the 1970s and 1980s that have been republished in other collections. Pedagogy and theory have been closely linked since the inception of women of color feminism, and this point is illustrated by the inclusion of syllabi, annotated bibliographies, and literary criticism in the anthology *But Some of Us are Brave: All the Women Are White, All the Blacks are Men: Black Women's Studies*.

On the other hand, to talk about the problem of visibility is to call upon an objective vision of what has been examined and studied, and to act as though there is a shared historical and academic canon that these writers and texts have not been

able to enter. This underlying assumption of a literary canon may sound outdated to some readers. However, in 2012 Norton anthologies continue to organize literature by genres and historical periods, or by authors' racial or ethnic backgrounds and national identities, so it is difficult to argue that canon-formation has ceased. The canon has just grown more spitting heads. Some of the scholars in women's studies and racial or ethnic studies have argued for the inclusion of particular authors and texts into canonical anthologies. This multicultural approach argues for particular kinds of visibility without critiquing the normative political and curricular work of canon formation. The processes by which canons construct knowledge necessitate the alienation and marginalization of texts and theory by lesbians of color, and the canonical anthologies themselves smooth over the craven and simplistic racialized and gendered equations of representation. In contrast, this chapter examines rarely-seen texts with the tenets of queer theory, black feminist theory, and critical race theory in mind to rethink the future work of these discourses.

Since canon formation is influenced by university policies and faculty members who conform to and write those policies, too often these canons continue to uphold whiteness, maleness, middle-to-upper-class status, and heterosexuality. In fact, while a university administrator could have the body of a woman of color and even go home to her wife at the end of the day, she attends meetings in which the unspoken consciousness and the policies of the university continue to privilege whiteness, maleness, social class status, and heterosexuality. In fact, this faculty member of color may be tapped to join a committee in order to enact the

university's diversity policies, with the understanding that he or she cannot question the underlying values of white privilege. As Jacqui Alexander explains,

> Institutional claims made within 'diversity' discourses become the claims within which people of color are understood. They represent people of color. But it is in their centrality that helps us to understand the force of contestation and the reason why any challenge to them runs the risk of being discounted and silenced. Discourses, which on the surface appear benign, become quite aggressive in the context of an ideological struggle to transform the relations of representation, for the institution would want its definitions to stand as the only legitimate claim relating to the subjects of whom diversity is ostensibly about ("Anatomy…" 133).

Ideologies and bodies do not neatly fit together—no matter how important affirmative action policies have been and continue to be in universities and other workplaces. By cherry-picking representative texts and fixing them through the control of curriculum and hiring practices, the university structure remains yoked to capitalism, white privilege, and hetero-masculinity. For example, articles as radical as "To Tame a Wild Tongue" by Anzaldúa often have their revolutionary possibility blunted by both the constraints of faculty and student assessment.

So this chapter uses the term "visibility" with a guarded reserve and with a bit of a wink. Chapter 4 of this dissertation considers how the white lesbian became a media darling in 2008, therefore what happened to the figure of the lesbian of color from 1970-1990 bears on this cultural analysis. Although activist movements do not always build on the successes of their forebears, and history ping-pongs its way between social advancements and backlashes for particular minority groups, lesbians of color published challenging writing and worked on vital community reforms during the 1970s, 1980s, and early 1990s.

Three sites of alternative discourses are examined in this chapter: *Azalea: A Magazine for Third World Lesbians* (first published in 1977, issues available from 1978-83), Combahee River Collective (texts and community work, organized in 1973), and *This Bridge Called my Back* (anthology and narrative history, first discussed in 1979). These sites were active as early as 1973, and several women worked or were published in more than one site (Barbara Smith and Cherríe Moraga are notable examples). The ramifications of their activist work continued to echo after each collective or organization folded, and many of the women involved agitated and published their work in various realms outside of the ones described here. This chapter presents glimpses of lesbian of color organizing in the United States, but does not presume to represent an exhaustive narrative.

Occasionally this discussion segues into the analysis of works by women who did not identify as lesbian during these years (or who relabeled their sexual identification later, like Sapphire). Instead of erasing these women from the chapter to make a smoother historical account, their contributions have been included to stretch and analyze the constraints of queer studies in and through critical race studies. In addition, many of the central organizers such as Moraga, Anzaldúa, and Smith identified as lesbian, but the women active in three of the four organizations were not all lesbians. This chapter begins with an examination of the only organization composed entirely of lesbians at the time, Azalea Collective, which published *Azalea: A Magazine for Third World Lesbians* for a lesbian of color audience.

1. *Azalea Magazine*: Fiction, sketches and nonfiction by "dark lesbians"

From 1977-1983 *Azalea: A Magazine for Third World Lesbians* published articles, poetry, and short stories by many writers who went on to publish for larger presses and more mainstream publications. Michelle Cliff, Cherríe Moraga, Donna Allegra, Sapphire, Becky Birtha, Chrystos, Barbara Smith, Beverly Smith, Jewelle Gomez, Donna Allegra and other women published the first short stories, articles and sketches that helped them imagine themselves as writers and artists. Audre Lorde, already an award-winning poet, published sections from *Zami: A New Spelling of My Name* before it was accepted for publication. The magazine based in Brooklyn, New York served as a virtual community for lesbians of color and seeded a flush of publications by more mainstream publishers.

The World Cat index reveals that copies exist in only 12 libraries in the United States, and none of these archives holds a full print run. Although LGBT archives may exist at the mercy of progressive libraries and universities, LGBT-of-color materials are situated even more precariously between race studies, sexuality studies, and the whims of individual archivists. Through the determined work of Wendy Larson at the Social Justice Archives, the University of Minnesota preserved a few copies, but these issues of *Azalea* were not published using archival materials. They were valuable to a particular community at a particular point in time and with the budget constraints of the collective they used the cheapest paper and ink they could find. *Azalea* was not a university press using acid-free paper and contemplating subject indexing for cataloging purposes. For these theoretical and

practical reasons *Azalea* has been only tangentially discussed in queer scholarship or race studies.

Although *Azalea* published many writers living in the New York area, it also published authors from Asia, Africa, and South America and sent copies of the magazine to writers as payment (Streitmatter 175). Issues were mailed in brown paper wrappers to readers in many parts of the United States and, upon request, free copies were sent to women living in prisons. It could be argued that this focus on Third World lesbians may have given this magazine a larger geographical reach than other feminist publications of its time.

The term "Third-World Lesbian" was chosen by Azalea Collective members but the term "Lesbian of Color" also appears in articles within *Azalea*, which indicates that both terms were in use during the late 1970s and early 80s. Although both terms intended to encompass women with African-American, Chicano, Latino, Asian, and Native ethnicities and cultural backgrounds, the term Third-World has currently gone out of common usage. Women in the Azalea Collective published writers living in countries where race and ethnicity were not always based on visual markers, and some *Azalea* readers and writers living in the United States hesitated to use American-based racial language and to call the United States their home country. Transnational feminism is the more recent term used for the conversation between gender studies and postcolonial studies, and some texts are additionally classified under diaspora studies. Yet the activist and theoretical work around essentialism, coalitions, and the problems of language swirled and eddied during the 1970s and 1980s--under different terms.

The Azalea Collective wrestled with how to publish while supporting nonhierarchical policies and this tension contributed to provocative and artistic issues. The editorial policy from volume 3, number 1 (winter 1979-80) stated that the magazine would print whatever readers sent them, and each issue was loosely based around a theme. As Rodger Streitmatter explains in *Unspeakable: The Rise of the Gay and Lesbian Press in America*, *Azalea's* editorial policy was unusual, even among lesbian magazines: "The founders were so determined not to perpetuate oppression that they refused to assess the quality of contributions sent to them, publishing all material without any editing" (175). The quality of the writing in these magazines did not suffer due to this open policy, though. Although she was already becoming established as a poet, several of Audre Lorde's poems and a piece of what later was published as *Zami*: *A New Spelling of My Name* were published in *Azalea*.

In the article, "But Some of us are Brave Lesbians: The Absence of Black Lesbian Fiction" Jewelle Gomez points out that she and Donna Allegra were both published for the first time in *Azalea* (23). Sapphire, who worked in the Azalea collective for several years and went on to publish two books of poetry and two novels, contributed several sketches to different issues and published a short story in the Short Story issue (1980). Members of the collective also published their own poems and sketches in the issues. Birtha, who went on to write children's books, and Linda Jean Brown, whose story was reprinted in *Home Girls*, both worked in the collective for several years. In this way, *Azalea* served both as a grounding point and

organizing project for the collective based in Brooklyn, New York, and as a visionary publication for lesbians of color in the United States and around the world.

The porous boundary between the collective and the writers reflected the importance of the publication for lesbians of color, and the editorial policy was built upon an ethical responsibility to the readers:

> Azalea is a magazine by and for Third World Lesbians. We try to remain non-elitist and non-traditional; working by a collective process and rotating editors' spot with each issue. Work is chosen for publication through an open-door policy: we print what You send to us; anything that is important to ourselves as Third World lesbians. We pay in copies (if you submit work you will receive a copy of the issue that it appears in).

The editors of *Azalea* had a working-class and populist vision of who their readers were, although several of the contributors also included their college degrees next to their hometowns in their biographies. According to magazine policy, women in prison were assured that they could request a free copy of *Azalea* in an unmarked envelope, which was also the policy at *Lesbian Tide* and *Dyke*, two other lesbian magazines publishing in the 1970s (Streitmatter 174). The cover of every issue of *Azalea* listed the price of $2.00 or $3.00 and the note "(more if you can, less if you can't)". On the cover of volume 3, number 1, the editors apologized for selling the magazine: "To offset our debts and also to raise money for the Third World Lesbian Writers' Conference, this issue is being sold for $2.00—sorry." Although the Astrea Foundation [now known as the Astrea Lesbian Foundation for Justice] gave the Azalea Collective a grant to cover the printing of the Short Stories issue (Fall 1980 vol. 3, no. 3), there is a record of only one other major grant: the Coordinating Council of Literary Magazines (CCLM). In the front of the Poetry Edition (1982

vol. 4, no. 3), supported by the CCLM's award, a short editor's note proclaims, "We are sorry this issue is late. We have had many problems this year. We appreciate your support and understanding during these times" (1). The collective or financial problems at Azalea may have led to the dissolution of the magazine in 1983, after the publication of Journals: Journal Pieces and Letters (vol. 5, no. 1).

The egalitarian values of the publication and its outreach to women behind bars provide a place for stories, and characters, that may have been edited out of other magazines. In "A Love Twister," a short story by Coqui (Fall 1980: vol. 3, no. 3) the main character Pepe, a small-time marijuana dealer, falls for Star. When Star is arrested for a parole violation and goes to Riker's Island Prison for three years, Pepe tries to date other women and forget about Star. The story ends with Pepe and Star embracing—after Star's release from prison. By this time both characters are also working on their sobriety. Many of the stories in *Azalea* have either a romantic ending or a tragic ending, and all are touched by moments of yearning for community, connection, and self-determination. However, there is a diverse mix of ethnicities in the characters, and some of them negotiate spaces of privilege and oppression.

The rare instance of a character calling on her class privilege appears in the story "First Affair" by Michiyo Cornell (Fall 1980: vol. 3, no. 3, 1-2). In a condensed version of a relationship that lasts several weeks, Louise and Myra go to a bar together then fumble around in bed. Myra's dad is a lawyer and she uses this info as a threat against a bartender in order to buy beer even though they are teenagers. Although Myra uses her father's clout, she also fears that he will find out about her

sexual relationship with Louise and force her out of their middle-class family. Louise comes from a more working-class background and she is baffled by how Myra calls on her class privilege within a same-sex relationship. The tensions between the women finally force Louise to leave Myra. Although some of the stories and articles describe love lost or love found, other pieces delve into the complexities of interlocking political identities and oppressions.

Editors Joan Gibbs and Claudette Furlonge include a provocative introduction for the Special 2nd Anniversary Issue that focuses on "3rd World LESBIAN MOTHERS" (vol. 3, no. 1 Winter '79-80). In their essay Gibbs and Furlonge analyze how normalcy is promoted in family court.

> Probably one of the most vicious forms of anti-lesbian oppression is the treatment of lesbian mothers and their children by the State, most particularly through the family court system. Under the present system of government, the nuclear family -- i.e. father, mother and 2.5 children – is promoted as the 'normal' family unit and to live any other way is viewed as a threat to the entire social, political and economic order. This idea, the nuclear family, is at the heart of the oppression of all women and lesbians and gay men (1).

After weaving together commentary on the family courts; the Moynihan report; family violence in heterosexual families; the prohibitive costs of day care, health care, abortions, adoption, and artificial insemination Gibbs and Furlonge stake a claim for lesbian mothers to make their own choices about motherhood. "We also feel that the right to have or not to have children should be a right available to all women regardless of color, finances or sexual orientation" (2). The tension between a systematic analysis of the troubling conditions of motherhood and the overarching desire for individual choice in the matter, while contradictory, holds together the

paragraphs of the introduction. In addition, many of these lesbian moms had their children when they were married to (or dating) men, and are now working to support their children after separating from or divorcing those men. The working-class lesbian mothers they describe in this introduction do not ache to stay home with their children like a fantasy 1970's housewife [a.k.a. rich and white], instead they find the most lucrative job possible to feed and clothe their children. These lesbian mothers of color in 1979 were not portrayed as heroes, but their difficulties were put in perspective by the larger cultural movements of the time. Yet, these editors do not perpetuate a rift between women with children and women without children, and they do not pretend that lesbian mothers are saints, either. The non-dogmatic nature of *Azalea* allows editors to juxtapose texts together in unconventional ways. Published six years after Roe v. Wade made abortion legal, the first piece in the 3rd World Lesbian Mothers issue describes a teenager procuring an abortion.

In "Abortion" Audre has an abortion the day before her 18th birthday. "The process took about 15 hours and cost $40, which was a week and a half's pay" (4). However, the first price that she was quoted was $300, and she felt lucky to find a more affordable provider, even if Mrs. Munoz was not a doctor. The character in this story flirts with a nurse at work, has a boyfriend named Gerry, and says her pregnancy is from another guy. The advice of the restroom attendant at the end of the story: "You gon' back home to your mama, yet?" she asked dryly" (8). Audre Lorde includes a version of this story in chapter 15 of *Zami: a New Spelling of My Name*, which was published by Crossing Press in 1982--two years after the *Azalea*

debut. Including this story in *Azalea* illuminates the sometimes-stormy relationships that lesbian daughters may have with their mothers, while it also presents a woman saying no to motherhood.

By 1979 Lorde had already published seven books of poetry, including *The Black Unicorn* (1978). Lorde's writing was already relatively well-known outside of lesbian or women's bookstores since she had been included in an African American anthology edited by James Baldwin. Lorde's publication in *Azalea* brought clout to the magazine, and attracted readers. Lorde may have enjoyed knowing that her writing would be read by lesbians of color who were seeking a sense of community and not by critics attempting to figure out her politics. Lorde may have also sent her poems and short stories to *Azalea* to help the magazine continue and to stay artistically connected to a larger audience of lesbians of color.

The 3rd World Lesbian Mothers issue includes two pieces by Lorde and one by Michelle Cliff, all of which were republished later. Cliff's piece, "On Claiming an Identity They Taught Me to Despise," weaves together quotes from *Wide Sargasso Sea*, by Jean Rhys, *Jane Eyre*, and dictionary definitions. Cliff also talks about childhood experiences.

> "' Was anyone in this class not born in the United States?' the teacher asked us in the fifties. I was in the third grade. I stood up and mumbled, 'Jamaica,' and became the focus of their scrutiny. I filled their silence with rapid lies" (Cliff 36).

This excerpt became part of the collection *Claiming the Identity They Taught me to Despise*, published by Persephone Press the same year as the excerpt appeared in *Azalea* (1980). Persephone Press also published the first edition of *This Bridge*

Called My Back. It may be evident that several writers began publishing their work with *Azalea*, and several women talked about the magazine as a personal lifeline.

In the Introduction to the Short Story Issue (Fall 1980 vol. 3, no. 3), Linda J. Brown describes the personal investment that she has in this issue:

> "This special short story issue began to grow out of a particular need I have as a dark lesbian womon [sic] who writes fiction, to see and read work by other dark womyn [sic] working as I do. Until now, in circles I was a part of, I hadn't found very many dark lesbians who are fiction writers, writing womon-identified [sic] material.
>
> "So, not subscribing to the ever-present myths of 'invisibility', 'incompetence' or 'born poets with natural rhythm', we decided to do a flyer calling for fiction by dark lesbians—and waited to see what would happen.
>
> "What did happen was out mailboxes flooded with work from sisters in nearly every part of the country. We found we had to limit page space in the issue because womyn sent such a volume of interesting, innovative, beautiful work.
>
> "Fiction writing is a solitary craft, I think, partially defined by the necessity of 'prolonged creative solitude'. But, solitude need not mean 'closeted'. There are sisters I have spoken to since beginning work on this issue, back in April, who have kept their stories hidden away in desk drawers, figuring no one wanted to read them.
>
> "I hope the publication of this first collection of short fiction by dark lesbians will spark the flame to the continuing work and support of this very important, little seen (so far) part of lesbian literature: Womon-identified [sic] fiction, written by dark lesbians.
>
> "We are excited by this issue and hope all of you will be, too. As usual, we need, appreciate, and solicit your feedback.
>
> Join us in celebration" (Brown).

This introduction refutes the notion that lesbians of color are invisible by describing all of the work that the editor received after the request for stories. However, this

story may reinforce the trouble of visibility: that until one is asked and responds, she could essentially be invisible as a lesbian of color. However, in this metaphor the moment of publication overlaps with the moment of visibility, although a byline is not quite the same as a photograph or video. In addition, visibility in a neighborhood or a city looks quite different from visibility in a publication, and does not necessitate skills in literacy or connections in publication. This slippage between the invisible and hyper visible lesbian of color is entwined with class oppression.

A piece in the Short Story Issue (Fall 1980 vol. 3, no. 3) depicts a creative lesbian of color living on welfare. In "The Refrigerator Story" by Sapphire the unnamed narrator agonizes over how her life has turned out and decides to kill herself by crawling into the refrigerator.

> The thirty-six dollars a week that she received in unemployment benefits and the forty-five dollars every two weeks from welfare never seemed to cover meager necessities, much less dreams (37).

As the story ends, the narrator places her bikinied behind on the bottom shelf and gently pulls the door closed. This metaphorical closeting (and apparent suicide) is the opposite of the editor's call for lesbians of color to send in their writing and become visible in print, but the two urges are directly related to questions of visibility and power. Sapphire continues to examine the importance of internal emotional health and external visibility after leaving the Azalea Collective.

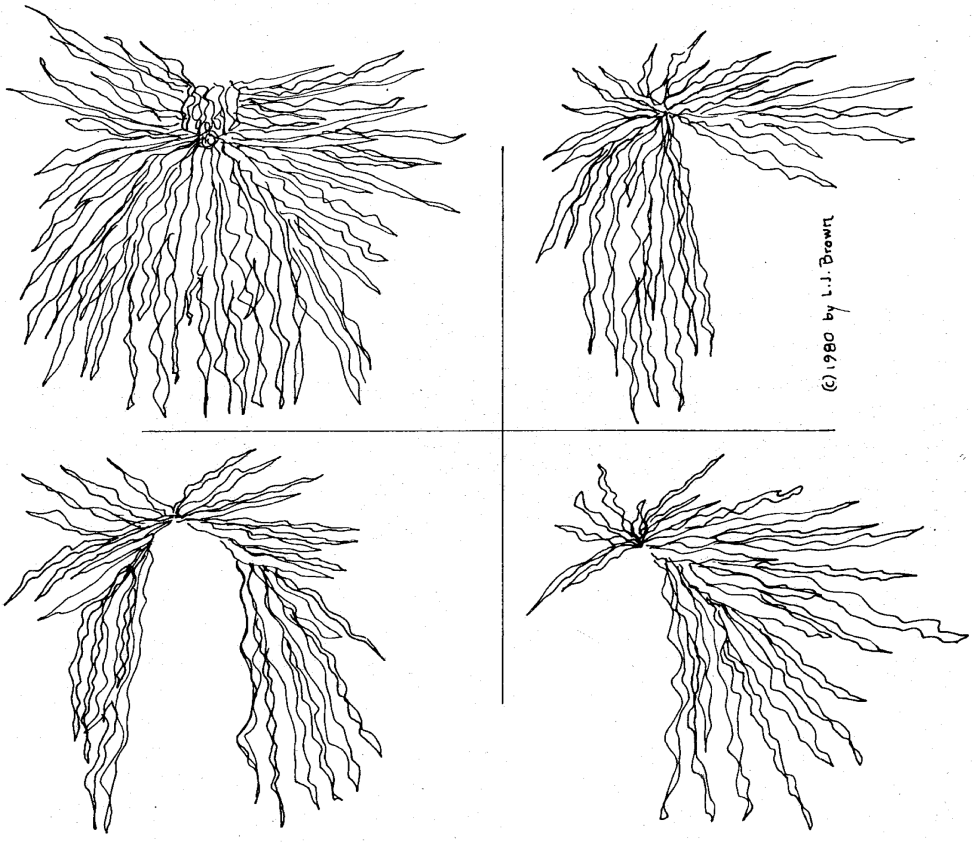
Sapphire's first novel, *Push,* published in 1996, centers around a young black girl who gives birth to two of her father's children and teaches herself to read and write. *The Kid*, published in 2012, follows Precious's second child through his

adolescence. At the beginning of *Push* Precious Jones walks down the street and remarks on her invisibility as a poor, black overweight young woman in Harlem. Although visibility may be a situational and shifting yardstick, it continues to matter—in a feet-hitting-the-pavement, living day-to-day kind of mattering. After all, we do not discard the notion of power simply because we don't always know how or why it functions or how it matters in different spaces and places. Because of its shifting, controversial, nod to modernist logics of old and its seeming unconcern for the revolutionary "queer world order" the question of visibility still counts, particularly when the people least heard from are impacted the most negatively by racism, sexism, homophobia, and classism. Sapphire's novels continue to examine the question of visibility that Azalea Collective members asked in 1980.

Although constrained by the technologies of the 1980s, self-portraits hold a place of particular importance in *Azalea*, and one entire issue was dedicated to graphics. The 3rd Anniversary Issue: Graphics: Limited Edition (vol. 4, no. 1) published in Winter 80-81 published these sketches by Irare Sabásu, Linda Jean Brown and several other artists.

"Dyke Next Door" by Irare Sabásu

In this sketch the black woman looks directly at the viewer and her afro declares both her strength and her normalcy. This visual combination brings out the importance of both change and community. Sabásu's biography describes her as a "Freelance artist, poet, writer. West-Indian amazon. Taurus-Gypsie. Come to participate in the NYC dance—and to add a few steps of her own. Goddess willing." Sabásu also was active in the Lesbian Herstory Archives [LHEF] based in Brooklyn (Thistlethwaite 167).



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This sketch, "sea anemonae or fine-line drawing or dreading for the revolution" by Lindajean Brown, also focuses on the power of black women's hair. The four sections of the sketch show the female figure in motion, while the absent facial features allow the viewer to move into this image as she wishes. Although the graphics issue contains several abstract works, the self-portraits in *Azalea* represent images of beauty, strength, and kinetic energy.

Many of the autobiographical pieces in *Azalea* call out to fellow lesbians of color from a space of isolation. One notable example appears in Fall 1980 vol. 3, no. 3, the *Short Story Issue*. Rosita Angulo Miret Libre De Marula explains the release she felt after extending her name by adding "Miret Libre De Marula" to the Angulo that she had to use after marrying a man. She uses this issue of *Azalea* "to reach more Spanish lesbians. 'Lesbiana, lesbiana, dime donde estas (lesbian, lesbian, tell me where are you),' she repeated to herself rejoycing [sic] her arrival of this point to her head, and almost singing to herself a tune" (12). The piece ends with a verse in Spanish where she calls out to find other lesbians like her in New York (12-13). In the Short Story issue, the editors found a space for De Marula's experimental and untitled piece without translating the ending of the piece from Spanish to English. The non-hierarchical editorial policy allows texts to spark throughout the pages of *Azalea*, and expands the vision of their publication's target audience.

Back page advertisements indicate that *Azalea* was used by scholars in women's studies to contact lesbians across the United States. The classifieds in Fall 1980, vol. 3, iss. 3 advertise for Cleis Press (Minneapolis, MN), B.C.A.R. publications (New York), and two professors in Illinois who explain, "Julia Penelope (Stanley) and Susan Wolfe are seeking personal narratives from wimmin that respond to the question, 'Why do Wimmin Marry Men?'" (40). *Azalea* built a network of readers and writers that extended beyond the New York area, based on the contributors' biographies and the advertisements. The issues available from 1979-1983 contain work by lesbians with several different racial and ethnic backgrounds, and although many of the contributors are from the New York area, nearly all submissions

assume or speak from a working-class background—for the characters, authors, and readers.

Reading issues of *Azalea: A Magazine by Third World Lesbians* provides a snapshot of a moment in lesbian of color organizing: a moment of political conflict and financial difficulty buoyed up an outpouring of critical and creative writing. Since each issue of *Azalea* was organized by a different editorial team, the magazine's layout, size, color, cover, and title were altered frequently. World Cat catalogues this publication as "*Azalea: A Magazine for Third-World Lesbians*" although some issues the title is listed as "*Azalea: A Magazine for and by Third-World Lesbians*." Some editors spend little time or space discussing the theme of their issue, while others muse at length on the potential impact of their issue on the reader and society. The grassroots editorial structure, space limitations on prolific authors, and the high quality of the sketches, stories, poems, journal entries, and letters show how successfully *Azalea* built and sustained a literary community for lesbians of color.

2. Combahee River Collective: A 21st Century Manifesto Written in 1977

In the 1970s the Combahee River Collective opened women's shelters, argued about solidarity and commitment, and worked to improve their community for women of color. In the anthology, *But Some Of Us Are Brave: All the Women Are White, All the Blacks Are Men: Black Women's Studies*, editors Gloria T. Hull, Patricia Bell Scott, and Barbara Smith present the formative documents (including the Combahee Manifesto, feminist syllabi, and journal articles) from this era of black feminism. As this anthology demonstrates, the key players in Combahee and other

collective black feminist work stitched together the colleges and universities where several of them worked with the neighborhoods where they agitated for change. Outside of Combahee River Collective, many feminists of color in the 70's and 80's worked together for local social change, recognizing that sexual, racial, and ethnic divisions were only distractions when the larger enemy was social injustice.

The Combahee River Collective organized in Boston, but traces its genesis back to a 1973 Eastern Regional meeting of the National Black Feminist Organization in New York [NFBO], a few months earlier. According to "The Combahee River Collective Statement," the manifesto written by the group in 1977, after several years they formally broke with the NFBO because of political and class-based issues. After analyzing and discussing the NFBO's statements, "They determined that the organization was headed in a reformist direction that would do little for the poor and working classes, most of whom were black. Several socialist and Marxist members had a significant impact on the ideological development of Combahee" (Springer 59). Barbara Smith recalls the influence of Sharon Bourke, a Marxist and seasoned activist who joined the collective and encouraged the group to foreground the analysis of class (Springer 59). This focus has led scholars to categorize the Combahee River Collective's statement as an example of Socialist Feminism, as Nancy MacLean does in her collection of documents from the women's movement.

The first section of this statement motions back to the historical work of black feminists in the 1960's and 70's as Black Panthers and civil rights workers, the middle section addresses the work that they have discussed and completed, and the

final section points ahead to the work that still needs to be done to dismantle many interlinking oppressions. As the statement explains, "...we are actively committed to struggling against racial, sexual, heterosexual, and class oppression and see as our task the development of integrated analysis and practice based upon the fact that the major systems of oppression are interlocking" (Combahee 9). This explanation of how interlocking and interrelated oppressions impact their lives and the unspoken disgust with the notion that oppressions can be ranked in order of importance or prioritized make the statement striking and complex. The statement also deconstructs gender at a time when many white feminists were touting essentialist doctrine. The Combahee River Collective statement, written by a group that included black lesbians, also doubts the political usefulness of lesbian separatism at a time in history when white lesbians were defecting from national feminist organizations.

> We have a great deal of criticism and loathing for what men have been socialized to be in this society: what they support, how they act, and how they oppress. But we do not have the misguided notion that it is their maleness—i.e., their biological maleness—that makes them what they are. As Black women we find any type of biological determinism a particularly dangerous and reactionary basis upon which to build a politic. We must also question whether lesbian separatism is an adequate and progressive political analysis and strategy, even for those who practice it, since it so completely denies any but the sexual sources of women's oppression, negating the facts of class and race (Combahee 14).

Particularly remarkable in this paragraph are the connections between seemingly disparate ideas: men themselves are not solely to blame for their socialization/or gendering, biological/essentialist politics are "reactionary," and the theory of lesbian separatism sidesteps class and race alliances. To take on all of these ideas in

one breath seems radically hopeful—as though once spoken together the ties between the arguments can be rewritten for a more just future. Notice also the shifting ground that they speak from: while the statement written by Combahee members wonders whether lesbian separatism can be useful, the membership of Combahee was drawn primarily, but not exclusively, from lesbians of color. And this membership was not only a dozen women, but the collective writes that "...hundreds of women have been active at different times during the three-year existence of our group" (Combahee 16). According to Springer, Combahee members continued to work together in other organizations, but held their last Black Women's Network Retreat in February 1980 (142).

The function of the Combahee River Collective morphed as the members and their needs changed. Consciousness-raising and supporting the activism of members were both early goals, and later some political rifts arose. The collective also states that members worked on "sterilization abuse, abortion rights, battered women, rape, and health care" in academic and community settings, but does note that "we were not doing political work as a group" before 1976 because of the influence of a few members (17). Working together was not always easy, and the dedication to a non-hierarchical leadership structure was as important as the political work of the group. As the collective explains, "we experienced several months of comparative inactivity and internal disagreements which were first conceptualized as a lesbian-straight split but which were also the result of class and political differences" (Combahee 17). Living these principals necessitated self-examination and the collective includes this in their statement, perhaps to disrupt a utopian visions of collective work. After this

tumultuous time, Combahee River Collective decided to become a study group and began to plan an anthology of black feminist writing. *Home Girls: A Black Feminist Anthology* (Kitchen Table Press 1983) and Kitchen Table Press resulted from this formative work.

From this segment of the statement it seems that Combahee was not always made up of only lesbians of color, but included women of color who identified as heterosexual. However, in Springer's analysis of Combahee she describes the collective as "...the only black lesbian, socialist, feminist organization in the Boston area" and explains how Combahee was asked to support other activist groups because of its political ethos (146). Combahee's embodied and multifaceted approach to ideology emerges through its statement as well: "We need to articulate the real class situation of persons who are not merely raceless, sexless workers, but for whom racial and sexual oppression are significant determinants in their working/economic lives" (13). Although it matters to historians like Springer whether all of the black women in Combahee were lesbians or not, for the women in the collective there was much work to be done, and the group's ideology was shaped by the lesbians and heterosexual women who were active at the time.

While the manifesto can be read and written about, the community-based work that they accomplished has a spottier paper trail. As the Combahee statement notes, the collective often partnered with other groups to work on projects: "we might, for example, become involved in workplace organizing at a factory that employs Third World women or picket a hospital that is cutting back on already inadequate health care to a Third World community, or set up a rape crisis center in

a Black neighborhood" (18). Springer notes, "Instead of dues, donations, or foundation grants, Combahee negotiated its unique political position as a valuable local resource" (146). While scholars years later flail around in archives for something to catalog and examine, the Combahee members at this time were less interested in leaving a historical trail than in responding to their community's crises. Later, several members became active in publishing through Kitchen Table Press and left behind a few more documents. While partnering with other organizations may have made the Combahee work more powerful and the impact more long-ranging, however, the scholarly record depends on a paper trail. Unfortunately, *The Combahee River Collective Statement* does not list the group's accomplishments, but reads as a treatise for analyzing the theories of their political work, and muses on the kinds of work that black feminists might do. As one of the few primary documents in the history of the organization it has been reprinted in several anthologies, including *All the Women are White, All the Blacks are Men, But Some of Us Are Brave, Home Girls: A Black Feminist Anthology*, and *Let Nobody Turn Us Around: Voices of Resistance, Reform, and Renewal*.

The Combahee Statement notes that much more work must be done to make white feminists aware of their racism so that they may work on the analysis of their own privilege: "Eliminating racism in the white women's movement is by definition work for white women to do, but we will continue to speak to and demand accountability on this issue" (Combahee 18). Overall, this statement encapsulates a moment in Black feminism when a group of women were struggling together to do vital work for the benefit of themselves, other Black women, and their communities.

In " 'All of Who I am in the Same Place': The Combahee River Collective," Duchess Harris gleans information by interviewing several of the former members: Barbara Smith, Sharon Page Ritchie, Cheryl Clarke, Margo Okizawa Rey, Gloria Akasha Hull, and Demita Frazier. Many of the Combahee organizers continued community-based work after Combahee dissolved in 1980, and their activism took place in both universities and neighborhoods. This socialist and radical group formed coalitions with other activists in the Boston area to open women's shelters and bring together outraged people in 1979, when twelve Black women were murdered in Boston and public officials were slow to respond (Smith Foreword to Combahee 5). Although many of the members were black lesbians, the group did not mobilize exclusively around African American nor lesbian issues.

Combahee has often been portrayed as an organization of African American lesbians, however, this assumption oversimplifies the women's sexual identities. In addition, the term "black women" meant women with African American and Caribbean backgrounds, who sometimes also had relatives or ancestors with a variety of racial and ethnic backgrounds. For example, Harris interviewed with Okizawa Rey, who was born in Japan to a Japanese mother and a black G.I. father.

The history of Combahee may be as complex as the political arguments and rifts that energized and characterized the collective. However, the manifesto's multi-faceted analysis of power, oppression, and chosen alliances stands in solidarity with the 21st century Critical Race Theory written by Patricia J. Williams and Melissa V. Harris-Perry.

3. This Bridge Called My Back: 1979 planning began, first published in 1981

> Now that we've begun to break the silence and begun to break through the diabolically erected barriers and can hear each other and see each other, we can sit down with trust and break bread together (Toni Cade Bambara Forward vi).

This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color was imagined by Cherríe Moraga and Gloria Anzaldua in 1979 and published in 1981 by Persephone Press. Although the anthology was not focused on lesbian women, both of the editors and twelve of the twenty-nine authors included identified as lesbian. Like the Combahee River Collective, which also had lesbians of color in leadership positions, the concerns of lesbians of color were woven through the heart of their work. What held the anthology together was a shared and disputed notion of what it meant to be a woman of color in the United States, and contributors continued this conversation through their writing and while they edited their anthology.

Collectively the authors, with the guidance of the editors, chose that term over the term Third World Women (used by the Azalea Collective). As Moraga explains in an interview completed in 2005, the authors in *Bridge* who could "pass" as white while culturally and ethnically identifying themselves within this group had some concerns about the new term (56-7). In this sense, the language of alliance among these authors carried an assumption of visual cohesion, or at least a visual identification. Yet, any disagreement about the politics of passing and the trouble of language did not hamper the project, and the overriding desire to publish the views of women of color overrode the rift over language and visuality.

The six sections in the anthology start with remembrances of childhood, include an analysis of the contemporary white feminist movement, consider the

divisions between and among women of color, and arc out to a vision for the future; Children Passing in the Streets: The Roots of our Radicalism; Entering the Lives of Others: Theory in the Flesh; And When you Leave, Take your Pictures With You: Racism in the Women's Movement; Between the Lines: On Culture, Class, and Homophobia; Speaking in Tongues: The Third World Woman Writer; and El Mundo Zurdo: The Vision. Poems, journal entries, and letters fill this radical anthology, so that the term "women of color" is represented with all of its ragged edges. In their biographies some writers call themselves Japanese, New York Puerto Rican, Latina lesbian feminist, Cuban, Latina and Jewish, Black, or Chicana while other writers say nothing about their ethnic identity and focus instead on where they live and with whom.

Many of the prose pieces in *This Bridge* employ questions to examine issues, use personal examples to talk about political and theoretical ideas, and several include footnotes to cite other female writers of color. Some of the pieces bend punctuation or spelling conventions, such as "No Rock Scorns Me as Whore" by Chrystos, and "The Other Heritage" by Rosario Morales. Both Chrystos and Morales include no periods or endmarks in their journal-prose poems, and Morales includes several fragments in Spanish (243-45, 107-108). These experimental pieces read as unedited versions of the authors' experiences, but they also serve as textual evidence of the ongoing struggle with languages and the conversations and alliances between women of color.

Mirtha Quintanales examines her experiences of being a "white-skinned" Third World lesbian from the Caribbean in "I Paid Very Hard for My Immigrant Ignorance"

(150-156). In this personal letter to Barbara Smith, Quintanales explains her frustrations and confusions as an emerging academic working through "this race/culture/class problem" and chains together questions based on personal experiences at home and at conferences (155). The problem that Quintanales encounters is woven into the institution of the academy, and she doubts that she can make a place for herself in the university. By publishing this epistolary conversation between women of color about the whiteness of the university white readers are given an entry point for critiquing these discourses.

This group of writers and their perspectives appeared in print at a moment when they were greatly needed. As Moraga explains in an interview, "It sold 10,000 copies in two weeks. Then the Press proceeded to fall apart. Then there was the horror of trying to get the book back. But Kitchen Table: Women of Color Press emerged from that..." (Anderson 53). Kitchen Table put out the second edition of *This Bridge Called My Back* in 1984. Third Woman Press, run by Norma Alarcon, a Berkeley professor and writer represented in the anthology, published a third edition that includes pictures of sculpture and other art by women of color. Cherríe Moraga's curriculum vitae lists an expanded third edition of *Bridge* published by Third Woman Press in 2002. In 2012, *This Bridge Called My Back* is out of print and only a few copies are available online through Amazon Books. However, for an out-of-print book *This Bridge Called My Back* continues to influence women of color feminism.

Concluding thoughts and lingering questions

The strategic alliances between women of color were built on many factors—and in some cases racial and ethnic identity carried more importance than sexual

orientation. In fact, an insistence on a lesbian-only space in queer (white) scholarship has contributed to a misunderstanding of the importance of racial and ethnic identification for women of color in the seventies and eighties and reinscribed whiteness into queer scholarship and while encouraging idolatry and precluding cultural or historical analysis. José Esteban Muñoz points out that "Audre Lorde, Barbara Smith, [Gloria] Anzaldúa and [Cherríe] Moraga, among others—are barely ever critically engaged and instead…merely adored from a distance" (11). This separation has led to a knot of misunderstanding, perpetuated by white privilege, which may be picked apart by listening closely to the women of color involved in the movement and examining the historical and textual evidence through racialized, feminist, and queer lenses. Lesbian-only scholarship has too often been racialized as white when scholarly analysis focuses on activists' sexual orientations and provides their racial and ethnic identities as a sidenote. A critical engagement with the narratives of the women activists in this study forces an examination of the racial and ethnic dimensions of feminist projects led by lesbians of color.

The structure of this chapter buries the interconnectedness of the sites, publications, and activists. Although the job of the conscious writer is to subvert language and its structures, in too many ways academic writing is linear and activist movements are more weblike and haphazard. It may be simple to say that while Anzaldúa and Morága were planning *This Bridge Called My Back* in San Francisco, Smith and Lorde were developing Kitchen Table Press in New York. In the 1970s and 1980s the white women's movement was tapping into the power of publication

by starting small publishers and magazines, so women of color were also taking part in the Women in Print movement. The issues of *Azalea* sustained and developed lesbian of color writers and readers who supported Kitchen Table and bought *This Bridge Called My Back*. Perhaps *Azalea,* the first organization and publication cited in this chapter, is the one that brought together the greatest number of lesbians of color, since Barbara Smith, Beverly Smith, Audre Lorde, Cherríe Moraga, Jewelle Gomez, Sapphire, and Michelle Cliff were all published there. Lesbians of color in many countries read these issues and were moved by them to submit their own writing. Luckily the Social Justice Archives at the University of Minnesota has a few copies, but these issues of *Azalea* were not necessarily meant to be collected—they were valuable to a specific movement at a particular point in time and with the budget constraints of the collective they used the cheapest paper and ink they could find. *Azalea* was not a university press using acid-free paper and thinking through subject indexes for cataloging purposes.

Springer talks about the difficulty in studying and documenting organizations built by black feminists like Combahee River Collective:

> Secondary source materials, such as organizational newsletters and meeting minutes, corroborate dates of emergence for the five organizations [Black Women's Liberation Coalition, Black Women's Alliance/Third World Women's Alliance, National Black Feminists' Organization/Black Women's Organized for Action, Combahee River Collective, and National Alliance of Black Feminists], but exact dates of black feminist organizations' decline were more difficult to pinpoint. Black feminist organizations often disbanded without an official announcement. Best estimates, based on secondary source materials such as final organizational newsletters, link the decline of black feminist organizations to the rise of 1980's conservatism (9).

While black feminist organizations like the ones Springer studied seemed to decline during the rise of Ronald Reagan in the 1980s, several of the organizations in this chapter did not seem to weaken until several years later. *Azalea: A magazine for Third World Lesbians* published until 1983—and one of its strongest issues "3rd World LESBIAN MOTHERS" (vol. 3, no. 1) came out during the winter of 1979. Kitchen Table Press was initially formed in 1980, and published fifteen books, which may be even more remarkable considering Springer's argument about the damaging effect of the Reagan years on grassroots organizations.

Although Kitchen Table Press is often recalled as Barbara Smith's press, many women worked to keep these collectives functioning. The following women were involved in (or published by) more than one of the organizations studied in this chapter: Barbara Smith, Beverly Smith, Cherríe Moraga, Demitra Frazier, Becky Birtha, Audre Lorde, Michelle Cliff, Chrystos, and Gloria Anzaldúa. Because of their corresponding goals and publishing projects, and because several women met at academic conferences, clumps of women knew each other and worked together at different times—such as Moraga and Barbara Smith when *This Bridge Called my Back* was going to Kitchen Table Press in New York. Moraga moved herself across the country as part of this alliance, and after several years moved back to California. An extensive network of lesbians of color was built in and around three particular cities: San Francisco, Boston, and New York, and this flexible network allowed the women in this chapter to support each other as they worked on various projects.

Successful alternative discourses hold people together at particular moments around common goals, texts, and with a common spirit. When women of

color came together around these projects, and with the leadership of lesbians of color, their critical work encompassed race, class, gender, and sexuality studies in a way that critical race studies and queer theory has not been able to follow (and perhaps still can't quite comprehend). The problem with these particular alternative discourses is that their work was far too rhetorically irreverent, politically radical, and deeply personal to be subsumed within university discourses and coursework, which became even more conservative and business-focused after the Reagan era. Critics today might say that *Home Girls* still seems too "lesbian" to be read in a Diaspora or Black studies class, and too black to be read in women's (or gender studies). *Home Girls* is unlikely to show up on a LGBT syllabus because queer studies is fighting an addiction to narratives about white men with money, and only a few queer theorists are working through the intersections of these privileges and their impact on the institutionalization of queer studies, queer theory, and the (institutionally perceived) needs of queer students on campuses today.

Since alternative discourses are necessary to the discussion of lesbians of color, the analysis of how and why the university disciplines queer studies, gender studies, and critical race studies matters as well.

> To write stories concerning exclusions and invisibilities is to write ghost stories. To write ghost stories implies that ghosts are real, that is to say, that they produce material effects. To impute a kind of objectivity to ghosts implies that, from certain standpoints, the dialectics of visibility and invisibility involve a constant negotiation between what can be seen and what is in the shadows (Gordon 17).

Melissa Harris-Perry uses "The Bridge Poem" in *Sister Citizen: Shame, Stereotypes, and Black Women in America* to introduce the central argument of her book: that Black women in America are saddled with stereotypes that continue to impact their lived experiences, social and political selves, and their complex relationship with their own country. Harris-Perry extends her argument by drawing on interviews with Black women in New York and Chicago who are middle-class and working class; married, unmarried and/or divorced; college educated and high-school educated, as young as 22 and as old as 50; but all of them are heterosexual. This narrowing of the agenda from *This Bridge Called my Back* to *Sister Citizen* suggests that, although Harris-Perry's writing is energized by the writing in the earlier anthology, the figure of the lesbian of color now stands in the shadow of the conversation about the myths and images of Black women.

Chapter 3: Publishing while Perishing: The Women in Print Movement from 1980-2000

"When I opened almost 14 years ago there were more than 130 feminist bookstores in the United States and Canada. Now, I believe, there are fewer than 40."
Gina Mercurio, owner of People Called Women, a feminist bookstore in Toledo, OH interviewed in 2007

Cultural, political and technological shifts between the 1990s and the 2000s made feminist publishing projects more difficult to organize, sustain, and complete. Feminist publishers closed, women's bookstores closed, digital texts ascended as paper-based publications became less influential, and feminist activism refocused after the Al Qaida attacks. Although each shift was a part of the larger conversations about community, nationalism, identity, and politics, newly-created technologies funded by capitalism impacted each revolution.

From the early 1970s through the 1990s, feminist bookstores, feminist publishers, and feminist communities flourished in many large cities in the United States and Canada, often in conjunction with women's studies programs at local universities and colleges. A report published by *Media Report to Women* in Spring 2003 details the changes in the Women in Print movement.

> The establishment of feminist bookstores was synergistically linked with the establishment of feminist publishers, and between the mid-1970s and the mid-1990s the two sides of the autonomous women's print industry grew in numbers and strength. By the mid-1990s, there were more than 120 women's bookstores in the US and Canada and more than two-dozen independent feminist presses. (1-2)

Feminist bookstores and feminist publishers began to disintegrate in the late 1990s, and the report blames the proliferation of corporate bookstores, the advent of internet retailing, and the widely-held notion that feminist activism of the 1970s had already succeeded in improving women's lives so woman-focused institutions

were unnecessary (4). However, women's bookstores were always important spaces for lesbians of color and white lesbians to meet and organize, and this knowledge is woven through the subtext of the report. The disintegration of the Women in Print movement, the declining women's bookstore movement, and the mainstreaming of Women's Studies all made lesbians of color less visible in urban communities.

The report namedrops lesbians of color, white lesbians, and straight women of color without identifying their affiliations. According to the report, Sweet Honey in the Rock and Holly Near gained exposure through publicity and sales at feminist bookstores while authors Rita Mae Brown, Dorothy Allison, Barbara Smith, and Tillie Olsen also focused their tours on feminist bookstores where their books were hand-sold to new readers by motivated booksellers. From this list, Brown, Allison, and Smith identify as lesbian, and Near was in lesbian relationships during the 1970s and 1980s. Since its inception in the 1970s, the singers and performers in Sweet Honey in the Rock have always been African American women. The report also notes that, "Book-buying/ readership profiles by race are not tabulated, but secondary evidence points to a particularly strong culture of book reading among African-American women" (3). These trends, and the lesbian subtext of the report, suggest that women's bookstores have been important organizing and identifying spaces for lesbians of color and white lesbians.

During the 1980s, as part of the Women in Print movement, lesbians of color created their own publications, started their own presses, and organized themselves

politically to address critical issues in their own lives and to critique the white women's movement. *This Bridge Called my Back: Radical Women of Color Speak Out*, the first text to use the term "women of color," was published by Persephone Press in 1981. Barbara Smith at Kitchen Table Press imagined a sequel to this important anthology, and gathered a board of co-editors to formulate it. *Sing, Whisper, Shout, Pray: Feminist Visions for a Just World,* which took sixteen years to finish, was completed during the most tumultuous years in feminist publishing and finally arrived in bookstores in 2002. During this time, Kitchen Table Press disbanded, and several feminist bookstores that held readings for *This Bridge Called my Back* in 1981 and 82 were out of business by the time of *Sing, Whisper, Shout*, *Pray* in 2002. Mainstream conversations about race, gender, and ethnicity shifted from 1990 to 2000 and readjusted again after the attacks of September 11, 2001. By examining two publishing projects anchored by lesbians of color and revisiting the Coalition Project that was formed to save Kitchen Table Press this chapter interrogates how mainstream visibility and political influence in the United States became even more tenuous for lesbians of color through the 1990s and 2000s.

In the first section, Cherríe Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa explain how *This Bridge Called My Back: Radical Women of Color Speak Out* grafted together their community-based work with women writers of color and ideological struggles with their graduate programs. By using Lisa Albrecht's experience as one of four co-editors of *Sing, Whisper, Shout, Pray: Feminist Visions for a Just World* the second section follows this anthology through the changes in women's publishing and bookstores while showing how the editors responded to the attacks on September

11, 2001. In the third section Jaime Grant talks about the ways that the university-based Union Institute and Kitchen Table Press worked to sustain the press through the 1990s as the print publishing world disintegrated during the rise of digital texts.

The women quoted in this chapter have extensive experience as activists, artists and academics, and all identify as lesbian. Moraga serves as Artist in Residence in the Department of Drama at Stanford University and holds a joint appointment with Comparative Studies in Race & Ethnicity. When Anzaldúa died in 2004, she had already taught at the university level for over twenty years and she was completing her PhD at the University of California, Santa Cruz. Albrecht is an Associate Professor in the School of Social Work at the University of Minnesota and an organizer for the 2011 White Privilege Conference held in Minneapolis. Grant and Smith have moved away from academia and into public policy and politics. Grant directs the Policy Institute at the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force in Washington D.C. and Smith is an elected city council member in Albany, New York. Although some of these women have moved away from the academy, they all tell stories about their struggles in the maelstrom of white privilege and heterocentrism in the university.

Harnessing a Community Project to a Graduate Degree: Cherríe Moraga and *This Bridge Called My Back*

In the Introduction to *This Bridge Called my Back*, Moraga and Anzaldúa have academic and revolutionary hopes for their anthology: "We envision this book being used as a *required* text in most women's studies courses" (italics in original xxvi).

Published in 1981 by Persephone Press, again in 1983 by Kitchen Table Press, and republished as a twentieth-anniversary edition by Third Woman Press in 2002, Moraga and Anzaldúa continued to envision this anthology as a necessary addition to the continuing work of feminist activism in the streets and in the academy.

As Moraga explains, this project had its roots in community and campus writing programs where Moraga met Gloria Anzaldúa, who was teaching classes at San Francisco State, and other Latina and female Asian writers. In the biographies section of the anthology, both Gabrielle Daniels and Nellie Wong list their membership in the Women's Writers Union, a campus group at San Francisco State University that continues today. Moraga and Anzaldúa reached out to potential contributors through their connections in the Feminist Writers Guild, Radical Women, and the Freedom Socialist Party in San Francisco (Anderson 52).

Gloria Anzaldúa moved to San Francisco in 1977 after leaving the Ph.D. program at the University of Texas. Like Moraga, she became frustrated with the white privilege embedded in university classes and found allies in community writing groups.

> When I moved to San Francisco, I participated in the Women's Writers' Union, where I got to know Susan Griffin, Karen Brodine, Nellie Wong and Merle Woo, among others. Also I joined the Feminist Writers' Guild, which was a little bit less radical. This is where I met Cherríe Moraga, whom I asked a few months later to become my co-editor for *This Bridge Called My Back*. Anyway, I found that this little community of feminist writers in San Francisco, Oakland and Berkeley, this Feminist Writers' Guild, was very much excluding women of color. (Ikas 4)

Although the Feminist Writers' Guild welcomed Anzaldúa into their group, she felt constrained by their brand of feminism.

> Every two weeks we would have our meetings and everybody would talk about the white problems and their white experiences. When it was my turn to talk, it was almost like they were putting words into my mouth. They interrupted me while I was still talking or, after I had finished, they inter-preted what I just said according to their thoughts and ideas. They thought that all women were oppressed in the same way, and they tried to force me to accept their image of me and my experiences. They were not willing to be open to my own presentation of myself and to accept that I might be different from what they had thought of me so far… Their idea was that we all were cultureless because we were feminists; we didn't have any other culture. But they never left their whiteness at home. Their whiteness covered everything they said. However, they wanted me to give up my Chicananess and become part of them; I was asked to leave my race at the door. (Ikas 5)

Both Anzaldúa and Moraga felt the need to create an anthology that spoke back to white women's feminism, both in the university and in these community writing groups. Although both were on the campus at the University of San Francisco the difference is that when they met Anzaldúa had already left her graduate program back in Texas and Moraga was in the middle of her Masters degree. Both the campus and the feminist community were sites of struggle.

Moraga describes the co-development of *This Bridge Called my Back*:

> And so it was by the end of that graduate study program in 1980 that I basically told [my advisers] that I wasn't going to do my master's thesis on Feminist Writers. I had already begun working with Gloria [Anzaldúa] on *This Bridge Called My Back* in 1979. So, I said to them, 'I want *Bridge* to be the master's thesis, because I'm doing it anyway. Everything has changed.' I said, 'I can't do white feminist writers.' I said, 'I can't do that. I know too much now. I can't do it. I want this book to be it.' And they said, 'And if we say no?' And I said, 'Well, then I don't get my master's degree, because this is what I have to do.'...[they said] "Write us a ten-page justification for the book." They were worried about my critical writing skills. And I did. Because in fact *Bridge* had been the logical outcome of the dearth of women of color material in my graduate program. I said, 'If I can edit this damn book,' I said, 'my critical skills are all right. I can organize something.' And I credit them both for giving me this allowance, for allowing my mind to change, which of course is the point of truly feminist graduate study. So everything changed after that. I mean, everything changed. (Anderson 52-3)

Moraga's experience in 1980 at San Francisco State fighting for and being granted permission to use a co-edited anthology for her Master's thesis sounds strikingly radical in today's climate for graduate work. Current demands for "rigor," alongside the reduction of funds for graduate humanities programs and the ascendance of high theory make community-based academic work scarce in current graduate work. The poignant voices in this anthology continue to challenge norms in feminist studies and theory today. Even though Moraga's advisers allowed her to use *This Bridge Called My Back* as her Master's thesis, she and Anzaldúa encouraged contributors to cut through academic-sounding writing and get to the emotional heart of each woman's story. It was tricky to get so many previously unpublished writers to trust the editors' input, but Moraga says,

> ...what motivated the book was pure need, you know, for us to be able — for women of color to, in all of our variations, to find a place with each other when we were so separated. And politically, I mean, that we didn't know of each other. And a lot of other people often ask me when are you going to do another *Bridge*, but I don't think there could ever really be another *Bridge* (55).

Several contributors to *This Bridge Called my Back* were awarded NEA fellowships over the course of their writing careers: Audre Lorde ('81 and '90), Toni Cade Bambara ('83), Ana Castillo ('90 and '95), and Gloria Anzaldua ('91). Considering that many of the women published in this anthology had not been published before the first printing in 1981, it is not surprising that only 4 of the 29 contributors won an NEA fellowship in the following years. Only Lorde won her NEA fellowship the same year that *This Bridge Called my Back* was published. It appears that three contributors to *This Bridge Called my Back* became more established after

1981, although several writers who became more famous, including Cherríe Moraga, have never been NEA fellows. However, as Binkiewicz argues, "Hispanic [visual] artists were still left out more often than not as late as 1977," and this bias toward modernist "politically neutral aesthetics" may have impacted some of the decisions in the literature division as well (171). The question of whether Asian and Native artists and writers have also been regularly overlooked by NEA boards because of cultural bias deserves closer analysis, but is outside the scope of this study.

The sixteen-year sequel to *This Bridge Called my Back: Sing, Whisper, Shout, Pray!: Feminist Visions for a Just World*

When Kitchen Table Press disbanded in fall of 1996, there was at least one more book in production. According to early fliers, *The Third Wave: Feminist Perspectives on Racism,* was scheduled for 1990. Over sixteen years the editors lost one member, watched a publisher disband and signed with a new one, and revised, edited, and discarded numerous articles by contributors. *Sing, Whisper, Shout, Pray!: Feminist Visions for a Just World* was published in 2002 by Edgework Books in San Francisco. Co-editors M. Jacqui Alexander, Lisa Albrecht, Sharon Day, and Mab Segrest worked together from the beginning and Dorothy Abbott and Tracy Gary joined as coordinators in the early 1990s--several years after Norma Alarcón left the project. Studying the trials that the editors of this anthology struggled through illuminates seismic changes in the feminist movement, the publishing industry, and mainstream United States culture between 1990 and 2002.

Lisa Albrecht explains how the sixteen-year project evolved.

> It was the fall of 1987 and Barbara [Smith] wanted to do an anthology that collected both Women of Color and white women's writing. Mab Segrest and Jacqui [Alexander] were on board right away and I joined in November 1987 as the only Jew in the collective. Sharon Day, who lives here [in Minneapolis] and is a dyke Native joined after that. We met in Ithaca and we were put up by Nancy [Bereano] at Firebrand [Books]. By this time I had my B.S. in Albany already…In the beginning conversations Barbara [Smith] said what she wanted but she couldn't afford to pay us.

Five of the writers from *This Bridge Called my Back* appear in *Sing, Whisper, Shout, Pray*: Merle Woo, Nellie Wong, Mitsuye Yamada, Cherríe Moraga, and Gloria Anzaldúa. *Sing, Whisper, Shout Pray* responds to the new (and old) anxiety of terrorism and rethinks the role of international feminist activism, while continuing to respect the work of the 1981 anthology. The travails of the sixteen-year project reflect how much the editors, and the work of their anthology, evolved globally.

The editors consciously worked through a grassroots model to solicit contributions, examine fresh issues and, like *This Bridge Called my Back*, to solicit new writers.

> We held collective meetings in each others' communities to find out what was going on and [find writers]…Mab did one in Durham [NC], here [Minneapolis] was Sharon, Boston was Barbara, and Norma was added later.

However, after several revisions and refocusing sessions over the years, of the 47 contributors only nine had not been published elsewhere. In the final draft, Matthew Nemiroff Lyons' article on anti-Semitism was included, which indicates that the editors saw the content of his article as more important than their initial focus on women-only writers.

In the initial outline for the anthology, the editors proposed the following sections:

I. Third Wave Feminism: Definitions and Contexts

II. Where are We? Racism in the 1990s

III. Personal Narratives, Dialogues, Coalitions

IV. Strategies for Change

The extended outline includes potential topics based on 1990s cultural conversations (e.g. "racism and the AIDS epidemic…the effect of the Reagan/Thatcher years globally") alongside concerns that continue to resonate in 2012 ("Historical analysis of racist tendencies in white feminism…constructions of white identity…intersections of race and gender/sexuality in different cultural contexts").

Once the editors collected articles that fit within their outline, they all read them and met on the phone.

> We each got four copies of everything to review and we'd have these long phone calls: 3 to 4 hours and this was before e-mail and computers and everything, so…(leaning in and shrugging to make the point) We'd debate the articles and revisions and one person got back to the author. One summer Mab got a beach house near Durham [N.C.] and we all met to work on it. Mab and Lisa—we'd take hits [as white women] and we were put in our place. Like we'd say that we were giving up a lot to work on this project and then the other collective members would point out our white privilege and how that worked for us every day…Norma left after that and didn't follow through. There were bad feelings…(Albrecht)

Although four of the editors remained on the project for the entire sixteen years, they had their disagreements over content and occasionally struggled with their publisher Barbara Smith, who, "was trying to control things." Many cultural and political shifts happened during those sixteen years that forced them to refine their goals, rework the outline, and reconsider the potential readers for the anthology.

> The first title was *The Third Wave: Feminist Perspectives on Racism*. That was because it was post-Bridge, but by [2003] it was [obsolete] and it had already been used. And people were expecting this book. I got notes in the mail about it…(Albrecht)

After Kitchen Table Press disbanded in 1996 and the project was dormant, Dorothy Abbott talked EdgeWork Books into taking on the project. A white lesbian philanthropist, Tracy Gary, raised the money to publish the book. It looked as though the book would come out in late 2001 or early 2002.

> So the book was going to press around 9/11 and we stopped it, we had to, and redid it to respond to [the attacks]. [Writers] were mad about this because [they] would edit their work and then it was rejected after the 9/11 editing. There were lots of angry people. I went out and got the Palestinian essays. (Albrecht)

The first section of the completed anthology, "The Color of Violence," speaks into the void left after the 9/11 attacks. It includes "first writing since" by Suheir Hammad; "The Night the Lights Went Out in Durban: Report from the United Nations World Conference Against Racism," by Linda Burnham; "I've Seen This War Before: To the House of Representatives, 14 September 2001," by Barbara Lee; "Phantom Towers: Feminist Reflections on the Battle Between Global Capitalism and Fundamentalist Terrorism," by Rosalind P. Petchesky, and "Lurching Through These Frightening Days" by an anonymous author. The articles added after the 9/11 attacks include first-person accounts of being Arab and Muslim in the United States and speeches and essays by women of color examining how these attacks and the fear and hatred around them scapegoat women of color and strain the push toward global feminism. This anthology also examines the Israel/Palestine conflict in the context of the 9/11 attacks.

By the time *Sing, Whisper, Shout, Pray* comes out in 2003 many women's bookstores are struggling to stay in business:

> …the genuine [women's] network and publishing network that worked for *Bridge* isn't there. You know that [*This Bridge Called My Back*] went from Persephone to Kitchen Table when Persephone shut down? But now the mainstream publishers took over it all. (Albrecht)

Sing, Whisper, Shout, Pray!: Feminist Visions for a Just World went out of print when EdgeWork Books closed in 2005.

> EdgeWork disappeared and a few months ago they found 150 copies somewhere in a warehouse. So now I've got 45 copies in my basement. We never got a penny and I've got the whole book on disk. (Albrecht)

Although the anthology is now out of print, Albrecht contends that the work of creating it was satisfying, and the core editorial group stayed resolute: "we never split up, the four of us." The climate for the anthology and the work of publishing changed drastically between 1989 and 2003 and the editors adjusted their mission accordingly.

Albrecht points out that women's studies was gaining clout at the same time that many feminist scholars detached themselves from grassroots work.

> There's no presence of the movement in the scholarly work—you're looking at it [the anthology]. There's so much assimilation now. I think it's because the activists were also writers and had to choose one or the other. Like Dorothy Allison—she had to choose writing because she got sick. A year or so ago Cherríe [Moraga] was here in the Carlson School [for a lecture] and we hugged and I brought my first edition of *Bridge* to get her to sign it. You know there's no movement sense now, or if there is I don't know about it. Lesbians of color are in nowhere-land again. It's moved backwards, not forwards. (Albrecht)

Albrecht notes that there are several paths available for women of color working on university research:

> Jacqui [Alexander] and Chandra Mohanty connected with the scholarship angle. Rose [Brewer] is not embedded here [at the University of Minnesota]. She came out of the Civil Rights Movement and [maintains that community focus]. (Albrecht)

In June of 2004, two years before it was closed, Albrecht moved her tenure line from General College, an institution that focused on educating students of color and first-generation students, to the School of Social Work at the University of Minnesota. Throughout her career Albrecht has connected to the community outside of the university through service-learning and liberatory pedagogy while distancing herself from high theory and battling racist and classist departmental politics. She explained how experience has sharpened her frustration with the two-headed beast of classism and racism within the university.

> When I was in Women's Studies [at the University of Minnesota] I got Barbara [Smith] a visiting professorship and the local girls [female professors in Women's Studies] were horrible to her. Back then Allison Bechdel lived here, so it must have been somewhere between '85 and '90, and I found Barbara an apartment over near Chicago [Avenue] and we had a party for her and they came and turned up their noses at her place. Her neighborhood! My neighborhood, you know?
>
> I became a race traitor in Women's Studies. Because of this [episode], because of the way I taught feminist pedagogy, too. I used parallel tracks [of race and class and gender] that needed to intersect also. And I used [Paulo] Friere and case studies. There was a lot of racism in the department and I wrote a case study about it that I used in class. (Albrecht)

Although Albrecht established a minor in social justice at the School of Social Work, she continues to question whether the university can sustain or support anti-racist work within its corporate and structural limitations. As she explains:

> Racism looks different in different historical periods. There's a lack of history and it's never embedded in academia. It's never been a part of the center of women's studies or ethnic studies. Or there's just one class. They say: Here's a class, so do it all!

Albrecht contends that the study of the complexities of oppressions is stymied by the departmental structure of the university that reproduces white privilege and male privilege while admissions policies tighten and the revolution clamors at the gates.

Sing, Whisper, Shout, Pray was finally published because of the editors' endurance, flexibility, and stubbornness. This history also reflects how the women's movement splintered, activists aged, and small publishers closed. While the do-it-yourself publishing movement went digital, the editors of *Sing, Whisper, Shout, Pray* struggled to stay in paper and to use that media to respond to discussions in gender studies after 9/11. However, the move to blogs, Twitter, online publishing and on-demand publishing serves 21st century feminist activists in a flattened hierarchy. This move to digital organizing has the potential to quickly mobilize activists globally—although it is dependent on the vagaries (and expenses) of each country's internet access.

Using University Resources to do Community-Based Work: The Alliance Between Kitchen Table Press and The Union Institute

Barbara Smith tells the genesis story for Kitchen Table Press in "A Press of our Own: Kitchen Table: Women of Color Press." Smith writes that Audre Lorde proposed the idea during a phone call in October of 1980 and the first organizational meeting, held in Boston, brought together African American and African Caribbean women. From the beginning they decided to publish writing by women of color. "We were saying that as women, feminists, and lesbians of color we

had experiences and work to do in common, although we also had our differences" (Smith 11). While Anzaldúa and Moraga were organizing an anthology on the West Coast, Lorde and Smith were part of another group of women of color who were organizing a publishing house on the East Coast. Some of these organizers already knew each other in print (because of *Azalea: A Magazine for Third-World Lesbians, Sinister Wisdom,* and special issues of *Conditions* and *Signs*) and some had met at academic conferences, but publishing *Bridge* allied radical women of color from both coasts.

Kitchen Table Press is also known for publishing *Home Girls: A Black Feminist Anthology*, which is now published by Rutgers University Press (where Cheryl Clarke serves as a dean). Barbara Smith edited *Home Girls, which* includes sixteen of thirty-two authors who identify as lesbian, including Ann Allen Shockley, Audre Lorde, and Michelle Cliff. Smith states that the goal of the anthology is to keep the writing from *Conditions: Five, The Black Women's Issue* in print for college classes to use (l-li). This collection from 1979 features a revolutionary centering of black lesbian writers, which stems from Smith's editorial work, but also reflects who was writing about black feminism and being published in journals like *Conditions.*

Another important collection, and the last book published by Kitchen Table Press in 1988, is *Seventeen Syllables and Other Stories* by Hisaye Yamamoto. This Japanese American writer was interned in Arizona as a child. In Yamamoto's stories Japanese American families manage cramped conditions in internment camps, wives and husbands fight over gendered and racialized expectations, and Nisei children bump up against their Issei parents' expectations and internment histories.

This vital work of Asian American literature pulls together stories that were originally printed as early as 1951 in various kinds of newspapers and magazines: *The Rafu Shimpo: Los Angeles Japanese Daily News*, *Pacific Citizen*, *Harper's Bazaar*, and *Partisan Review*. These stories have been anthologized in many multicultural literature textbooks, and reflect an ethnicity different from the longtime publisher of Kitchen Table, Barbara Smith. Smith's biography is so closely entwined with the history of Kitchen Table Press that the Hispanic, Latino, and Asian authors from their catalogue are often overlooked. Kitchen Table Press was not just a publishing house for black women, but sometimes it is mis-remembered as one. In 1983 Kitchen Table also published the collections *Cuentos: Stories by Latinas* edited by Alma Gómez, Cherríe Moraga, and Mariana Romo-Carmona, and in 1987 printed *A Comrade is as Precious as a Rice Seedling* by Mila D. Aguilar. After the 1980s the rhetoric of conservatism separated people even more drastically along racial lines, and today there is a paucity of scholarship detailing and analyzing cross-racial movements and collectives.

Kitchen Table Press, while radical in its unification of women of color under one publishing house, also used editors and commentators who had ethnic backgrounds similar to the writers. King-Kok Cheung, a professor at UCLA, introduces the volume by Yamamoto, and includes a note to thank Barbara Smith for a particular idea about racism in one of the stories. One way to interpret this separation is to argue that while Kitchen Table Press published a few anthologies that brought together women of different ethnicities and racial identities, it also respected the differences between authors. One of these markers of respect was to

assign African American editors to projects by African American women, and Latina or Chicana editors to projects by Latina women. In many cases, this publishing practice continues today. *This Bridge Called My Back* broke with this pattern since the authors were Latina, African American, Asian American, and Native, while the editors both identified as Chicana lesbians. However, the *Bridge* project began before Kitchen Table Press was organized, and the anthology was already printed once before it came to Kitchen Table.

The ending of Kitchen Table Press, like the other organizations in this chapter, has not been thoroughly documented. In the article, "Building Community-Based Coalitions from Academe: The Union Institute and the Kitchen Table: Women of Color Press Transition Coalition," Jaime M. Grant describes how the Union Institute worked to raise money and write grants with the staff of Kitchen Table Press in order to keep the press active. In 1996, Grant writes, "For more than a decade, the press has operated on the genius capital of a few leading lesbian feminists of color" (1024). This partnership with the mostly white, middle-class "and (largely perceived to be) heterosexual" staff at Union Institute allowed the board and staff members of Kitchen Table to have access to the infrastructure of a university, including the use of computers and a copy machine (1027). In 1995 the press finally raised enough money, primarily through house parties and grants, to move out of Barbara Smith's home and into the basement of a church in Brooklyn, New York. Along with radical white writers such as Grace Paley, some notable gay and lesbian artists and activists were involved in this effort, including Pulitzer-Prize winning playwright Tony Kushner and cartoonist Alison Bechdel (Grant 1030). With

the fear of Kitchen Table Press ending, many people came together to organize and donate money. At the end of the article Grant asserts that in its new home "...the press is assuming an active role in the artistic and political life of the neighborhood and communities of people of color across the city" (1032). Although Grant's article states that the fundraising efforts secured $200,000, it was not enough to keep Kitchen Table Press going. There is no record of the press after 1996, and according to WorldCat the last book published was the paperback edition of *Seventeen Syllables and Other Stories* in 1988. In the essay "A Rose," which functions both as a tribute to her friend Lucretia Medina Diggs and to the work that they shared with Kitchen Table Press, Barbara Smith explains that after years of struggling with debt and carrying a crushing workload Kitchen Table Press closed in the summer of 1997.

> The feminist movement helped explain the ways we had been trivialized and victimized just because we were female and offered strategies for empowerment and change. But in both the Black and women's movements, with their sexism, racism, and élitism, we were still poor relations. For us, …Kitchen Table Press was one of its few visible outposts. Fighting to save Kitchen Table Press was in some ways fighting for our own lives. And we knew if we needed the Press, other women of color did too (Smith 199-200).

Kitchen Table Press, under the direction of Barbara Smith, published 15 books or pamphlets by women of color, including the second printing of *This Bridge Called My Back: Radical Women of Color Speak Out*, edited by Moraga and Anzaldúa. With very little money and a small staff, this press gave writers such as Hisaye Yamamoto, Mitsuye Yamada, and Cheryl Clarke their first national exposure. Kitchen Table Press put out its final book in 1992: *Camp notes and other poems* by Yamada. Some of these titles are printed by Rutgers University Press in 2013, where Clarke

serves as Dean of Students, but many of these texts are now out of print. The struggles that finally ended this press, and the sustained silence about its demise, are part of larger forces in the worlds of publishing and feminism.

In 1994 the Union Institute Center for Women and Kitchen Table Press began working together on a three-year plan to raise money to stabilize the leadership of the press and solidify its future (Grant 1027). Jaime Grant, the former Director of The Union Institute who now works as the Director of the Policy Institute at the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, collaborated with Smith, a personal and professional friend, to harness the resources of a university for a community project. They formed a coalition to move the press out of Smith's home and into an office so it could continue as a nonprofit publisher. Grant explains that, as a white woman working with Smith and other women of color, she intentionally worked on tightly-focused scheduling and fundraising issues and attempted to follow the direction of Smith and other women of color regarding the long-range vision or mission of the press.

As Grant emphasizes in the article, "Building Community-Based Coalitions from Academe: the Union Institute and the Kitchen Table: Women of Color Press Transition Coalition," published in 1996, although the larger coalition team worked on fundraising, grant writing, and long-term planning, the smaller Kitchen Table board, made up of women of color, made all the hiring and policy decisions. The entire coalition agreed to this separation of duties to maintain the independence of the Kitchen Table Board.

> But the hardest struggles for the coalition were figuring out how to shoulder the responsibilities. And the cross-racial stuff in the coalition did not dissolve or blow up. I think I talked about this in the [*Signs*] article but white folks agreed from the beginning to facilitate and not make decisions for the press. White people stepped back and we were all cool about the structure from the beginning. Then we just enforced that structure as needed. This took out the critical fault lines right away. There were no blowups on the board. (Grant)

Grant fielded calls from white feminists who were surprised by the antiracist power structure. Since these women were accustomed to being in leadership positions when working with women of color, they were often offended by the coalition's reaction to their advances.

> Powerful white women would call and say that they had ideas for us and wanted to participate and we would say we actually need your check! [laughs] These white women had not been told that before and their opinions had always mattered before and they didn't know how to take that. (Grant)

Although Grant had already worked with racist reactions from white feminists, she continued to be surprised. When she directed the women's center at Bucknell College in 1987, Grant discovered how feminism supported white privilege in academic culture:

> Here's my first contact with racism in white women: I was 20 years old and the director of the center at Bucknell and I was doing research on the Boston murders that Combahee River Collective had organized and demonstrated about [in 1979], so I invited Barbara [Smith] to campus. White women called me into a meeting and asked me why I hadn't asked for permission. But I was the director--I didn't need permission. They told me Barbara Smith was going to be hateful. I said I'd read her writing and I doubted that. But they had seen her at conferences and they said, "She has so much anger!" I told them they didn't have to come to the lecture, then. They wanted to un-invite her, but I refused to do it and I told them, "Are you going to un-invite her?" (Grant)

The white feminists' nervousness about having Smith on campus turned out to be unfounded.

> So she came to campus and talked in three classes, held the lecture, and then a group of students asked her to go out for drinks and she went to this po-dunk hotel lobby. She stayed with them until 10 pm and they asked her questions like, "I just don't see why we can't get along." Questions that just steam me, you know? But Barbara answered every question so gently [voice catches]… ever the teacher. She'd say, "My experience of this is really different and here's why…" (Grant)

With this experience in her background, Grant reached out to Smith to help her stabilize and revise the business model for Kitchen Table Press. As the coalition continued to plan and meet, grassroots fundraising became the focus of their work together and a greater percentage of their financial contributions came more from ordinary people and less from major donors.

> The most extraordinary thing we did was getting the intern from [Boston University] and she called people to set up house parties and we raised $30,000 in a summer [1995]…everything from Wilma Mankiller hosting something in Oklahoma to women just pulling together a barbeque in their back yards.
>
> And when we started calling it was not a hard sell. The women on the phone knew that the press had changed their lives and they were willing to help.
>
> What astounded me about the project was how many women sent in $30 checks, and these made a big difference for us. A few small pro-feminist foundations helped, too. GAIA foundation gave us money early on, and ASTREA came through for us, too.
>
> In the end we had raised $300,000 to get the press going again, but even with a million dollars it would not have been enough. The huge foundations never came through…This changed my view of things—I mean, a women-of-color project that could publish such important books and make a sea change, but then not get grants? [her voice falters] The structural inequities could never be <u>more</u> obvious! But then Barbara's been living through this forever! (Grant)

While soliciting donations for Kitchen Table Press Grant was reminded of that earlier encounter with white feminists' racism:

> I was told [working with Kitchen Table Press] would be the end of my career! [laughs] Barbara Smith has such a reputation that is so racially constructed. White women are so afraid of her because she is so sharp and misses nothing. (Grant)

Even with the money that Union Institute helped raise, Kitchen Table Press went out of business in 1996.

> The press moved to Brooklyn and we got a space above a church for nearly nothing. [sigh, pause] We had 6 months of payroll but it wasn't enough.
>
> This was the mid-90s and the publishing industry as a whole went under. All the big presses ate the little ones and this was not a good time to be relaunching a small press. So if you look at it this way, we were not successful. (Grant)

In an interview with Barbara Smith conducted by Loretta Ross, Smith considers how Kitchen Table Press changed the publishing landscape for women of color writers.

> And as they say in those silly Hollywood comedies when a person is talking about their acting career going badly, you know, the joke they always say is, A year or so ago I couldn't get arrested out here in Hollywood. Well, back in the late 70s, early 80s, in relationship to mainstream publishing, women of color couldn't get arrested in New York City [laughs] around Madison Avenue, where all the publishing houses are.
> So the thing is that yes, we absolutely made a difference. If I hadn't enjoyed it for most of the fifteen years, I wouldn't have done it, because I don't do things that don't feed me. (Ross 82)

When analyzing the impact of the Kitchen Table Transition Coalition, Grant also takes a long-range view. Several of the women from the Transition Coalition went on to direct academic and community-based projects.

> Well, I actually see some of them as successes of the coalition. Jude Hemking was 18 and she was there for the first conference calls and she went on to become the founding director of the Audre Lorde Project in New York City and I consider her one of the best queer activists of our time. Cathy Cohen is pretty much running the University of Chicago and she was on the coalition board. Barbara Smith—she's the grandmother of my kids…now she has a

> university job and she's on the city council in Albany [NY]…Trish Bonneke is in Iowa raising kids with her partner—and she's on the city council, too. (Grant)

While one measure of the success of the Transition Coalition would be if Kitchen Table Press was still publishing books by women of color, by moving the press out of her home Smith was able to move on to other projects and eventually to run for public office. Grant traces the connections between the Transition Coalition, the activism and scholarship of its former board members, and the NGLTF.

> [In 2010] We just completed a seventy-question survey of 6500 transpeople which everyone said was historic. It's never been done before. And we were careful to include lots of end-users in the development of the survey. We also included outreach to low literacy, low income, and people living in survival-sex situations. We also received 400 paper surveys from people who needed help finishing them and we did that, too. The Kitchen Table work impacted the concerns that I brought to the work. (Grant)

As Grant explains, the larger arc of LGBT activism in 2013 finally encompasses the concerns of transgender people, and her experience working through intersections of oppressions and privileges in the Coalition allows her to reframe this work with an eye toward many levels of inclusion.

Changes in individual consciousness carry over to organizational change to make new questions posable, and new avenues of inquiry visible. Grant continues to challenge racist policies and practices within the NGLTF and added that her work with the Coalition, "…meant a lot to me. This is work I will always have on my resume."

In her interview, Smith points out that many other feminist presses went out of business around the same time as Kitchen Table Press.

> Some of the presses that were so important—Firebrand, Diana Press—faded earlier on, but it [Kitchen Table] was one of the really groundbreaking presses. I'm trying to think of other presses that were really important that just don't exist any longer. Some of them have changed hands. But there are many other—this is a story that's not only the Kitchen Table story. But because we were a women of color press, we had less. (Ross 78)

Even with the fundraising help of the Transition Coalition, Kitchen Table Press was not able to raise the capital or create the ongoing infrastructure that would allow them to continue through the rise of big box superstores, the closure of many feminist bookstores, and survive to participate in Facebook networking, on-demand publishing, and e-book production. The maintenance of Kitchen Table Press would require less hardware and in-person promotion in 2013 than it did in 1995, and with a two million-dollar endowment the press may have survived the technology, publishing, and retail transformations of the 1990s and 2000s.

Looking back: Racism and classism splits a feminist bookstore collective

Although many feminist bookstores supported and encouraged the work of female writers and publishers, the women in these collectives sometimes struggled to make decisions democratically and maintain equitable relationships. In Oakland, California the collective that ran A Woman's Place Bookstore fractured over race and class lines which emerged during decisions of changing store policies. These disagreements led to a lockout of four members on September 12, 1982 and eventually led to the dissolution of the bookstore.

According to "A Struggle at A Woman's Place," written by Darlene Pagano, Elizabeth Summers, Jesse Meredith, and Keiko Kubo, the members of the collective disgreed on what kind of feminism their bookstore would support. While Carol

Wilson and Natalie Lando argued that no women should be excluded from any of the bookstore events, the other four members suggested that some events should be open to particular segments of the community. One suggestion was for a lesbians- only reading and a women of color reading. A Black woman requested that only men and women of color be allowed to attend a forum focused on books for children of color. These policy changes were prompted after criticism from "many women, including Dorothy Bryant, Florence MacDonald, Alta, Bell Hooks [sic], Daphne Muse, Elana Dykewoman, Women Against Imperialism and the editors of Womanblood" (3). Responding to these requests from women of color writers, feminist organizations, and feminist publications could have broadened and strengthened the customer base for the struggling bookstore, but the locked-out four suggest that Wilson and Lando balked at these suggestions since they did not fit with a circumscribed white and middle-class version of feminism.

The locked-out members worked with a version of feminism that reached out to many oppressed people, much like the Combahee River Collective's manifesto of 1977:

> … A Woman's Place as an institution should understand feminism as a coalition of women who oppose sexism and are struggling against sexism in many different ways. For example, for the four of us, the oppression we've experienced due to sexism, class, racism, anti-semitism and homophobia are all central in our lives (2).

Pagano and Meredith stood in solidarity with the women of color in the collective: Summers and Kubo, and created a majority. However, this voting bloc was circumvented by Wilson and Lando, who wielded their racial privilege and status as founders of the collective by changing the locks on the store and posting a

note on the door proclaiming that the collective had been pared down to two members. According to information compiled by the Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender Historical Society of San Francisco, all six of these collective members entered binding arbitration which incorporated the bookstore, but Wilson left the group and started a new bookstore with Alice Molloy (a former member of the collective) in October of 1983.

The history of the lockout at A Woman's Place Bookstore reflects just how embattled women of color were in the (white) feminist movement in the 1980s, even while pockets of women were forming publishing houses and bookstores. Although the publishing world has changed dramatically in the past thirty years, there are still political and existential fissures between women of color and white women, and these separations also exist between lesbians of color and white lesbians in 2013. Although the identity politics of the 1980s has morphed into the study of transnational feminism, in American pop culture the white lesbian continues to crowd out her queer sisters of color.

Chapter 4: What's visible now? The creation of [white] lesbian celebrities

> I could argue that while it has been acknowledged that race is not simply additive to or derivative of sexual difference, few white feminists have attempted to move beyond simply stating this point to describe the powerful effect that race has on the construction and representation of gender and sexuality. (Higginbotham 255) (qtd. in Hammonds 302).

Although many scholars grant that sexuality and race are co-constructed and co-reinforced discourses, "race" continues to be analyzed primarily when referencing authors and characters of color. This tendency continues to suspend the complex conversations about clashing and complicit discourses and conserves versions of the truth (and curricula) that inscribe white privilege. In some ways, the structure of the Enlightenment university relies on silence around whiteness as part of its public image through diversity-focused recruitment narratives that populate its classrooms with a majority of white students. Analyzing the carefully chosen images of multicultural campus life on glossy brochures and interactive websites gives an observer a glimpse at how white privilege is dependent on images of people of color to map out its boundaries. Even at the University of Minnesota, an institution known for its scholars in race, gender, and sexuality studies and located in an urban environment, the deafening silence around race and ethnicity in many departments and classrooms continues to uphold narratives of white privilege.

Therefore, within much scholarship originating in the United States, whiteness often continues to stand as a silent (and overarching) category of racialization. A few exceptions circle the unraced space. Ethnic studies departments teach classes where the complexities of race may be discussed and studied. Education departments consider race and poverty statistics when crafting studies to

raise student test scores or increase teacher effectiveness. In this case, race and poverty are examined as social problems that the researchers quantify through study and alleviate with innovative pedagogies, while middle-class whiteness continues as the unquestioned norm. The academic silence around race stands in contrast to memoirs written by female scholars who wake up from their naps of white privilege—such as those written by Mab Segrest, Frances Kendall, and several others (Garner 41). In these narratives about discarding (or fighting) white privilege, the white writer centers the book on her journey toward social justice. This structure speaks most markedly to the white reader who may be privileged by several discourses that may reinforce her racialization. Whiteness in the university exists as a classed and gendered phenomenon in the air we breathe, the water we drink, the narratives we create, and the degrees we earn. These discourses support the university, and like those of us who work in higher education, they do not end at its borders. The markings of these borders are more visible in particular spaces than others, but structures of power inflict violence on bodies.

Bodies (texts, authors, or celebrity personas) that are marked in one category and unmarked in others are rarely discussed in their wholeness, but in pieces: race here, gender there, and sexuality over there. This disassociation disorder, perpetuated and sustained through language, simplifies the lived experience of multiple oppressions. As Audre Lorde points out in "An Open Letter to Mary Daly," "The oppression of women knows no ethnic nor racial boundaries, true, but that does not mean it is identical within those differences…For then beyond sisterhood is still racism" (70). Lorde writes to show a white lesbian about how Daly's scholarship

reinforces racial stereotypes by the narratives it includes about the genital mutilation of African women and the narratives it does not retell about powerful Caribbean and African goddesses. Disconnecting the white writer from her text and reconstructing it for her from the standpoint of a black woman is work that has often been charged to women of color. The title of the anthology *This Bridge Called My Back* reminds white readers who becomes trampled by white feminist scholarship.

This chapter intervenes in the tangled conversations about power, race, class, sexuality, and gender by weaving together popular texts in the United States to examine how the lesbian body has been raced and classed in the 21st century. Articles from the *New York Magazine, The Nation*, *Mother Jones*, *The Village Voice*, *Out Magazine*, *Time* and *The Advocate,* as well as television programs and videos on You Tube sketch out the narratives around the construction of acceptable lesbians. Scholars such as Sharon P. Holland in *Raising the Dead: Readings of Death and (Black) Subjectivity* (Duke University Press 2000), Gayatri Gopinath in *Impossible Desires: Queer Diasporas and South Asian Public Culture* (Duke University Press 2005), and Lisa Duggan in *The Twilight of Equality?: Neoliberalism, Cultural Politics, and the Attack on Democracy* (Beacon Press 2004) have produced projects that engage with the troubling biases in queer studies and queer politics while expanding queer studies beyond the boundaries of white American masculinity. While neoliberal critiques of queer politics and U.S. policy examine race and class, this chapter illuminates the images of white lesbian celebrities produced by sources "within" the U.S. (online and offline) that populate a deliberately raced space.

In the mainstream media today, celebrities such as Rachel Maddow, Suze Orman, and Ellen DeGeneres participate in a great white lesbian image which is fit, stylish, coiffed, smart, and wealthy for white heterosexuals to consume through the lens of liberal politics. However, much of the exceptionalist mythology that produces white lesbian celebrities is subtly framed by the racial and sexual othering of people of color, often men. The heterosexual black male and the heterosexual Latino male provide images whose participation in narratives of masculinity (and concurrent maturity, desirability, and sexual/physical power) is used to measure the acceptability of white lesbians. Chapter four analyzes the images of lesbians in pop culture in the early 21st century by asking the question, "Which lesbians are visible now?"

Rachel Maddow: Sex symbol and sage

As Winnie McCroy notes in "The Butch is Back, With a Poster Girl," "The new butch is not only afraid to be pretty, but she's equally comfortable with men and straight women" (2). The poster girl that McCroy refers to in her title is Maddow, who moved from radio (an invisible medium) to television in September 2008 after MSNBC offered her a show. This move to TV requires a daily makeover, since Maddow notes that her preferred wardrobe is "'like a first grader'" but her on-camera garb she calls "'lady clothes'" (qtd. in Traister 24). The TV drag, which allows her to appear not only grown-up but also upper class, makes her image palatable to mainstream viewers.

The before and after photos may be subtly different, but the on-screen image does feminize Maddow's more masculine edges. Before the TV makeover *The*

Advocate published a photo in the July 15, 2008 issue to accompany the article "Air America's Sweetheart" by Mette Bach. In this shot, Maddow wears little-to-no makeup, her short hair fits her head tightly, and she sports no glasses or jewelry. Maddow's finely-knit gray sweater frames her face with a high round neck. Easily mistaken for a boy on the street, this image of Maddow marks her as a soft butch lesbian. In a later screen shot reprinted in the March/April 2009 issue of the *Columbia Journalism Review* to accompany "The Sarcastic Times" by Alissa Quart, Maddow wears lip gloss, her professionally-sculpted eyebrows accent the slightest bit of eye makeup, and her longer and softer haircut wraps around her ears. Her longer bangs flip up and over with the help of hair gel. She does not wear jewelry with her gray pinstriped suit jacket and black round-necked thin sweater. This version of Maddow reproduces enough female markings to keep her from being mistaken for a boy, and her tailored suit marks her as smart, professional, and businesslike. Missing in both photos are her trademark heavy black glasses, and Maddow says they reflect too much and cannot be worn on television (Jeffery 72). Yet, if boys (and girls) don't make passes at girls who wear glasses, then Maddow has figured out how to discard them and entice more viewers. This version of "lady drag," allows the straight audience to see her gayness throughout the performance. As Merkin explains,

> ...Maddow's ambition has allowed her to play the mediagenic game: to be carefully made up, her brown eyes given depth with flattering eye shadow, her short (but not too short) haircut artfully coiffed. With her Poindexter glasses, Jil Sander pantsuits and Converse sneakers, she's not trying to pass, but she's willing to prettify her image sufficiently to endear her to male viewers (112).

Merkin's term "prettify" suggests that Maddow gender conforms to attract heterosexual male viewers. Although the men on MSNBC also wear dark suits, their eyebrows are a bit messier and their lips shine less. Maddow herself deflects questions about her makeover with quips: "I wear just as much makeup as the other guys on MSNBC" (McCroy). In this era of high-definition television, and with new formulations of makeup to hide imperfections, media personalities must think even more carefully about their appearances. In "The Maddow Knows" Clara Jeffery asks about her change in appearance and Maddow notes, "It wasn't at anybody else's encouraging. I wanted my appearance to not be the only thing people would pay attention to. So essentially I was seeking genericness" (73).

The "genericness" Maddow performs connects her to her male colleagues while enacting what Judith Halberstam names female masculinity. Although the dark suit jacket without jewelry reproduces masculinity, the eye makeup echoes femininity. Having her name on a news program also links Maddow to a conventional yet iconoclastic performance of masculinity. If "[m]asculinity in this society inevitably conjures up notions of power and legitimacy and privilege; it often symbolically refers to the power of the state and to uneven distributions of wealth," then (left-wing or right-wing) cable news could be the perfect stage for digestible performances of masculinity (Halberstam *Female Masculinity* 2). Maddow's "generic" presentation can be read as a performance of bombastic masculinity.

The notion of genericness also contains racial privilege: Maddow's whiteness allows her to blend in with the "other" white guys in dark suits whose opinions are worth hearing and debating. MSNBC, "The Place for Politics," carries eight television

news shows as of 1/20/2010. Four women and seven men work as hosts or co-hosts of programs, and all eleven are visibly (or invisibly) white. As of 1/3/2012, MSNBC broadcasts sixteen television news shows, and fourteen of the seventeen man and women who host or co-host these shows are visibly white and their racial or ethnic backgrounds are not discussed in their biographies. In the past year, the ratio of hosts of color has risen from 18% to 31%. In January of 2013, there are eleven news shows listed on MSNBC's website, and nine anchors and hosts of color out of twenty-nine: Martin Bashir, Veronica de la Cruz, Tamron Hall, Melissa Harris-Perry, Richard Lui, Al Sharpton, Mara Shiavocampo, Touré, and Alex Wagner. However, these journalists of color are more likely to appear in ensemble casts, and only Martin Bashir and Melissa Harris-Perry anchor their own shows, so performances of white masculinity continue to anchor the broadcasts.

In the *Mother Jones* interview with Jeffrey, Maddow jokes, "I'm sort of in 'Dude Looks Like a Lady' territory anyway" (73). Although Quart leaves the comment on her appearance until the end of her article, she calls Maddow "...Chaplinesque, with her dark cap of hair and expressive black eyebrows set against pale skin..." (Quart 14). Before Maddow was granted a show of her own, she often appeared on Keith Olbermann's political show and occasionally filled in for him as host. These cameos earned her the description of a "ballsy gremlin," a description that links Maddow's boyishness, cleverness, and her visual image (Traister 22). Traister argues that the tomboy Maddow creates a new space from which to critique politicians and contemporary issues, even though cable news continues to stabilize white middle-class masculinity.

Daytime talk shows on broadcast channels reproduce a version of white middle-class femininity that clashes with Maddow's butch masculinity. While cable news interviewers confront guests about their political views at hard-edged desks on sets with dark colors, daytime talk hosts populate brightly-colored sets and chat conversationally with guests about their lives while sipping from coffee mugs. The hard-hitting masculinity of the cable news shows contrasts with the breezy femininity of the daytime shows, and the norms of both formats presume to cater to the expectations of their target audiences.

During Maddow's appearance on the daily talk show "The View" (March 5, 2009) four of the five co-hosts of the show refrain from identifying with Maddow while highlighting her idiosyncrasies. Each co-hosts marks out her own personality or image through her wardrobe. Actor Whoopi Goldberg wears tennis shoes and a loose gray smock with black pants, comedian Joy Behar sports a cerulean cardigan over a low cut black tank top, actor Sherri Shepherd is dressed in a black v-neck wrap dress, designer Elisabeth Hasselbeck also wears a black dress but with a high neck and long chunky gold necklaces, and journalist Barbara Walters's classic red blazer tops a white button-down shirt with a thick gold choker. At this table, Maddow's black finely-knit sweater with a high round neck, heavy black glasses, and lack of jewelry mark Maddow's image as the most masculine.

The hosts ask questions that mark Maddow as queer. After asking her to stand and show off her "big lesbian" height (her own description), they ask her how she got a TV show, to which she answers, "I don't know!" and laughs. Then they show a picture of her and her same-sex partner and ask: How did you meet your

partner? Do you get any hate mail because you're gay? How did your conservative parents react when you "came-out" to them? Were you a tomboy? These questions about personal relationships and family roles repeat the narratives of middle-class hetero-femininity that are performed by the show. When these narratives are smoothly retold, the political and racial differences between the five co-hosts are spackled over with laughter and cheery conversation. In a genre that privileges the performance of female bonding, disruptions spotlight the performances of femininity.

Maddow confesses that she had long blonde hair as a child, and Goldberg breaks in to say that she did, too. At this moment, all of the women at the table break into laughter and must fleetingly acknowledge how race is silently woven through this performance of femininity. Goldberg and Shepherd are both African American, and Behar, Hasselbeck, Walters, and Maddow are racially white. The absurd notion of Goldberg with blonde hair stops the discussion and acknowledges Maddow's whiteness through Goldberg's blackness while it connects the female masculinity of both women. Walters points to Goldberg and quips, "She's about to come out of the closet!" and Goldberg acknowledges, "That door's been open for years." This exchange not only jokes about Goldberg's race, but also about the rumors that her more masculine presentation calls her heterosexuality into question. This rupture indicates how dependent the performance of femininity is on whiteness and heterosexuality. When the "big lesbian" comes to the heterosexual women's talk show, race emerges as the sexual orientation of the guest is being discussed and several narratives unravel simultaneously. While the joke revolves around the

potential links between Goldberg and Maddow, the two women at the table with the most masculine physical presentations, what also stands out in this rupture is the stereotypical femininity of the petite Hasselbeck (with her long blonde hair) who perches to the left of Maddow. When Maddow comes to "The View" Goldberg gains an ally.

On her television and radio shows, Rachel Maddow's persona evokes a clever but firm high school teacher. Maddow's Ph.D. in political science was gently mocked in the "Ask Dr. Maddow" segment of the radio show on Air America, and some of the television shows end with a "Moment of Geek" segment. Maddow wrote her dissertation on methods for controlling AIDS and HIV among prison populations, and her clout as a Rhodes Scholar is often cited to burnish her credentials as an intellectual. In the New York Times article "A Fresh Female Face Amid Cable Schoolboys" Alessandra Stanley points out the differences between Maddow and the other personalities on cable news:

> Her program adds a good-humored female face to a cable news channel whose prime time is dominated by unruly, often squabbling schoolboys; Ms. Maddow's deep, modulated voice is reassuringly calm after so much shrill emotionalism and catfights among the channel's aging, white male divas.

Stanley disrupts gender stereotypes to examine Maddow's brand of (young, queer, white) female energy: her deep, calm voice contrasts with the high-pitched rows among the male hosts. Even the motto of the show, "Mind over Chatter," seems to position Maddow against the assumptions about the vapid female and male talking heads on TV. As Rebecca Traister points out in "Mad for Rachel Maddow," "Maddow is one of the few left-liberal women to bust open the world of TV punditry, which

has made icons of right-wing commentators like Ann Coulter and Michelle Malkin" (22). These critics interpret Maddow's presence as the catalyst that makes television into a freewheeling gender-queer space, while continuing to minoritize and objectify her image. This revolutionary sex symbol seduces many kinds of viewers.

Maddow's glamorous butch image attracts heterosexuals to her show: women *and* men. Traister posits that Maddow is universally loved: "The 'gay for Rachel' meme appears to transcend gender and sexuality. Women, men, straight and not straight: they're all gay for her" (23). Maddow is irresistible, no matter people's orientations, genders, or politics. In the article "Butch Fatale," Merkin notes that "every weekday night… [Maddow] makes love to her audience" (112). If news could be porn, Maddow would be the poster girl-boi. The anonymous Daily Intel column in the *New York Post* from July 17, 2008, lists six reasons that the (presumably) female writer is "gay for Maddow." Two of the points allow the writer to identify with Maddow's quirky job history, three of the points show Maddow poking fun at her role as an uberlesbian and a sex symbol, and one of them admires her educational credentials. The column ends with "Okay, we still don't want to kiss her or anything. But still: swoon." The female columnist who re-proclaims her heterosexuality at the end of a mash letter to a female newscaster restabilizes her own heterosexuality even in the absence of a byline.

The swooning critics almost run out of words when they attempt to describe their awe and desire. However, "sexy" often translates as "white," "cheery," and approachable. In "The Rachel Papers" Jonanna Widner speculates on how many

analyses of Maddow's show remark on how nice she is to her guests: "her natural ease, her politeness, and her refusal to engage in the pile-ons so beloved by the dudes of cable news…But much of the media's treatment of her niceness borders on fetishization, in a way that speaks to how capable women are often represented in the media" (39). As a sex symbol Maddow's female masculinity becomes less complicated to her overwrought heterosexual viewers. Straight men and straight women alike can admire the flickerings of femininity along with the echoes of masculinity.

The straight couple's crush on Maddow, referenced in McCroy's *Village Voice* article "Rachel Maddow, the New Sexy," sounds like a dalliance with intellectual desire in a heterocentric and visually obsessed culture that focuses on physical desire. Perhaps the language for intellectual desire becomes overwrought simply because we must rely on the simplistic language of sexual desire. However, the desired object need not have any desires. It's much simpler if her image exists as a cipher to be filled with the needs of the desiring public.

McCroy calls Maddow,

> A bona fide butch sex symbol, desired by lesbians, straight women, *and* men. Maddow describes herself as 'a big lesbian who looks like a man. I'm not Anchorbabe, and I'm never going to be. My goal is to do the physical appearance stuff in such a way that it is not comment-worthy' (3).

Usually straight white men on television get a free pass on their appearance, as long as they generally reproduce the norm, and Maddow points to this privilege while attempting to tap into it. In contrast, the images of women of all sexualities and races on TV are open to comments from viewers. The common image of the

"anchorbabe" (in Maddow's words) is only noteworthy in its failed reproduction, while Maddow's onscreen image is consistently called "authentic" as Judy Berman in Salon.com says, and as McCroy quotes in her article. Butch authenticity, in the case of Maddow's image, occupies a queer space beyond the "anchorbabe" and her suited male counterpart.

This narrative of authenticity and its sibling the narrative of sagacity are also told in mainstream and gay and lesbian media sources. In the December 2, 2008 issue of *The Advocate*, a newsmagazine for GLBT readers, editor Jon Barrett explains the importance of the truth that lesbians tell us in the midst of an economic and political crisis.

> What is clear, though, is that this time—when we Americans decided it was again time for a dose of good old-fashioned authenticity—we didn't wait for the excruciatingly slow electoral process. We instead turned to lesbians—women like Rachel Maddow...and Suze Orman...,who not only are open about their sexual orientation but aren't afraid to rip the Band-Aid off the scab of disillusionment" (5).

This discourse minoritizes "The (white) Lesbian" while giving her a role in a masculinist heterosexual empire. The narrative follows this chain of logic: "the lesbians" are not easily swayed by the mainstream hype that catches the rest of us. Lesbians possess their own brand of knowledge, their own community, and a unique access to the truth because they are not swayed by trends or fashion. We call on lesbians to tell us the truth when *we* are completely lost. Those lesbians serve as oracles and soothsayers for a damaged or lost world, and they have direct access to female intuition (a notion left over from 70s feminism). When this narrative is repeated by a gay publication, gay (white, middle-class) men are placed in the

mainstream heterosexual population while lesbians and queer women are shunted to the outside. This separation happens even while "The (White) Lesbian" is worshipped for her candor. While Maddow and Orman gain media attention through the use of this narrative, they also become disposable commodities who will presumably have no role in the mainstream media once the economy rebounds.

In *Appropriating Blackness: Performance and the Politics of Authenticity*, E. Patrick Johnson explores how in the discourses of race, "authenticity is another trope manipulated for cultural capital" (3). The narrative of authentic blackness protects the silence around whiteness and its connection to economic power while policing bodies. Although queer studies occasionally parrots the trope of authenticity to argue for community-building and civil liberties, the trope of authentic queerness also protects the normative silence around whiteness and its connection to economic power while policing bodies.

Barrett's editorial in a gay magazine yokes authenticity and the figure of the (white) lesbian to a deeper, more painful truth that the gay white middle-class audience needs to hear. When the wild party is over, says Barrett, the sensible lesbians will help us find our way home. This flattering and condescending connection keeps Maddow's sexuality and gender foregrounded while her privileged racial and class status remain unspoken and unanalyzed.

Not every GLBT commentator reveres Maddow. In his column in *The Advocate* on February 10, 2009, Michael Angelo Signorile examines Maddow's work as an interviewer and role model:

> This lesbian superstar is informed and witty on the twists and turns of the election campaign, astute on issues regarding highway infrastructure, illuminating when turning to the war in Iraq and Afganistan, and brilliant at skewering the Republican agenda. But she's lacking and, perhaps inadvertently, sometimes dismissive when it comes to focusing on the very big civil rights movement of our time, LGBT rights (70).

Although some GLBT activists and critics may disagree with Signorile's link between the civil rights movement and the cause of LGBT rights (and same-sex marriage), others might point out that Maddow also says little about sexism or racism while classism has only recently become voiced through the work of the Occupy Movement. The issues discussed on Maddow's program are dictated by the issues chosen by other news organizations, but as a white lesbian in television news, her privilege is partially contingent on not discussing her exceptionality in the news machine. It could be argued that Maddow does not lie about her sexual orientation and that makes her a hero for GLBT people. Conversely, silence about one's privileges, not oppressions, is the strongest weapon in the hands of the privileged—and this silence reproduces neoliberal narratives of equality and freedom.

Signorile begins his critique from the assumption of Maddow's freedom to talk about whatever she pleases on her show, yet this chapter's analysis focuses on Maddow's image and the ways in which it is constructed through the discourses of whiteness and class privilege. The radical queer Rachel Maddow that Signorile pines for could not exist on 21st century cable news—she would not engender the same kind of poster-boi status with heterosexual women and men.

Suze Orman: Preacher and Therapist

Bloggers do not write mash notes to Suze Orman, the author of nine bestselling self-help finance books, the star of "The Suze Orman Show" on CNBC, and the creator and star of seven PBS specials on personal finance. Orman told a New York Times reporter that she was a lesbian in February of 2007, after she had already become a bestselling author and television celebrity (Kregloe). The titles of Orman's books connect spirituality and money to connect individual growth and financial independence: *The Courage to be Rich* (1998), *The Road to Wealth* (2001) and *Women and Money: Owning the Power to Control Your Destiny* (2007). One of Orman's lessons is that women (even married women) need to pay off their debts and take control of their own finances so that they do not have to rely on others financially. Although this message does not challenge the mythology of the American Dream or question capitalism, the extended interviews with Orman often contain an anxious subtext related to Orman's image and motivations.

People call Orman's CNBC show with as personal and varied questions about how to spend an inheritance, how to talk to children about money, how to justify buying a new designer purse and whether a daughter's dance lessons are too expensive. During the calls Orman asks specific questions about living wills, trustees, the ages of children, and sometimes the caller's income. These answers appear on the split screen as the caller continues to explain his or her situation. Orman sometimes calls female callers "momma" or "girlfriend" and tells callers to repeat her favorite words as she answers questions: "I was wrong--I made a mistake." Another one of her mantras appears on her webpage: "People first, then money, then things." The short counseling sessions feel like they could be happening in a

confessional—however, Orman remains upbeat and pushes viewers to take responsibility and set up contingency plans. According to Dominus, "…she has figured out a way to channel an innate charisma and a televangelist's intensity into an otherwise bland message of fiscal responsibility" (35). As Martha Burk explains in "Suze Orman's Bottom Line," "She's 50 percent pop psychologist, 50 percent rock star and 100 percent about financial empowerment for women" (34). However innocuous this mission might sound, critique targets several aspects of her work.

One meme from the articles about Orman is that her financial advice has become more valuable to middle-class Americans since the economic collapse of 2008, but her image is often described as distasteful or even grotesque. Orman's fiftyish California-girl image contains markings of femininity, masculinity, and middle-class values--within a field of unmarked whiteness. The photo of her short wavy blonde hair, direct blue eyes, and bright grin appears five times on the homepage of her website www.suzeorman.com and on the cover of each book. Since 1999 this image has barely changed yet many interviewers remark on her grooming. In a *New York Times* article titled "Off the Shelf; The Ubiquitous Suze Orman," Harry Hurt introduces Orman:

> There are many things more flammable than the subject of mammon and women, but most of them come in steel canisters stamped ''hazardous materials.'' Among the substances that need hazmat warning labels are the liquid that bronzes Suze Orman's hair, the paste that whitens her teeth for her publicity photographs and her latest financial advice manual…(Hurt).

Hurt's humor suggests that since Orman's grooming products are making her artificially beautiful then her financial advice must not be trustworthy. In this passage the anxiety about her manipulated image suggests that Orman may be a huckster—and although sexual desirability and the manipulation of one's image are often linked, Hurt instead links Orman's transformation to her marketability. This uneasiness suggests a discomfort with the seen and unseen ways in which Orman performs an aging femininity. Halberstam notes, "…when and where female masculinity conjoins with possibly queer identities, it is far less likely to meet with approval" (*Female Masculinity* 28). By the time of Hurt's article, Orman's sexual orientation had already been revealed to the press—although he does not include this tidbit about his interviewee. In addition to Orman's performance of femininity, and with an aging body, she preaches within a traditionally male field: economics.

In "Suze Orman: Queen of the Crisis" an article from *Time Magazine* by Sheelah Kolhatkar, Orman's monstrous image emerges as she counsels people on camera:

> Over the top as she is, Orman's ubiquitous presence has become a sort of unofficial economic barometer: the worse things get, the harder she is to avoid. Her style seems almost intentionally annoying: she screams on camera, her blue eyes practically bugging out of her head. (Kolhatkar)

In this description, Orman's power grows as people become more nervous about their finances and she stalks the viewer from medium to medium. The hysterical and omnipresent huckster reaches out to a stunned audience who cannot escape her antics. Kolhatkar criticizes Orman for saturating the marketplace with her image—the very definition of celebrity. Descriptions of Orman change dramatically based on

the publication and target audience. Orman's interview *in Ms. Magazine*, a feminist publication, is more complimentary than interviews in *Time Magazine* or *The New York Times*.

In some photographs and articles Orman's image meshes masculinity, femininity, and class privilege—which links to the continuing promise underlying her advice. In the opening photo to Susan Dominus's article in the *New York Times Magazine* "Suze Orman is Having a Moment" Orman lounges on a powder-gray sofa wearing a pink robe with white cuffs. While reading a thick investing report and holding a white cup of coffee she turns to smile at the camera. A tall vase of white roses rests on the end table as the breeze blows a floor-length curtain around the edge of the table. Since she took her own investment advice, Orman enjoys her coffee and in her bathrobe all morning--not like so many other people who need to scurry off to work for someone else each morning. Meshing symbols of relaxation, studiousness, and femininity allows class privilege to exist just within the viewer's reach and whiteness to remain unspoken. The image suggests that if the reader follows Orman's advice she could also go into business for herself and feel this relaxed about her 401K—and this dream sequence seems crafted specifically for a female viewer. The caption sharpens the edge of the image, "At home near Fort Lauderdale. Like many evangelists, Orman was once a captive of her wants." Even in a moment of repose, the caption suggests that Orman went through a difficult transformation before she reached this level of equilibrium. The caption frames the journey toward class privilege as a simple twelve-step program that any self-disciplined woman could take.

Dominus calls Orman an "evangelist" and Damon Darlin describes her as a "telegenic personal finance guru." If Orman is a religious leader, then her books serve as the scriptures—and this connection between finance and spirituality echoes the titles of Orman's books: *The 9 Steps to Financial Freedom: Practical and Spiritual Steps So You Can Stop Worrying* and *The Courage to be Rich: Creating a Life of Material and Spiritual Abundance*. These titles suggest that Orman connects self-help rhetoric and spiritual rhetoric to increase readers' sense of self-efficacy. Connecting financial wealth to spiritual clarity also distances Orman's teachings from unearned and unexamined racial privilege and the generational aspects of social class. In this framework, Orman emerges as a holy leader, beyond the trappings of privileges and oppressions. From this position she enjoys a connection to divine wisdom.

In contrast, a violent image for the economy emerges in *Time Magazine* in 2009. Kolhatkar describes Orman as "…a medic tending injured soldiers on a battlefield." At a moment when the United States was fighting expensive wars in both Afghanistan and Iraq, this battle zone metaphor instills Orman with the expertise to save American lives. In the economic war zone many of Orman's patients are fighting for their country's economy and losing everything. This startling metaphor, inflected with tropes of masculinity, also serves to connect the American Dream of individual wealth to jingoism.

Although Orman does not preach against capitalism, she does critique the common practice of using credit cards to spend more than one's salary while setting aside nothing in a savings account. This somewhat conservative approach to

financial stability is not why she has become a lightning rod. In *Ms. Magazine* Burk and Orman discuss why economists and financial experts critique her:

> Orman has come under fire from Wall Street types for being too emotional herself. Is it gender, fame or both? "I think it's gender," [Orman] says unequivocally. When she wrote a bestseller with "spiritual" in the subtitle, "Wall Street and the financial-medium male population, as well as the [women who write about] finances, started to attack me on, 'What can emotions have to do with money?' "I would come back and say, 'You have certain indicators of consumer confidence levels-what do you think [they are? They're] emotional indicators that you base the stock market on. Those things are okay, but because a woman writes a book about emotions and money, you want to attack it.' (Burk 38)

Since finance has built its narrative using unemotional, clinical assumptions about money and the stock market, Orman's personal, emotional approach to finance may be threatening. Narratives of masculinity value stoicism and long-range investments, while narratives of femininity link spending money and immediate happiness. Orman's approach links saving and financial control to female power—a formula that meshes pieces of both masculine and feminine narratives. Although Orman has critics, her visibility has risen exponentially since 2007.

In the *Wall Street Journal* article "Crisis Makes Suze Orman a Star," Suzanne Vranica and Stephanie Kang measure Orman's influence. " 'Her star has really risen,' says Sal Taibi, president of the New York office of Lowe, the Interpublic Group ad firm that created the "Got Milk?" ads. 'She went from a cult personality to a really mass celebrity very quickly.' " (B4) Advertising executives quoted in the article note that her "likeability scores" went up considerably from 2007 to 2008, when Orman earned $25,000 for a "Got Milk?" print ad and commanded $72,000 per speaking engagement (B4). Vranica and Kang explain that Orman refuses to endorse banking

companies since they tend to encourage people to overspend and undersave (B4). This valuable visage does allow Orman to attract viewers, though. Ratings for the TV show in May of 2009 are up 22 percent from May of 2008 (Dominus 35).

In Carmen Wong Ulrich's article "7 Money Principals for Black Women" in the June 2007 issue of *Essence*, Orman's message is altered in several ways. This article is accompanied by three pictures of young and thin black women wearing expensive clothing and displaying their relationship to money. In the first photo an African American woman in a blue halter dress sits on a white chaise, throws cash over her head and laughs. The second photo shows another African American woman with her hair in loose braids pursing her lips critically and holding a black pump in front of a shoe display. In the final photo, the woman in the blue halter dress (from photo one) leans back on the white chaise and fans herself with a bundle of money. All three of these photos create a narrative of professional black women who have spent some money on clothing and makeup but also understand that saving their money is tied to happiness. Unlike the articles in publications for white audiences, Orman's picture appears halfway through the article in a small shot of her book cover. *Essence* magazine uses the largest photos to mirror back to its readers a vision for their own relationship to money. The sixth point of advice is also tailored to *Essence's* target audience: "Watch how Your Honey Handles Money" reminds the black female reader that she makes more money than the man in her life, and to watch out because he could become a burden with his shaky financial history. In this publication, the black heterosexual female is constructed with access to class privilege that could be compromised by a (presumably black) boyfriend or husband.

This rupture in heterosexual normativity is precipitated less by the presence of the white lesbian in the black women's publication than it is a symptom of the cross-pollination/interdependence between the narratives of class mobility, whiteness, heterosexuality, and femininity.

From this article in *Essence*, it becomes more obvious that the preceeding articles in *The New York Times Magazine*, *Time* and *Wall Street Journal* silently employ white privilege to describe the unfettered journey toward class privilege. This assumption becomes more noticable in the article "SMART MONEY: In a time of economic calamity, one voice rises above the panic" by Neal Broverman in *The Advocate*, a publication for GLBT readers. Broverman starts the article by citing the charged financial climate of December 2008:

> HAS THERE EVER BEEN A TIME WE'VE NEEDED SUZE ORMAN MORE? With marriage changing the financial equation for thousands of gay couples and the World economy teetering on collapse, the money guru's sage counsel has become required reading, viewing, and listening. (11)

Broverman assumes that these same-sex couples are middle-to-upper class since they are getting married, own property, and have some money in the stock market. In contrast, the single, working-class LGBT person who rents an apartment would have little need for Orman's retirement fund or mortgage advice. The narrowing of *The Advocate's* target audience continues with the quote that Broverman chooses from Orman's speech at the Human Rights Campaign Dinner:

> " '…for you and me and all of us to truly change what's going on in this world you have got to be financially powerful. You cannot be in debt; you cannot have financial bondage if you want to set yourselves free.' " (11)

Orman's advocacy is limited to the richest queers—a target market that has gleaned a lot of attention in the past ten years, and one that *The Advocate* courts in order to keep its print magazine alive. However, this focus overshadows the fact that many more LGBT households are working class and below than heterosexual households.

After analyzing the 2000 Census, the 2002 National Survey of Family Growth (NSFG), and the 2003 & 2005 California Health Interview Surveys (CHIS), researchers at the Williams Institute at UCLA found that same-sex households were more likely to live in poverty than opposite-sex households. Racial privilege was also linked to class mobility, and once the data was broken out they saw that African American and Latino/Latina people living in same-sex households are more likely to live in poverty than white people in same-sex households. One analysis of the report pointed out that

> African Americans in same-sex couples have poverty rates that are significantly higher than black people in different-sex married couples and are roughly three times higher than those of white people in same-sex couples. (Cisneros and Sakimura 11)

This separation in poverty rates between African American gays and lesbians and white gays and lesbians can partially account for the images of white same-sex couples and their desirability as consumers in the capitalist system. Why build an ad campaign to sell hybrid cars or vacation cruises to people who are unlikely to be able to afford them? However, the report indicates that same-sex female couples are much more likely to live below the poverty line:

> The poverty rates of lesbian/bisexual women are higher than those of heterosexual women (and the difference is statistically significant at the 10% level), with one quarter of lesbian/bisexual women living in poverty versus only one-fifth of heterosexual women. (6)

Yet, the myth of the wealthy gay man evaporates when the Williams Institute's researchers crunch the data. According to this report, "Gay men are as likely to be poor as are heterosexual men in the United States as a whole, and are more likely to be poor than are heterosexual men with the same characteristics" (Almeda, et. al. 15). Even the sacrosanct narrative of the rich (white) gay man wavers as the researchers examine the data.

By analyzing the 2010 census statistics, and adopting the methods of the Williams Institute researchers, scholars could learn more about the longitudinal effects of race, gender, and sexuality as components of class status. The National Gay and Lesbian Task Force's campaign to "Queer the Census" also calls for a check-off box so that same-sex couples may have their families counted, and their demographic data accurately recorded. Orman may not be seen as a sex symbol, but she is idolized as an independent lesbian and savvy businesswoman, and her image participates in the pervasive notion that all LGBT people are wealthy.

Ellen: The Pioneer and the Talk Show

DeGeneres's career has also benefited from the changing attitudes toward the (white) "butch" lesbian, but the target audience for and Degeneres's onscreen persona on "Ellen: The Ellen DeGeneres Show" are markedly different from Maddow's on "The Rachel Maddow Show" and Orman's on "The Suze Orman Show." Maddow's show centers on political discourse and has a decidedly liberal bent, and

Orman's show dishes out bracing financial advice. DeGeneres's show, produced in Los Angeles and distributed by CBS, centers on "lifestyle" issues and rarely ventures into politics. As her website explains, "Through her show, she brings her humor, personal warmth, insight and talent for tackling topical issues into viewers' lives with her distinctive style touching every aspect of the show" ("About the Show"). The website also emphasizes how much fun the show is, while reminding online readers and television viewers that they can win products and watch celebrities compete in games.

Another difference between DeGeneres, Maddow, and Orman lies in the contrasts between the early Ellen DeGeneres (and her character Ellen Morgan) and the more recent Ellen DeGeneres and her character on daytime TV. On the sitcom "Ellen" that ran on ABC from 1994 to 1998, the character of Ellen Morgan was looking for a boyfriend, a therapist, and later a girlfriend. This searching for love and trying to figure out her identity drove much of the humor and plotlines in the show. Once the character and actress (the two Ellens) "came out" to the audience in 1997, the show became "harpingly pedagogical" as it attempted to teach straight viewers about GLBT culture (Joyrich 38). After the show was cancelled, the comedian fell out of the public eye for several years. In 2001, DeGeneres hosted the Primetime Emmy Awards "receiving several standing ovations and widespread critical acclaim for her work in a post-9/11 atmosphere" (Fees 30). This ceremony marked her re-entry into mainstream culture at a time when U.S. nationalism was being used as a response to the terrorist attacks on the Twin Towers. After 9/11 the cultural capital

of whiteness in the United States took on an additional importance--one in which DeGeneres's whiteness trumped her sexuality.

> When people are talking about hierarchies of entitlement and justice, they set up a scenario in which nationality generates entitlement, and when it comes down to it, colour [sic] is the privileged sign of nationality: whiteness is a kind of flag (Garner 151).

At a moment in history when American flags were flying on many homes and taxicabs, DeGeneres reintroduced herself to the nation with several jokes, including, "What would bug the Taliban more than seeing a gay woman in a suit surrounded by Jews?" In other words, the viewer who cheers for DeGeneres also hopes to irritate the Taliban, and Degeneres's status on the show says something about tolerance in the United States.

In 2003 Ellen DeGeneres voiced the part of Dory, an "absent-minded fish", in the Disney/Pixar animated film *Finding Nemo* (Fees 30). This absent presence in a children's film re-introduced her to the families who watched the film in the theater and on DVD, and in a non-threatening, nonsexualized and disembodied way. In conjunction with the film she appeared on talk shows and presented the public with her new persona. The same year, "The Ellen DeGeneres Show" debuts in a daytime slot, a show that is still enjoing high ratings over 6 years later. In her latest incarnations, DeGeneres has become a Cover Girl model for Simply Ageless makeup, and became a judge on American Idol in 2010. This final elevation marks her complete enmeshment in American pop culture. Note that there are at least five Ellens here—a character, TV host, comedian, actress, model. DeGeneres has joked about her chameleon qualities in various interviews.

Barbara Smith points out in the preface to "Where's the Revolution?" that DeGeneres does not advocate the overthrow of heterosexism, and not one of her personas has, either. In the April 14, 1997 interview DeGeneres was asked by *Time* magazine writer Bruce Handy if she's angry that other actresses have not come out publically and she says that all members of the gay community are individuals and she does not judge their choices. The appeal to the freedom of the individual over the needs of the community puts DeGeneres in line with the American dream. It also presumes that she came out to help her show—a miscalculation at the time. She also foreshadows her next career move, "Maybe I'll find something even bigger to do later on. Maybe I'll become black" (qtd. in Smith 178).

This offhand comment points to DeGeneres's whiteness. In two senses she is already seen as other: a woman and a lesbian. Even though her 1997 interview with Handy indicates that she is anxious that she will not get work after her daring (and commercial) outing/s, in 2009 her face time has increased beyond where it was in 1997. Her blond hair, Greek surname, and pale skin mark her as white in the United States, and by joking that this was also a chosen identity, DeGeneres flexes her white privilege. After all, in the face of all that uproar from the religious right about her evening sitcom, she still has her whiteness, and as she predicted, this gave her another rebirth in daytime TV.

The "Ellen" show markets itself to a stay-at-home mom demographic (white, suburban, and straight). In January of 2013 in Minneapolis her show airs at 9:00 am, and her guests include the stars of current movies and television shows. DeGeneres often plays herself as the fool to make guests and the audience comfortable—

dancing to her desk, asking obvious questions of guests, and staging ridiculous competitions between audience members. While Maddow's intelligence and academic credentials are played up in her onscreen persona, DeGeneres's daytime persona hinges on her need for fun, she sometimes pretends not to understand the jokes, and her sexuality is only a minor part of her persona. In "Resisting, Reiterating, and Dancing Through: The Swinging Closet Doors of Ellen DeGeneres's Televised Personalities," Candace Moore critiques the show: "…DeGeneres avoids the topic of her own homosexuality and actively closes down conversations in which the very word or concept comes up" (17). This strategy continues to attract viewers and acclaim for the show. According to the show's website, since 2004 "The Ellen Show" has been awarded 29 Emmys, in the categories of talk show, special class writing, and host.

On her daytime talk show, the normalized figure of Ellen DeGeneres rises in contrast with the racially and sexually othered figure of her disc jockey, Tony Okungbowa. In the first few years of her show, after her monologue each day she yelled out, "Tony, make me dance!" and he would spin a funky current hit. Now the viewers and audience knows that her dance up into the seating follows the monologue—without the command to Okungbowa. The DJ's job on the show goes beyond choosing the soundtrack. One section of "The Ellen Show" website includes images of Okungbowa's head photoshopped into various scenes where his blackness and maleness are part of the gag. For example, in one image Okungbowa wears a long silver gown and accepts an award at a beauty pageant. In another, Okungbowa enjoys the affections of four elderly white women in a hot tub. Comments on the site

cheer Okungbowa's ability to be a good sport and note how funny the images are to viewers of the "Ellen Show." These gags on Okungbowa displace queerness from DeGeneres and onto her black male D.J.'s image—a move that strengthens the normativity of DeGeneres's image. Although another section of "The Ellen Show's" website includes images from DeGeneres's wedding to di Rossi, none of the artsy images show the couple kissing, and only a few show them embracing at all. DeGeneres wears a tuxedo and di Rossi plays the part of typical (straight) bride in a full-length white gown with her long hair knotted into an updo. Nothing in these gleeful wedding images is presented as ironic, in contrast with the images of Okungbowa. In fact, the campiness of one relies on the seriousness of the other.

Viewers of the show know DeGeneres is gay, but she plays with a heterosexual female persona as she questions the guests. In an interview with Jake Gyllenhaal on her 400th episode (Nov. 10, 2005) she asks him to take off his shirt for the boisterous female audience, but notes that he doesn't need to do it for her (Moore 27). DeGeneres acts as an intermediary for the straight female members of her audience--channeling their desires into her questions and erasing/downplaying any homosexual desires of her female audience members. For any crush that the women might have on the host can quickly be reoriented toward the blushing Gyllenhaal. Moore characterizes her behavior during the Gyllenhaal interview a "faked crush" that she camps up for effect (27). This Ellen persona does not quite become straight, though, she performs a semblance of the straight woman's desire and in the process stabilizes the heterosexual narrative.

As Moore explains, the interview ends quickly with an awkward gesture toward Gyllenhaal's other movie, *Brokeback Mountain*, the movie built around the love affair between two men (Moore 27). The queer content of this movie seeps into the cracks of the interview, but the spoken dialogue focuses on *Jarhead* [the movie about (presumably straight) male Marines]. Straight women's desires are central to this daytime talk show, so DeGeneres must act as the stand-in for the straight women watching and attending the show.

When DeGeneres interviews a Latino actor, another layer of power and otherness emerges in their banter. On October 21, 2009 Mario Lopez comes on the show to promote both his new children's picture book *Mud Tacos* and his appearance on the racy television show "Nip/Tuck." To start the interview, DeGeneres shows the straight female audience a beefcake shot of Lopez running out of the ocean with his wetsuit unzipped, and they squeal and clap as he blushes and talks about his first triathalon. Then DeGeneres cuts to a shot from "Nip/Tuck" of Lopez in a tight black leather corset and garters with fishnet stockings. Lopez sucks in a breath and over the titters of the audience exclaims, "How did you get that? I don't think you're supposed to show that one! It's ok, he's doing that for the woman he loves." By using this picture on the show, DeGeneres piques viewers' interest in the "Nip/Tuck" show while queering the straight Latino actor. Seeing a photo of Lopez in a corset seems particularly disturbing considering that retouched photos of Tony the D.J. often show him in sexually compromising vignettes. In some ways, both Okungbowa and Lopez negotiate their masculinity in the presence of DeGeneres's female masculinity, with her white privilege as the trump card. At the

end of Lopez's appearance she talks him out of his shirt and into the dunk tank, for the sake of charity. Clothed, he would have raised $10,000, but topless he is worth $20,000, a negotiation that he calls "shady."

Moore contends that the daily ritual of DeGeneres's dancing at the beginning of her show reminds the audience of her queerness:

> In order for ritual actions to effectively cloak, but still deliver, content, they must be repeated; this repetition allows ritual actions to take on an ambiguity that serves to protect symbolic meaning from becoming surface meaning. Ellen's coming-out dance is similarly repeated in the first fifteen minutes of every show, unanchoring its meaning, while effectively performing the extraordinary in the everyday, the queer outside the closet. Literally dancing *out* into the audience, she provides an effective performative pun (22).

This performative pun may be so buried in the text of the everyday, though, that DeGeneres's sexuality can be read as having has nothing to do with the dancing. In one sense, the viewer expects Ellen to dance for the audience, and she performs on cue every weekday morning. The discourse of the daytime talk show is shaped by heteronormativity and capitalist values, and these forces overshadow any latent queerness attached to the actress. The calculated queerness of the photos of Tony the D.J. also allows DeGeneres to open up a more palatable homonormative space for herself—one that straight female viewers can accept.

DeGeneres was also hired by Cover Girl Makeup as a model for their "Simply Ageless Collection" with advertisements debuting in January 2009. At the age of 50, as McCroy says, her "combination of intellect, wit, and boyishness" made her "accessible to Middle America" (3). In contrast with the notion of perfect femininity that many other models present, this makeup company wishes to tap into an image

associated with boyishness to sell its product to many more women, particularly women who are concerned about visible signs of aging.

Behind the scenes, the corporations that donate products to the "Ellen Show" enjoy additional publicity on television and online, and can use this connection to seem more liberal. For if DeGeneres gives away Kitchenaid blenders or BlackBerry phones to her studio audience then these companies can tout themselves as tolerant toward LGBTQ people, without working overtly to end discrimination in their workplaces or changing their policies to address the needs of GLBTQ couples. DeGeneres stands in as the Ur-lesbian for the 21st century, but her image is framed by capitalist values and desires. Her show feeds on consumer capitalism and heteronormative values.

While "…women of color feminism attempted to dislodge interpretations of racial domination from the narrative grip of liberal capitalism," DeGeneres works within liberal capitalism to solidify her position as a celebrity (Ferguson 115). In addition, queering racialized masculinity helps her wield white privilege and centers (straight) female desires as it objectifies men of color. DeGeneres laughs, dances, and gives away BlackBerries and Kitchen Aid Blenders to her audience members. White heteronormativity, and its handmaiden (white) homornormativity, provide the backbone for the liberal enterprise of "The Ellen Show."

Femme and Butch whiteness—the desire of paradox

What marks the great (white) lesbian? Notable in the discussions of Maddow, Orman and DeGeneres is their butchness—neither Maddow nor DeGeneres wear

heels and all three favor short haircuts. What would a femme lesbian look like on TV? Well, like Portia di Rossi or Cynthia Nixon or most of the cast of "The L-Word."

> Indeed the power of lipstick lesbians relies precisely on the fact that their is an exclusively inner 'outing'; outside they are all mascara, blush and, yes, lipstick. Their allure is in their ability to mimic the normative language of sexual discourse while at the same time poking it in the eye (Merkin 112).

Merkin has a point, but a muddy one. Arm-in-arm at the Emmys, neither di Rossi nor DeGeneres can be read as heterosexual—or can it be inferred that the straight viewer can tighten the lens and see only di Rossi in her tight gown and co-opt/twist her image into a straight fantasy? The "inner 'outing'" of the femme lesbian with her butchier wife in a heterosexual setting does not quite work the way Merkin presumes it does, because the layers of power and privilege intersect and blur while a celebrity is being made and remade for the desires of the wealthiest and most influential members of the audience. Those powerful tastemakers are not the lesbian viewers, of any class or race.

This gets back to the earlier question: why does so much of the attention go to Maddow, Orman, and DeGeneres? Does it go back to the myth of lesbian authenticity played out on the gendered body? When visibility matters, how one "looks like a lesbian" matters, and the heterosexual eye trumps the queer eye with a privileged vision. This is the point of the contemporary lesbian stereotype: she has primarily butch characteristics, she's decidedly white, and any whiff of gender-bending or gender-queering is softened with designer wardrobes and spa visits. She's a white butch with high-class tastes and lifestyles, and the white privilege and access to get her there.

The Matter of Visibility and the Matter of Invisibility: Race, Class, Gender

In "Epistemology of the Console" Lynne Joyrich questions why GLBTQ activists use visibility to challenge the mainstream culture.

> …while relying so heavily on discourses of enlightened visibility is certainly understandable in this post-Enlightenment society of the image, this nonetheless means that queer political and cultural opposition becomes framed in the same terms as the dominant ones that we'd like to challenge, thus undermining the effectivity of that opposition (16).

Is this a war against straight culture, and are the queers winning if there are more of us (even white ones) on the tube? Joyrich's connection between Enlightenment thought and the metaphors of knowledge and visibility aptly lays out the territory. However, if the war will take place in universities, then Enlightenment metaphors will prevail. On the mainstream media front (including television), the visibility=knowledge trope constitutes the media and its narration about itself. For the trouble is not just that the programs being made do not reflect the experiences of many viewers, but also that the watcher desires a sense of visibility from the media—always knowing that this desire cannot be fully fulfilled. Even while the programmers watch the surveys and protect top-rated shows, many complex narratives cannot be told (or shown) because of presumably small audience shares or because of the constraints of a 60-minute show. Television is "…a medium that, through its glowing blue light, marks out an area for both the commodification of sexuality and its surveillance and policing" (Joyrich 16).

Examining television figures of the (white) lesbian leads directly to the raced and sexualized knot of visibility, invisibility, and desire. While it might be more to see more lesbians of color on TV, making these figures visible (and whole) conflates

all the problems of the media: women can be seen, identified, and commodified while they are being (hetro)sexualized. Race can be seen, consumed, and reified while it is being consumed and controlled.

Scholars and celebrities of color who identify as LGBT talk about the figures that loomed large in their childhoods. Marga Gomez recalls the lesbian figure on TV who first attracted and horrified as a child—a story retold in *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics*. Queer white scholars Glyn Davis and Gary Needham in the intro to *Queer TV: Theories, Histories, Politics* discuss the first gay figures on TV that impacted their young consciousnesses (6). An intimate bond forms between TV programs and their queer viewers, and Muñoz builds his theory around the notion that a queer of color viewing a performance of race or sexuality must adopt a both/and stance toward the figure. While being intrigued or excited by the character, he or she must also "act straight" (and presumably repelled) for the preservation of his or her safety in a heterosexual setting.

This chapter focuses on the white lesbian figures visible on TV and in magazines today, but an additional study could interview viewers to examine the ambivalent relationships that lesbian or queer viewers and readers have toward these figures, particularly in a world filled with reality television shows. While dancing between the both/and each queer viewer (of color and white) negotiates his or her own politics, public identities, and personal relationships.

Conclusion:

The paradoxes of visibility, hypervisibility, and the roaring silence of oppression

> The persistent rhetorical figuration of lesbianism as unrepresentable, invisible, and impossible brings to representation the very thing that, this figuration claims, remains outside the visual field. Because lesbian invisibility is precisely, if paradoxically, a strategy of representation—even a strategy of visualization—lesbian visibility cannot be imagined as its redress. Annamarie Jagose, *Inconsequence: Lesbian Representation and the Logic of Sexual Sequence* 2

> Therefore, the "body" that I seek here has a very *queer* materiality, for it is simultaneously forever absent and always already present—we can always marvel at its ability to matter so much, and then not matter at all…Citing black.female.queer in queer theory is a forgetting that had proportionate outcome across sexuality studies. Sharon Patricia Holland, *The Erotic Life of Racism* 81

Summary

Although *This Bridge Called My Back: Radical Women of Color Speak Out* was used in many women's studies classes as the discipline was built in the late 1980s and early 1990s, white queer theory and Black feminism rarely acknowledge its impact. In addition, this anthology was edited and almost completely written by lesbians of color, and their perspectives on race, class, gender, and sexuality issues are only recently being reincorporated into these fields of study. White queer theorists reached over to French feminism for their Genesis story and Black feminist theorists called on their enslaved heterosexual sisters. In addition, when scholars quote Audre Lorde's critiques of either white feminism or university culture they rarely grapple with the intersecting and sometimes conflicting identities that fed Lorde's work. They quote Lorde, but do not craft theories where she could live. This

dissertation is energized by the questions: how and where is the lesbian of color figure visible, hyper visible, and placed in shadow? Is there a historical component to this silencing shift in feminist and women's studies? Which spaces, texts and discourses discipline this figure, and how does this rhetorical violence continue to privilege whiteness, social class status, heterosexuality and masculinity?

Chapter one interrogates theoretical texts to find the edges of sexualized and racialized bodies. "What Does Invisibility Look Like? Tracing the absence of black lesbian bodies in theoretical texts" uses close readings of theory to examine how and where the figure of the lesbian of color is overlooked, squeezed out, or tokenized. Texts examined include Judith Butler's *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex,* Patricia Hill Collins's *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment* and *Black Sexual Politics*: *African Americans, Gender, and the New Racism*, and Dwight McBride's, "Can the Queen Speak? Racial Essentialism, Sexuality and the Problem of Authority." The chapter ends by arguing that the additive multicultural model has pervaded queer theory, black feminist theory and queer of color theory and cast the figure of the lesbian of color outside of current liberal discourses and language.

In chapter two, "Rhetorically irreverent, politically radical, and deeply personal: Lesbians of Color Organize," lesbians of color speak to and for themselves. During the 1980s and early 1990s, lesbians of color organized collectives, tackled community work, and formed a publisher to publish collections that delivered their work into university classrooms. This chapter examines the work produced by the Azalea Collective in Brooklyn, NY, the Combahee River Collective in Boston, MA,

Cherríe Moraga and Gloria Anzaldua's planning for *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color,* and the work of Kitchen Table Press. These texts and activists influenced ongoing conversations in academia about the intersections of race, class, gender, and sexuality.

Chapter three examines how feminist publishing changed over a twenty-year period, and how these changes impacted publishing projects by lesbians of color. "Publishing and Perishing: The Women in Print Movement from 1980-2000" begins by describing the environment for feminist publishing in 1980, when *This Bridge Called my Back: Radical Women of Color Speak Out* was published by Persephone Press. At this time the white feminist movement in the United States was encouraging women to publish their own texts and to buy books at independent feminist bookstores. Women of color started their own publishers and joined feminist bookstore collectives as part of this trend, and through the 1980s and mid-1990s the Women in Print movement flourished. However, near the end of the 1990s feminist publishers and bookstores disbanded as bookstore chains opened many new stores and publishing moved into digital formats. This chapter compares the cultural challenges for two feminist anthologies edited by lesbians of color: *This Bridge Called my Back: Radical Women of Color Speak Out* in 1981 and *Sing, Whisper, Shout, Pray: Feminist Visions for a Just World* in 2003.

The whitening of feminist studies has led to the current climate in pop culture that fetishizes white lesbians. Chapter 4, "What's visible now? The creation of [white] lesbian celebrities" considers how pop culture in the 2000s has creates and reproduces a palatable image of the lesbian: white, fit, wealthy, and smart.

Figures such as Rachel Maddow, Suze Orman, and Ellen DeGeneres have been elevated to encapsulate lesbianism and reproduce the specter of a liberal American society. These celebrity lesbians occupy a classed and raced space in pop culture that pretends to be neither.

By moving from high theory to activist work and feminist publishing of the 1980s and ending with popular United States culture of the 2010s, this dissertation argues that in both academic scholarship and pop culture the privileged images continue to bolster white privilege, class privilege, and heterosexuality.

Interpretations

In 2010 media comes into the American home, workplace, and mobile phone through relatively new outlets: Facebook, You Tube, Twitter, Netflix, and Internet websites, and reality television shows such as "America's Got Talent" and "The Voice" interface with their audiences through voting mechanisms and online discussion forums. These forms of media operate on the principle that the viewer can participate in the creation of content, which is then presented back to them alongside a few interactive advertisements. The narrative of the instant celebrity pops up around the You Tube video of the moment (e.g. a white straight couple boogies down the aisle, Justin Bieber crooning in his bedroom, etc.). Viewers help these overnight sensations extend their fifteen minutes of fame and presume that visibility (measured by the number of views) in this seemingly open forum (anyone with the technology can upload a video) can equal celebrity and upper-class status. This kind of visibility must be open to anyone, right?

Yet, even as it offers a moment of individual freedom for the viewer at his or her computer, the technology of You Tube rests on neoliberal assumptions about visibility and political power that center whiteness, heterosexuality, and wealth. You Tube packages and connects these moments of freedom so that the viewer can choose another similar video package to follow the last. Here the viewer is consumer and creator, but the website follows the connections and creates another picture of the viewer, to direct her to additional content. The Amazon website works in a similar way to both profile and cater to the needs of each consumer. Freedom and surveillance entangle the online consumer.

As Hong notes: "Modes of surveillance produce and regulate racial, gendered, and sexual difference. By the same token, these mechanisms of surveillance implicitly valorize whiteness, masculinity, and heteronormativity, and ascribe these categories to the imperialist subject" (77). While the needs of each individual may be paramount in the online environment, unless each user expressly notes his or her race, ethnicity, sexuality, or social class, he or she is assumed by the computers crunching the data to be white/Caucasian, heterosexual, and middle-to-upper class. By searching for queer texts on Google, listening to Spanish flamenco music on Pandora, or buying lesbian fiction on Amazon, the computer user is "seen" as not the norm by the data crunchers. In this online capitalist system, the disposable income to shop freely might be the most important assumption of the surveilling technology.

How does the onscreen environment in the 21st century continue to make the lesbian of color invisible? Even when white GLBT people are invoked as a target market, that focus assumes that this group has access to disposable income because

of their racial privilege, an assumption that serves to justify the silence toward and about queers of color.

According to the report, "Poverty in the Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Community" published by the Williams Institute at the UCLA School of Law, the least prosperous GLB couples contain at least one African American or Latino/Latina partner living in rural area—and these are geographically some of the least visible types of households in the mainstream media. The gender gap in income comes across most strongly in the National Survey of Family Growth from 2002:

> Using national data from the NSFG for people ages 18-44, we find that 24% of lesbians and bisexual women are poor, compared with only 19% of heterosexual women. At 15%, gay men and bisexual men have poverty rates equal to those of heterosexual men (13%) in the NSFG. (Albeda, et. al. ii)

In layering all of this data it emerges that lesbians of color, partnered or not, are more likely to be acquainted with poverty than white lesbians, and lesbians over 65 (of all races and ethnicities) are more likely to live in poverty than their gay male peers. This study also found that children being raised in same-sex female households were more likely to live in poverty than their peers in opposite-sex households.

This study indicates that white lesbians, particularly retirement-aged ones, may not have the financial resources that advertisers hope, and the money equals representation equation falls flat. While white lesbians may enjoy the privilege of seeing their lives represented in movies, on television shows, and in online content, the redundant image of the wealthy white lesbian has been constructed for the

advancement of consumer culture, not the advancement of womankind. The interrogation of how and why lesbianism is represented as white and wealthy deserves to be interrogated though critical race theory.

Suggestions for future research

After struggling to write about the absent presence of the lesbian of color and poring through archives for publications from the 1980s, it has been a relief to read Sharon Patricia Holland's analysis in *The Erotic Life of Racism.* Holland sharpens critical race theory against black feminism and queer theory and finds the "black.female.queer" figure standing in these overlapping discourses—ever-present, occasionally quoted, and essentially overlooked. Another way in which Holland circles this problem is by naming this figure S.H.E. (Singular, Historical, Exogenous)—in contrast with the universal and more privileged bodies that stand in for humankind. Holland's central argument about S.H.E. harmonizes with the analysis of theoretical texts from chapter one of this dissertation. In addition, by interrogating the ways in which racism and heterosexism hold together the language that we must use to write theory we could expand the work of Holland's theory.

> It is my contention that the overarching problem here is that queer of color critique is not solely addressing the remnants of identity politics, but the object of queer theory's ongoing ridicule: a feminism that somehow turned the corner on the black body and never looked back. (Holland 81)

Let us continue to reach back with reverence to the nascent era of white queer theory to see which conversations were left at the academic conference and which bodies were deemed not queer enough or too fraught with meaning to be used for

high theory. That is one way to bridge the hypervisible and colorblind mainstream media to the past and current online activism by lesbians of color.

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