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Reconsidering a Politicized Erotic: Lesbian Feminism, Mis/Recognition, and Identity Practices

by

Molly L. Slattery

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APPROVED, THESIS COMMITTEE:

Judith Roof
Professor of English
William Shakespeare Chair in English
Department Chair

Cary Wolfe
Bruce and Elizabeth Dunlevie Professor of English
Director, 3CT: Center for Critical and Cultural Theory

Cymene Howe
Associate Professor, Anthropology

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For my grandmother, Laura Perez-Hill

“para que así conozcan la razón de mi canto.”
Abstract

This genealogical study examines the ways in which the discourse of identity shapes lesbianism activism as it surfaced in response to the misogynistic lesbophobia inherent to US feminist and homophilic identity political groups in the mid to late 20th century. In particular, the dissertation focuses on identity politics models that are premised upon theories of social inclusion, where recognition and visibility are presumed to signal social integration. In this register, inclusion proves to be a problematic trope because it gave rise to the demand for authenticity and the democratic prioritization of the majority stakeholders’ needs in identity political groups. In the spirit of accommodation, political lesbians capitulated to heteronormative pressures and disavowed desire, reinstating a feminist hegemony that masqueraded as “lesbian” resistance. Accordingly, this research endeavors to ascertain why lesbianism was open to critique from other identity political groups and what mechanisms allowed lesbianism to be subsumed within those discourses. The identity politics models described herein are premised upon the assumption that visibility equals power. Because lesbian desire is not visibly inscribed on the body, lesbians may deploy strategies of misrecognition that make risk-aversive behaviors such as passing commonplace for the lesbian. Yet, identitarian groups used political models based upon the necessity of honesty, transparency, and visibility, making identity politics a hostile terrain wherein the lesbian activist found herself enmeshed. Contemporary theorists, however, have picked up on the importance of misrecognition, play, and performativity, but, when executed within the discourse of identity, these critical responses reproduce hegemonic strategies of containment that normalize
difference. This analysis documents moments of strategic misrecognition that operate successfully because of a conscious acknowledgement of lesbian exclusion from the social. While this research holds that identity political groups are excluded from the social to their detriment, the dissertation looks into the possibility that systemic exclusion may produce novel counteralignments to the regime of identity, focusing, instead, on important “differences that make a difference.”
Overview

Lesbian activism emerged in the mid-1950s and gained national attention within a decade. With little prior public presence and a nonexistent protest network, lesbian activists aligned with identity-based feminist and homophilic groups. These groups had recourse to identity politics models that held that denigration occurs when a group or person is misrecognized. In this register, self-sovereignty and demand for rights based upon the specificity of the individual are prized: recognition must be precise, and visibility matters. Communities composed of individuals so constituted are susceptible to fragmentation because, with so many competing interests, it is difficult to achieve consensus, and marginalization of fringe elements may occur. Established identitarian groups tolerated lesbian difference, even though many felt that the transgressive nature of lesbianism would alienate members of the status quo who then would reject public policy initiatives and legislation such as the Equal Rights Amendment and Roe v. Wade.

Despite initial intolerance, lesbian activism gained enough momentum for participants to author multi-discursive critiques of the norm of heterosexuality via a politicized erotic. Two interconnected values lend structure to the politicized erotic in toto: the desire to maintain a lesbian identity that is based upon intimacy between women; and, the commitment to visibilized “political” or social strategies to confront male-defined practices. Seen as a “natural” counteralignment to the heteropatriarchy, lesbianism became a cause célèbre in the women’s movement in the 1970s. The specificity of lesbian desire was a hurdle for heterosexual feminists, however: when lesbians insisted upon the specificity of their desire, the term lesbian appeared to close
off the possibility of being open to difference (here, the difference of the heterosexual feminist hegemony). Being open to difference meant being able to incorporate all differences within a given rubric, and subsuming difference led to homogenization according to prevailing heteronormative narratives in feminism and homophilic groups. In the spirit of accommodation, activists deployed sanitized versions of lesbian strategies of resistance bereft of desire. Without the mooring of desire, lesbian activism succumbed to heteronormative pressures within the women’s movement, and the exuberance with which radicals had embraced political lesbianism cooled to disinterest by the early 1980s.

Accordingly, this research attempts to discover why lesbianism was open to critiques from other identity political groups and what mechanisms allowed lesbianism to be subsumed within those discourses. Identifying some of the processes responsible for lesbian feminism’s expurgation from academic, activist, and mainstream cultures brings to light the systematic, cross-generational misrecognition of the politicized erotic made possible when the movement is filtered through the sieve of identity. The identity politics models described herein are premised upon the assumption that visibility equals power. Because lesbian desire is not visibly inscribed on the body in the way that blackness and biological sex are, for example, lesbians may deploy strategies of misrecognition that make risk-aversive behaviors such as passing commonplace for lesbians. To combat invisibility and misrecognition, identity-based groups used a political model that was premised upon the absolute necessity of visibility and recognition, making identity politics a hostile terrain for lesbians. To this end, the dissertation examines the ways in which risk-aversive lesbians used strategic misrecognition such as passing and hoaxing to
avoid detection by hegemonic forces as well as push the limits of identity as a useful political concept.

Lesbian activists in the Daughters of Bilitis (DOB) hid in plain sight, pretending to be part of a poetry salon, assuming heterogenderal, heteronormative identities, and holding very public discussions about the nature of inversion – the point being that the DOB used tactics of misrecognition while laboring to change the popular notion that homosexuals were pathological. The DOB’s conservatism initiated a powder keg reaction in academia and in activist groups. However, the power of misrecognition was not lost on the critics of the DOB, and counter-discourses surfaced to revamp concepts like parody, crossing, passing, and drag outside of the Daughters’ fascistic tendencies. The discourse of identity informed these counter-discourses, however, just as it had informed the DOB’s activism. Identity, here, is problematic because it normalizes, coding difference and pigeonholing disruptive forces. Because identity is transparent, operates dialectically (in this genealogy), and must answer to the continuous lack that drives sublation, identity gives rise to a proliferation of constructs. In the dynamic of identity production, identities are broken down into attributes that can be mixed and wielded. In the genealogy presented herein, when gender and sexuality become understood as attributes, they lose their specificity and become co-equivalents in poststructuralist accounts of parody, performance, and performativity (i.e., Sue-Ellen Case and Judith Butler). Furthermore, members of the hegemony can appropriate attributes to masquerade as minoritized individuals, forcing us to question the progressiveness of the exceedingly visible proliferation of identities that queerness and LGBTQIA acronym sustain.
To tease out this phenomenon, this dissertation locates an important nexus wherein incipient lesbianism activism, the discourse of identity, and the disavowal of lesbian desire coalesce (introduction and chapter 1). After providing historical context starting in the 1950s to the present moment, the dissertation maps the trajectory of one thread in this genealogy, starting with the Daughters of Bilitis, detouring through performance and performativity narratives, to end with an analysis of Showtimes’ *The L Word* to determine the consequences of the discourse of identity and the modes of visibilization that it produces (chapters 2-4). The study also examines relevant alternatives to the identity model from within the archive and concludes by suggesting that both the alignments and counteralignments presented share in a theoretical preoccupation with social inclusion, a concern that distracts critics from addressing the actual disappointments of the identity dynamic (chapter 5).

This dissertation provides a critique of the premises underpinning the discourse of identity: subjects start from a point of social integration, where integration means freedom. Using a systems theoretical understanding of exclusion, the analysis proposes an alternative to the theory of inclusion, suggesting, instead, that exclusion from social systems provides individuals with freedom because modern individuals are not constitutive components in systems. Nonetheless, individuals communicate according to systemic codes that are misogynistic, homophobic, and lesbophobic, operating via the normalizing discourse of identity. Toying with the mis/recognition motif, lesbians produce playful counteralignments that scramble heteropatriarchic codes and disrupt hegemonic narratives, not because lesbians refuse to play by the rules of identity politics but because they understand the rules so well. And, this irreverence is something that
hegemonic forces in identity politics could not tolerate - not from women and certainly not from lesbians.
I. Introduction

I.1. Lesbian Activism, Identitarian Engagements

With the official charting of what would become the first national lesbian organization, the Daughters of Bilitis, lesbian activism burst on the scene in the mid-1950s and gained national attention within a decade. With little prior public presence and a nonexistent protest network, risk-aversive lesbian activists aligned with identity-based feminist and homophilic groups in the movement’s incipience. Reformist identity politics groups such as Henry Hays’ homophilic male-oriented Mattachine Society and the National Organization for Women (NOW) were safe havens for lesbian activists in the 1950s and 1960s (Gross 26-27). These organizations operated via the demand for legitimate recognition, holding that denigration occurs when a group or person is misrecognized. The goal of minoritized individuals is to be recognized in culture to enjoy the privilege of full citizenship: as Catharine MacKinnon notes, for example, feminism is based on the notion “that women are human beings in truth but not in social reality” (12). According to Shane Phelan, self-sovereignty, uniqueness, and demand for rights based upon the specificity of the individual are prized: recognition must be precise. Following in the footsteps of Phelan, Stephanie Gilmore and Elizabeth Kaminiski also point to the paradox of liberalism that emerges in identity politics, suggesting that individuals form communities with like-minded or similarly constituted individuals to create counterpublics, as Nancy Fraser also posits in her critique of Habermas, or collective identities, a concept borrowed from sociologists Verta Taylor and Nancy
Whittier. Taylor and Whittier understand collective identity as being composed of three ideological underpinnings:

- the construction of boundaries between insiders (“us”) and outsiders (“them”); the formation of an oppositional political consciousness; and the negotiation of identity through everyday practices such as language and dress . . . suggest[ing] that identity formation both is crucial to the survival of a movement-based organization and has a positive impact on individual members’ self-concepts. (97-98)

Communities composed of individuals so constituted are susceptible to fragmentation because it is difficult to arrive at a consensus. If consensus is achieved, it comes about with the marginalization of some element, which raises the contentious question: who gets to speak for others?\textsuperscript{vii}

For 20\textsuperscript{th} century American lesbian activists such as Del Martin, Phyllis Lyon, Barbra Gittings, Barbara Grier, Shirley Willer, Helen Sandoz, and Edith Eyde, it appeared as if everyone but the lesbian got to speak for herself at the mid century mark. As Shane Phelan suggests, the inability of the homophile and women’s movements to adequately address lesbian needs and treat lesbians as equals was the driving force behind the formation of a separate political lesbian movement (23-5). For example, in the early days of the homophile movement, lesbians were silenced by sexism, relegated to the backbenches, and expected to perform stereotypical roles in the meetings.\textsuperscript{viii} One lesbian working within Mattachine in the 1940s said, “There wasn't a women's movement yet so there wasn’t anything to have a conflict about. We knew our place - we were always the coffee makers . . . . There was a clear set of chores for women” (quoted in Stein 68).
Established feminists groups tolerated lesbian difference, even though the purportedly transgressive nature of lesbianism was seen as a threat that would alienate members of the status quo, who then would reject public policy initiatives. In the mid-1960s, however, tension came to a head and NOW president Betty Friedan purged the organization of top-ranking lesbian leaders. Lesbian identitarian organizations were also marginalizing. The homophobia and misogyny in powerful identity-based organizations also prompted lesbian activists such as Helen Sandoz and Barbra Gittings to leave the Daughters of Bilitis in the 1960s when the founders devoted all of their support and energy to the women’s movement proper. In the 1970s, the Furies and the Radicalesbians invented distinct lesbian communities, though group leadership was typically white, middle class, educated, and conservative (S. Phelan 153). Therein, lesbian activists adopted identity politics strategies such as mobilization, visibilization, and consciousness-raising from feminist, homophilic, and civil rights protest organizations with which lesbian feminists had forged coalitions.

Anything but static, lesbian activism morphed from social conservatism that aimed for assimilation in the 1950s to identity-based activism and to radical lesbianism, separatism, and BDSM in the 1970s. Over the course of three decades, lesbian activism gained enough momentum for participants to author important multi-discursive, multi-phenomenal critiques of the norm of heterosexuality via a politicized erotic. While lesbian activist modes of resistance were diverse, two interconnected values lend structure to the politicized erotic: the desire to maintain a lesbian identity that is based upon intimacy between women; and, the commitment to highly visibilized political action
to confront concomitant hegemonic forces such as heteronormativity, militarism, and capitalism that lesbian activists found deeply entrenched in male-defined social practices.

Caught up in the competing and sometimes irreconcilable demands of the women’s movement and lesbian activism, lesbians had to contend with accusations of misogyny. Feminists feared that lesbians recapitulated the processes of male desire in their sexualization and objectification of women. Subsequently, a contingent of feminist thinkers asked lesbians to downplay homosexual desire. Influential activist groups such as the Daughters of Bilitis ended up accommodating erotophobic identitarian requests. As lesbian feminism grew increasingly more visible, it also became increasingly less lesbian. Gender studies scholar Alice Echols submits, “. . . sex troubled many heterosexual feminists who had found in the women’s movement a welcome respite from sexuality” (218). To win approval from powerhouse feminist organizations, some lesbian feminists such as social conservatives Lyon and Martin as well as up-start activists Audre Lorde, Ti-Grace Atkinson, Karla Jay, Adrienne Rich, and Catharine McKinnon “distanced themselves from the sexual aspects of lesbianism . . . to persuade feminists that lesbianism was not simply a bedroom issue, and that lesbians were not male-identified ‘bogeywomen’ out to sexually exploit women” (Ibid.). For those lesbians who did not conform to the heterosexualized feminine models of lesbianism, downplaying sexuality was a way to address the accusation that their masculinity was somehow complicit with men and patriarchy . . . by disentangling lesbian sexuality from heterosexuality and re-conceptualizing heterosexual sex as consorting with “the enemy.” They capitalized on dominant assumptions regarding female sexuality . . . to draw a
distinction between lesbian sex and heterosexual sex, claiming that lesbian sex was “pure as snow” since it did not involve men. (Ibid. 218)

Amid the cacophony of complaints, however, lesbian feminism slowly curried the favor of leading identitarian powers, despite its initial triviality in the identity politics arena. Ivy Bottini, head of the New York NOW chapter in 1969, prioritized the “lesbian question” during her chapter meetings, unapologetically asking if lesbianism was a feminist issue in an eponymous article. Despite her authority, Bottini garnered the rancor of the organization proper, and NOW-president Betty Friedan determined that such posturing detracted from the organizations goals. Friedan called Bottini and her Sapphic sympathizers a “lavender menace.” Friedan’s homophobia betrayed a fear held by a number of straight feminists, who felt that the taint of lesbianism, itself socially stigmatized, would have a deleterious affect on more important, broader social issues like women’s equality. Susan Brownmiller, a progressive yet heterosexual feminist, remarked on Friedan’s slight, assuring her New York Times audience that the lesbian presence was not so much a lavender menace but a “lavender herring” that evoked no “clear and present danger” to the feminist movement (Brownmiller 82). When lesbian activists took offense at Brownmiller’s characterization, Brownmiller was beside herself and could not fathom why her quip upset her lesbian compere. Domesticating the lesbian for her literate, urbane heterosexual audience, Brownmiller was blind to her dismissiveness, which rendered the lesbian apolitical.

Friedan unceremoniously dumped Bottini and then expelled top lesbian position holders, one of whom was the inimitable Rita Mae Brown, then-editor of NOW’s national publication. The lesbian question abided with Brown, and it roared to the fore on
May 1, 1970 at the Second Conference to Unite Women in New York City. Noticing that the conference contained no lesbian speakers, NOW lesbians staged a veritable coup. A group of 20 or so women soon to be known as the Radicalesbians turned off the lights and stormed the stage to address an audience of no less than 300 women during the conference’s opening remarks. Wearing tee shirts with Friedan’s darling sobriquet emblazoned proudly front and center, Brown and her lavender cohorts distributed what could be considered perhaps one of the most articulate declarations of radical lesbianism, “The Woman-Identified Woman” manifesto (1970).

The Radicalesbians, fed up with the institutional homophobia in NOW, penned one of the most compelling and influential articulations of a politicized erotic. Therein, lesbians were defined as the “rage of all women condensed to the point of explosion” (No pag.) Anger had surfaced on two fronts: lesbians organized to combat male misogyny and feminist homophobia. The authors of the manifesto understood the world to be coded via a prioritization of masculine imperatives; however, the Radicalesbians held that males were not inherently biased, contrary to the popular mythos that organized around “lesbian femi-nazis.” Instead, misogyny was the product of socialization, which was arbitrary and contingent. Lesbianism, they wrote, “is a category of behavior possible only in a sexist society characterized by rigid sex roles and dominated by male supremacy. Those sex roles dehumanize women by defining us as a supportive/serving caste in relation to the master caste of men,” whom the Furies’ Charlotte Bunch less favorably dubbed “pigs” in her essay, “Lesbians in Revolt” (1972). Far more generously, the Radicalesbians held that social forces “emotionally cripple men by demanding that they be alienated from their own bodies and emotions in order to perform their economic/political/military functions
effectively” (Woman-Identified Woman No pag.). In this way, homosexuality is “a by-product of a particular way of setting up roles (or approved patterns of behavior) on the basis of sex; as such, homosexuality is an inauthentic (not consonant with "reality") category” (Ibid.). If society evolved in such a way that men did not oppress women and all sexuality was acceptable, the Radicalesbians reasoned, “the categories of homosexuality and heterosexuality would disappear” (Ibid.). In its contemporaneous vestige, however, the social was a cold, unfriendly place for women and lesbians, dominated by ossified misogynist and heteronormative codes that sabotaged the Radicalesbians’ attempts at self-actualization. Despite the contingent nature of social relations, lesbians lived in a constructed world and so were misrecognized. Words like lesbian and dyke were descriptors with which to discipline women: “When a woman hears this word (lesbian) tossed her way, she knows she is stepping out of line. She knows that she has crossed the terrible boundary of her sex role. She recoils, she protests, she reshapes her actions to gain approval” (Ibid.). Lesbian, the Radicalesbians write, “is a label invented by the Man to throw at any woman who dares to be his equal, who dares to challenge his prerogatives (including that of all women as part of the exchange medium among men), who dares to assert the primacy of her own needs” (Ibid.).

Addressing the second point of anger, the Radicalesbians describe feminist discourse, reporting that feminists were hesitant to discuss lesbianism, lest those same weighted words be hurled in their direction. From the Radicalesbian’s firsthand account, we know that some feminists were “hostile” and “evasive” when pressed to discuss lesbianism, and feminists often dispelled serious debate by “incorporate[ing] it into some “broader issue” (i.e., feminism, third world women issues, race, class, etc.) (Ibid.).
Pointedly, the Radicalesbians insisted that the women’s movement must deal with lesbianism on its own terms:

until women see in each other the possibility of a primal commitment which includes sexual love, they will be denying themselves the love and value they readily accord to men, thus affirming their second-class status. As long as male acceptability is primary—both to individual women and to the movement as a whole—the term lesbian will be used effectively against women. *(Woman-Identified Woman No pag..)*

Ignoring lesbianism and lesbian desire, feminists did not antagonize heteronormativity, they reasoned; instead lesbophobic feminists sought “acceptability for women's liberation, and the most crucial aspect of the acceptability [was] to deny lesbianism” (Ibid.). Some lesbian activists recommended that the easiest way to critique the heteropatriarchy was to eschew its rules, to essentially stop having sex with men. But the Radicalesbians noted that this course of action is a red herring. They suggest, instead, a two pronged approach: “on one level, which is both personal and political, women may withdraw emotional and sexual energies from men, and work out various alternatives for those energies in their own lives”, but more importantly, “on a different political/psychological level, it must be understood that what is crucial [italics mine] is that women begin disengaging from male defined response patterns” – ergo the importance of lesbianism and lesbian desire as one of many counteralignments in the feminist movement and culture proper. Following this line of reasoning, the Radicalesbians held that heterosexuality was problematic to be sure (Brown’s later vitriol regarding heterosexuality is a case in point), but rethinking male-defined response
patterns such as ingrained self-loathing and validation from male-defined social roles was the chief issue, at least according to the manifesto. This emphasis was not merely about downplaying lesbian sexuality, as critics have noted, but it was an attempt to get feminists to understand that their dismissal of lesbian issues was but a byproduct of the misogynistic oppression that feminists had forsworn.

As Radicalesbian Karla Jay points out, an overwhelming majority of the NOW audience who received the manifesto embraced the insurgence, which was so effective that NOW members began to speak extemporaneously about the lesbian question, showing their support for their lesbian sisters. The occasion was anything but somber, and, the next day, conference members created impromptu panels to discuss the topic more thoroughly. Jay even notes that the conference ended in a group dance, a tactic long employed by the Gay Liberation Front (144). And, Brownmiller remarks that, after the meeting of the Second Congress, she witnessed a “coming-out fervor akin to a tidal wave,” though she “was bewildered by the overnight conversions and sudden switches in overt orientation by many of the activists [she] knew.” In this way, Friedan’s indecorous faux pas propelled lesbian feminism from relative obscurity to unprecedented endorsement from feminist and intellectual allies critical of phallocentricism: if feminism was the theory, lesbianism was now the practice. The link between the two is worth explicating: both feminists and lesbian feminists located the source of oppression “in the sexual and procreative relations in the home, which find extension in other spheres of life that the male culture defines as personal rather than political,” which prompted the reversal of the hetpat schema that students of the movement find in the ubiquitous lesbian feminist motto, *the personal is the political* (Ehikhamen 104). Feminists began to
appreciate the nature of lesbian resistance, locating power not in homosexual erotics *per se* but in feminine intimacies (which could be nonsexual) and in the disavowal of the penis – for, what better way to critique phallocentrism than by attacking it at its root? As a “natural” counteralignment to the heteropatriarchy, lesbian feminism became a veritable *cause celebre* in the women’s movement for a moment in the 1970s.\textsuperscript{xvii} Doing politics meant rethinking community and intimacy patterns, i.e., dispensing with the penis for political lesbians and feminists alike, and practices surfaced to address the personal/political commitment that feminists and lesbian feminists shared. The lesbian presence was finally tangible.

A subtle yet detrimental conceptual shift underlies this connection, however, especially when the “political/psychological” is overshadowed by the “personal/political”: lesbian *sexuality* was slowly and systematically replaced with lesbian *experience*, which covers an extensive range of *women’s* experiences, sexual or otherwise. Because lesbian feminism dispenses with the penis and male-oriented intimacy patterns, lesbian sexuality was presumed to be a counterhegemonic practice in and of itself – this attribute made the position novel and appealing to radicals of all stripes. Theorizing against masculinized culture, feminist modes of being that resisted the traditional patriarchal family structure were aligned with a sanitized version of lesbianism *bereft of sexuality*.\textsuperscript{xviii} Biddy Martin, for example, criticized the woman-identified woman concept (filtered through the personal/political mold) because, therein, “lesbian desire remains desexualized as the desire for connection with other women. In short, representing lesbians' difference from heterosexual women is not, in her account, critical to successfully representing lesbian within a difference-sensitive frame” (Chesire
Calhoun 213). Feminists and lesbian activists who insisted upon the deprioritization of lesbian sexuality or those who donned the mantle of lesbianism *sans* desire reinforced the heterosexual norm.\textsuperscript{xix}

Sundry modes of lesbian disappearance were deployed, and some were more underhanded than others. For example, Friedan’s homophobia was invidious but obvious; yet, less obtrusively, Ti-Grace Atkinson championed a stoic feminism that deplored submission to the base appetites. In her essay, “Nobody Needs to Get Fucked,” Barbara Lipschutz echoes that sentiment and urges women to “free the libido from the tyranny of orgasm-seeking” because, she argues, “sometimes hugging is nicer” (quoted in Levy, no pag.) – as if completely misreading the intention behind the “Woman-identified Woman” manifesto and taking that reading to its illogical extreme. In the same manner, poet and activist Adrienne Rich disavowed the lesbian erotic, insisting that sex does not have to factor into intimacy, a point taken to its philosophical limits with her “lesbian continuum” (1980).

Using Catherine MacKinnon’s analysis of the connection between capitalism, pornography, and the degradation of women, Rich’s theoretical lesbianism is a critique of *compulsory heterosexuality* as well as a well-intentioned critique of feminist lesbophobia. Rich first finds fault with the feminist movement for ignoring and downplaying lesbian needs but then undoes all the good she tries to do by coming up with an accommodationist strategy. Rich argues that compulsory heterosexuality results from the over-determination of the heteropatriarchic paradigm that gives men full access to women’s bodies, decrying the inequity and positing a woman-identified experience. Here, the best way to resist heteropatriarchic privilege is to concentrate on intimate
relationships between women. Rich broadens the term *lesbian*, however, to *lesbian experience*, and so deploys a new concept called the *lesbian continuum*. Where *lesbian* failed to be open to all critiques of the heteropatriarchy (i.e., it was a closed strategy for heterosexual women), a woman-identified woman could situate herself on a continuum of political lesbianism, selecting from a range of experiences that included heterosexuality, bisexuality, homosexuality, and even asexuality, effectively invisibilizing the homosexual aspect of lesbian feminism.xx Denied the specificity of desire, lesbian feminism’s vivacity is torn asunder. The continuum was no flash in the pain, and its logic permeates the lesbian archive, though it came under intense scrutiny. Twelve years after its postulation, in 1992, for example, Jan Clausen published an article in *Out/Look* magazine wherein she announced her sexually-fulfilling relationship with a man as well as her outright refusal to identify as anything but a lesbian (Stein 28). Accordingly, Brownmiller's surprise at the wave of lesbian conversions should not be a surprise to us. While NOW feminists should be lauded for their openness, we might suggest that the complete 180 that Jay and Brownmiller witnessed at the 2nd Congress came about because feminist readings of the manifesto were colored by the bias of their own conditioning so much so that many converts missed the point of the manifesto: the Radicalesbians wanted feminists to challenge their own male-defined response patterns to avoid discriminating against lesbians in the ways that these response patterns had conditioned heteronormative feminists to treat lesbians. “The Woman-identified Woman” essay was a critique of the pervasiveness of heterosexuality that demanded the recognition of lesbian desire; it was not a white flag.
I.2. Institutional Apparati of Identity

Heteronormative pressures were institutional and personal, often coming from the least likely of sources. For example, the institutionalization of Women’s Studies programs in the late 1960s and early 1970s was a veritable coup for the Women’s’ Liberation movement and for lesbian activists as well. As Bonnie Zimmerman notes in her 2002 NWSA article, “Women's Studies, NWSA, and the Future of the (Inter)Discipline”:

Almost immediately, we created innovative, interdisciplinary courses that continue to be the core of women's studies programs: the introductory course; feminist theory; gender, race, and class; lesbian lives; women's health; and so on. These courses demonstrate the inherent power of beginning our intellectual inquiry with what Christine Delphy called “the oppression of women”. (x)

Even though the Equal Rights Amendment did not pan out, minoritized women, lesbians, and ethnic minorities gained ground in the academy. In retrospect, however, Zimmerman wonders why more progress wasn’t made, vaguely noting, “. . . due to a number of structural and institutional reasons, these courses have not always reached their full potential of smashing discrete categories of knowledge, nor do they proliferate as widely as gender-based courses within the disciplines” (Ibid.), making us wonder, in turn, the ways in which this failure happened, and why.

In 1970, noted Women’s Studies advocate, Catharine Stimpson, put forth the call for the creation of a national organization for women’s studies scholars.xxi Noting the importance of the professionalization of the field, Dr. Stimpson inspired a group of scholars, who met in San Francisco four years later, to hammer out the constitution for
the National Women’s Scholars Association (NWSA), an organization unprecedented in its reach and now in its 35th year of activity. To paraphrase Zimmerman, the main objectives of the NWSA involved combining the local with the global, being activist if only by way of theory while fostering interdisciplinarity; “promoting feminist theory, pedagogy, and practice”; “creating a sense of professional identity”; mentoring women’s studies grad students; and, finally, “nurturing a feminist community” (Zimmermann viii–xx). Lesbian issues co-existed with and were housed within Women’s Studies programs and the NWSA, and these associations had an impact on how we think about lesbianism and lesbian feminism. As the NWSA grew, within it grew the tendency to marginalize, aping the problems in the Women’s Liberation movement. Very often, lesbians were asked to downplay their sexuality in the name of the “greater good.” Preparing for the International Women’s Year conference, progressive feminist Amy Swerdlow presented at a women’s studies meeting in Maryland in 1975 and argued that “no struggle should be put forward around lesbian issues; that could wait until later”, which Tucker Farley, former chair of the NWSA National Lesbian Caucus, says “was perceived as being as much a slap in the face as when male leftists told women they would have to wait until "after the revolution."” (36-7)

The first NWSA Lesbian Caucus members met with initial support, according to Barbara Gerber, chair of the Lesbian Caucus (1990-1993). However, external forces in the press, being fed information from old guard members of the academy, scapegoated lesbians, blaming their influence on the financial woes that were hounding women’s colleges. Numerous attempts were made to get the NWSA to initially renounce scapegoating - to no avail. Farley reports:
One example was the Feminist Scholarship Conference, which had taken place 28 February-3 March 1978 in Champaign, Illinois. At a session devoted to "The Problems in Women's Studies," the stated problems included: needy students who want counseling, not academic work; conflict between street Women's Studies and real Women's Studies; and—lesbians. Why lesbians? Because of lesbians, women's colleges were closing: Sarah Lawrence was in trouble, Bryn Mawr and Smith were to follow, those in comfortable niches were discomfited, and students were scared away from fear of being seduced. \[\text{xiii}\]

Closing down women’s colleges, of course, was anathema to the feminist cause.

On the personal level, Sharon Deevey, writer and Women’s Lib activist, lived through the establishment of the NWSA and explains her feelings of shame and isolation when she told friends and fellow activists that she had left her feminist-sympathizing husband after having fallen in love with “Joan.” Expecting to be embraced for her commitment to the cause, Deevey reports on the deep-seeded heteronormative predisposition that supports the institution of marriage: “My friends, and their husbands, explained to each other that I had been stolen by a man-hating lesbian. Their hatred of Joan as a “real” lesbian only emphasized their need to continue seeing me as a passive, duped, nonthreatening “real woman” (23). Deevey goes on to speculate about the nature of heteronormativity and its materialization in the feminist movement proper. Deevey’s Women’s Liberation friends committed to the idea of lesbianism and its utility in the feminist movement but did not practice lesbianism nor did they seem to understand it:

Much of my new oppression as a lesbian was coming from my heterosexual friends – the women I had loved and worked with in the W.L. [Women’s
Liberation movement]. I was a “nice” lesbian who explained to them over and over, as many times as they asked, why I was a lesbian and how I was oppressed.

(24)

Deevey’s commentary is indicative of a divide between feminist and lesbian activists that became palpable in the NWSA. Therein, some caucuses were marginalized and pitted against one another, as special interest groups warred over position and place. In particular, Barbara Gerber discusses the tension that stemmed from the 3rd World Woman’s Caucus, which claimed that it would also represent 3rd world lesbians and lesbians of color, while the Lesbian Caucus provided a chair of those designations. Allegations of racism and homophobia were cast across the aisle, growing to a fever pitch by the mid 1980s.

Since its emergence in the arena of identity politics, lesbian feminism had to attend to accusations of conformism, classism, essentialism, racism, heterogenderism and/or apolitical separatism from various segments of the lesbian contingent displeased with how its leaders were addressing the needs of their supposedly intersectional subjectivities – an observation that picked up steam with the apostate contestations of the Combahee River Collective in the 1970s and coursed through the multiculturalism wars in the 1980s. Internal disputation typically occurred alongside the request to prioritize some other identity attribute (race, class, gender, etc.) over or in spite of sexuality. However, doing so diminished the scope of a properly lesbian politicized erotic and paralyzed its effectivity (Zimmerman Separatism 455-8). Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, the multiculturalism wars were unkind to lesbian activists, who lost considerable
ground so much so that, by 1990, the NWSA held “lesbian sensitivity” classes for those in all other caucuses (Gerber 6-7).

In her book *Objective Lessons* (2012), Robyn Weigman identifies the rationale that may drive lesbophobia in academia, in activism, and, in particular, in Women’s Studies departments. Weigman provides researchers with valuable insight that may pinpoint an attribute inherent to the field, and, later on, to the field of gender studies, that renders lesbianism the “lowest common denominator” or “less than” in the identity politics arena (Phelan 17). Weigman argues that Women’s Studies is supported by the assumption “that if we only find the right discourse, object of study, or analytic tool, our critical practice will be adequate to the political commitments that inspire it” (2-3), an impetus that emerges with the academic institutionalization of the political concerns of denigrated groups in the 1970s and 1980s. While Weigman is careful not to critique the drive for innovation in the field, she suggests that questing after novel critical practices left behind or glossed over important questions that second wave feminist theory had asked. Yet, it’s hard to determine if Weigman’s analysis is little more than a nostalgic plea for the authority that came before. Similarly, Tessa Elizabeth Jordan and Jo-Ann Wallace argue that the third wave feminist appeal to “high theory” often dismisses the “backwards” language 1970s activists used without evaluating how dominant cultural codes such as heteronormativity may have informed observations of backwardness. Theorists charged feminist and lesbian feminists with relying on a muddled form of identity politics that essentialized experience – and, as has been shown, these theorists were often correct: when lesbians insisted upon the specificity and necessity of their desire, the term *lesbian* was not open to difference. In this way,
feminism—itsself enmeshed in heteronormativity—left lesbian feminism behind as failed
trope but only after sublating it and subsequently robbing it of its potency as a social
strategy. Their mistake was demanding that being open to difference meant being open to
all difference within a given rubric or category (i.e., lesbian could not accommodate
heterosexual feminism).

Critics were quick to pick up on elitist and essentialist tendencies in lesbian
feminism, penning condemnatory essays and scathing rebukes against individuals in the
movement who had the power to define lesbianism (e.g., typically educated, white,
middle class, heterogenderal, sexually conservative women) at the expense of lesbians on
the margin (e.g., working class or ethnic). While many forms of lesbian feminism were
indeed elitist, essentialist, and even pathological—Valeria Solanas’ *SCUM Manifesto*
(1967) comes to mind—there were a number of texts, movements, and events that were
unfairly pigeonholed.\textsuperscript{xxviii} Shelving its vivacity and shunting lesbian feminism into
Women’s Studies departments, impassive NWSA caucuses, and crowded anthologies in
the 1980s, critics reduced the richness of the movement to an essentialist narrative in
lesbian feminist texts that intrinsically fought against such imposition, thereby handling
the “anxiety of influence” of lesbian feminism and so resolving an oedipal crisis (Gallup
3-5; *Roof A Lure* Chapter 2).\textsuperscript{xxix} Critics were suspicious of the ways in which radical
lesbians defined lesbianism exclusively within the realm of homosexual desire.\textsuperscript{xxx} Highly
influential essays such as Alice Echols’ “The Feminism of Yin and Yang” (1983) and, a
little later on, Joan Scott’s “The Evidence of Experience” (1991) are standard examples
of the reproach leveled against lesbian feminism, faulting this method of social analysis
for its purported deployment of a universal, ahistorical lesbian subjectivity. Interpreted
through the lens of identity and identity politics, lesbian feminism is unpardonably anachronistic. Third wave and poststructuralist sensibilities urge theorists to recoil from the ontological prioritization of identity, a premise that is often built into the political models that lesbian feminists had recourse to within the confines of identity politics.\textsuperscript{xxxi}

While problematic in its nostalgia, Jordan and Wallace’s text call for a reconsideration of the feminist, lesbian, and lesbian feminist original nomenclatures because the efforts of the “second wave” are often caricaturized as reductive and simple. As Weigman notes, “in the compulsion to overcome what has failed” (52), feminist and Woman’s Studies scholars embraced novel modes of analysis that radically distance their work from anachronistic concepts, often ignoring or misrecognizing important similarities between outmoded and novel concepts – the social construction of identities in the manifesto being one of the most significant, which was glossed over as essentialism. Sue-Ellen Case, author of the important often-anthologized essay, “Towards a Butch-Femme Aesthetic”, stands guilty of this charge, reducing lesbian feminism to the heterogenderality of the Daughters of Bilitis (the consequences of which are explored herein). Second wave feminism and lesbian activism are far from guiltless, of course, but the point is that the \textit{trope of failure} attends both second wave feminism and lesbian feminism, constraining their most robust and energetic moments.

Using Wendy Brown’s essay “The Impossibility of Women’s Studies” (1997), Weigman details how the trope of \textit{failure} informs and limits the field imaginary in Women’s Studies, arguing that each new cohort of scholars distances itself from past scholarship that has not shown significant pay-out: jejune women’s lib discourses linked to the failure of the ERA are jettisoned in favor of more theoretically rigorous 3\textsuperscript{rd} wave
analyses, and the term *woman* is found problematic as it, too, is incapable of capturing the complexity of what it means to be a woman. As the term *women* fails, Weigman illustrates the ways in which Women’s Studies gravitates toward complexity with a reading of Leora Auslander’s essay, “Do Women’s + Feminist + Men’s + Lesbian and Gay + Queer Studies = Gender Studies?” (1992). Deemed essentializing, the term *women* was gradually and systematically replaced with the more expansive, sexier term *gender*. In this framework, gender is a master concept that is supposed to alleviate the essentialism, but, as an umbrella term, it also has a tendency to co-opt both sex and sexuality, leveling important differences between the “subcategories” it attends.

When the feminist hegemony accuses lesbian modes of visibilization and avenues of social critique essentialist, it recontains lesbian difference and misrecognizes its potential. Scholar and sometime protestor, Jill Dolan, has called for a long-overdue reconsideration of lesbian feminism, maintaining that, despite its flaws, the movement has “yet to be given its due,” having been deemed “too white, too middle-class, too sexually conservative . . . to serve as an historical model for the new queer sex radicalism and its rejection of bounded identity categories” (205). Dolan argues that lesbian feminism is more “vital, lustful, intellectually acute, and more culturally diverse than it’s been described” (206). We might suggest that this sexual vitality—and concerns regarding how to manage it—may be the very thing that sparked critical consternation from the right and the left all along. xxxii

Award winning lesbian erotic film director Barbara Hammer reports on the one-sided nature of the critical lesbophobic misrecognition she experienced firsthand in the late 1970s and early 1980s. xxxiii In her *Menses* (1974) and *Women I Love* (1976),
Hammer tries to upset convention juxtaposing nature scenes with lesbian sex acts (e.g., butterflies in flight layered over mutual masturbation vignettes). Accused of essentialist biologism, Hammer explains:

... the critics were leading the feminist movement after I made the films. And I wasn't aware that by placing women in nature, nude, and celebrating the expanse of nature, I was saying that women were purely biological . . . I welcomed [the criticism], except that it wasn't a criticism in dialogue. It was a criticism after the fact . . . [It was] so harsh and so judgmental that I couldn't keep doing the same kind of work. (Haug 75-6) xxxiv

Hammer insists that her erotica was some of the first of its kind and so was bound to be imperfect; however, she also claims that the scope of her work was too easily dismissed as essentialist twaddle that sutured nature to the feminine, recapitulating worn Western stereotypes and so failing to be innovative. Instead, her immediate critics may have overlooked the ways in which Hammer tried to destabilize and subvert detrimental social codes. xxxv For example, suturing the feminine to the natural world is a long-standing problematic theme in the western cannon, but Hammer aims at redescribing the trope according to her version of its lived use. At the time of filming her erotica, Hammer observed that “large numbers of women were living in Mendocino and Albion and leaving for the woods - out of the urban setting to try and find this lesbian life that was truer to what they felt they were, rather than being inhibited by the cultural constrictions of the city” (76). Hammer’s execution may be suspect (the topic of a different paper altogether), but her instincts are impressive: appropriating the tired theme of feminine biological essentialism was meant to be a strategy of resistance based upon the specific
needs of a group of lesbians living in California in the early 70s. Furthermore, we might suggest that Hammer understood lesbian separatism as poetry, and her oeuvre is a statement about developing an erotic aesthetic. For Hammer, the city represents linguistic, cultural, and sexual oppression. Nature is something other, not merely the other half of a worn-out binary (e.g., nature/culture, feminine/masculine) but a metaphor for the poetic process of decreation (and recreation) where a *bricoleur* could pick a restricting trope from the broken, decaying world of convention to make the world anew. To offer an example, we might suggest that Eve Ensler tries her hand at this type of poetry in her very famous reclamation of the word cunt in *The Vagina Monologues* (1996).

Hammer concedes, however, that she and those of her ilk were swept up in the sparkling novelty of lesbian feminism and radical lesbian erotica in the 1970s – women had never had so much sexual freedom nor the ability to express themselves so licitly, she insists - and naively believed that “all lesbians were going to be curious, breaking rules, breaking norms, out on the fringe” (75). Yet, Hammer and fellow filmmakers Su Friedrich, Susana Blaustein Munoz, and Julie Zando “[found] that the lesbian audience was just as conservative as the heterosexual one” (Ibid.), and the didacticism of Hammer’s art house films never caught on in an appreciable way with generations of lesbian audiences. xxxvi Dismissed as pornographic exhibitionism or, at best, honored as a precursor to the sex-positive lesbian BDSM movement that rose to prominence in the late 1970s and early 1980s, Hammer’s legacy may deserve the type of critical reimagining that her films prescribe and motivates the following redescription of lesbian activism that pays attention of lesbian feminism while also entreating the complexity of the
phenomenon. In this way, an appreciation of political lesbianism is enriched by “deploy[ing] modes of thinking that are no longer binary and structuralist and that allow for the coexistence of multiple, inter-inflective dynamics” (Roof *Remaking* 4), which necessitates reading lesbian feminism through Jacques Lacan, Gilles Deleuze, and Niklas Luhmann, disparate thinkers who nonetheless “share an attention to post-structural complexity and an understanding of phenomena as multiple, inseparable, inter-inflective, and difficult to delineate” (Ibid.) – Hammer’s work in a nutshell.

I.3. Identity, Operativity

Weigman’s analysis pinpoints a pattern in academia and activism: identity politics operates on the generation of novel concepts and tropes over time. In this respect, hegemonic forces revel in and are sustained by the proliferation of tropes, categories, concepts, and identities. According to Dympna Callaghan in her essay on race, identity, and the feminist hegemony, “The Vicar and the Virago: Feminism and the Problem of Identity”, such proliferation may work in the service of hegemonic identity, resolving the boredom of reigning identity by co-opting otherness, particularly lesbian otherness. Callaghan begins her analysis detailing the infamous Vicar and Virago affair that took place in Britain in 1988. Rahila Khan, a feminist writer living in England, experienced unprecedented professional success writing about and through her experiences as a young Asian woman growing up in the UK. Khan was so successful that noted feminist publishing house, Virago Press signed her and requested that she publish a second novel. Sought by national media sources when she was expected to do a publicity tour, Khan succumbed to pressure and stepped forward to reveal her true identity: Rahila was a white
middle class male vicar named Toby Forward. Forward was unapologetic in his hoax as he felt that being an artist validated his indiscretions, insisting, “experience should not be required to validate utterance” (196) – at least, he argued, not in an aesthetic apolitical domain. Callaghan demonstrates, however, that Forward’s stubborn insistence on his innocence engages with the discourse of liberalism and stems from a “long-held humanist assumption used to buttress the white male canon” wherein “the author’s race and gender are irrelevant” (Ibid.). As Callaghan points out:

the crucial contradiction of the liberal humanist aesthetic is that individual identity and personal experience are paramount aspects of art so long as they provide evidence of a universal human nature on the model of the privileged white male; but they become specious once they mark the specificities (gender, race, etc.) that are diametrically opposed to this hegemonic model of identity.

(Callaghan 196)

Callaghan concludes that in this register whiteness and maleness may not determine a place in the cannon but literary merit, she cheekily notes, seems to “[accrue] to those both white and male” (Ibid.). Even though the author and text do not adequately correspond, Callaghan cautions that imagination or artistic license should not be “boundaryless” (Ibid.). Instead, Callaghan suggests, echoing the sentiment of Roof and Weigman from earlier:

the appropriation of subordinate identities by privileged whites demonstrates that endeavors to compensate for the exclusion of racial “minorities” from the means of literary production can become the very means for continuing this exclusion.

(Ibid.)
Forward’s literary production not only hid the author’s whiteness while narrowly defining racial experience of others based upon white mediation but also “invent[ed] an ethnicity that . . . colored the blandness of white (non)identity, which has become so normalized to be entirely devoid of racial marking” (197). This position of racial transparency is the “perfect “neutral” base from which to assume and appropriate all other identities” while also being “a condition of perpetual lack that in turn provides the rationale for all colonizing gestures” (Ibid.). Callaghan relies upon Terry Eagleton’s understanding of modernity to detail the processes by which identities are colonized via Forward’s hoaxic rationale: “in a symbolic economy dominated by the commodity,” Callaghan explains, identity is “the ephemeral function of this or that act of consumption, media experience, sexual relationship, trend or fashion” (Eagleton 145; quoted in Callaghan 197). In other words, identity is no longer a matter of self-sovereignty, and the humanism that sustained the discourse of liberalism finds itself divorced from liberalism “by contemporary market conditions” and the “endless proliferations of late capitalism” (Callaghan 197). Referencing the proliferation of lesbian types in the modern landscape, Dean Clark suggested (in an essay of the same name) that we call this phenomenon “commodity lesbianism” (1991).

Commodity lesbianism is supported by the discourse of liberalism. Liberal discourse supported the idea of equality for all citizens while insisting upon the validity of the self-interest of each social actor, what Callaghan calls the “unmediated authenticity of the first person” (195). Building a community of women to nurture positive collective identity was paramount to lesbian activism but problematic from the get-go, as the demands of competing individualities could perpetually frustrate consensus. Furthermore,
recalling Weigman’s argument from earlier, feminism was not innocent in its “attempts to foreground difference”, according to Callaghan. In its appropriation of the discourses of liberalism and identity, feminism has not been “immunized . . . from the brutal colonizing forces of the marketplace”, as “it remains the case that the debacle was in part the result of feminism’s participation in the commodification of ethnic identity, a signal of white feminism’s still troubled encounter with racial difference” (198).

We find this proclivity in another unlikely place: in feminism’s enduring response to lesbian activist critique of heteronormativity. Heteronormativity is an ideological force that codes in various social registers, controlling expressions of sexuality and articulating these expressions via its own internal logic; and, the disavowal of lesbian desire was, in part, a result of feminism’s involvement in the commodification of identity, illustrating its distressing engagement with heteronormativity. Allowing various modes of sexualities to proliferate, according to the identity dynamic, heteronormativity shows itself to be “bland” and so thoroughly normalized that it, too, works from a position of “perpetual lack that provides the rational for all colonizing gestures” (Callaghan 197). What’s more, this social force allows the expression of multiple sexualities, and once antinormative sexualities are visibilized, they, too, can be swept up in the operation of identity. Identities may be arbitrary and limitless, but their emergence depends upon the selections that came before and the signifying system to which they refer – in other words, meaning is nowhere but it isn’t everywhere.

The identity dynamic is still at play today. Consider queering and the LGBTQIA+ acronym, for example, that emerged in the wake of the AIDS pandemic. During the 1980s, the demonizing media barrage that surrounded the AIDS pandemic demanded that
gay and lesbian activists train their energies on the crisis. Humanizing victims and finding a cure for the disease became top priorities. Nan Hunter, the director of the ACLU for Gay and Lesbian Rights Project in the 1980s, noted that the AIDS pandemic overwhelmed and dominated gay and lesbian public policy in initiatives for over a decade: “There were hundreds of AIDS related bills that got introduced in state legislatures during that period of time. Literally hundreds! It was just amazing. It was . . . a tornado of AIDS-related legislation” (quoted in Bernstein 560). As a demographic, lesbians were and remain the lowest risk group for contracting the virus through lesbian sex alone; nonetheless, lesbian organizations sank their resources into fighting the disease.

By the end of the 1990s, however, lesbian activists began questioning the legitimacy of ignoring the pressing, if not dire, healthcare needs of their own communities. Presenting at the Lesbian AIDS Caregivers Conference in San Francisco (1989), plenary speaker Jackie Winnow began her talk as follows: "I’m in a room of lesbian AIDS caregivers, wondering why we're not also lesbian health caregivers . . . . In 1988, approximately forty thousand women are living with cancer in the San Francisco/Oakland area, at least four thousand of them lesbians. The forty thousand don’t have the services that the one hundred women with AIDS have....” (Quoted in Schwartz 230). Winnow suggested that women’s healthcare issues were not a cultural preoccupation because of rampant hardwired misogyny: “No one takes care of women or lesbians except women or lesbians, and we have a hard time taking care of ourselves, of finding ourselves worthy and important enough to pay attention to” (Ibid.). In light of the apparent need for support, public policy, and healthcare in the lesbian community,
Winnow asked: “How is it that we are here today talking about AIDS?” We might suggest that a pervasive theme of accommodation haunts lesbian activists who are devalued doubly for being female and homosexual – in society and in other identitarian groups. The attention paid to the AIDS pandemic did not spur reciprocal concern for lesbian issues from the mainstream media or other minoritized groups, even after the discovery of potent antivirals. As the AIDS pandemic became less devastating, AIDS activists shifted their concerns to queer activism, and, with it, its academic iteration, *queering*, both of which preceded and influenced the emergence of the *LGBTQIA+* acronym that gained cultural currency as acceptance increased broadly to dwarf lesbianism, lesbian needs, and lesbian activism yet again.

As gay and lesbian visibility trended upward to unprecedented levels of presence and acceptance in the “Gay ‘90s”, lesbian issues where being subsumed in larger cultural narratives like queering and the *LGBTQIA+* acronym (Gross 156). Those who queered, theoretically, used deconstructive techniques to problematize the norm of heterosexuality, and the *LGBTQIA+* acronym, a much more profane designation, was and is still used as a version of the “peoples’ queer,” a term that accommodates all difference and future differences for emerging “antinormative” subjectivities. White gay males have been accused of setting the tone for the queer debate in academia as well as the queer activist agenda, which means that queer-identified lesbian concerns may have been overlooked, where their political, social, and cultural needs may be taken for granted that as being the same as gay male concerns. Despite the progressive nature of queering, when queering dispenses with the social contingency of the lesbian or when the *LGBTQIA+* acronym is used to represent all of its radically disparate constituents with thoroughly different
political requirements (e.g., when Asexuals are taken to be politically akin to Trans
people, for instance), erstwhile “antinormative” elements are stripped of their specificity
and made co-equivalents in a quasi-dialectical process that levels difference while
bolstering the reign of sameness and identity. xxxix Asking that unruly individuals and
populations come out to be identified so that they may count (and be counted) and so
procure rights, the program of identity is transmitted through the alibi of visibility. This
process is counterintuitive because while it allows diverse demographics to become
visible, it also whitewashes the specificity of each group or individual that falls within the
overarching domain of the queer or the acronym, and domesticates the unruliness of
lesbian desire. xi “Antinormative” identity processes performed in the name of progress
such as these subsume difference to create a synthesis or a new norm, and, when that new
(anti)norm initiates conflict with some other normative power, a synthesis and polyvalent
syntheses emerge that levels difference ad infinitum.

Identity politics that is based upon the discourse of liberalism asserts a self-
sovereign subject, the demand for an authentic life based upon that sovereignty. Identity
is distinct characteristic of an individual or group. In the examples entreated herein,
specificity (race, gender, sexuality, etc. and the combination of these elements) permits
the unit to stand apart, but identity groups operate according to the same processes,
confusing identity (self-actualizing) with identification, a process whereby the subject
incorporates a feature or quality of the some other entity, altering its internal constitution
in the exchange. For example, feminism’s engagement with lesbian activism is
problematicized in its relationship to the hegemony, demanding the repudiation of unruly
homosexualities. Early lesbian activism stands guilty of this charge as well: the
Daughters of Bilitis (DOB) were socially conservative, heterogenderal, and, at times, fascistic. How do we explain this odd contradiction?

In loosely Hegelian terms, at any given moment, society is the dazzling play between contradictory forces that unfold temporally by means of the dialectical engagements aimed at the resolution of conflict and the realization of eventual perfection in the here and now. The thesis, i.e., the ruling power, ideology, or identity at any given time, is located in specific moments, classes, ideas, or peoples but must deal with threats to its integrity. Dialectical models of being operate on the premise that a class or a subject may fully know itself but not the exterior. Thetic forces must confront not only their own internal differences but also the difference of the outside, i.e., the antithesis. The antithetical is often misunderstood because it is different from the thetical. Difference provokes anxiety and conflict and is seen as a threat to the ruling ideology; to alleviate anxiety, one dispels difference with outright eradication or acceptance, appropriation, assimilation, or reconciliation. Lesbian feminism was antithetical and tried to move from a point of misrecognition and inauthenticity to a state of recognition and equality. The DOB borrowed from the tenets of the ruling ideological forces and embraced heterogenderality in order to diffuse anxiety. This is an example of affirmative dialectics, where $A + B = C$, and $C$ becomes the compromise. Additionally, the synthesis of conflicting ideologies may involve jettisoning prior prejudice in the name of a higher calling – according to McKinnon, the shared humanity of each group. When Laura Bush and her daughter, Barbara, came out in support of marriage equality, for example, it was done so in an appeal to and an understanding of universal humanity of gays, lesbians, and straight people. Finding equality in shared humanity, however, may paper over species
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discourse (human over animal/nature) that undergirds homophobia, misogyny, and racism. In other words, affirmative dialectics ensures that “difference is a function of an always attainable identity” (Halberstam 141). Because identity politics process dialectically, they are supposed to avoid the problems inherent to essentialist identity politics, functioning by means of a narrative model of identity that has “the capacity to generate meaning over time so as to hold past, present, and future together” (Benhabib 353; quoted in Weir 118) – to make meaning and lasting connections through an expanding solidarity. Embracing the horizon as such has its ethical upside, no doubt, but, as with most Hegelian-inspired dialecticians, critics have to be suspicious of telos and ask to what end are these actions being performed?

Any end, even one that is deferred in the name of advancement, may be realized with an “ends justify the means” rationality, so the counteralignments that result in the name of progress may actually end up recapitulating power and identity.

Strategies of resistance are performed to secure the reversal of a relationship of forces, to unwork nodal points and power nexi that dialectical procedures establish: for instance, one queers to combat the typically racialized heteronormative, an example of which is the Forward affair mentioned earlier. However, power alignments like whiteness and heteronormativity very often demand and are predicated on that which is the Forward affair mentioned earlier. Counteralignments can and do question the veracity of the dialectic. Yet, counteralignments may in fact be co-opt discursive events to sustain their own operational fitness; so something like a Bakuninian revolutionary gesture such as queering may demonstrate how the proletarian revolutionary strategy of resistance is co-opted to sustain the very forces that are being rebuked. Any end, even one that is deferred in the name of advancement, may be realized with an “ends justify the means” rationality, so the counteralignments that result in the name of progress may actually end up recapitulating power and identity. So the counteralignments that result in the name of the horizon as such have to be suspicious of telos and ask to what end are these actions being performed?

However, power alignments like whiteness and heteronormativity very often demand and are predicated on that which they prohibit, neutralize, and control. Dialectical procedures can co-opt counteralignments to sustain their own operational fitness, so something like a Bakuninian revolutionary gesture such as queering may demonstrate how the counteralignments that result in the name of progress may actually end up recapitulating power and identity.
heteronormative becomes a *homonormative* via the dialectic. (This is not to say that all moments and methods of queering are dialectical, of course.) We see this problematic at the center of the gay marriage equality debates in academia during the 1990s, of which Judith Butler, Michael Warner, Leo Bersani, and Jack Halberstam were a few of the most vocal opponents. Butler, for example, demonstrates how the legalization of gay marriage sustains state power:

. . . the successful bid to gain access to marriage effectively strengthens the marital status as a state-sanctioned condition for the exercise of certain kinds of rights and entitlements: it strengthens the hand of the state in the regulation of human sexual behaviors; and it emboldens the distinction between legitimate and illegitimate forms of partnership and kinship. Moreover, it seeks to reprivatize sexuality, removing it from the public sphere and from the market, domains where politicization have been very intense. (177)<sup>xlvi</sup>

Butler continues, noting that “. . . the only possible route for a radical democratization of legitimating effects would be to relieve marriage of its place as the precondition of legal entitlements of various kinds. This kind of move would actively seek to dismantle the dominant term, and to return to non-state-centered forms of alliance that augment the possibility of multiple forms on the level of culture and civil society” (Ibid.). Echoing Butler (and Hannah Arendt), Michael Warner reasons, “To say ‘I do’ to marriage is the same thing as saying that non-marital queer sex should be criminalized . . .” (133).<sup>xlvii</sup>

Quoting Chauncey et al. (1989), Halberstam illustrates that "modern gay and lesbian history has favored a narrative about progressive enlightenment within which the same sex couple emerged into liberation towards the end of the twentieth century by
throwing off the tyranny of inversion (tyrannical because it presumed heterosexual structures of desire) and by inhabiting non-variant gender identities and refusing role play” (143); to the contrary, following the logic delineated in Foucault’s *Histories*, the “. . . self-congratulatory, feel-good narrative of liberal humanism that celebrates homo-heroism and ignores the often overlapping agendas of the state and homosexuals, or the family and homosexuals, or decency and homosexuals” (Ibid.). To deal with this problem, Halberstam suggests that we embrace the anti-social, the anxious, the *end of days* mentality, to craft a queer agenda that works cooperatively against global capitalism. Furthermore, Halberstam suggest that we define queerness as a mode of crafting alternatives with others, alternatives which are not naively oriented to a liberal notion of progressive entitlement but a queer anti-nihilistic politics, “turning to a history of alternatives, contemporary moments of alternative political struggle, and high and low cultural productions of a funky, nasty, over the top and thoroughly accessible queer negativity” (Halberstam 154). Taking a psychoanalytic approach, Leo Bersani views sexuality not as “. . . a life-force connecting pleasure to life, survival and futurity, sex, and particularly homo-sex and receptive sex, is a death drive that undoes the self, releases the self from the drive for mastery and coherence and resolution” (quoted in Halberstram142), and this is not to be lamented. Accordingly, for theorists like Lee Edelman, in his text, *No Future* (2005), the “rejection of futurity” is “the meaning of queer critique”, and Edelman argues that we should “. . . embrace the negativity that we anyway structurally represent” in that the “queer subject has been bound epistemologically, to negativity, to nonsense, to anti-production, to unintelligibility” (141) – to nonreproductive sex and death.
However rigorously these counteralignments attempt to move outside of the dialectic, especially with the figure of the queer, Mario Feit suggests that we look a little more closely at the motivations driving these stances. These arguments may be moments of negative dialectics, as that which “turns lack, conflict, and non-reconciliation into anthropological or social signatures whose sublation is either completely unthinkable or, at best, possible in the distant future” (Ibid.). While affirmative dialectics ensures that “difference is a function of an always attainable identity” (Ibid.), negative dialectics can be just as problematic: “difference is only the negative image of an identity that remains the withdrawn and heavily veiled anchorage of all conceptualizations. From this perspective, even variations on a negative dialectics turn out to be theories that have yet to break loose from the reigns of identity-logical thinking” (Ibid.). We might suggest that Warner’s anti-social queer aligns with dialectics of this sort. Some critiques, then, cannot escape the yoke of the dialectic because they function from the margin as anti-thetical moments that not only engage with but help to produce the canonicity and elevated status of the texts they seek to undo, which, Tom Eyers claims, “has the effect of both taming the very possibility of a genuine philosophical act, one that might arise from the nominally unthinkable, and conferring radical chic to ‘anti-philosophy’ which, upon its reinscription in the architecture of the canon and its negative opposite, is divested of much of its transgressive potential” (5).

Returning to the stakes of the “no future argument”, Feit suggests that gay and lesbian academics who rally against marriage equality from a fear of mortality do so because they are enamored of identity: “the transmission of cultural memory from one gay generation to the next is . . . more precarious than the heterosexual transmission of
culture” because, typically, gays and lesbians are not raised by gays or lesbians nor do they raise gays or lesbians often when gays and lesbians do reproduce (Paragraph 49).\textsuperscript{xlvii}

According to Feit, gays and lesbians cannot naturally reproduce which makes it difficult for gays and lesbians to guarantee that their lifestyles, traditions, and cultures will get passed on or have some sort of continuity—making homosexuals anxious so they embrace the “no future” argument.

In “Touching Feelings” (1995), Eve Sedgwick deploys a Kleinian conceptualization of the subject’s anxious or paranoid relation to the outside world and its ethical response to that world in what she calls \textit{reparative reading}. Sedgwick is writing in response to the deployment of the “no future” arguments that Edelman, Bersani, Halberstam, and a number of queer theorists were endorsing in the 1990s. The argument essentially conceives of the queer as an anti-social, anti-capitalistic embodiment of the death drive used to dash the hetpat dream of “reproductive futurism,” which crystalizes in the rhetoric that surrounds marriage equality and the nuclear family. Edelman takes gay marriage and gay parenting to task as they are molded on the hetpat template to instead support the rogue life of the self-serving queer. Sedgwick pithily suggests that while “being the death drive” may be liberating, it also entails a will to power that is not a blissfully narcissistic expression of self-love but one that may tend to tyranny. Locating the penchant for subjective despotism in the “no future” texts, which are characteristically hypercritical, authoritative, and cutthroat, Sedgwick does emphasize the importance of these works to “organize vast amounts of territory and tell big truths” (Hanson 101). However, she also puts forth a call for a depressive, reparative reading that
favors play, affect, and specificity, stemming from Freud’s analysis of paranoia and Melanie Klein’s work on object relations.

Sedgwick notes, “Freud traced every instance of paranoia to the repression of specifically same-sex desire, whether in women or in men” (Sedgwick 255), which allowed his heirs to pathologize homosexuality and call paranoia a homosexual disease. Guy Hocquenghem instead insisted, “if paranoia reflects the repression of same-sex desire, then paranoia is a uniquely privileged site for illuminating not homosexuality itself, but rather precisely the mechanisms of homophobia and heterosexist thought” (Ibid.). From that point forward, Sedgwick argues, being able to read paranoiac signs became one of the most important strategies of queering. Scholars like Edelman, Bersani, and Tim Dean work within this tradition, but Sedgwick sees it as limiting and pushes for a “less aggressive, less thesis-driven, less angst-ridden style of critique that would seek to repair the damage of homophobia and other forms of prejudice and violence rather than simply revealing allegedly new and ever more insidious forms of abuse” (Hanson 102).

An opposite position is a weak, depressive and reparative way of viewing the world. To get to this position, Sedgwick refers to Melanie Klein’s understanding of the ego as that which occupies and oscillates between these two “changing and heterogeneous” positions (paranoid v. depressive) as it matures, moving from the paranoid stage then to the depressive stage. In this moment, the death drives becomes crucial in development. According to Sedgwick’s Klein, an infant’s developing ego can adopt a paranoid position “of terrible alertness to the dangers posed by the hateful and envious part objects that one defensively projects into, carves out of, and ingests from the world around us” (257). Klein notes that an infant is initially terrified of the world that
s/he cannot master (e.g., the external, the other) and fears for its own life, which produces a paranoid anxiety. A psychically healthy infant projects this fear outward, displacing anxiety on objects. The objects become “bad,” and the infant internalizes the good, which it associates with itself. As the infant matures, it moves from the paranoid position to occupy the depressive position, which is “anxiety-mitigating: where one can use one’s resources to assemble or “repair” the murderous part objects into something like a whole (even though the whole that is created does not resemble some pre-existing whole)” (Sedgwick 257). In this whole, the infant incorporates both the “good” and the “bad” attributes of the object. For instance, the breast or the mother are both nourishing and withholding to the child—a healthy ego can deal this inherent conflict and still relate in the world, understanding the necessity of each position. Regardless, one “assembles to one’s own specifications, the more satisfying object is available to be identified with and to offer one nourishment and comfort in return” (Ibid. 258).

Following the spirit rather than the letter of Klein’s law, Sedgwick suggests that individuals occupy paranoid and depressive states. It’s important to note that the depressive never surpasses the paranoid state; the two are inseparable and a person may oscillate between the two positions. Reparative reading is another way of talking about an ethics of care that itself can be paralyzing because it often relies upon an essentializing capacity of care attributed to the female, that, in light of the history of lesbian feminism, reads as the recapitulation of accommodationist models where every social became a concern for lesbians in their critique of anti-capitalism and war during the 1970s. Instead of focusing on an ethics of care, which is not to deny its validity, we might
support the idea of interrogating positionings to look at the multitude of identities that are formed in response to the other in gap-moments.

Sedgwick’s paranoid position is useful in this analysis because being lesbian and visibilizing (coming out or protesting) entails evaluating risk to come up with a response to the world: living openly, for instance, or assuming an identity and living in it. Identity can be useful, especially for those who feel as if they are constantly at risk. When gays and lesbians pass, cross, and hoax - being misrecognized, sometimes through their own actions (passing, crossing for play or to pragmatically gauge risk) and sometimes by merely living in power’s blind spot, is power.

I.4. The Visibility Paradigm

The Stonewall riots are a watershed moment in the gay and lesbian archive. Where once calculated under-the-radar activism was the de rigueur form of collective protest, the community’s violent, well-publicized response to the police raid-and-round-ups in Manhattan’s gay district during the summer of 1969 is emblematic of a novel yet enduring response to inequity (Gross 12; Carter 10; Faderman 195). Riding the waves of social protest, lesbian and gay activists deployed and continue to embrace an active strategy of resistance that stresses “visibility (centering on the importance of coming out), militancy (mobilizing to confront power), and an end to sexual regulation and the monopoly of the compulsory family system (through which the state assumes a monopoly on defining acceptable relationships)” (Sears 96). Coming out, staying out, and publically protesting was and, in many respects, remains the gay and lesbian political strategy par excellence (Gross12).
Nearly half a century distances us from Stonewall, and lesbians and gay men are everywhere – uncloseted neighbors, friends, relatives, co-workers, and elected officials are out, loud and proud. Gay men and lesbians occupy space in the media and are presented positively in textbooks, literatures, plays, and poems; and, they grace the silver screen. Common sense suggests that increased presence is indicative of cultural change, an idea grounded in the supposition that when heteropatriarchic ideologues are exposed to the true to life, “lived experiences” of the oppressed, be it in everyday encounters or in the media, “those who are not part of [the marginalized] community will increase their understanding of the diversity and strength of [those] communities” (Castle 7). Or, as Peggy Phelan notes with a touch more aplomb: “increased visibility equals increased power” (7).

Hermenute and sometime analytic philosopher Charles Taylor reports in his essay “The Politics of Recognition” that contemporary political stratagem that confront prevailing ideological forces typically are dependent upon the rhetoric of identity and so prioritize modes of recognition. In these instances, however, Taylor reports that identity is defined as the self-selected characteristics that makes an individual unique, how a person comes to understand who they are (i.e., why certain differences matter and in what context), and the ways in which unique characteristics are part of the infinite set of permutations that cohere under the umbrella of universal humanity. Additionally, identity is dialogic in that an individual negotiates his or her identity in relation to the expectations and needs of others, which sets it up as a point of contestation. This understanding of identity belongs to the tradition of liberalism, itself dependent upon 18th century philosophical innovations such as social contract theory, the doctrine of the rights
of man, the idea of authentic individualities, and the notion of universal equality.

According to the tenets of liberal identitarianism or identity politics, which, for Taylor, bespeaks the Hegelian master-slave dynamic, if an individual or a group is not recognized by the law and afforded the immunities, protections, freedoms, and rights as the majority of its citizenry, then that individual or group is denigrated, marginalized, and oppressed – that is, it is misrecognized, if recognized at all: in other words,

identity is partly shaped by recognition or its absence, often by the misrecognition of others, and so a person or group of people can suffer real damage, real distortion, if the people . . . around them mirror back to them a confining or demeaning or contemptible picture of themselves. Nonrecognition or misrecognition can inflict harm, can be a form of oppression, imprisoning someone in a false, distorted, and reduced mode of being. (25)

The concept of inauthenticity illustrates the ways in which identities are not essential but are socially constructed and thus reinforced by the hegemony. Societies based upon liberalism hold forth the promise of deliberate rationality, and they are desirable because they take difference into consideration. One may not arrive at the truth of some other but liberal ethics demands that one tries. As Amy Gutmann suggests, these societies stand for the freedom and equality of all people [and] rest upon the mutual respect for reasonable intellectual, political, and cultural difference. Mutual respect requires a widespread willingness and ability to articulate our disagreements, to defend them before people with whom we disagree, to discern the difference between respectable and disrespectful agreement, and to be open to changing our own minds when faced with well-reasoned criticism. (quoted in Taylor 24)
In this way, identity politics “challenges both the definition of a particular identity and the power that enforces it” (Hekman 93).

Disparate activist discourses share in certain fundamental premises that include the notion that denigrated groups seek social and political affirmation because each start from a position of *misrecognition*, if they are recognized at all. As Nancy Fraser points out,

... to be misrecognized...is not simply to be thought ill of, looked down upon or devalued in others' attitudes, beliefs or representations. It is rather to be denied the status of a full partner in social interaction, as a consequence of institutionalized patterns of cultural value that constitute one as comparatively unworthy of respect or esteem. (2000 113-4)

To combat misrecognition, activists have insisted upon identity, deploying identity politics strategies, e.g. consciousness-raising activities and watch-dog group policing of media representations, to counteract damming stereotypes and other forms of inaccurate representation.iii

Visibility has functioned as a marker of social recognition for a number of denigrated social groups including lesbians,liii and recognition is supposed to imply social integration, equality, and freedom. However, we might suggest that recognition was not necessarily representational and indicative of social inclusion; what is being recognized is not the specificity of observed sexualities. Instead, the *meta-terms* of the visibility paradigm like gay, homosexual, queer, or LGBTQIA attempt to reference all minority sexualities. In so doing, meta-terms or categories also reduce complexity via the racialized heteropatriarchic standards that they impose. In this way, we are not given the
tools to address lesbianism or something like radical lesbian politics that has the potential to critique hegemonic forces. To tease out the repercussion of this phenomenon, we may examine a highly visible event that drew an enormous amount of press, the Joseph Biden pro-gay proclamations during the last US presidential campaign.

Hot on the campaign trail in 2012, US Vice Presidential incumbent Joe Biden came out in favor of marriage equality, saying that the sitcom Will & Grace “probably did more to educate the American public than almost anything anybody’s ever done so far” in terms of furthering the acceptance of homosexuality. With nearly 17.3 million viewers tuning into Will & Grace every week at its peak, the Vice President’s comment may have some validity. However, Biden’s off the cuff remark glosses over a number of problems in the show. On the one hand, there are no lesbian regulars in the cast, so the homosexuality that viewers digest is predominantly male (and predominantly white). On the other hand, male homosexuality is domesticated. Will & Grace’s popularity may be due, in part, to the explicitly vanilla heterosexual tension shared between its gay and straight leads. Gay Will is paired with straight Grace, and gay Jack is partnered up with campy Karen. Flirty, cute, and catty, each pairing demonstrates loving, companionate relationships devoid of sex and sexuality, which are reserved for procreation. Instead of focusing on complex social interactions, the show puts forward an underlying imperative that highlights the importance of finding one partner with whom to have a nuclear family modeled on but exceeding the companionate template. Will and Grace perform coupledom well, and Jack and Karen, who serve as foils, intensify the lead performances. Jack and Karen are capricious, selfish, silly, and thoroughly nonserious. Coded as such – nonserious and complementary - the two may be the closest thing to
homosexuality that we get in the series; however, both are bit players who supplement the yawning repetition of the central storyline: for eight years, Will and Grace go through the same set of circumstances. Plot after plot, one of the two finds a potential partner, but that partner never quite lives up to expectation, so Will or Grace dumps his or her paramour to return to the safety of their sexless, nonthreatening relationship. (In this respect, Will and Grace are more stereotypically lesbian than they are straight or gay.) The show culminates with their “breakup” when the two finally find suitable partners, and their companionate relationship ends on bad terms. In the last scene of the last episode, however, viewers witness an important meet-cute, when Will’s college-aged daughter and Grace’s college-aged son (both of whom are replicas of their parents) experience love at first sight. By means of this surrogate relationship, the audience gets the closure (by proxy) that it desired for nearly a decade—to see Will and Grace together, forever, in love—but this time, reproduction seems guaranteed. Here, the grounding heteropatriarchic paradigm that is the show’s narrative is thus doubly reaffirmed.\textsuperscript{lvii}

Sexuality is unruly and messy, but, in this program, both homosexuality and heterosexuality are sanitized to prioritize the reproduction of the nuclear family, precisely what the gay \textit{beau geste} seeks to combat.\textsuperscript{lviii} That a statesman like the bumbling Joe Biden picks up on the significance of “family rhetoric” and domesticated homosexuality made palatable to a wide audience is no clumsy mistake. Decades of criminalization and discrimination had configured homosexuality as an assault on American state and culture. \textit{Will & Grace} allows viewers to experience a domesticated homosexuality that is brought within the purview of the hetpat norm. (It should not be much of a surprise, then, that the one of the only rights that Americans are willing to confer upon homosexuals is the right
to get married, to become heterosexual.) While it is unfair to expect a sitcom to serve as a site of resistance, what’s at stake with both the sitcom and Biden’s sentiment is the loss of gay and especially lesbian cultural specificity and their difference(s) from heterosexuality. *Will & Grace* fails as a progressive mode of *visibilization* because the identity (not difference) that it showcases is one that we are already excruciatingly familiar with, and the program ends up producing the *disappearance* of homosexual difference.

To contextualize Biden’s comments in more rigorously historicist terms, we may refer to Jasbir A. Puar’s work on race, homosexuality, and the co-opting of difference. Puar has produced an eloquent argument suggesting that biopolitical forces of the modern nation-state, particularly in the US, have framed homosexualities in terms of the rhetoric of terrorism. In an attempt to tame the terrifying unknown threat of alternative sexualities, biopolitical forces racialize homosexualities in order to document and control unruly populations. The attack on queerness and homosexuality is not blatantly antagonistic, but the success of domestication depends upon the spontaneous consent to seemingly progressive discourses that emphasize a one-size-fits-all model of social affirmation. Puar argues, “The result of the successes of queer incorporation into the domains of consumer markets and social recognition in the post-civil rights, late twentieth century, these various entries by queers into the biopolitical optimization of life mark a shift, as homosexual bodies have been historically understood as endlessly cathected to death” (Puar xxii). Puar tracks an epistemic shift, noting the “transition under way in how queer subjects are relating to nation-states . . . from being figures of death (i.e., the AIDS epidemic) to becoming ideas of life and productivity (i.e., gay
marriage and families)” (Puar xxii). In these terms, the popularity of *Will & Grace*
signals homosexuality’s incorporation into mass culture, so much so that the political has
taken note and endorses its ascendance. Will and Grace’s relationship—its maturity, death,
and rebirth through reproduction—is a ready metaphor of Puar’s transitory phase and its
*telos*. As Puar notes, “the politics of recognition and incorporation entail that certain—but
certainly not most—homosexuals, gay, and queer bodies may be the temporary recipients
of the “measures of benevolence” that are afforded by liberal discourses of multicultural
tolerance and diversity” where “. . . benevolence is contingent upon ever-narrowing
parameters of white racial privilege, consumption capabilities, gender and kinship
normativity, and bodily integrity” (Ibid.).

Turning Puar’s argument back upon itself, however, we might suggest adding the
dominant discourses of homosexuality and queerness to her list of “benevolence” as well.
Each undergirds Puar’s work and problematizes it in the terms that she spells out in her
critique of hegemonic culture.\(^{lxi}\) Here, Puar’s observation of the rhetorical transition of
homosexuality from death to reproduction is based upon tracking a primarily gay male
phenomenon (AIDS). The threat of unruly lesbian sexualities and the cultural response to
both are included in her analysis, of course, but the examples that connect lesbianism and
threat/death are more of an exception than the rule (i.e., connecting lesbian sexuality to
invisibility or porn). Furthermore, Puar insists upon using the terms homosexual and
queer to inform her radical politics. To be sure, the lesbian and lesbianism are mentioned
in relevant and robust examples of queerness, for example, but lesbianism is never itself
consider political in the same way that queerness is configured.\(^{lxii}\) In Puar’s analysis,
“lesbian” is an identity and one that is enacted in the services of queer politics, depriving
lesbianism of its unique theoretical or political potential, which is precisely why Teresa de Lauretis disavowed the term so quickly after coining it. Puar’s text may be a stunning example of forward-thinking scholarship gone awry in that her antinormativity discourse, divorced from a serious consideration of a lesbian politick, only further imbues the normative with power.

As Judith Roof and Robyn Weigman remind us, “making subjectivities of the 'margins' visible as representational and/or political presences has proven to be not only difficult but at times politically suspect” (viii) because “too often the minoritized subject who tries to speak from the specificity of its cultural position has been recontained through a new, deafening ‘authenticity’ that reduces the complexity of social subjectivity” (Ibid.). Furthermore, these processes “naturalize the requirement that only same sex sexuality can be brought into the open while exempting heterosexuality from the demand of visibility” (Xhonneux 98). Despite its progressive slant, visibility does not necessarily equate to the social affirmation of gay and lesbian cultural specificity (or difference).

The point of this research is not to arrive at a more adequate and realistic understanding of lesbian activism; doing so would play into the identity dynamic explained above. Rather, the dissertation traces the ways in which the discourse of identity perturbs lesbian activism, evaluates the consequences of the identity dynamic as it courses through the counteralignment then and in our present moment, and offers an alternative to the identity politics model. To reevaluate the visibility-identity-recognition nexus, this dissertation poses important questions that attempt to ascertain how a revitalization of some of lesbian activism’s more provocative perspectives may produce
modes of in/visibility that reaffirm the heterogeneity and specificity of lesbianism and a politicized erotic. What intellectual, rhetorical, and methodological mechanisms enable and force us to talk about lesbianism in terms of identity? In what ways does lesbian feminism(s) engage with identity politics to enrich and complicate lesbian identity while neutralizing dissensus? If one of the goals of identity politics is to be recognized correctly and socially integrated, how does a redescription of lesbian activism with an emphasis on difference rather than identity change the contours of the inquiry?
Identity, Recognition

1.1. Identity and the Social Construction of the Lesbian

To help illustrate Taylor’s politics of recognition as it applies to lesbian activism, we may first look at the way identity has been foisted upon the lesbian. Lesbians and lesbian difference have not always been visible; archival research suggests that lesbian invisibility may have been a sign of social tolerance until the modern episteme, when sexuality and the discourses surrounding it “exploded” (Foucault HS1 17-18). Sexuality became an object of documentation, especially in what would become the “soft” sciences. Among those investigators making headway in these emerging sexological fields, psychiatrist Richard Frieherr von Krafft-Ebing and physician Havelock Ellis delineated the distinctions between culturally “normative” and “deviant” sexual practices to understand the ramifications of psychosexuality in the social. Lesbianism in its current usage, however, was socially and conceptually unthinkable until fin de siècle European sexologists and their American scions pathologized the female homosexual. This is not to say that female homosexuality did not occur in the pre-modern before the importation and rise of sexological categorizations; rather female intimacies flourished, and, unlike the experience of male homosexual partnerships, these relationships met with approval, especially when the sexual aspects of Sapphic arrangements were overlooked.

Where the quasi-religious, pre-modern understanding of homosexuality saw the act as a sinful practice that any person could appropriate, the sexological-medical model of homosexuality defined homosexuality as a behavior that the medical community could
use to identify and diagnose a specific type of person.\textsuperscript{lxvi} As Jeffrey Weeks maintains, “the sexologists’ definitions, embodied in medical interventions, “created the homosexual”, and male and female homosexuality was “a production of social categorization, whose fundamental aim and effect was regulation and control. To name was to imprison” (76).\textsuperscript{lxvii} Designating homosexuality as a class triggered what Faderman calls the “morbidification” of lesbian sexuality.\textsuperscript{lxviii} Morbidification entailed condensing the various cognates of female homosexual desire into the overarching category of gender inversion. In the scientific register, a woman’s homosexual tendencies became manifest when her internal wiring did not correspond to her anatomy. Concurrently, sexologists held that women were naturally disinclined to want to have sex (i.e., only men were “naturally” inclined to be sexually assertive), and so they proposed a theory that explained both sexual desire in women as well as antinormative lesbian desire: women who practiced homosexuality were thought of as men trapped in women’s bodies.\textsuperscript{lxix} In this way, lesbian sexuality was framed “scientifically” through the lens of heterosexuality, collapsing the specificity of gender and sexuality in the process. Rendering sexuality and gender co-equivalents corralled very important differences (gender and desire) under the aegis of non-heterosexual antinormativity (more on this problematic below). Faderman’s research brings to light an intriguing notion: because the link between sex and gender is not natural and because thinking about lesbian desire in terms of identity is a result of epistemic frames, contemporary critics do not have to formulate theories of lesbian sexuality through gender or identity – a theme that lesbian feminists were keenly aware of and struggled to articulate to their overwhelmingly identitarian audiences.\textsuperscript{lxx}
Because lesbianism was polyvalent, sexological-medical discourse did not match up with psychosexual experiences and often reflected the class biases of those scientists creating the discourse. For example, Faderman brings to life lesbianism in American cities, detailing the permissiveness of Harlem Renaissance and the modernist avant-garde movement in the early 20th century. Forward-thinking lesbian musicians and artists pushed back against restrictive sexual and gender categorizations such as the gender invert that both sexologists and prominent lesbian figures like Radcliff Hall insisted upon. Across the board, bohemians extolled the virtues of untamed sexuality that exceeded gender inversion as well as the melancholic sociopathology attributed to perpetually frustrated lesbians, echoed in Hall’s Stephen Gordon in the ubiquitous “lesbian” novel, *Well of Loneliness.* As the avant-garde challenged the validity of institutional knowledge regimes and narratives, everyday lesbians were also bucking convention. In lesbian circles in the early to mid-20th century America, the “butch” replaced the gender invert. Where the scientific community defined lesbian sexuality as inversion, butch was a sex-gender category that lesbian-identified women claimed for themselves. Science, politics, and the media did not ignore the butch, of course, and quickly incorporated the nomenclature into their respective registers. It didn’t take a revolution in thought for this semantic adoption to occur because the butch was exceedingly legible, a variation on an old theme—an invert in men’s clothing, the butch made sense discursively. However, her counterpart, the femme, emerged as a perplexing phenomenon not only because she upset sexological expectations but also because she could pass as a straight woman.

By the 1940s, the “butch-femme” dynamic as well as the “kiki” phenomenon,
e.g., those who did not conform to butch or femme roles, were some of the prevalent modes of lesbian performance, comprising an increasingly complex typology, especially in the community-building bar scene (Faderman *Return* 580). Conversely, health care professionals and high-ranking members of the federal government, clinging blindly to the norms of heterosexuality and heterogenderality, still held that gender inversion was the principal expression of female homosexuality. The publication of the second Kinsey report in 1953 rocked the ship of state, however, conclusively exhibiting that 1) women were akin to men in that they desired sex, and 2) feminine and kiki women indulged in lesbian sexuality regularly and with pleasure. This knowledge took the feds by surprise, and they reacted by initiating a Pink Scare in D.C. to ferret out all duplicitous, potentially treasonous femme lesbians whose licentious unruly sexual partialities were as threatening and morally corrupt as communism. Here, the invisible femme proved to be a counteralignment to the hetpat regime, yet her visibilization marked her imprisonment when she was spoken into existence to be identified, managed, and policed.

As early as the 1940s, lesbian visibility was an issue for the United States government. During this time, the Hays Code helped establish guidelines to clearly demarcate homosexuality and censor such representations on the silver screen. Dressing as men or playing the fairy, lesbians and gay men were identifiable, and so the state could track and manage its visible homophilic populations. However, the Kinsey Report insisted on the disarticulation of inversion and homosexuality, effectively pulling the rug out from under the government and its institutionalized understanding of lesbian sexuality. Though charges of conservatism abound, the Kinsey Report made bald-faced,
commonsense observations, concluding that sexuality was fluid and that a lesbian needn’t be a masculinized man. A feminine woman could and did desire other women. This simple observation became a problem, however, when the state developed the notion that feminine lesbians, in their inherent duplicity, were primed for and susceptible to foreign influence (Gross 15).

The femme who could pass as straight became the subject of intense government scrutiny. Robert J. Corber draws our attention to a report that came out of a well-publicized 1950s Senate Appropriations Committee on the governmental employment of “sex perverts.” The chief officer of the District of Columbia vice squad, Roy Bick, “created a panic when he testified that thousands of federal employees had been arrested on morals charges, many of them across from the White House in Lafayette Square, a notorious cruising venue” (Corber 39). Blick’s fallacious claims resulted in a Pink Scare, and “the committee issued a virulently homophobic report asserting that male and female homosexual government employees constituted national security risks because they were supposedly vulnerable to blackmail by foreign espionage agents” (Corber 39). The committee felt that it would be impossible to locate these deviants, because, as the report stated, “all homosexual males do not have feminine mannerisms, nor do all female homosexuals display masculine characteristics in their dress or actions” (Ibid.). The report acknowledged the obvious: "many male homosexuals are very masculine in their physical appearance and general demeanor, and many female homosexuals have every appearance of femininity in their outward behavior" (Ibid.), which meant that “if gays and lesbians could no longer be easily identified by an inverted gender identity, then they, too, could infiltrate the government undetected and
subvert it from within by perverting "normal" employees” (Corber 39-40). In this way, “the Cold War construction of the lesbian was deeply implicated, namely, in the transformation of the category of the femme” (Ibid. 40). Unlike the butch who could not pass, the femme served as the locus of anxiety regarding homosexuality as a threat to the state and the American way of life. Corber notes, “what is so striking about this development is that historically the femme was invisible; that is, her lesbianism became visible only in the presence of the butch” (40). And, in a brilliant turn, Corber goes on to suggest that “the tendency of the national security state to isolate the ability of gays and lesbians to pass as perhaps the only characteristic that distinguished them from heterosexuals may explain this dramatic development” (Ibid.). Because the femme could pass as a straight woman, “the femme's femininity threatened to reveal that the normative alignment of sex, gender, and sexuality was no biological mandate but an ideological fiction that worked to maintain the dominance of heterosexuality” (Ibid.). Uncoupled from the butch, the femme was a powerful agent of transgression in her invisibility and her ability to pass, manipulating the authenticity requirements that the identity dynamic demands.

1.2. In the Chiasmus: The Daughters of Bilitis

Prior to the Bick affair, “lesbianism was overlooked by the law since women were generally beneath the law” (Faderman *Odd Girls* 189). Yet, the second Kinsey Report forced the federal government to rise from its dogmatic slumbers to acknowledge the complexity of female sexuality. As government observation increased and itself became more complex, lesbians from sundry demographic groups - working class,
middle class, white, African American, Asian American, butch, femme, academic, socialist, conservative, etc. - were becoming visible on their own terms, slowly assuming the mantle of public activism.\textsuperscript{lxxxii} This was especially true on the West Coast in the 1940s, a locus that scholars have treated as a cynosure in the gay and lesbian archive. This moment is important because it is one of the first stirrings of identitarian rhetoric, i.e., \textit{visibility signals social integration, which will lead to political representation}, in the homophilic movement, and it is particularly relevant in lesbian activism. Working within an identitarian system that bolsters the reign of heteronormativity confounds one’s ability to adequately represent lesbianism. Manipulating the mechanisms of identification, however, proved advantageous.

Coincidentally, invisibility fomented the visible growth of activism, and the West Coast was a suitable site of emergence for incipient homophilic activism because, as historian Craig M. Loftin suggests, its urban hubs provided anonymity that allowed homosexuals to foster sexual subcultures out from the watchful eye of their East coast, mid-Atlantic, or Bible-belt hometown acquaintances (103).\textsuperscript{lxxxiii} What makes California significant, in light of the Second World War, is that its industrial leaders were defense subcontractors who sat atop a massive economic bubble. Wartime production as well as the Cold War arms race required the relocation of scores of highly skilled workers. Following general employment trends, gay men and lesbians moved to Los Angeles, San Diego, and San Francisco along with their straight confrères, seeking high paying defense jobs or work in the various economic sectors that arose as a result of military growth (Loftin 101-3).

While Los Angeles, in particular, was not an outright haven for gays and lesbians,
its city leaders were often indifferent to the residents of its burgeoning gay ghettos, so long as mob tithes were met and politicians’ palms greased, just as in the East. Yet, by the 1950s, the mood was changing. In Washington, Joseph McCarthy adopted Nebraskan Senator Kenneth Wherry’s fustian rhetoric, which derisively connected homosexuality to the immorality of communism (Gallo xxv). Fear mongering trickled down from the federal government to state, regional, and local levels, and a palpable anxiety spread from Washington throughout the country. One exceptionally nasty politico targeted L.A. homosexuals with a dogged callousness that heretofore had been unparalleled in the city. Under the reign of Police Chief William “Wild Bill” Parker, the L.A. vice squad subjected gays and lesbians to dehumanizing interrogations and blatant homophobic targeting (e.g., illegal search and seizure, jeering, beatings, public outings, and false arrests) on the streets and in the bars.\textsuperscript{xxxiv} Often, arrest and exposure meant blacklisting, job termination, and forced migration. Wild Bill’s zealotry was a driving force of oppression, but his campaign ultimately backfired because gay and lesbian community leaders began forming alliances that were conspicuously political. As Loftin notes, “The potent mix of Chief Parker’s dreaded vice squad, the McCarthyite atmosphere, and a growing sense of gay community came together in the formation of the country’s first two gay civil rights organizations, the Mattachine Society in 1950 and ONE, Incorporated in 1952. Both were founded in Los Angeles” (Loftin 103).\textsuperscript{xxxv}

The feeling of isolation also may have compelled early (middle class) lesbian activists to risk exposure.\textsuperscript{xxxvi} For instance, in 1947, Edith Eyde moved to Los Angeles where she began working as a secretary at RKO studios. Told to “look busy” in a job that required very little, Ms. Eyde surreptitiously penned the world’s first-ever lesbian
newsletter, *Vice Versa: America’s Gayest Magazine* (Gallo xxxiv - xxxv). Eyde’s feelings of seclusion and her inability to connect with lesbians outside of the working class lesbian bar scene, which, she, a veritable teetotaler, did not favor, spurred her actions (Endres and Lueck 156). Eyde reports, “I was by myself, and I wanted to be able to meet others like me. I couldn't go down the street saying ‘I'm looking for lesbian friends . . . ‘ [the newsletter] gave me a way of reaching out to other gay gals—a way of getting to know other gals . . . .” Eyde was a poet, a musician, a skilled editor, and, above all else, a noted lothario, who, by her own admission, thoroughly enjoyed the budding lesbian scene in California. With interests so diverse, Eyde put forth no more than nine issues of her newsletter at twelve copies apiece, and she distributed the publication to her friends who likewise passed the magazine along their own friend networks (Streitmatter 2-3).

According to Del Martin and Phyllis Lyon, Eyde inspired the two lovers to co-found the San Francisco-based Daughters of Bilitis (pronounced “Bill-E-tis,” according to Martin, so as not to sound like a disease) and with it, a lesbian magazine, *The Ladder*, sometimes printed as *The Ladder: A Lesbian Review*, depending upon the political inclinations of its editorial team. Martin and Lyon had an aptitude for discovering multi-talented, pioneering activists such as Barbara Gittings, Rita La Porte, Helen Sandoz, Stella Rush, Barbara Grier, Jeannette Howard Foster, and Valerie Taylor (Marcus 129). These women initiated a discursive explosion: by the 1970s, hundreds of lesbian newsletters, journals, and magazines as well as a handful of publishing houses and presses flourished where *none* had existed before. *The Ladder* was one of the most successful and long-lasting lesbians magazines printed in the US, extending beyond the
hands of acquaintances and friends throughout the country and overseas. Funded by a very generous anonymous benefactor named “Pennsylvania” in the 1960s, *The Ladder* was published once a month from 1956-1970 and then once every two months from 1970-1972.

*The Ladder’s* editors and contributors took their work seriously and entreated matters important to lesbians. In the very first issue, the Daughters of Bilitis (DOB) made the very important step, in the “President’s Message,” to designate homosexuals as minorities who needed special dispensation from the government to ensure their rights and freedoms (October 1956). The DOB used *The Ladder* as a way of proving their humanity and combatting misrecognition as well. Each issue of *The Ladder* printed the DOB’s statement of purpose on its pastedown, and the objectives included 1) educating the “variant” so that she may “understand herself and make her adjustment to society”; 2) “creating a lesbian archive and a library while sponsoring and recording public discussions”; 3) “advocating a mode of behavior and dress acceptable to society”; 4) educating the public so as to dispel prejudice and the mythos surrounding sexual deviance; 5) participating in research with authorities to “increase scientific knowledge of the variant”; and, 6) “investigating the penal code to promote legal change and limit criminalization”. The objectives made it clear that not only did heterosexuals misrecognize lesbians, but also that lesbians were not acting in accord with lesbianism.

In order to “prove” homosexual normality, the DOB, along with ONE and other national homophilic organizations, sponsored talks given by leading scientists, psychologists, and sexologists of the day to put their working theses to the test. These public forums were designed to help the “gender variant” or lesbian fit in, and the DOB
advocated an aesthetic of blending to help dispel pernicious rumors about the nature of variance. Assuming a strategy of assimilation—playing the het femme—allowed risk-aversive lesbians to navigate their environments with less social consequence. Rather than having both their femininity and sexuality questioned, het femmes dispelled one of the myths that propped up the theory of gender inversion: feminine women could be and were homosexual. As Faderman notes, “Because middle-class lesbians were less stereotypically obvious as homosexuals, they paid less dearly in everyday life than their working-class counterparts who were more blatant in their public behaviors and in their style of dress” (Odd Girls 184).

DOB het femmes wanted to eradicate stereotypes: as the second thesis of The Ladder’s mission statement demonstrates, one of the primary roles of the DOB was to educate the public to the DOB-backed lesbian lifestyle, which would lead “to an eventual breakdown of erroneous taboos and prejudices.” In order to demonstrate homosexual normalcy, the DOB, along with ONE, Inc. and other national homophilic organizations, sponsored talks given by the leading scientists, psychologists, and sexologists of the day to authenticate a nonthreatening, socially palatable homosexual identity. In so doing, the DOB actively promoted a heterogenderal agenda to convince “other” lesbians to act correspondingly for the benefit of the movement. Elitist and disdainful of the histrionics of working class lesbians who frequented gay bars and played the conjoined butch-femme roles, the DOB tried not to draw attention to lesbian variance from the norm. DOB leaders suggested that lesbians embrace a heterogenderal feminine aesthetic, for they felt that “obvious lesbian behavior on the part of one member might cast disgrace on the entire group” (Ibid. 181) and “[going] so far to sponsor fashion shows to encourage
lesbians to dress in a more feminine way” (Schultz 381).

Martin and Lyon favored policies of assimilation to cope with discrimination, and prominent DOB members valorized profoundly reductive white, middle class, sexually conservative, teetotalling, heterogenderal, and heterosexual privilege, which much less biased iterations of lesbian feminism had to account for throughout the movement. The initial stages of lesbian activism – at least the DOB’s version of it – focused on establishing a heterogenderal *homonormative* to visibly demonstrate to the medical community and the public that lesbians were similar to heterosexual females in every way save for their sexual predilections. Lesbian activists held that their cultural situatedness began from a point of *misrecognition*. Speaking on one’s own behalf to remedy misrecognition was and remains a driving force in both identity and coalitional politics. In particular, dispensing with myths about innate pathology (what Shane Phelan has called the “medical model of lesbianism”) as well as the supposed lesbian predilection for corruption and criminality became a top priority for lesbian activists in the DOB, which entailed not only coming out but also carefully negotiating that publicity.

Comingling with the progressive commentary, readers were also privy to articles in *The Ladder* that were often mawkishly sentimental or dependent upon questionable research. Regarding the latter, for example, Martin relied on dubious science to make the case that women were less susceptible to cultural conditioning than men in the article, “Male and Female – There is a Difference” (July 1959). According to case studies, male cats – in the study, the unquestioned equivalent of human males – could be trained to return to a “mating pen” after only one round in said mating pen; researchers found,
however, that female cats refused to be trained to go to the mating pen of their own accord, no matter how many visits. The researchers felt this evidence proved that female cats as well as women and lesbians by extension were not as easily conditioned as men, and this observation was used to support the existence of a fundamental difference between human males and human females. In the same issue, a staff writer interviewed Artemis Smith, author of “Odd Girl Out.” Smith was stridently no-nonsense, opening the interview by saying that she lives with her female lover and their two cats, who were also both female and both queer. To add to the bizarre, almost jejune tone of the issue, Martin wrote a personal response to an off-hand comment that she believed had been meant as an insult directed at Lyon. A newspaper reporter noted that lesbian publication editors were burly; according to Martin’s piece, Lyon was the only editor of a lesbian publication at the time, so Martin proceeded to defend her lover by printing her measurements (bust, waist and hip), which Martin states puts Lyon in a universally recognized thin and attractive category. Appearances mattered, but so did being recognized on one’s own terms.

The Ladder also housed exceptionally ageist articles prior to the lesbian ageist and fat women’s liberations movement in the 1970s. The March 1959 Ladder report on a luncheon with Dr. T. M. Merit, Dean Emeritus of ONE Institute, provided the older generation of lesbians with a list of “dos and (mostly) don’ts” for dating younger lesbians. In general, dating younger women was frowned upon because the differences in physiognomy were excruciatingly visible and brought attention to the couple. Attention was anathema to the hypersensitive DOB, who wanted nothing more than to fit in with the status quo. Dr. Merit’s rules included theses such as 1) If you cannot dance, do not
dance it as you will look a fool; 2) Do not flirt with young people, because you look desperate, and people will laugh at you; and, 3) Date someone your own age so as you both grow old together, you won’t notice the physical changes so much and will be much more tolerant of the decline in your partner. Above all, lesbianism was increasingly linked to observation and publicity; the message was clear: a lesbian was not to draw attention to herself.

Despite this, the lectures and meetings grew in number and met with success, so much so that the DOB actively solicited leaders for satellite groups throughout the country. Within five years of its establishment, city, state, regional, and national DOB conferences were held, often biannually, and sister groups popped up in L.A., New York, D.C., Chicago, Houston, and various cities throughout the US. While the members of the DOB were embracing publicity, their visibility was tempered with risk-aversive tactics. During the early days of the DOB, Martin and Lyon hired Edith Edye to write for and edit The Ladder, but Edye wrote for the magazine using her very famous anagram, Lisa Ben (“lesbian”). The artist subsequently answered to that pseudonym for the rest of her life, capitalizing on the fame she found in her niche while disavowing her straight identity (Brandt 133).

The anagram and the pseudonym (of which a majority of the initial Ladder contributors used) are interesting because they are emblematic of a risk-aversive trend in lesbian publishing and activism during the 1950s and 60s. Ben and activists of her ilk were keenly aware of the persecution and discriminatory practices of local, state, and federal governments: anonymity was coveted, especially in literature dissemination across state lines, which fell under the purview of the Comstock Act, a law that
criminalized the distribution of immoral (i.e., pornographic) materials through the federal mail system up until 1958 (Bullogh 65). Pseudonymity, on the other hand, was akin to having a superhuman alter ego with which to seek redress from the government. The Mattachine Society, for example, was named after a medieval French courtesan masquerade practice that encouraged masked men to criticize the monarch without reprisal. The DOB may not have adopted this policy directly, but, working hand in hand with Mattachine’s Marxist founder, Henry Hay, the secret sorority surely was aware of Mattachine’s ideological underpinnings, critiquing government and social policy often using pseudonyms to maintain anonymity. Strategic visibilization and misrecognition coupled with risk-aversion were preferences in the incipience of the homophile and lesbian activist movements, and the risk aversive nature of their activism comes to the fore in the ways in which lesbian activist chose their images, names, and histories.

Lesbians have appropriated images and contrived histories from suspect sources because of the absence of a rich and far-reaching history. Lesbians, according to Barbara Hammer, had no real sensual tradition of self-empowerment such as porn until the 1970s; women had no drawings, photographs, or videos that they used to create lesbian porn “because women were taught not to look at each other’s bodies” (Haug 90). Hammer is discussing the importance of lesbian filmic erotica in the 1970s but her off-the-cuff statement neglects the importance of the invented traditions in the lesbian archive. There may have been a dearth of images, texts, etc. about lesbians but lesbian pulp novels, Sapphic poetry, the myths of the Amazons, the Songs of Bilitis, modernist texts serve as prime examples of erotica. Even if these texts are misleading or misogynist, lesbians happily appropriated them to create their own histories in a world that offered them very
The Daughters took their name from the *Songs of Bilitis*, a text translated by French poet Pierre Louÿs in the early 1890s. An archaeologist unearthed a Cypriot sepulcher years prior and found a set of 158 poems written on the walls. These poems became Louÿs’ *Songs of Bilitis*, an autobiographical *bildungsroman* that describes the sexual maturation of the historical courtesan, Bilitis of Pamphylia, contemporary and lover of the poet Sappho as well as Mnasidika, a recurrent love interest in Sappho’s fragments. *Songs* explicitly details Bilitis’ story as lesbian erotica. The poems celebrate homosexuality, documenting the first stirrings of desire in the young woman to stop just short of depicting coitus, which is equated to clandestine ancient female rites. The silence around copulation isn’t surprising, however, as *Songs* turned out to be a hoax Louÿs perpetrated. Until 1893 and a trip to Northern Africa where poet and friend Andre Gide goaded Louÿs into losing his virginity to a female prostitute, Louÿs had very little firsthand knowledge of sex and sexuality.¹ According to Gretchen Schultz, Louÿs was merely cutting his teeth with *Songs*, which was his first attempt at erotica in what turned out to be a sexually explicit pornographic oeuvre that is characterized by its obsession with lesbianism as well as pedophilia (383). Though he lifted verse from Sapphic texts, Louÿs wrote *Songs* himself. *Songs* was so masterfully composed and Louÿs’ knowledge of the ancient Greece so thorough, critics praised and continue to praise the text as a fine example of the neoclassical impulse in the French literary canon, even after they uncovered the hoax.

*Songs* was not published in the US until the 1970s, but some US lesbians procured the texts by means of underground exchange. Many, including Lyon and
Martin, only knew of the text, its reputation, and the hoax but celebrated *Songs* as an important part of the lesbian archive, despite never having read the poems. Had members of the DOB read the poems well (or had they read some of Louÿs’ more scandalous lesbian depictions found in his other works), the group would have been made privy to Louÿs’ intense objectification of lesbians and the intrusive, voyeuristic nature of his observations. Despite the voyeurism and objectification with which the text is imbued, in a clever critical repositioning, the DOB managed to leverage the hoax to dupe Big Brother, using *Bilitis* as the group’s name. As a celebrated literary text that no one had actually read in the States, the *Songs of Bilitis* was the perfect cover. Martin suggested playfully that the DOB could always tell law enforcement that the risk-aversive Daughters assembled in her drawing room were part of a poetry salon (Gallo xviii).

However, not all of the founders of Bilitis knew about Louÿs’ text: for that matter, many of the members and subscribers could not locate many positive representations of lesbianism in the archives. A chronicler in *The Ladder* knew enough to list Louÿs’ book in their lesbian bibliography, and while they knew enough to call the text a hoax, they also called it “a sensitive and searching picture of Lesbian love,” which papers over the text’s inherent exoticism and the masturbatorial exercise of the male gaze. In typical DOB fashion, the founders created a sanitized version of the myth, which they accepted as part of their heritage:

By overlooking tragic endings, whitewashing kinky allusions, forgiving objectifying representations, making over masculine characters, and disregarding heterosexual recuperation, the DOB recast Bilitis in their own image. Their Bilitis was romantic, feminine, committed to women, and G-rated. Indeed, the DOB
pointed out repeatedly that lesbians were unfairly hyper-sexualized in popular images, and, accordingly, the *Ladder* insisted on representing the lesbian as everywoman. (Schultz 385)

However, the DOB had a very pragmatic reason to adopt Louÿs' *Bilitis*. Schultz argues that the full erotic potentiality of lesbian sexuality was sacrificed to protect the members of the DOB, who were . . . tentatively venturing out of the closet into a hostile public arena barren of positive lesbian images. The lesbian in the public imagination of the 1950s was only whispered about; she led a shadowy, tragic existence, cut off from family and denied social acceptance. Her tragedy, both in reality and in melodramatic fictional accounts, was her invisibility. Thus, to achieve lesbian visibility by filling the void with images, the DOB stretched its reading of Louÿs to the limits of plausibility. (Schultz 385)

Schultz may be overly generous in this last appraisal, because the DOB had members who tried to make the lesbian presence public; however, old guard homophiles were more than reticent about publically identifying. Yet, by the 1960s, an ideological transition was afoot: subscribers, members, and even group leaders wanted more from the conservative organization.

While the DOB wanted to fit in as part of the status quo, they also knew that the man they took their name from and the book that he wrote were shams. On this level, the DOB embraced paradox, knowing that visibility is always a form of misrecognition.
because the authentic is never visible. The DOB’s recourse to a manufactured “autochthony” may be a red herring in that what is crucially important is not Bilitis or any one book or event; rather, the cloak and dagger play of visibility and invisibility is strategic and necessary for at-risk subjectivities who of necessity must be crafty bricoleurs, assembling lifestyles through the mix and match, context-dependent appropriation of habits, images, legacies, genealogies, attitudes, affectations, styles, and performances. Along with their insistence on a one size fits all lesbian model, the DOB appropriated the false “positive” image of lesbianism even though it visibilized a sexualized spectacle performed by Louÿs for the benefit of Louÿs, his pleasure heightened by the successful hoax.

In their difference from the status quo and even from each other, gays and lesbians have pined for recognition and presence, and the stakes are great, for, as Suzanna Walters has argued, “the explosion of gay visibility” in the later half of the 20th century may be “the continuation of the American question of whether democracy in difference is possible” (25). The assumptions that underlie this “democracy of difference” based upon visibility are problematic, however, because identity informs difference to its determent. William Connolly makes clear the problem of identity:

An identity is established in relation to a series of differences that have become socially recognized. These differences are essential to its being. If they did not coexist as differences, it would not exist in its distinctness and solidity.

Entrenched in this indispensable relation is a second set of tendencies, themselves in need of exploration, to conceal established identities into fixed forms, thought
and lived as if their structure expressed the true order of things. When these pressures prevail, the maintenance of one identity (or field of identities) involves the conversion of some differences into otherness, into evil, or one of its numerous surrogates. (Connolly 64)

On a theoretical level, what this means is that identity comes about at the expense of differences, where it may “[convert] that difference into otherness in order to secure its own self-certainty” (Ibid.), essentially repeating the flawed dialectical logic of identity and crippling the possibility of any sort of democracy in difference. To denigrated identitarian groups in the 1960s and 1970s – and well into today – being visible, however, was regarded as an act of civil disobedience: it was and remains as a political strategy in lesbian activist movements. To famed lesbian feminist Audre Lorde, poet and purveyor of an intersectional identities-based aesthetic, visibility exposes lesbians to risk, but it is absolutely vital in that it allows communication to occur where once there was silence: “visibility which makes us most vulnerable is that which also is the source of our greatest strength,” because, Lorde avers, having presence is in itself a defiant political response to oppression: “I have come to believe over and over again that what is most important to me must be spoken, made verbal and shared, even at the risk of having it bruised or misunderstood.” In the visibility equals power rubric, however, individuals may unwittingly and spontaneously consent to the heteropatriarchic identificatory regime in the name of “progress.” Visibility is supposed to signal social inclusion, which is supposed to guarantee rights and power; however, certain modes of visibility signal identification, a biopolitical strategy that allows the state or its various institutions to identify, track, and manage populations. It makes sense to think that once “out” and
recognized on one’s own terms, the liberated individual will live more authentically.

There is something suspiciously disingenuous in this allowance, however – coming out is an act of identification that we may think is performed of our own accord; yet, despite the liberatory aspects of self-actualization, coming out may evoke Althusserian interpellation, cementing individuals in the quagmire of ideology at the precise moment when they presume to escape or transcend it.\textsuperscript{cix}

Thus, when gays and lesbians come out or activate their sexuality publicly, they may “execute a revolt that was already implicated in and, thus, domesticated by the heteronarrative” (Ibid.). If power alignments such as heteronormativity demand and are predicated by that which they prohibit, neutralize, and control, then, as Tom Eyers notes:

\begin{quote}
\ldots the Law not only produces its transgressive, dialectical antithesis in the form of a resistance coded in the language of that resisted and thus constitutive of that language, but in \ldots enjoyment or transgression predicated entirely on the perverse fact that it is demanded, framed by an injunction, reveling in the originary prohibition of the Symbolic. (5)
\end{quote}

When visibility is proposed as a solution to social exclusion, supposedly progressive, classist modes of visibilization obscure the ways in which homosexuality is produced against the heterosexual norm.

\subsection*{1.3. The Case against the DOB}

The outright prejudices of the DOB are a dominant thematic in the narrative of lesbian feminism and cast a weighty pall over its trajectory. Of note, performance theorist Sue-Ellen Case authored a derisive evisceration of DOB heterogenderality and lesbian
feminism in her “Toward a Butch-Femme Aesthetic” (1980) where she foists the political onto butch-femme roleplaying. This essay remains a standout text in the archive, downplays the radicality of lesbian feminism, and so contributes to the continued misrecognition of the significance of lesbian feminism, charging the entire movement (and the DOB in toto) with the exceptionally egregious errors of a few influential individuals. Rather than offering balanced criticism against heterogenderist DOB members, Case’s work ends up reinforcing what she attempts to critique—heteronormativity—using a heterogenderal model, i.e., the conjoined butch-femme subjectivity, that is itself incapable of conceiving of sexuality sans the phallus.

The butch-femme subject arises from the questions posed in Technologies of Gender, Teresa de Lauretis’ book that investigates the extent to which heterosexual women are capable of creating feminist counteralignments as they are inscribed within the discourse of heteronormativity. Picking up on de Lauretis’ thematic, Case works to develop a feminist politick outside of the confines of heteronormativity and sees the possibility for real critique in butch-femme lesbian pairings, which the leaders of the DOB opposed. By virtue of the implicit homosexuality involved in the butch-femme pairing relationship and the Marxian critique of DOB elitism to which it gives rise, Case reports that butch-femme does not recapitulate the strictures of heteronormativity and heterogenderality; instead, Case finds power in the lesbian parody of heterosexuality as a “natural” strategy of resistance (295). To be politically effective, however, the butch and the femme must share in their subjectivity. Case tries to demonstrate the ways in which butch and femme call each other into existence: being a butch depends upon having a femme (and vice versa): as she quotes the Sinatra song, “you can’t have one without the
other” (Case 295). The joint subject position comes with a few generic requirements: in order for the campy performative functionary to work, lesbians must 1) come out of the closet; 2) clarify the “basic discourse or style of camp for the lesbian butch-femme positions” (one wonders by whom); and, 3) develop “an understanding of the function of roles in the homosexual life-style would have to be developed, particularly in relation to the historical class and racial relations embedded in the project” (Ibid. 294-5)—and, again, one wonders who will define these roles, which roles and relations will be deemed relevant, and why only race and class are being mentioned in this critical nexus, and not species, for example.

Case goes on to suggest that once this intellectual throat clearing has been accomplished, lesbians then will be able to perform politics via a dually-inhabited subject position through camp and parody, demonstrating that lesbians needn’t “impale themselves on the poles of sexual difference or metaphysical values but constantly seduce the sign system, through flirtation and inconstancy into the light fondle of artifice, replacing the Lacanian slash with a lesbian bar” (295). The statement is perplexing for a number of reasons not least of which is that one fails to see how seduction and the use of sexuality to manipulate a master heteronormative discourse is anything but performance for and according to the rules of heterogenderality and heteronormativity – more on this in a moment.

In order to provide intellectual rigor to her argument, Case references the work of Joan Riviere, an early 20th century Kleinian, to show how women have used performance, masquerade, and risk-aversion to challenge the heteropatriarchy. Deeply involved in European psychoanalysis, Riviere was something of a cause celebre,
translating Freud’s work in in the early 1920s and garnering critical acclaim. Profoundly
influenced by Ernst Jones’ typological analysis of human sexualities, Riviere wrote the
article, “Womanliness as Masquerade” (1929). Beginning her analysis with the basic
Freudian premise that humans are inherently bisexual, Riviere reasoned that one’s unique
development, internal conflicts, and plaguing anxieties determine what type of sexuality
becomes manifest in adulthood. Each sex submitted to gender binarizations with
culturally contrived attributes foisted upon it – reason, intellect, virility, aggression, etc.
attributed to the masculine; concern, empathy, vanity, etc. attributed to the feminine.
Noticing that a certain type of homosexual man would often perform or “exaggerate”
heterosexuality and masculinity to “defend” against his true sexual orientation, Riviere
then examined women who “wished for masculinity” but “put on a mask of womanliness
to avert anxiety and the retribution feared by men” (Ibid.). Riviere detailed a case study
of a successful patient who was talented in a number of roles – the patient was a loving
wife and an attentive mother, who was an intellectual with a satisfying profession.
Though her analysand was accomplished, sexually fulfilled, and beloved, she suffered
from a nagging affliction and experienced stage fright after giving lectures, so much so
that she would fret about her performance and seek the approval of her male peers, often
by flirting with them or, alternately, by being demure. Riviere quickly determined that the
patient unconsciously needed affirmation from father/authority figures and so had
unresolved Oedipal issues, “wish[ing] for recognition of their masculinity from men and
claim to be equals of men, in other words, to be men themselves . . . though publically
she acknowledged her condition of womanhood” – she performed femininity to pass.
Riviere concluded that both heterosexual women and homosexual women suffered from the same affliction and psychological drive.

Using Riviere’s research as a springboard, Case reasons, “All womanliness is a masque worn by woman to disguise the fact that they have taken their fathers' penis in their intellectual stride . . . rather than remain well-adjusted castrated women, these intellectuals have taken the penis for their own and protect it with the mask of the castrated, or womanhood” (Case 300). Case adds that the difference between heterosexual women and lesbians is that “heterosexual women do not claim possession openly, but through reaction-formations; whereas homosexual women openly display their possession of the penis and count on the male’s recognition of defeat” (Ibid.). Case then reduces the 1940s and 1950s butch-femme relationship paradigm accordingly: the butch is the “lesbian woman who proudly displays the possession of the penis, while the femme takes on the compensatory masquerade of womanliness” (Ibid.), which necessitates the link between the two. “The femme,” Case continues, “foregrounds her masquerade by playing to the butch, another woman in a role; likewise the butch displays her penis to a woman who is playing the role of compensatory castration. Because there is no referent in sight, no one knows where the penis is;” and, as she puts it, “the fictions of the penis and castration become ironized and camped up . . . play[ing] on the phallic economy rather than to it” (Ibid.). Double agency, here, is expressed in one subject position – the butch-femme who will challenge the patriarchy with camp and performance.

Finally, Case writes, “these penis-related posturings were always acknowledged as roles (in the 40s and 50s), not biological birthrights, nor any other essentialist poses.
The lesbian roles are underscored as two optional functions for women in the phallicracy” (Case 300). In other words, butch-femme couples exhibit the phallus and play coy in the light of day in their performance and, in so doing, lampoon the hetpat order—“while the heterosexual women's role collapses them into one compensatory charade,” where heterosexuality is a disingenuous show of inferiority that masks the desire for phallic power, at best, or caters to its whims, at worst (Ibid.). Camping up the butch-femme relationship model gives “agency and self-determination to the historically passive subject [the female cum lesbian], providing her with at least two options for gender identification and with the aid of camp, an irony that allows her perception to be constructed outside of ideology, with a gender role that makes her appear as if inside of it” (Ibid.).

The problem, however, is that Case’s butch-femme assumes male privilege by pretending or playing at the penis. Evoking the phallus, even in its campy disavowal, illustrates how difficult it is for Case to conceive of sex between two women without a phallus (which, of course, is not a literal penis). Recalling Case’s remarks on the Lacanian slash and the flirtatious, seductive rhetoric that she uses to put her potential dissenters in check, we might suggest that her adroitness speaks to her desire to tempt, attract, and, ultimately, appease a master law, which she names and sexualizes for her readers – the lesbian bar will replace the Lacanian “slash.” Following Case's reading of Riviere, the slash is the line drawn between the id and the ego when a woman assumes the mantle of masculinity, trying to be both nurturer (female) and authority (male). To escape this pathological way of living, Case reclaims the masquerade as parody with her lesbian bar, i.e., the hyphen between the butch-femme. A play on words referencing early
to mid 20th century dyke bar culture, the lesbian bar is supposed to represent the
“distance, artifice, and grotesque manifestation of a self-conscious attitude toward one's
sexuality” (Andelini-D’Onofrio 90). However, butch and femme lesbianism are not only
tethered to each other but they are also tied to gender and codified in binary terms with
little to no wiggle room. (Below we suggest that gender is much more complex
phenomenon.) As Judith Roof notes in her “Polymorphous Diversity,” butch-femme
paradigms like those espoused by Case look for “a resolution of the ‘inconceivability’ of
lesbian sexuality in a phallocentric system” all the while “recuperate[ing] that
inconceivability by superimposing a male/female model on lesbian relationships” (245).
Roof concludes that while the butch-femme paradigm can critique social mores and roles,
lesbian sexuality is much too complex and “too completely intertwined with cultural
constructions and configurations to comprise more than a partial perspective in any
politics premised on identity” (251).cxi

Imitation, camp, and irony in this instance are problematic because they presume
inferiority – butch-femme coupledom is always in some respects an imitation of an
“originary” heterosexuality. Case’s campy performance is an attempt to anticipate the
Other’s desire, and it plays up to the sadistic pleasure that a master may feel when
imitated. This performance is more than just presenting two female bodies parodying
heterogenderal and heteronormative roles. The performance levels the difference between
sex and gender, making the two identity categories interpenetrating co-equivalents,
reducing difference to identity and sameness, which is oppression. Unwittingly
identifying with the target of her critique, Case’s butch-femme dyad reflects the
inconceivability of sex without the phallus–and so renders what she assumes the hetpat
gaze desires (i.e., tamping the “slash”) as her own desire, which has something to do with bars, poles, and, perhaps, tamping a personal sense of lack. Case’s butch-femme paradigm, then, is a strategy of recontainment of the lesbian sexuality from the outset, functioning as a process of disappearance that whitewashes lesbian desire by recapitulating the norm of heterosexuality.
Engendering and Visibility Politics

2.1. Performance/Performativity

Linking theater, performance, and the critique of heteronormativity, Case endeavors to explain sexual difference through an aesthetic of gender via camp, a satirical mode of social commentary that denigrated groups had appropriated with success.\textsuperscript{cxii} Since the 1900s, camp had been used to describe gay male behavior in unflattering terms (i.e., feminine, overwrought, histrionic, affected, etc.); however, the aesthetic produced a distanced, ironized performance of reality, a reality set “in quotation marks,” as Susan Sontag noted in her famous paper on gay male camp. Therein, Sontag suggests that homosexuals “pinned their integration into society on promoting the aesthetic sense” where camp functioned as “a solvent of morality . . . neutralizing moral indignation [by] sponsor[ing] playfulness.”\textsuperscript{cxiii} Camp does not belong to any group, of course. Playing on stereotypes, giving way to frivolity, and delighting in hyper-stylization and histrionics, camp exacerbates the everyday to the point of absurdity. Oppression may be inscribed on the site of homosexuality when the subject matter is not taken seriously. However, camp is also deliberately subversive in its non-seriousness, “eradicating the ruling powers of heterosexist realist modes” (Case 298), warping the lens of heterosexuality (i.e., successful camp may force viewers to address why they may laugh at the “inherent” humor in a cross-dressing feminized black man, for example). Performed via the butch-femme aesthetic, camp is supposed to allow lesbian women the opportunity to frame their perspectives from outside of heterosexist ideology “with a gender role that makes her appear inside of it” (Ibid. 301). Camp exploits modes of recognition, but since the aesthetic is a strategy developed and perfected by gay men, we may do well to question
its suitability for the specific needs of lesbians and women, given that the heteropatriarchic forces stereotypically define women as nonsensical, delirious, irrational, etc. However, in Case’s hands, camp does not transcend ideology because her butch-femme aesthetic fails in deploying a properly postmodern theory of performance and gender performativity in her recourse to a seemingly stable subjectivity that is constructed in its relationship to the phallus.

Case’s butch-femme aesthetic does not kowtow to the law or, in Lacanian terms, the Father, but attempts to seduce it to subvert authority. This drive for recognition is akin to the workings of desire – recognition is what is desired. Yet, one can never be recognized adequately enough, which is akin to economy of desire. The subject quests after pre-Oedipal wholeness to fill the lack introduced to the subject by means of castration, language, and separation from the mother. Since one can never return to the pre-Oedipal state, there is always something to be desired. The Daughters of Bilitis, for example, wanted to be recognized as heterogenderal heterosexual lesbians so much so that they ended up disavowing their own sexuality to take on a properly feminist cause when they aligned with NOW in the mid1960s. For Case, desire comes in the form of the absent present, the phallus that she cannot and does not get rid of in her butch-femme aesthetic. In this way, Case’s conjoined subjectivity precludes the possibility of lesbian sexuality, and the butch-femme performance ends in (phallic) disappointment.

Judith Butler’s work in Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity (1990) ups the ante in the performance/performativity gender paradigm, evacuating the subject from the discussion to arrive at political modes of recognition that try to sidestep the trap of determinism. To accomplish this task, Butler builds her
theoretical edifice on a Foucauldian reading of modernity, power, discourse, and
subjectivity. During our era or the modern episteme (1770 through the present,
perhaps), loci of power do not predetermine the social order, which

must not be sought in the primary existence of a central point, in a unique source
of sovereignty from which secondary and descendant forms would emanate; [the
intelligibility of the social order] is the moving substrate of force relations which,
by virtue of their inequality, constantly engender states of power, but the latter are
always local and unstable, and ‘Power’ ... is simply the over-all effect that
emerges from all these mobilities. (Foucault HSI 93)

Power courses over and through the modern subject, which is patently non-Cartesian: the
subject is not unified through conscious awareness of itself (i.e., the cogito) nor is it the
storehouse of meaning and power. (Given Freud’s theorization of the unconscious and
Saussure’s work on the arbitrary nature of signification, words and things do not match
up or have a natural one to one correspondence with their referents: the speaking subject
uses a language that s/he does not own.) The Foucauldian subject is a function of
discourse, and discourse is defined as “systems of thoughts composed of ideas, attitudes,
courses of action, beliefs and practices that systematically construct the subjects and the
worlds of which they speak” (Lessa 285). However, we should avoid “imagining a world
of discourse divided between accepted discourse and excluded discourse, or between the
dominant discourse and the dominated one” (Foucault HSI 100); rather, the social is
composed of “a multiplicity of discursive elements that can come into play in various
strategies ... transmit[ting] and produc[ing] power” (Ibid.). Because discourse is
everywhere, reinforcing power, subjects should be thoroughly determined by their
situatedness. Not so, urges Foucault: discourse “also undermines and exposes [power], renders it fragile and makes it possible to thwart it” (*HSI* 100). But, how is this possible? Foucault’s answer evokes complexity:

> There is not, on the one side, a discourse of power, and opposite to it, another discourse that runs counter to it. Discourses are tactical elements or blocks operating in the field of force relations; there can exist different and even contradictory discourses within the same strategy; they can, on the contrary, circulate without changing their form from one strategy to another, opposing strategy. (Ibid. 102)

Resistance is possible and the collocation of similar strategies and statements may inspire systemic change within discursive regimes. Foucault notes:

> there is a plurality of resistances, each of them a special case: resistances that are possible, necessary, improbable; others that are spontaneous, savage, solitary, concerted, rampant, or violent . . . it is doubtless the strategic codification of these points of resistance that makes a revolution possible, somewhat similar to the way in which the state relies on the institutional integration of power relationships. (Ibid. 96)

Examining the psychic constitution of the modern subject, Foucault looks at the juridical (or, in a different register, superegoic) demands that the subject responds to and suggests that the subject represses desire to function in society (e.g., the incest taboo). Repression may give birth to modes of transgression, which problematizes the nature of strategic revolt. As Geoff Boucher writes, “the repression of desire actually creates a field of anticipated transgressions, because any norm is constituted through a citation of its
exceptions” (116). **cxvii** “Subject formation,” Boucher continues, “is the modality by which power operates and it follows that the psychic interiority of the desiring subject is merely a result of the operation of power” (Ibid). Boucher locates the bridge between Butler and Foucault in this moment: Butler, he notes, “shifts ‘from interiority to gender performatives’ by following Foucault in the proposition that normalisation involves the body as the site of a compulsion to signify” (Ibid.). Styles of individuality or how one uses identity to respond to power may be “the very modality of [an individual’s] subjection” (Butler *GT* 172; Boucher 116). We, then, are forced to ask: what makes gender performativity a special site of resistance?

Butler’s theory of identity “rejects the essentialist conception of gender as a substantial difference expressing an underlying natural sexual division” (Ibid. 115). As Boucher explains, “gender performances . . . are subjectless productions of a discursive formation, whereby that formation both polices and produces those bodies constituted in its field . . . gender appears to be everywhere, and yet there is no subject who might criticize the ubiquity of the reigning discourse on heteronormative identity” (Ibid.). **cxviii** Borrowing from Althusser and Lacan, Butler holds that we are hailed and also born into our genders (e.g. a baby girl’s room is painted pink in anticipation of her arrival). Gender is scripted, performed, and repeated, but this repetition is not mandated by a power on high. And, gender attributes are contingent – there is no natural connection between femininity and the color pink, for example.

Using a formula with which LGBTQIA scholars are *overfamiliar* (and so perhaps take its veracity for granted), Butler explains the ossification of stereotypes by defining gender “as the repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid
regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance, of a natural sort of being” (43). These rituals get picked up and repeated in the socius and are subsequently mapped on the body to constitute the body, making gender an iterative process. Gender iterations “retroactively construct the “originary materiality” of sexuality” (Ibid.) and so construct identity fictions that extend the scope of gendering to conditions that seem to have existed prior to its iteration: gender is thus exposed as unstable, contingent, discursive, and arbitrarily constructed, made palatable only by virtue of its own exercise (problematicized in a subsequent chapter). Furthermore, heteronormativity assumes that all subjects should be heterosexual and so are called into existence via the signification of heterosexuality on the body as a “recitation of the norm and its constitutive exclusions”, which creates and imposes a seemingly stable gender/sex binary (Butler 171; quoted in Boucher, 116). Note a crucial distinction between Case and Butler, here: Case postulates a recoverable, stable subject in her butch-femme aesthetic while Butler’s gender has no true subject but is the collocation of processive enactments of genderings, experiences, events, etc. that mold the body according to the dictates of co-present discursive regimes.

Gender in Butler is a political practice that gestures toward an ethics of care for the other, attempting to remedy social ailments such as heterogenderality while giving voice to the oppressed, critiquing hegemonic practice by producing “a political genealogy of gender ontologies … [to] deconstruct the substantive appearance of gender into its constitutive acts and locate … those acts within the compulsory frames set by the various forces that police the social appearance of gender” (GT 43-44).\textsuperscript{4xi} Butler holds that homosexuality is de facto “unthinkable” in heteronormative discourse (Ibid. 117). While
homosexuality is coded in heteronormative terms and thus it is incorporated in discourse, it cannot be understood in-itself. However, productive counteralignments may come from the constitutive outside. In deconstructive terms, the outside (or absence) always informs the interior - thus the outside is constitutive, and exteriority is merely provisional. While this is not quite the same type of insistence upon the absent present phallus that haunts Case’s aesthetic, Butler’s practices on the margin can

. . . exploit the paradoxical “constitutive outside” of the hegemonic norm. These excluded practical identities permanently threaten the hegemonic norm:

permanently, because they assist in its constitution and are therefore everywhere implied as an absence supporting its presence; threaten, because they expose its arbitrariness as a diacritical construction. (Boucher 117)

Drawing on Louis Althusser and Jacques Lacan, Boucher explains the significance of institutional forces on the construction of the subject, which boil down to its fundamental misrecognition: “Ideological institutions interpolate (hail, recruit) “individuals as subjects” through the mechanism of misrecognition” and “the individual has identity conferred upon it by virtue of misrecognizing itself as a subject, that is, a mirror image of the collective Subject that is the (supposed) author of social relations” (Ibid. 120). This, too, is a moment of misrecognition because “social relations constitute the subject as a mere bearer of decentered structures. But this misrecognition is not an epistemological mistake that expresses a subjective desire for self-identity . . . it is the effect of institutional rituals that impress an ascribed subjectivity on the operator of these social practices” (Ibid.). This drive for recognition is conformist:
Indeed, because this effect of “hailing” is not a singular act, but a continuous repetition of ideological interpellations, the subject-citizen is constantly demonstrating their innocence through conformist practices. (Boucher 120) Butler famously suggests that one way to accomplish a critique of the gender is by using or wielding gender attributes in new contexts to resignify gender practices to put on display the iterative aspect of gendering without origin. This disposition – to be recognized on one’s own terms – comes from her understanding of pre-discursive auto-affection. Prior to the subject’s enmeshment in language, its primary driver is its own narcissistic will to life and desire for self-identity (auto-affection). One may exercise volition to recontextualize gender attributes – and, under these auspices, drag becomes Butler’s master signifier. According to Boucher, the “intentionality that drives gender parody is located . . . in the pre-discursive kernel of the human individual” (Ibid. 120); yet, as Boucher notes, pre-discursive volition may actually signal the death of the infans, so “. . . the claims that the speaking and acting “I” is constituted through discourse and that an auto-affective pre-subject precedes discourse are in contradiction” (Ibid. 122).

Theorists like Case and Butler who define gender as both performance and the performative hold that gender is “conscious and individually operated choice among inessential possibilities. With camp and transgender practices, “this taking on is conscious and both parodical and sincere at the same time” (Roof RG 17). Judith Roof notes that the problem with the performance/performativity analogue of gender is not merely located in the illogical confluence Boucher points out; rather, because gendering as such “occurs as conscious and secondary” where “any gender "performance" comes after the subject’s primary sexuation, adheres to binary cultural categories (even if these
are redistributed among sexes), and appears to be wieldable” (Roof RG 17). Understood as being both imitative and generating categories in this paradigm, gender shifts to sets of attributes. Dissolved into attributes, some other notion of gender takes the stage—a stage, which it turns out is not a drag performance, but something we call “identity.” Gender's “attributes” are not expressive but “performative” in so far as gender’s imitative structure (persisting somewhere—in the subject, between the subject and culture, as an imperative) constitutes, presumably in subjects, a gender identity that at the same time also becomes a mode by which such “identity” is displayed. (Ibid.)

The will to life or the auto-affection of the sovereign ego in the prediscursive realm plus the disavowal of gender essentialism in Butler may seem to produce a virile performative politic, but “performativity (in its rather hybridized combination of performance and Austin’s linguistic “speech act”), however, is itself an effect of a systemic operation of gender, constituting a part of a scopic gender regime at the point in history when visibility politics were both most persuasive and most conservative” (Ibid.), according to Roof, which means that “the performative hybrid” – of which the LGBTQIA acronym is a symptom – “had a way of occupying the entire field, of occulting the complex systematicity of gender in cultures, of being an answer, which was no answer at all (no answer to what genders are available, or how genders change and interact, for example)” (Ibid.). As performance, gender is somehow wieldable: identities are selected and used to adorn the subject in an exercise of freedom, but Roof asks, how and why are some attributes selected repeatedly and over and against other attributes to the point of their willful exclusion? One might suggest that some attributes are made visible because they
are sustained via epistemic and discursive regulations. Gender becomes a proliferation of identities and attributes for viewers to don and doff, and “these attributes are made visible but elide and exclude some others, obscuring both gender and sexuality as the economy appears to elucidate it” (Roof RG 17). Roof asks us to seriously consider this understanding of gender – do we always consciously choose our gender attributes? And, when we do, what exactly does that mean?

2.2. Bertha Harris’s Lover

Roof holds that gender is a verb, a process: “to gender is signal, mask, obscure, suggest, mislead, misrecognize, and simplify the uncontainable, uncategorizable chaos of desires and incommensurabilities characteristic of subjects, but energetically contained by society” (2). Furthermore, she contends that gender's job is always to make the subject fit. In so far as one of two binary gender distinctions tends to stand in for and obscure the complex negotiations genders represent, "to gender" is always to reduce, locate, and simplify processes that extend through history from the psychical terrain of the subject to the socio-cultural manifestations, ramifications, and possibilities attached to genders' binary resolutions” (Ibid.)

To be sure, a number of texts, theories, and artifacts exist that exploit the ossification of binary gender, even and especially now as gender tries to be everything (as signaled with the LGBTQIA acronym and transgender): this is how identity functions, especially via dialectics. In loosely Hegelian terms, at any given moment, society is a dazzling play between contradictory forces that unfold temporally by means of the dialectical
engagements aimed at the resolution of conflict and the realization of eventual perfection in the here and now. A thesis, i.e., the ruling power, ideology, or identity at any given time, is located in specific moments, classes, ideas, or peoples but must deal with threats to its integrity. Dialectical models of being operate on the premise that a class or a subject may fully know itself but not the exterior. Thetic forces must confront not only their own internal differences but also the difference of the outside, i.e., the antithesis. The antithetical is often misunderstood because it is different from the thetical. Difference provokes anxiety and conflict and is seen as a threat to the ruling ideology; to alleviate anxiety, one dispels difference with outright eradication or acceptance, appropriation, assimilation, or reconciliation. Lesbian feminism was antithetical and tried to move from a point of misrecognition and inauthenticity to a state of recognition and equality. The DOB borrowed from the tenets of the ruling ideological forces and embraced heterogenderality in order to diffuse anxiety. This is an example of affirmative dialectics, where A + B = C, and C becomes the compromise. Additionally, the synthesis of conflicting ideologies may involve jettisoning prior prejudice in the name of a higher calling – say, the shared humanity of each group. When Laura Bush and her daughter, Barbara, came out in support of marriage equality in the early 2000s, for example, it was done so in an appeal to and an understanding of universal humanity of gays, lesbians, and straight people. Finding equality in shared humanity, however, may paper over species discourse (human over animal/nature) that undergirds homophobia, misogyny, and racism. In other words, dialectics as such ensures that “difference is a function of an always attainable identity” (Halberstam 141).
Because identity politics process dialectically, it is supposed to avoid the problems inherent to essentialism, functioning by means of a narrative model of identity that has “the capacity to generate meaning over time so as to hold past, present, and future together” (Benhabib 353; quoted in Weir 118) – to make meaning and lasting connections through an emerging, expanding solidarity. Embracing the horizon as such has its ethical upside, no doubt, but, as with most Hegelian-inspired dialecticisms, critics have to be suspicious of telos and ask to what end are these action being performed? Any end, even one that is deferred in the name of advancement, may be realized with an “ends justifies the means” rationality, and the counteralignments that result in the name of progress may end up recapitulating power and identity.

Lesbian feminism was entangled in the quagmire of identity politics, but there were a number of moments that stand out because of their supremely conscious awareness of the fascistic nature of identity. In terms of the problem outlined above – rendering gender and sexuality co-equivalent identity attributes – Bertha Harris exploits the politics of recognition and the discourse of identity in her rendering of gender and (mostly) lesbian sexuality in her metafictive novel, *Lover*. In 1976, Harris published her “lesbian” novel *Lover* by the lesbian owned and operated Daughters Press. Published by an alternative press, the text did not gain much notoriety when it was published but numerous lesbian studies critics since have cited the text as not only as a provocative statement on sexuality and aesthetics but also hold that it stands by itself as a strong work of metafiction. However, as A. C. Gable points out, only one critic (Gable herself) has written a full-length scholarly article on the text. According to Gable, the text didn’t draw much attention early on because it did not conform to the norm of post-Stonewall
lesbian fiction. She cites Rita Mae Brown’s *Rubyfruit Jungle* as the template with its focus on realism, whiteness, positivity, and predictability. The text also did not quite fit in the norm of postmodern fiction, which was, at the time, itself predominantly male and heterosexual (Gable 59-60). *Lover* is a text in need of an audience.

As characteristic of metafiction, *Lover* is not really about anything nor does it set out to accomplish much; in fact, Harris has insisted that she only wrote the novel to impress a lover and, despite the thematic of rampant lesbianism in the text, Harris is very hesitant to call her text a lesbian novel (Ibid. 60). Instead Harris fully embraces performance and refers to the text as “a theatrical performance. There's tap dancing and singing, disguise, sleights of hand, mirror illusions, quick-change acts, and drag” (Intro *Lover*). The narrator is anonymous and untrustworthy; the narrative structure, a patchwork of haphazard vignettes, is unpredictable, nonsensical, and unruly. A book about a lesbian writing a book, the novel is both an autobiography and a study in self-referentiality. Characters run wildly from vignette to vignette, often spring-boarding from the page to vanish and reappear in incongruous later scenes. A sense of coherence in the text can be attributed to its recurrent themes, however: performance, camp, visibility, artistic creation, sexuality, cross-dressing, and authenticity (i.e., the narrator forges paintings). In/authenticity is an especially important theme. Harris draws from generic conventions to pervert them, mixing supposedly inviolable genres: opera, plays, and prose are styles that Harris writes through, refers to, and mixes in the text. Savvily deploying an aesthetic of contamination, Harris also mixes genders: a slew of characters participate in simultaneous multiple levels of passing and cross-dressing that confound the reader.
Perhaps the novel’s brightest moments come in the very first vignette. Appropriating Richard Strauss’s opera, *Der Rosenklavier*, Harris appropriates the first act: the curtain opens to “Octavian,” a woman who dresses as a man, seducing the Princess Marie Therese von Werdenberg, the wife of the field marshal. A maid enters the room, and, to avoid detection, Octavian dresses in an attendants’ clothing and affects a woman’s mannerisms. In so doing, Octavian becomes a woman dressed as a man now dressing as a woman. The audience is privy to the farce but also sees how the characters are duped. In this way, Harris illustrates a lesson about how identity and gender are mediated by the expectation effect – “what you see depends upon what you expect to see” (Gable 61). Harris also links gender to the process of artistic creation, as the artist works within and changes generic conventions. The protagonist forges paintings for profit; Harris appropriates (forges) Strauss’s opera in the opening vignette and then performs cross-dressing on the stage; the audience knows about the deception but those who are duped in the play are duped because of their own expectations – what they expect to see. Binary gender system sets up our expectations – boys have beards; female maids would attend married ladies in their bedrooms. However, multiple conflicting desires collect in these characters, and the process seems to spin out of control so that even the reader has to catch her breath to try to figure out the “original” state of a character. Gable calls our attention to a scene in the novel where the anonymous narrator, the lover, gets ready to take her beloved out for a night on the town in New York:

It is hard to dress because she doesn’t know who she will be tonight. She could be Queen Elizabeth the Second if she had time to do her hair in pin curls, if she owned something simple and fuschia-colored, with a bolero jacket, if she had a
pearl necklace. She thinks of T. S. Eliot; but her jock strap is at the laundry and her lips are too full. She wants to wear a stained trench coat and be a detective.

She wants to squire this broad to a blue-plate special, then back to her place or her place. But the beloved is pounding the mattress and yelling, ‘‘Empty! Empty!’’ so the lover makes the simplest choice. She becomes a drag queen named Roman.

She laces white shoe skates with red pompoms to her feet and circles her recumbent beauty, flashing her brawny black-haired legs. (63; quoted in Gable)

The lover is like the novel – she and the novel have no beginning; there is no authentic subjectivity, no origin, no start, and no finish. We do not know the narrator’s name or her history. All we are privy to is her engagement with her beloved. With all of the crossing and passing in the text, we cannot presume her lesbian sexuality is originary. Gable notes that this mixing breaks with convention – a drag queen usually signifies a homosexual man with his crossing ‘‘calling into question the female gender’’ (147). Instead, in this particular performance, a lesbian crossing as a drag queen produces dissonance, according to Gable, confusing crossing, passing, sexualities, genders, and so confounding readers’ expectations of the way that gender and sexuality function, which we are culturally conditioned to assume is binary and correlative. When the lover is ready to leave, s/he enhances her get up with a beard, adding another layer to her performance and re-dressing as a man, as Gable notes. This whirling dissonance demands that the reader try to make sense of the gender performance to ultimately show the absurdity of gender categories.

We might suggest that Harris is less an author and more of an historian in the genealogical vein. Layering gender attributes, Harris’s lover ‘‘push[s] the masquerade to
its limit and prepare[s] for the great carnival of time where masks are constantly re-a-appearing” (Foucault NGH 93-94) demonstrating that subjectivity is not discoverable and is “no longer the identification of our faint individuality with the solid identities of the past, but our ‘unrealization’ through the excessive choice of identities” (Ibid.).

Culture is busy working against this trend, ossifying gender or incorporating unruly elements. Harris’s lover has an identity, but it is ontologically weak: as readers we “attempt . . . to unify [all of the identities] under a mask” (Ibid.) to figure out its original gender and sexuality, for example, so to pin down the true identity of the subject; yet, Harris’ dazzling, dizzying prose baffles readers who thought they knew what to expect but constantly have to play catch up to figure out the economy of desire at play. Harris’s layering does not allow the reader to “discover a forgotten identity, eager to be reborn”; instead, readers are let in on the secret of gendering that Roof is more than aware – Harris’ gendered subject “. . . is a complex system of distinct and multiple elements, unable to be mastered by the powers of synthesis” (Ibid. 94), though society busies itself coding the unruly.

Harris’s lover “is in itself only a parody: it is plural; countless spirits dispute its possession; numerous systems intersect and compete” (Ibid.). There are no contexts; it is anything but “sincere and compliant with gender or genre expectations” (Roof 12), so it is not performative. While gender (and all identity attributes) is wieldable in the text, gender is not anchored to the body, and discourse does not constitute the body. Instead, both gender and discourse seem to float away from the body. Nothing sticks or has traction – genders and sexual desires flow over bodies and take forms only to disperse, as witnessed in the figures of Octavian and the lover. Harris’ lover is conscious of the way
that gender works: “what you see depends upon what you expect to see” (Gable), and the lover exploits this notion but does so as a matter of whim to appease desire in the moment. No doubt, with the lover, a performance is going on but the lover does not enact the performative: signification here conveys no meaning, makes no sense, and does not try to accomplish anything. Furthermore, identity has no continuity and is disassociative. It is ironic in that it toys with modes of recognition and viewer expectations but it is not performed in a *deliberately* political way. It has no *telos* and no point but its own display and the pleasure derived in its enactment.

Unlike Harris’s playful yet complex notion of gender, the identity model, made ubiquitous with the rise of the performance/performativity gender analogue, levels the difference between sexuality and gender. As a result, both become attributes of identity, which leads to some interesting problems, especially when denigrated identity attributes are covertly appropriated, the subject of the next section.
Identitarian Erotic

A contingent of lesbian activists worked to define lesbianism as a politicized erotic with an emphasis on difference and personal specificity. Juxtaposing identity with sensuality, Audre Lorde developed a watered down feminine erotic that was meant to be “a source of power and information . . . not [to] be confused with pornography.”

Because pornography “emphasizes sensation without feeling,” Lorde invests her erotic economy with sentiment, noting in *Uses of the Erotic*:

> The principal horror of any system which defines the good in terms of profit rather than in terms of human need, or which defines human need to exclusion of the psychic and emotional components of that need—the principal horror of such a system is that it robs our work of its erotic value, its erotic power and life appeal and fulfillment. Our erotic knowledge empowers us, becomes a lens through which we scrutinize all aspects of our existence.

In this schema, profit is the endgame of hetpat processes, whether it is sexual or economic. In the pornographic register, profit’s equivalent is orgasm and reproduction. Erotic-value, a component of the *personal*, is not motivated by profit, because it is set up as the antithesis of use-value and utility. Use-value implies inauthenticity, and the erotic must take on and undo utility to revolutionize the social – if orgasm happens to befall those engaged in the erotic, that is merely a propitious bonus. In an interview with Claudia Tate, Lorde gives supreme value to eros, defining it “as the deepest life force, a force which moves us toward living in a fundamental way . . . [it is a] force which moves
us toward what will accomplish real positive change.” For Lorde, aesthetic production is akin to living, and eroticism is located in aesthetics as well as in the here and now. When performed correctly, it is supposed to confound the norm of heterosexuality:

We're supposed to see "universal" love as heterosexual. What I insist upon in my work is that there is no such thing as universal love in literature. There is this love in this poem. The poem happens when I, Audre Lorde, poet, deal with the particular instead of the "UNIVERSAL." My power as a person, as a poet, comes from who I am. I am a particular person. The relationships I have had, in which people kept me alive, helped sustain me, were sustained by me, were particular relationships. They help give me my particular identity, which is the source of my energy.

Taking Lorde at her word, relationships give her identity - lovers, friends, and acquaintances engage with and shape her subjectivity. Lorde’s penchant for appositional relationality comes to the fore in the lists of particular self-descriptions that pepper her oeuvre. In the above quote, Lorde refers to herself as “I, Audre Lorde, poet” – stringing together a set of nouns in apposition to discuss her singularity. She runs off two more lists: 1) “as a person, as a poet”; and, 2) “kept me alive, helped sustain me, were sustained by me, were particular relationships.” These lists are applied as lacquer to enrich the subjective experience, but, as the term apposition suggests, the subject is nowhere (in no position), so the words, lists, relations, and particulars are used to describe, identify, and anchor the subject. In one of her most quoted lines, we recall that
Lorde calls herself “black, lesbian, mother, warrior, poet” – a list of nouns in apposition.

And, in the poem, “Now,” Lorde succinctly demonstrates her ethical aesthetic:

Woman Power
is
Black Power
is
Human Power
is
always feeling
my heart beats
as my eyes open
as my hands move
as my mouth speaks

I am
are you

Ready.

At first blush, the poem is a celebratory rallying cry. In this particular moment, the speaker announces that denigrated identity categories (e.g., “women” and “black”) are now allied with humanity as equivalents. Furthermore, these heretofore-denigrated identities are imbued with the power that comes from being considered human: Women Power/is/Black Power/is/Human Power/is. Power is always feeling, coursing over the body: it is everywhere - in the speaker’s every observation, every movement, every speech act, and in every heartbeat - which enables the speaker to act: “I am …. Ready.”

Announcing power and presence, the speaker addresses a “you” (I am/Are you/Ready). This you could be the erstwhile oppressor, and a statement of warning, as if to say, “I am now ready—and you had better be.”

The enjambment gives way to ambiguity, though. The speaker also may be addressing an internal you simultaneously, as if tenuously second-guessing itself – I am/(Are you?)/Ready. The tone here is interrogative, and the speaker uses the “Are you”
to address to the other you that is the speaker’s radical alterity from the world and from its self. The enjambment allows us to read I am as the subject of the sentence and Are you as its predicate: as if looking into a mirror, the speaking subject says “I am” and the speaker’s deaf, mute, paralytic image reflects a hollow declarative back as the interrogative, “Are you,” which may arouse internalized self-doubt in the speaker that oppression and trauma induce. Ultimately, the enjambment allows readers to overcome ambiguity. The you in the couplet, i.e., Are you, is also indicative of the you outside of the subject – both a singular entity (you, over there) and a plural group (you people). Dealing with an external “you” (singular or plural), the subject secures its power, constituted and stabilized by its relationship/s to the outside, i.e., the leitmotif of communality that patriarchic forces obscure. In plurality, the subject finds assurance as it relates to and accounts for itself, others, and the outside. To be a subject, then, one lives not only in the cross-hatching of all of one’s identities (race, sex, gender, etc.) but also in the cross-hatchings of the various lives that perturb, penetrate, and influence that particular subjectivity, which give it traction. In this way, “Now” is the enactment of Lorde’s ethical aesthetic.

However, Lorde’s living erotic depends upon repetition and apposition: both are indicative of sameness and identity (as opposed to difference and specificity). In “Now,” the copula is repeated in different variations five times; as is repeated three times as is power; the first person pronoun is repeated four times (i.e., I and my, indicative of being and identity); and, line structures such as “X Power/is” appears three times as does the “as my X” line. Each use is particular and singular. No descriptor (X) is given prioritization, except in its ordinal unfolding. Since each descriptor is presented with
similar and repeated grammatical structure and cadence, all of the nounal adjectives are co-equivalents. The elements that are prioritized are being and identity writ large as the repeated copula and as power. Power is not beneficent here, but it intrudes: the speaker tells us that power is always feeling my heart beats even as the speaker acts. Everything is affected by and imbued with power: power feels the most basic, life-giving force (heart beats). Lists in apposition, despite their particularity, are rendered the same by power, so each entity is a restatement of the same just with a new descriptive twist. As such, descriptors in apposition do not produce difference nor are they the effects of difference; instead, the lists reduce complexity by eradicating specificity in the same way the LGBTQIA+ acronym works.\textsuperscript{cxxx} The LGBTQIA+ acronym combines a number of incongruent elements but presents each as having some sort of commonality (say, antinormativity), which links all of the subsumed categories under the yoke of sameness, of identity. When the logic of identity is appositional, all identity categories can be blended together, eschewing the particularity of each. (Of note, of course, is that Lorde does not evoke lesbian power.)

Even though Lorde stresses the interrelated nature of all aspects of her subjectivity, remaining suspiciously silent about lesbian power, Lorde elevates woman and black to human in “Now”. However, Lorde’s aesthetics do not combat misrecognition or inauthenticity because she remains trapped within the discourse of identity. Lorde’s lists do not produce intersectionality - what Lorde mostly likely wants from her theorization of the particular in its relationship to other particularities - unless we understand intersectionality to mean the “everything” that is identity – and, we do not. Lorde’s particularities are not an effect of difference reflected by the descriptors in
apposition; rather, each descriptor is posited as a stable identity in and of itself prior to its inclusion in the series (thus the use of commas or line separations) – that is, prior to difference.

The identity dynamic plays out in the contemporary moment when the difference between visibility and the spectacle is overlooked. The naked woman in the western cannon, argues Carol M. Armstrong, is “to be present to the gaze of the others” (234). John Berger suggests that the male gaze is trained upon female bodies and so objectifies these bodies. In the meantime, women are conditioned to “watch themselves being looked at” (47). This holds true for the lesbian as well: she does not occupy a position of subjectivity. Instead, she is beheld so that she may be enjoyed. Her visibility is not indicative of her own presence but she functions as a support for the subject, the one who looks. For the appropriating subject, it is often not enough just to look and revel in the fantasy, considering that “the increasing circulation of gay and lesbian images in consumer culture has the effect of consolidating an imaginary, class-specific gay subjectivity for both straight and gay audiences” (Hennessey 112). The identity dynamic that supports the hegemony subsumes and normalizes sexualities, perpetuating the need to create more selections, more variations from which to find its support. Race, class, gender, ethnicity, and sexuality become attributes, as we demonstrated with Butler, and fall within the purview of identity—all become wieldable, “encapsulating the subject in individualized slots, while the struggles over difference that foment the identity dynamic remain safely out of view” (Ibid. 123). However, wielding the proliferation of identities to respond to and curtail the regime of identity is problematic as evidenced with Audre
Lorde’s aesthetic, the consequences of which become glaringly apparent when those who traditionally hold power pick up the tactic.

### 3.2. The Perplexing Case of Amina Arraf

Paula Brooks and Amina Abdallah Arraf al Omari collaborated for all the right reasons. Beginning in 2008, Brooks served as the domain master of the Internet-based *LezGetReal*, a website devoted to lesbian issues the world round. Encompassing community outreach, art, and reform, *LezGetReal* began as a global sounding board for members of lesbian and LGBTQ communities. Brooks solicited Arraf, a thirty-something, half-Syrian, half-American, deaf, self-identified lesbian, to contribute to *Lez* by posting blogs in real-time about life in war-torn Syria. According to rebel accounts of the Assad regime, Syrians have not been allowed to blog for ten years and counting, which made Arraf’s testimonials significant because her narratives provided a rare glimpse into the internal dynamics of the Pan-Arab state heretofore barred to Western eyes. Through her blog, *A Gay Girl in Damascus*, Arraf gained world-wide attention giving voice to rebel Syrian forces, which, until this point, had little to no opportunity to self-represent to a global audience. Narrating with the candor of an insurrectionary with nothing to lose, Arraf wrote refreshingly simple, heart-felt accounts that captivated her growing audience.

For Arraf, the Internet proved to be a place for community expansion and for thinking of community outside of the geophysical. Of the connections that resulted from Arraf’s candor, one of the most important involved her foray into intimacy: Amina openly practiced her sexuality via social networking sites; here, she met women, had
casual online affairs—she even flirted with Paula Brooks herself—and eventually fell in love with a young Canadian woman who shared her sentiment, despite living thousands of miles apart and never having met in person. But, just as Arraf’s message began picking up steam, things went incredibly wrong. Amina disappeared. cxxxii

Word spread that Amina had been kidnapped—and the digital community responded. Bloggers from around the globe began investigating her disappearance: what they uncovered left them reeling. cxxxiii Because her Syrian readers could not locate Arraf’s family and friends, concerned followers began investigating her Internet connections, and Paula Brooks was relentlessly hounded. Brooks provided as much detail as she could, explaining that she had never met Amina. She had exchanged email and had even attempted to speak with Arraf on the telephone, but only after much pleading and, then, only to a man whom Arraf identified as her father. On June 12, 2011, just six days after Amina’s disappearance, Amina addressed her concerned readers, announcing that she was not only safe but that “she was a he,” a straight, married male-identified American, working on a Ph.D. in Syrian economic development at Edinburgh University. Tom MacMaster, the deaf Syrian lesbian rebel formerly known as Amina, had assumed a pen name and even went so far as to appropriate another woman’s Facebook profile picture for his nom de guerre, making a young Londoner, Jelena Lecic, a potential target for impassioned Ba'athist loyalists. (A hoax of this nature is not a new phenomenon, as evidenced with the prior mention of the Vicar and Virago deception.)

On top of perfecting the Syrian lesbian look, the hoaxter got into character years prior by cruising online dating sites using lesbian avatars to enter into relationships to further hone his craft. MacMaster claimed that he was writing experimental fiction using
Internet technologies and insisted that his intentions were noble, that he was using art and fiction to give voice to those peoples and issues that receive little attention in the foreign and American presses, many of which he duped, including CNN, the New York Times, NPR, and Al Jazeera.\textsuperscript{cxxxiv} The Guardian's Brian Whitaker put it like this: "Living a fantasy life on your own blog is one thing, but giving an interview to CNN while posing as a representative of the region's gay people appears arrogant and offensive . . . ."\textsuperscript{cxxxv} Regardless, MacMaster has insisted time and again that he used Amina to make available “a perspective that doesn’t often get heard on the Middle East and that was also a challenge for . . . somebody who had aspirations as a novelist, to write in a voice of a character who is absolutely not me."\textsuperscript{cxxxvi} Motivated by profit and the ability to use art to steer politics, MacMaster as Amina had approached the South Asian queer activist, Minal Hajratwala, in May of 2011 in the hopes of publishing Amina’s “autobiography” nominally dubbed \textit{A Thousand Sighs, And a Sigh: An Arab American Education}, of which “lesbian Amina” served as Middle Eastern version of Henry Adams. Lesbian Amina, however, was a new version of an older, straight Amina model that MacMaster had been blogging through some months prior to his invention of Lesbian Amina.

“Straight Amina” drew no real attention, so MacMaster went back to the drawing board, to procure, in his words, a “louder response” and, after having received the desired effect, he subsequently decided that Amina 2.0 would "suffer new perils" before being captured, released, and leaving Syria for "retirement" (Friedman no pag).\textsuperscript{cxxxvii}

But MacMaster’s sock-puppetry is not the end of the story: the pressure of the indefatigable investigative work wore down Paula Brooks. A day after MacMaster’s confession, Brooks came forward with her own secret, admitting that she, too, had
assumed an identity. “Paula Brooks” was the alias of Bill Graber, a 58 year-old Ohioan construction worker who had spent time in the military. Graber explained that he started the *Lez* site when he witnessed work-place discrimination of two of his lesbian colleagues. Wanting to do something to help the oppressed, Graber determined that lesbians poorly utilized the Internet as a political forum. Unlike MacMaster, Graber made no attempt to link his political desires to a contrived aesthetic project. However, both MacMaster and Graber confessed that they feared that being hetero white western males would call into question the sincerity of their messages, so both, supposedly unbeknownst to the other, fashioned new identities, picking up clues from the cultural surround to perfect their performances of lesbianism by proxy. MacMaster and Graber felt like that they could speak well and better for others whom they professed to embrace, even though MacMaster admitted that the role of Syrian lesbian was thoroughly foreign to him. In observing and re-enacting their respective understandings of lesbianism, MacMaster and Graber unwittingly reproduced an inauthentic visibilization of not only lesbianism but, in MacMaster’s case, the inauthentic visibilization of Syrian rebel counter-alignments – whitewashing and invisibilizing the lived experiences of each through flippant passing. Syrian queers and political dissidents suggest that MacMaster’s passing not only endangered dissidents by drawing them into the fray to find and defend a fictitious character, and so risking exposure, but his actions also further discredited their attempts to critique the pan-Arab regime that already looked unfavorably upon Western meddling.

Reactions from readers around the world were predictable: deploiring the duplicity of these two men, lesbian/sympathist bloggers, columnists, and subscribers expressed
their displeasure. Calling these lesbian hoaxes “emotional frauds,” Louise Carolyn, one of the principle editors of 
*Diva*, a lesbian life-style magazine, argued that Graber and MacMaster traded upon the raw emotions of young lesbians who used the Internet to carefully negotiate their incipient ingress into the community. Carolyn suggests that men who pass as lesbians online do so for “sexual and malicious” reasons. Kira Cochrane notes that deriving pleasure from such hoaxes may be only the tip of the iceberg, however. According to Cochrane, the use of assumed lesbian personas is exploitative and nothing less than a power grab that results from the success of identity politics: all of the hard fought legitimacy that lesbians have been accorded is delegitimized when those who traditionally hold power, i.e., white Western heterosexual males, try to regain power that they sense has been stripped away via the burgeoning of plurality and political correctness that identity politics ushered in. In this way, identity politics and the discourse of identity gave birth to their own counteralignments – but no one picked up on this problematic. Instead, Iman Qureshi, an up-and-coming web-credible lesbian writer, notes: “MacMaster felt ostracized from ‘his own people’ and took on a persona in which he felt he could be heard without criticism” (Cochrane no pag.). Qureshi continues, “This seems to me to be a hero complex that’s every bit a delusion—a “Look at me, look how I am standing up for oppressed people”” (Ibid.). Ultimately, MacMaster's duplicity, narcissism, and flippancy display "a Western style for dominating [and] restructuring" (Said 3) and betray an Orientalist disposition, a disposition MacMaster maintains he was critiquing with the Amina 2.0 persona. Beatrice Campbell furthers the argument, insisting that MacMaster’s actions are doubly ironic, because, as she puts it, “we have a boundaryless white American boy absolutely habituated to a kind of supremacy . . . who
reiterates that supremacy through his blog” (Ibid.). We might suggest that the Amina/Brooks hoaxes are indicative of a resurfacing and rehashing of a paradigm that borrows from the angry white male stereotype we find in modern American cinema, where the outright sociopathy of a Michael Douglas in *Falling Down* (1993, dir. Joel Shumacher) or a Clint Eastwood in *Gran Torino* (2008, dir. Clint Eastwood) morphs into the seemingly innocuous but similar and utterly paternalistic pseudo-do-goodery with which both Graber and MacMaster have hoodwinked us.

While these reactions are more than understandable, focusing on the psychological interiority of the hoaxer may miss the point. The events themselves strike at the heart of a pervasive problem that haunts representations of lesbianism and lesbian communities. According to descriptions provided by popular lesbian-oriented sites like [autostraddle.com](http://autostraddle.com) and [afterellen.com](http://afterellen.com) as well as those in film and television, anxiety about authenticity is pervasive in our communities.\textsuperscript{cxliii} Answering personals, responding to Craig’s List ads, chatting with men who disguise themselves as women on social networking sites, and even dating bisexual women are all social acts that involve risk, and the stakes can be very high.\textsuperscript{cxliv} The likelihood of being targeted for violence is a very real but small threat, given the disproportionate number of times we engage intimately via the Internet compared to the violence from deception that this technological multiverse makes available. However, lesbians have no choice but to be suspicious, because coming out and staying out entails risk: family, friends, jobs, and health/well-being can all be potentially lost or threatened by the mere utterance of a seemingly insignificant concatenated expression: *I’m gay*. Where Graber and MacMaster risk scorn for what amounts to be an embarrassing indiscretion, lesbians may live in a state of peril merely
by being visible, vocal, and alive. Lesbians have not cornered the market on super-heroism, of course, and every act of coming out does not involve incredible risk. To the contrary, coming out on one’s own terms involves a great deal of risk assessment, a thoroughly pragmatic but conservative act, which makes one less champion and more actuary.

The Internet is full of possibilities, but it was not a brand new technology in 2008. It is reasonable to assume that most users check their naïveté at the door when intimacy comes about in “real world” face-to-face exchanges as well as through electronic interfacing. Internet technologies provide users with anonymity while we simultaneously nurture online connections via our self-fashioned identities. We may pass as our avatars, and we may be tempted to act unconscionably: as the famous New Yorker cartoon pithily suggests, “On the Internet, nobody knows you're a dog.” However, due diligence proved that Amina and Brooks are not lesbians or even people—the truth merely took some time to surface. It stands to reason that on the Internet, as in life, everyone knows you could be a dog, an infidel, a hoaxter, etc., including those baby dykes Louise Carolyn feels we wizened elders need to protect. Our desire to protect the newly minted innocents betrays an ageist naïveté about young or new lesbians’ savvy, not to mention a reactionary response to the dangers of cyberspace and the hyper-technological. Additionally, we can ferret out a strain of an almost maternalistic impulse in statements like Carolyn’s, where protecting our “new members”, so to say, entails reproducing a community that is paranoid about its own extinction. This rhetoric, performed in the name of care for the other, reproduces the type of community we need to critique because it recapitulates the problem: here, the most ethical gesture is caring for the other—the very foundation of identity politics and the demand of visibility politics—and this is precisely
what both Graber and MacMaster claimed they were doing. Yet, when het white males
don, self-fashion, or appropriate lesbian personas as such, they, too, assume a certain
amount of risk: if they are found out and forced out of their closets, they, too, are
subjected to shame, ridicule, and ostracism from the very communities they profess to
serve. In effect, Graber and MacMaster could claim to be practicing an ethics of care,
because on some level they have risked it all. Terrified that lesbians are becoming
invisible, that lesbians will always be invisible or devoid of substance, we ostracize the
two in order to reproduce our own “authentic” communities and preserve a regime of
truth.

3.3. The Savagery of Passing

Self-determination and social fluidity mark our experience of modernity: any
person, gay or straight, with the means to do so, can hoax/pass and then come out or
confess to live more “authentically” for any number of reasons: in this way, the
confessional nature of passing has universal applicability. Since consciousness-raising
activities in the 1970s, coming out, however, seems to be built into gays’ and lesbians’
experience of the social as a rite of passage and also as an ethical requirement in what
seems to be increasingly open and understanding world, which is logically premised upon
the idea that visibility and increased visibilization create a more tolerant world. Lesbian
feminist Rita Mae Brown notes that prior to the 1970s, lesbian couples “were forced to
lead a double life if they were to economically and socially survive” (64), though she
takes her contemporaries to task for the apoliticality of the closet: “women who remain
silent leave . . . outspoken women to face the common oppressor” (70).
However, some gays and lesbians choose to stay closeted. Safety and other pragmatic considerations motivate passing, tailoring the universality of the phenomenon to a very specific set of expectations and personal needs. Unlike the homosexual passing, being a het white male does not produce the need to pass as a lesbian. (MacMaster could have picked any mask or not pick one at all.) Being a homosexual woman, however, may produce the need to pass as a heterosexual because, sometimes, one’s life, title, rank, station, or economic security depends upon it. When a homosexual passes, he or she is performing a risk aversive behavior, creating a socially palatable persona with which to frequent his or her more public haunts. And, we may do well to insist on the idea of more (or less) publicity or a spectrum of publicity, if the distinction between public and private still stands at all. We might suggest that publicity is a matter of degree, measured in each social register that we participate in at any given moment. Furthermore, we might also suggest that each social register provides codes of legibility, and though we may always exceed the parameters of these codes, codes exist nonetheless, and we are, in part and partially, determined by them, recognized by some other according to its modes of recognition. In this analysis, recognition implies the apparatus of identification and control. The visibility paradigm demands transparency and almost forces one to be loud and proud, as the saying goes. Yet, context, circumstance, experience, biases, and heuristics influence how an individual assesses a risk event like coming out/passing, which makes each passing/coming out event unique to the individual experiencing it. Gays and lesbians have a lot to lose if they gauge a risk event unsuccessfully: they can be and have been murdered, tortured, beaten, disowned, fired, shamed, institutionalized, and alienated because of their visceral sexuality.
Nevertheless, we find the bias against passing and invisibility strong today. Dan Savage, reigning media queen, social liberal, and sexpert to the LGBTQIA+ community, detests passers. The hoaxers that he targets happen to be adult homosexuals who choose to live in the closet or pass when necessity dictates. Savage firmly believes that no healthy, self-respecting adult homosexual should be closeted in any social setting at any time, and that it is each homosexual’s responsibility to be and remain out in every social situation. In Savage’s terms, passing undermines a commitment to real change, and he holds that civic duties are more important than an individual’s desire to remain stable or manage risk. The only way that the world will change, the ship of state righted once and for all, is if all homosexuals are visible at every moment. Savage allows one exception to his politics of visibility, however: when gay and lesbian youth are dependent upon a family for their livelihood, they may need to protect themselves from potential familial abusers or poverty by staying in the closet until they are solvent and self-reliant. Mercifully, Savage graciously extends immunity to any person, young or old, who needs to remain closeted if there is risk to life or limb. As a palliative for those youths who find themselves imprisoned by the homophobia of their loved ones and trapped within the confines heteronormativity, Savage has created a special project called It Gets Better, a YouTube forum where people record their experiences of coming out that serves as a bridge to the freedom that adult gaydom promises. The hope is that the target audience of at-risk youths will wait out the storm while clandestinely becoming part of the community through digital technologies that their elders are incapable of mastering. Average Joes and Janes - those who remain in the closet at work, for example - get no
reprieve from Savage for special circumstances, which, we might suggest, applies to every person whenever they feel the need to pass.

Though a passionate activist with good intentions, Savage may base his judgment on passing from the blind spot of his own privilege. Savage’s privilege does not spring merely from his whiteness, his gayness, or his socio-economic status. Instead, Savage’s privilege comes from his ability to communicate: he is a journalist, blogger, public figure, gay spokesperson, expert, therapist, columnist, talking head – what’s more, Savage has an audience: his It Gets Better Project has had 50 million hits . . . and counting. A characteristically frank truth-teller, Savage makes it a point to take risks and talk about taboos. Savage aligns his work with visibility and politics the politics of recognition, following in the footsteps of Merle Miller, one of the first journalists to not only come out bravely in the New York Times article called “What It Means to Be a Homosexual” (1971) but also to do so in a forthright manner. Miller, Savage quotes, came out because he was “sick and tired of reading and hearing such goddamn demeaning, degrading bullshit about me and my friends.” In this way, Miller’s coming out was triggered by his ethical responsibility to the world, as Savage would have it. Savage writes, “Miller, in anger, came to the defense of himself and his friends and helped to change the world” (Savage No pag.). Who in their right mind could fault either gentleman for such plucky truth telling?

3.4. Parrhesia and the Politics of Recognition

Michel Foucault brought the term parrhesia into academic vogue in the 1980s. Drawing upon the Greeks to inform his reading of Immanuel Kant’s distinction between public and private responsibilities, Foucault endeavored to develop an active ethics of
care for the other based upon duty and obligation. The parrhesiastes fit the bill as it was a noble creature who traversed the public and private domains, making public the innermost truth of its being to foster social change. Social change meant alleviating pain and avoiding unnecessary injustice. To accomplish this task, the parrhesiastes was unlike the Platonic rhetorician (Cf. *Phaedrus*) in that s/he found it her duty to disclose her truth with no hijinks (rhetoric or persuasion). These truths did not pretend to be universal but were personal, contingent, arbitrary, and localizable per the experience of the parrhesiastes, especially if that meant disregarding the risk that truth telling involved.

One envisions Socrates with cup in hand as the ideal parrhesiastes, but a different version of Socrates suffices here – it is the Socrates amongst the cicadas talking with Phaedrus about the nature of rhetoric whom a Foucauldian should imagine:

> the parrhesiastes is someone who takes a risk. Of course, this risk is not always a risk of life. When, for example, you see a friend doing something wrong and you risk incurring his anger by telling him he is wrong, you are acting as a parrhesiastes. In such a case, you do not risk your life, but you may hurt him by your remarks, and your friendship may consequently suffer for it. If, in a political debate, an orator risks losing his popularity because his opinions are contrary to the majority's opinion, or his opinions may usher in a political scandal, he uses parrhesia. Parrhesia, then, is linked to courage in the face of danger: it demands the courage to speak the truth in spite of some danger. And in its extreme form, telling the truth takes place in the "game" of life or death.

While this figure is admirable, it is also impractical to assume that it could exist in modernity, according to Foucault, precisely because the modern episteme gives
individuals no recourse to ontological truths, so much so that the parrhesiastes’ stance seems egotistic and a sign of moral superiority that is intolerable. Furthermore, if one is to exercise care for the other, a true parrhesiastes might also exercise care for himself or herself – exposing one’s self to risk exposes one’s self to cruelty. Despite the figure’s obsolescence, we still find people who insist upon the righteousness of absolute self-transparency, a doctrine Savage and those of his ilk adopt in their insistence upon confession and the apoliticality of passing. Per the terms of this analysis, MacMaster was a tool is because he spoke his own truth but did so using the feints on rhetoric and persuasion: MacMaster was duplicitous and broke the code of the parrhesiastes – full disclosure and full truth no matter the cost. According to this rubric, Pierre Louys got a pass because he was merely a vessel for his muse – fiction is always mediated and an artist is typically given license. This is the same pass that Forward presumed in his lesbian hoaxing-aesthetics becomes the alibi of the hoax.

Savage, a journalist, believes in full transparency, and, sustaining that belief is another subtle (perhaps unconscious) belief in the separation of the public and the private, making Savage less of a parrhesiastes than one might suspect initially. When it comes to passing (lying), Savage holds that it is only appropriate for dependents in bad situations. One may pass until he or she achieves their majority or independence. Independence from what, we might ask? It is an independence from the family, typically considered a private domain, separate from the state, according to liberal discourse. Yet, in the family, one has presence; one has publicity (in the family, at least) and the weighted expectations of being a daughter, a mother, a father, a son – all of these roles have significance within the family unit. All are legible, even if that legibility never matches up with cultural
scripts (i.e., a parent may be abusive or uncaring, for example). In the family, one is knowable. Perhaps a family member does not live up to the familial scripts, whatever they may be, but, one lives with a family, typically, until it reaches its majority, and so the family knows each member intimately — at least, more so than they may know the local bartender, mailman, neighbor, grocer, cashier, etc. When a child is no longer dependent — when he or she goes through high school, college, and the rough patch of young adulthood - when this child becomes solvent on his or her own terms and can start its own life, Savages’ prophecy comes true — it is better. But, how is it better?

It is better, we might suggest, because one is no longer strapped to the structure of the family; one no longer gets status and livelihood from that unit. Instead, the independent adult is tetherless – free from the family it was born into along with the duty to live up to its familial and social scripts. The individual may be employed and have other responsibilities but these are not the source of its original shackles; in this sense, the individual is free. The individual is in its majority and so is invisible unless s/he chooses to visibilize in social registers – one can come out to one’s family, work colleagues, or neighbors – but, what are the incentives to do so? Social registers code and control, as does the rhetoric of the family that Savage unabashedly endorses – making Savage more of a conservative than he lets on. Above all else, family is the cornerstone of a sound society for Savage. Achieving majority means freedom - the most freedom – to never identify, even though mechanisms are in place to code and pigeonhole. What is important here is that passing or invisibility for an adult outside of its birth family is not necessarily restrictive – to the contrary, it may be one of the most liberating modes of existence, especially, for the lesbian, if the experience of modernity is so overdetermined and coded
by the will to visibilize and visibilize in a manner that takes difference for granted (see
the Biden example). Denying an individual the ability to pass could be a master mode of
exclusion that excludes other important modes of exclusion like passing, which could be
closer to the spirit of Foucault’s parrhesia than Savage’s transparent “busybody” who
courts, celebrates, and demands confession in a world that expects nothing less.

3.5. Authenticity and the Hoax

Macmaster’s hoax is properly situated in a trickster archive. Once we peel back
the layer of the Amina persona, we find MacMaster; we then peel back the Macmaster
layer to find Paula Brooks and, behind her, yet another homunculus, Bill Graber, and
behind him, countless hoaxers in regress who have used a lesbian persona to navigate
their forays into intimacy, using lesbianism as a politicized erotic. Our question from
here on out will be to ascertain why MacMaster selected his target. What makes
lesbianism so appealing for hoaxing? To answer this question, we must entreat the hoax.
A hoax is a con that takes itself seriously. Seriousness is convincing “smoke and mirrors”
that masks mundane reality—a ball switches hands, a coin is tucked into a sleeve, or a
man begins posting on a lesbian site while the trickster engages in outright simulation or
misdirection. Tricksters and con men attempt to make their deceptions foolproof, as
audience members are mesmerized by the hoax event—the disappearing coin,
deployment of the Amina persona, or the “old switcheroo” game of cups. A grifter like
MacMaster stays at least one step ahead of his audience, who ceaselessly interrogates the
performance as part of the performance. In the Macmaster case, Amina always seemed to
be one step ahead of her readers. In order to perfect the illusion, Macmaster had to keep
Amina at a distance and invisible. Examples of displacement abound: when asked for interviews, Amina had to refuse because coming out of hiding would jeopardize her life. When phone interviews were offered in lieu of sit-downs, Amina’s inability to hear posed a problem. CNN eventually offered to and aired an adumbrated chat session with her. Each time Arraf came up with an excuse to dodge a meeting, talk, or interview, someone tried to accommodate Amina verify her authenticity. With each excuse, frustration grew, but the excuse, the distance, and the delayed gratification drew her audience closer to her. The threat of increased proximity spurred MacMaster’s need to provide more evidence and more justification to self-authenticate without visibilizing. Self-authentication entails “those moves which draw our attention to the authenticating processes that authenticate while not authenticating at all. Documents, Experts, Testimony, Material evidence. All faked” (Roof Oddball 4).

Amina’s story was her testimony, but it was too good to be true. Her audience was dazzled with the details of her life, but these details seemed overly tailored to Western theatrical tastes. Arraf’s story has the tempo of a cop drama: never a dull moment, suspense occurred in the right spots to further the denouement of Amina’s bildungsroman. Arraf’s life was storybook, romantic even, and thoroughly unreal. Still, readers bought the con. They were invested in her and demanded her presence when she disappeared. At the time of her disappearance, suspicions about her veracity were already on high, but readers continued to suspend their disbelief. As Roof insists, however, audience disavowal is an element of the hoax: we recognize the hoaxic pattern and know we are being conned, but proceed regardless.
The con depends upon sleight of hand and usually proceeds by distraction. The audience is forced to focus on a shiny bauble of some sort. In MacMaster case, the newest, most fascinating, most identity-laden subject, i.e., the deaf/woman/lesbian/Syrian/rebel, draws us in and acts as the shiny bauble. If we recall Connolly’s quote from earlier, we might suggest that a fascination with identity and authenticity captivated Amina’s audience: “Identity requires differences in order to be, and it converts difference into otherness in order to secure its own self-certainty.”

Audiences did not follow “straight Amina,” who suffered from many of the same social and personal problems as did Amina 2.0. However, Amina 2.0 was the embodiment of a panoply of differences—a multicultural, differently abled, Islamic, hot, young, rebel lesbian Laura Kroft type who wanted to speak to us. All of Arraf’s identity tags and differences captivated Macmaster and his westerner audience because both MacMaster and his audience are ideologically conditioned to seek self-certainty and so we fetishized the dark, foreign, heretofore terrifying other. Fetishizing Amina tempers anxiety about the uncontrollable, unmappable racialized other—essentially everything that is not Western. Macmaster made visible those minoritized groups he manipulated, but, in so doing, he robbed each of their voices and specificity. Managed as such—scrubbed free of difference, sanitized and homogenized—Amina wasn’t so much ripped from the fabric of culture when she disappeared or when we realized that she was a paper tiger, instead she was ground into it, like currants strained through cheesecloth.

Though we quest after it, self-certainty, i.e., authenticity, is impossible. The hoax makes this abundantly clear. The hoax offers “specters of authenticity” (Roof Oddball 5), as we peel back layer after layer, trying to unearth truth but never arriving at it, unless, of
course, we figure out the trick or the tricksters shares his trade secrets. As Roof succinctly notes, the hoax ultimately shows how the symbolic can trick itself, the hoax is the most symbolic of all. Operating within a complex web of desires, projections, and affirmations, all circulating within sets of cultural narratives, proscriptions, and warnings, the hoax is its archive and its archive perpetuates a desiring economy that never tires either of repetition or the ways it reflects more "official" culture. (19)

When Macmaster confessed, his audience was enraged at him for his calculated duplicity, but we might suggest that his audience was also upset with his poor gamesmanship because the gig was up. The audience wanted the hoax to continue so that they could keep detecting and chasing after identity. As his critics point out, MacMaster is an unwitting fool and is guilty for recontaining minoritized others (and so “disappearing” them). However, those of us who went along with the ruse were similarly preoccupied with identity, a mode of disappearance that bulldozes the lesbian, the Syrian, the rebel, and the differently-abled. Critic and con share equal culpability in this game of cups. Both are enamored of authenticity.

When one passes, one chooses an identity that simultaneously depends on and ossifies the fictions upon which that identity is premised. Identities freeze the play of the social to create social scripts that do not match up to the complexity of the phenomenon. A lesbian passes as a heterosexual but does so because she knows social scripts of heterosexuality and when she passes she reaffirms those scripts. It may seem counterintuitive, but the parrhesiastes depends upon and requires identity scripts or fictions to function as well: being truthful about one’s homosexuality confirms
supposedly authentic modes of relating to the world. Authenticity is an important ideal in here in the realm of identity politics because, therein, it is considered a stabilizing factor for society. But stability is extremely fragile. In the parrhesiastes schema, societies maintain their rigor when participants engage openly and truthfully. A truthful person does not hoax, pass, or deceive other social actants as MacMaster did. In the same vein, a gay person who passes must also tell the truth to others in the gay community as well as in society in general, because the stakes of truth-telling are great: society coheres around the idea of truth and trust. Truth visibilizes the membership of social actants. Of course, this is nothing short of liberal social contract theory that stresses cohesion and integration that abhors instability so it requires, depends upon, and tries to contain unruly social forces. The parrhesiastes who loathes passing is conservative and akin to MacMaster in the use and abuse of ossified tropes to corral difference.
Televisuality, Identity, and the Spectac(L)e

4.1. Self-fulfillment and Performativity

The Amina Arraf catfishing scandal illustrates the ways in which social scripts and identity fictions are caught up in the dynamic of visibility and are underpinned by a faulty notion of authenticity. We have suggested that this dynamic ultimately reflects a self-fulfilling reality that is anything but authentic, a trope that haunts the lesbian archive. For example, in the 1950s and 1960s, lesbians deployed social scripts that narrowly encapsulated lesbianism. Lesbian feminists attributed the pervasiveness of butch and femme stereotypes to social constructivism and socialization: “lesbians had been well brainwashed by the parent culture so that they acquiesced into making their subculture a carbon copy of heterosexuality” (Faderman *Return* 580). Furthermore, because the bar scene was one of the few public areas for lesbians to socialize and was overwhelming dominated by the butch-femme paradigm, “a young woman who initially only wanted to find ways to express her love for other women was forced to take on the stereotype of “the Lesbian,” whether or not it had anything to do with who she was” (Ibid.). Despite the noted elitism in a number of these stances, lesbian feminists Sidney Abbot and Barbara Love suggest in the renowned text, *Sappho was a Right-on Woman: A Liberated View of Lesbianism* (1972) that the lesbian experienced a double-bind: “Whereas she has been impersonating a heterosexual woman, now she is impersonating a Lesbian. She gives herself over to a new image, also defined by central casting. The stereotype of the Lesbian becomes self-fulfilling” – a tautological phenomenon that we not only see in the lesbian bars in the mid 20th century but in mass media in the 20th and 21st centuries from pulp novels to televisual events.
Pseudo-scientific hoaxers produced their own lesbianisms with “research” based upon their own subjective fantasies. Lesbian pulp novelist Lawrence Block, for example, using the pseudonym Dr. Benjamin Morse, invented case studies in his seminal work, *The Lesbian* (1963), detailing different types of “everyday” lesbians from the college co-ed to the professional woman and the failed heterosexual in order to ascertain the motivations for lesbianism. In his *Twilight Women* (1963), L.T. Woodward, M.D., a.k.a. fiction writer Mr. Robert Silverberg, documented the supposed causes and varieties of lesbianism as well, concluding, among other things, that an oversexed heterosexual female would “go lesbian,” and so the good doctor reinforced the importance of strictly monitoring female sexuality. With very little cultural and mass media space devoted to something like an “authentic” lesbianism, pseudo-sociology provided the imagery that helped create lesbian identity scripts based upon personal conjecture. That which was visibilized was visibilized for the benefit of the hetpat gaze.

Early sexologists brought lesbianism within the purview of the sciences and therein deemed it antinormative while foisting gender upon sexuality, creating not just a class of individuals, i.e., the homosexual, but a type, i.e., the gender invert. Typologizing is complicit with the discourse of identity and is exceptionally problematic for the lesbian. The federal government, scientists, and sham sexperts then busily went about developing a classificatory system to document the nuances of lesbian sexual deviance. This fledgling typology postulates at its base a stable identity, i.e., the normative *heterosexual*, and, by extension, its equally stable derivative, i.e., the antinormative *homosexual*. Both are part of the regime of identity. In order to secure its domain, identity operates via normalizing codes and processes that erase difference. Additionally, the
regime of identity depends upon maintaining the lesbian typology. For example, sexologists and governmental regulatory powers worked from their own biases and held that sexuality/gender was visibly marked on bodies. In these terms, the gender invert made sense: organized around the discourse of binary gender, a feminine man and a butch woman were phenotypically identifiable, clearly visible, and so could be categorized according to their antinormative behaviors. The need for a visible antinormative typology explains the uproar that the femme in the 1940s created when the feds discovered that their well-manicured admins were potential covert sex deviants. It also helps to explain why the Clinton-era discriminatory military policy Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell (DADT) was bound for failure. Accounting for, managing, identifying, visibilizing, and ferreting out unruly sexualities makes antinormative forces less threatening and the reigning power structures more stable.

In the first ever lesbian-centric serial, Showtime’s The L Word, the program endeavored to make visible “authentic” lesbian lifestyles but created a stilted, arbitrary and self-fulfilling typology. Viewers tuned in to The L Word (2004-2009) only to complain immediately about the absence of lesbians who reflected the realities of the viewers themselves. The producers instead created hyper-stylized, larger-than-life lesbians and, in so doing, catered to the pretense of an authentic lesbian social that was actually devoid of established models. While having no prior identity and no prior internal resemblance is a Deleuzian caveat necessary for social perturbation (more on this in a bit), The L Word falls well short of this type of critical repositioning. The L Word simulacra depend upon an exceptionally loose prior conceptualization of lesbian identity: here, a lesbian is a person whom the show identifies as a lesbian, though the show draws
upon recognizable tropes to have traction and make sense. When viewers receive new data, accept the premises, model their identities around the characters’ identities, and continue to watch the program, they reinforce the validity of the types, making them stable and also “self-fulfilling” in much the same way as the “Lesbian” operated for Abbot and Love. Because the creators play upon recognizable, culturally available tropes such as butch and femme, some viewers buy into the representational soundness of the show, even if the tropes are outmoded or fantastic. At the same time, viewers also buy into the liberal promise of future openness to difference when the show tests out new “lesbian” tropes such as a trans man or a lesbian-identified man. The L Word’s typology is not one of difference without prior identity—if anything, that “prior” is constantly being refreshed and updated with the introduction of new lesbianisms such as the trans man and the lesbian-identified male. The typology makes room for all “lesbian” identities, mixing and matching genders, sexualities, races, socio-economic backgrounds, and every other potential identity category. The “L” in The L Word is but a placeholder for all identities that come within the purview of the norm that the show produces and reinforces. In these terms, The L Word does not produce lesbian visibility but erases lesbian desire while punishing each character that disavows the penis. The L Word is what happens when lesbian sexuality is reduced to the lowest and least important identity category. Lesbianism is so unimportant it is not even mentioned in the title of the show: the L that refers to the lesbian is but a staging ground for identity.
4.2. ShowTime

The L Word ran on ShowTime for six seasons from 2004 – 2009, meeting with various degrees of success. The target audience included not only lesbians but also the public at large, especially attracting the attention of white males ages 18-35. The program’s appeal resides both in the sensational and in the common. Sex sells, of course, but its presentation matters. With a sustained, relatively sophisticated plot and its attempts to be politically engaging, the show takes itself seriously. However, it is also palatable with traditional stories and characters. While The L Word’s mainstays are lesbian or bi-sexual, an exciting moment in the history of television no doubt, the character types nevertheless resemble generic media staples. The paterfamilias, Bette, played by the freshly resurrected Jennifer Beals of Flash Dance fame, is the lovelorn, biracial art director. Tina, played by Laurel Holloman, is an everywoman who comes into her own, though she is Bette’s on-again/off-again-on again femme-y paramour. Katherine Moennig plays Shane, the lesbian version of Queer As Folk’s Brian Kinney, an irresistible rogue with a heart of gold, and Mia Kirshner enjoys her darkest role to date as Jenny Schecter, the brooding intellectual. Alice, played by Leisha Hailey, a lesbian-identified actor known to every dyke over 25, is the quirky yet vacuous glamour-girl media personality. Hailey’s character is one part of a comedic duo, whose other half, the sporty dyke, Dana, is played by Erin Daniels. Important in the cast of characters, too, are Bette’s sister, Kit (Foxy Brown herself, Pam Greer), Max (a trans man played by Daniela Sea), and Helena Peabody (Rachel Shelley). Make no mistake, however: these characters may have been born from a generic template but they are by no means ordinary, their fantastic nature offset by the invisibility of everyday lesbians in the show.
The primary narrative retains most of the core characters but introduces a panoply of tertiary sex-sexuality-gender constructs throughout the program’s duration. These tertiary characters further the plot but also are the producers’ response to its audience in its attempts to adequately mirror the complexity of its lesbian audience. The narrative unfolds for the principle cast in present-day West Hollywood: every character has money, sans the starving artists in the group whose androgyny and heroin chic cool make up for their poverty as limitless cultural cash. Despite the ubiquitous lesbian up-do, every character is made-up, airbrushed, and beautiful—a little too beautiful, a fact that the show’s producers have taken much flack for, as activists have claimed that the featured actors do not depict a real picture of what average, non-glamorous (read traditional butch and non-airbrushed femme) lesbians looks like. In the first two seasons, the producers made no attempt to remedy the representation problem, maintaining time and again that this particular group of women accurately represents only one facet of the lesbian demographic and that they cannot possibly cover every aspect of lesbian life. Insisting on the local is well and good, but, if visibility matters, why not include a butch rather than, say, a lesbian-identified male or an S&M trans dominatrix? Could it be that butch just isn’t as provocative, doesn’t provide enough spice? Would this entertain the hetpat gaze? Or, perhaps more tellingly, could it be that butch is old hat and we are always already conditioned to desire more?

In the quest for more and new entertainment, The L Word’s plotlines are convoluted and become increasingly extra-ordinary following soap conventions. For example, in one episode, we are lead to believe that Alice has had sex with a vampire, which may have been deployed as a parodic take on the vamp but fails in its hokey-
ness. Predilection for the undead aside, the hyper-stylized characters sleep with one another, which scintillates and attracts. One of the primary appeals of the show comes from the visibilization of “realistic” lesbian sex that heretofore found no currency on the screen, except, of course, in porn. More concerned with the accurate depiction of lesbian sex than allowing quotidian lesbians to meaningfully participate in storylines, producers hired sexperts to coach their actors. Sex—straight up “authentic” lesbian sex of every imaginable variety—is visibly showcased. With so many forms of sex, the show could not possibly go wrong in its representation of the lesbian sex act – something was bound to stick and convince the audience of its authentic nature so long as two women are involved in the act. What producers failed at doing was investing these acts with a lesbian erotic that confounds heteronormative conditioning. Barbara Hammer could only get herself to watch one episode of The L Word, and, even after the program’s cancelation she was unable to talk about the show. She comments that the program rightly tries to address lesbians as diverse group, but the characters were long-haired, lipstick, long fingernail girls, not lesbians”- each attribute an old-school but primary “tell” of the lesbian. Hammer suggests that the drive to have heteronormative lesbianism represented on the screen has been present since she started making films in the 70s as well. Responding to an interviewer, Hammer notes:

Well it was clear it was going that way from the beginning. Like I said, all the lesbians wanted to have The L-Word [even 30 or 40 years ago]. They just wanted me to replace heterosexual identities with lesbian identities in the same structure, so you don't really change the system. That's not, to me, what a lesbian is about. A lesbian is rupturing, it's breaking open ways to breathe anew.
The L Word is predictable in its use of stereotypes, linear narrative, and convention. As we would expect, the core group of characters is flawed (for this drives the plot): many are promiscuous, many commit infidelity and backstabbing, but unity, friendship, and connection keep the friends afloat. The importance of community is emblematized in the show with a recurring Six Degrees of Kevin Bacon thematic: a sexual conquest network, called OurChart, written on a board until the idea goes digital, linking all of the women to each other via the partners they have shared. The lesbian characters are responsible for self-determining and mapping the territory, and each new sexual encounter reconfigures the map. Notably, however, the map is expands its territory and is a visible instantiation of the LGBTQIA acronym, including more and different types of conquests with men, women, heterosexuals, bisexuals, etc. of all walks of life. The drama unfolds along these paths of connection, which are replete with break-ups, commitment ceremonies, clubbing, nesting, parental issues, death, and, of course, girl-on-girl sex.

In keeping with the expansion thematic, the show’s writers refuse to define the “L” word, suggesting that the term lesbian is something that one negotiates at every moment and during every encounter, a tip of the hat to the heterogeneity of the lesbian community. This remains the case until the show entertains lesbian-identified women who are not glamorous. The core characters let viewers in on this dynamic when they entreat what they call the “hundred-footer,” the stereotypical butch, a figure that almost always appears on the periphery in The L Word, if she appears at all. The hundred-footer, visibilized only a handful of times on the show, is akin to the viewer. It is our double, existing outside of the screen or just beyond the camera’s gaze—on the outside looking in. Viewers may need this distance from the fiction. The hundred-footer, in all of its (and
our) obscene, material, and psychic imperfections, must happen off-stage, like violence in a tragedy, lest we ruin the spectacle and shatter the fantasy, knowing that the program cannot articulate lesbian desire. We learn what it means to be a televiualized lesbian in our invisibilized co-presence as hundred footers on the other side of the looking glass.

However, the show tries to address this visual deficiency. The significance of shorn hair, a lesbian signal and rite of passage for some, is traded upon in the show when the legitimacy of Jenny’s lesbianism is called into question. Jenny is pretty and so passes as a heterosexual, and a patronizing (male) ex-fiancé calls her out on it. Jenny remedies the problem immediately; she cuts her hair, gets laid by a lesbian-identified woman, and experiences empowerment as a tried-and-true lesbian. Jenny’s transgression does not weaken the coursing power of the heteronormative in the text. In this instance, however, even after the hair cut, Jenny is still beautiful and continues to be mistaken for a male sex object. During each show, we are made privy to identity negotiations like Jenny’s, and the quest for definitive strategies of identification is one of the show’s central preoccupations. In one pointedly campy scene, the women attempt to ascertain the sexual orientation of a potential conquest, a chef at an upscale restaurant:


TINA: [whispering] Look at the earrings.

BETTE: Hoops. Hard to read . . . Well, she’s got some good lezzy points for her walk and the way she moves that chopping knife.

SHANE: But she’s way femmy on the coiffure tip.

ALICE: Yeah, and her reaction to the two of you kissing was split because she didn’t freak out—which was a good sign—but she hardly paid any attention.
TINA: But, you guys, she’s got nine in the lez column and she only has seven in the straight.\textsuperscript{clxv}

Such dialogue acts as an \textit{in your face} declaration of the problematic concerning lesbian identification. Here, assessing identity or relying on gaydar is equated to ascertaining performance types and aesthetic attributes, which is little more than correctly aligning relevant stereotypes to identity constructs.

The text’s subtleties also spell out the problem of identifying and even defining the term lesbian. Each show is titled with a word that begins with the letter “L”—“ Luck, Next Time,” “Lies, Lies, Lies,” “Luminous,” “Loyal,” “Lap Dance,” “Late, Later, Latent”—an acronymic logic that pointedly refuses to address the contextually most obvious term, the “l” in \textit{The L Word}. By refusing to offer a stable definition of the term, let alone call it by name, \textit{lesbian}, a viewer pigeonholes the particular set of experiences represented in \textit{The L Word} in accordance with his or her own set of categorical expectations. The show, then, enables viewers to point and say “Ah, \textit{that's} a lesbian.”

With all of the hype and ballyhoo, we know that the show is supposed to be about a group of lesbians, even if we are not told so directly. Thus, the process of intellection mimetically apes the ways in which the human makes sense of its environment, sorting out information and consequentially organizing and categorizing based on the past and amortizing present experience with an eye toward the future. On the other hand, this new encounter provides at least a minimal expansion of the categorical determinants that serve to constitute the lesbian, and the term is therefore opened up for the viewer to the point where the lesbian is exceeded. Here, a lesbian is not merely a woman who has relationships with other women (per our expectations). S/he can be ultra-hip \textit{and} bi-racial
“and sophisticated and worried about her job and . . . the apositionality of which should be reminiscent of problems inherent to Lorde’s identitarian erotic.

However, given the category’s fundamental fluidity—the “L” could stand for anything, where producers make it stand for “Lesbian” in majuscule, the program’s refusal to define the term, person, and/or experience gives way to an underpinning, perhaps unintentional, drive toward quasi-dialectical homogenization. The idea of homogeneity—of anyone, even allies, being able to slid into L—or the sublimation of everything within the movement’s purview is introduced to the audience from the start of each viewing experience of *The L Word*. A string of seemingly never-ending gerunds (“. . . loving, laughing, fighting, fucking . . .”), uttered in the breathless cadence of the second season’s theme song, glorifies a protracted adjectival project where the lesbian and lesbian experience can never be pinned down, except only temporarily, on a chart mapping expanding sexual conquests, which prioritizes sex as the ultimate risk event. When lesbianism is determined by the prioritization of sex in the televisual the producers are playing with fire – intimacy teeters on the brink of pornography and is “restrictive in its sense of what constitutes a consumable lesbian image, uncritically privileging femme styles of presentation and touting them as “new” and “exciting” while gesturing back to a retro discourse of pornography and politics” (Heller 67). For the creators of the program, however, the risk is worth the benefits because they want to embrace a lesbian paradigm of inclusion through expansion. The lesbian experience is too complicated to sum up or neatly categorize: it is beautiful because it has the potential to embrace everything. And, in Season 1, it is Lisa, the lesbian-identified male, who drives home this point emphatically.
4.3. Lisa the Lesbian-identified Man

The writers court the sensational when they introduce Lisa, the lesbian-identified biological male who is stereotypically masculine except when it comes to sexual orientation and relationships. Lisa plays lesbian very well, laboring under the assumption that lesbianism and sexuality, much like gender as Judith Butler tells us, is performed and can function as a site of contestation for fixed identity constructs. Lisa prefers “standard” lesbian sex to heterosexual sex, focusing on the importance of oral sex and sex toys. She is histrionic following the strictures of the lesbian relationship dynamic that saturate the cultural as so much mythos, which insists, for example, that all lesbians are insecure and inherently over-dramatic in their dealings with their mates, whom they have lived with since their second date. Lisa’s girlfriend, Alice, more than suggests that Lisa has perfected her lesbianism. Consider the following dialogue, where we find Lisa and Alice in bed, post-coital:

Lisa: Where are you going?

Alice: I would like to go to the bathroom.

Lisa: So, are you coming back?


Alice gets up. Lisa snuggles into her pillow.

Lisa: Hurry back, lover.

Alice walks down the hallway.

Alice: (to herself) What a lez!
Shortly thereafter, Alice becomes frustrated with the needy Lisa and begins to pursue another partner, Andrew, whom we presume to be a not just a man but *The L Word’s* version of male masculinity (Bette being the female cognate). Alice, holed up in her apartment in an attempt to avoid the increasingly obsessive Lisa, explains the situation, saying to her new paramour: “Oh, s/he’s my *lesbian boyfriend* . . . You get it, right?” Alice’s love interest shakes his head “no” and walks out the door (and, essentially, out of Alice’s life). Alice then addresses Lisa and her indigestible lesbianism:

Alice: You know what, Lisa? When I first started seeing you, I wanted something simple and easy. And instead I end up with the most complicated interpretation of sexual identity I’ve ever encountered.

Lisa shifts from foot to foot, frowning.

Alice: You know, I mean, you do lesbian better than any lesbian I know! Okay. And I don’t want a lesbian boyfriend. I’m sorry! (Shrugs) I want a boyfriend who’s straight, or I want a lesbian who’s a girl!

The logic of inclusion that the show endorses wants viewers to believe that this passage is indicative of the complexity of Lisa’s self-fashioned gender-sexuality selection. Though her selections make her “indigestible,” to borrow from Rene Hoogland, Lisa is a lesbian as much as any other (per the logic of the show) because she slips into categories when the situation calls for it. As Bette’s sister Kit intones, “If the dude wanna’ give up his white man rights to be a second-class citizen, then hey, welcome to our world.” But with the prior example of MacMaster, we should suspect that renunciation might be the last thing that is actually occurring with the Lisa character. But, following the logic of the program, we sympathize with Lisa. We could accuse Lisa of gross appropriation only if
we choose to ignore certain things: her category comrades, the “real” lesbians, accept her and she attracted Alice prior to her identification as a lesbian. She wasn’t trying to trade on the dynamics of lesbian identity to fool or manipulate Alice. Lisa, perhaps, is a “lesbian” articulated via the logic of postlesbianism: in these terms, calling her such does not entail whitewashing or homogenization because the potentially infinite complexity of an individual always resists this movement of homogenization by virtue of its status as a “becoming.” However, this type of postlesbianism is still wrapped up in the identity game: Lisa has been identified, her attributes noted. The lesson is that a man can be a lesbian if the community accepts him. However, once Lisa is accepted, Alice breaks up with her, and Lisa never returns to the narrative proper nor does her trope. Something has happened in the program, but, given the tools of identity politics, viewers can’t pinpoint what the absence of the lesbian-identified man means. Why does she disappear? Lisa emerges as a figure in an ever-expanding lesbian typology, which is symptomatic of how media of dissemination function. While Lisa holds out the promise of shattering heteronormative paradigms by virtue of her postlesbianism, she also signals our obsession to document, define, and identify nonstandard sexualities. This practice extends to documenting and domesticating race, gender, and species in the program as well. Framed as such, if we focus on Lisa’s impact in *The L Word*, is the text to be lauded or lampooned?

**4.4. Excursus: Mass Mediation**

Instead of focusing on people, humans, and norms as the be-all-and-end-all in a discussion on communities, German sociologist Niklas Luhmann suggests that we rewrite the subject/object distinction that grounds so much of our philosophical debate and
instead use the systems/environment distinction to focus on differences with and made by those unities given their spatio-temporal specificities. This distinction is important – and makes the application of Luhmannian systems theoretical perspectives relevant in this analysis – because it allows us to examine the ways in which communications take precedence and function systemically without recourse to the human (and identity) as an Archimedean lever, the target of our critique. To begin, social systems are functionally differentiated systems of communication and their presence as well as their interdependent comingling signal modernity’s ascension for Luhmann. The architecture of pre-modern (literate and urban) Western civilization was based on hierarchical or stratified structuration, where one’s social position was the equivalent of one’s identity and given by virtue of the pater familias’ rank and title. Accordingly, the “... organizing principle of this type of society is the principle of differentiation into different levels or strata within the hierarchy. Equality within each stratum contrasts with the inequality between one stratum and another within the hierarchical order” (Schwanitz 144) where the structure is top-heavy and significant in terms of its representative possibilities. In other words, the top tier (the sovereign, church leaders, nobility, etc.) “represent[s] society as a whole.” With the onset of modernity, however, “It is no longer groups of people that are differentiated but types of communication” (Ibid.), and communication, for us, has everything to do with systems and, most scandalously, (almost) nothing to do with humans: to paraphrase one of Luhmann’s most infamous remarks, “Only communications communicate.”

Systems may use communication, and, in these terms, it is the system that is given precedence (over the human). Instead of being regarded as a collective of human
participants (where the part makes up the whole), society is understood as being composed of systems and systemic interactions that include humans or psychic systems but do not privilege them. It is in this way that our understanding of communication can be enlarged. No longer is communication to be thought of as mimetic representation of thought, nor does it exclusively belong to the linguistic domain; rather, the circuitry of systemic economies produce contextually meaningful communicative events that emerge in specific systems. Hans-Georg Moeller points our attention to the various function systems that we participate in everyday: “When someone buys a chocolate bar or stock, this is understood as economic communication; when someone watches TV, this is understood as mass media communication; and when a vote is cast and counted, this is understood as political communication” (6). With this set of examples, we get a taste of what Luhmann calls functional differentiation; that is, society is composed of subsystems (the economic system, political system, mass media system, psychic systems, the legal system, the educational system, the intimacy system, etc.) that are known through their functions, i.e., what they do and encompass. These subsystems of society are laid out linearly, i.e., none is to be privileged, though everyone from Drucilla Cornell to William Rasch agrees that the economic is “more equal than others,” to use that classic Orwellian phrase.

Dietrich Schwanitz notes, “... society is no longer regarded as the sum of its parts, but as a combination of system-environment differentiation, each of which reconstructs the overall system as a unity of the respective subsystem and its specific environment according to the internal boundary of the subsystem” (144). What Schwanitz is getting at is the articulation of a (sub)system’s autonomy (thus the maintenance of its
boundary) and its autopoeisis or ceaseless self-production that effectively secures for itself the boundary between the “outside” (the environment or/as other systems) and the system’s internal organization. As Eva M. Knodt succinctly puts it, each system

. . . reproduces itself recursively on the basis of its own system-specific operations. Each of them observes itself and its environment, but whatever they observe is marked by their unique perspective, by the selectivity of the particular distinctions they use for their observations. There is no longer an Archimedean point from which this network could be contained in an all-embracing vision . . . .

(Knodt xii)

To say it another way, Lyotard’s rejection of grand metanarratives is right on the money. A system is a self-regulating network whose internal dynamics are defined as the interconnection of its “parts” or components and their interactions which sustain the system’s status as a system by self-generating the very conditions of its possibility. In this way, the system co-evolves with its environment, creates a boundary from the environment, and maintains its autonomy as a network of parts and flows where no one part or flow provides an originary foundation of meaning or causality; instead, Luhmann emphasizes the importance of contingency, systemic operations, and the outside.

Systems deal with noise from the exterior in terms of their own filters and systemic modes of communication. Thus a system is susceptible to its environment and changes within its environment. It is the environment primarily that perturbs the system. The environment is everything outside of the system, but the environment is always the environment of a specific system, even though the environment proper is more complex than any system is by virtue of its alterity, “outsideness,” or unmappability. As a
system is irritated or perturbed by the external, it can only “know” the environment by virtue of its own internal dynamics, which, strictly speaking, are non-causative and relatively unpredictable (on the level of structure) and hence susceptible to change. In maintaining its internal operations, the system tries to “know” its environment by reducing environmental complexity, using filters that actually build up its own internal complexity as a response to the infinitely complex environment that rubs up against it (Moeller 16-17). The seemingly paradoxical relationship between self-determination (or autopoeisis/autonomy) and determination by some exteriority remains fundamentally grounded in the site where the communicative event finds itself. As Richard House suggests, a system as an

... autonomous unity may be affected by its environment, but such effects are determined by its own internal structure and the limits of its "structural plasticity." The referential or representational dimension of information is thus subordinated to the operations of a "semiotic" field constituted within (if not identical with) the closed structure of the organism. (29)

One of the ways that a system comes to terms with its environment is by its reliance on its self-referential internal binary code, which is generated when a system reaches a certain degree of complexity—that is, when it reenters the distinction between self-reference (its observation of itself as a singularity) and hetero-reference (its observation of the environment as something other). As far as the mass media (for us, the strictly televisual) are concerned, the code is information/non-information. Information may come from the system’s interaction with the outside as it pertains to the system’s operations. Non-information, in these terms, is not noise per se, but may be information
that at one time was new to the system but, once processed by the system, no longer perturbs the system. It is understood and coded via the system. In this way, the butch lesbian no longer surprises television viewers and may be the reason why she never has a starring role on *The L Word*. In some respects, television viewers are still in the pre-1940s mindset and surprised when a femme arrives on the scene and declares her lesbianism. The femme is the antithesis of noise.

The mass media functions and creates a general reality or knowledge base for its audiences that the system itself ends up producing, and every system uses or is coupled to the mass media’s general reality, which in turn generates an ever-changing public opinion (Moeller 136). The mass media system selects and produces new information for the audience from the environment or other systems that it finds itself structurally coupled to as it tries to stabilize infinite complexity. We can call this complexity variety, and variety goes hand in hand with repetition as the mass media system’s operational strategy. Information cannot be repeated; repetition, in fact, almost always implies the transformation of information to non-information. As Luhmann writes, “A news item run twice might still have its sense, but it loses its information value. If information is used as a code, this means that the operations in the system are constantly and inevitably transforming information into non-information” (quoted in Moeller 127). Too much variety, however, entails chaos and thus makes the functional performance of the system less rigorous; on the other hand, too much redundancy may spell systemic stagnation. By these lights, Lisa’s presence in *The L Word* necessitates the shows self-description of lesbians as *Ls* rather than as a group who shares a set of attributes like femaleness and homosexuality. While this is progressively postlesbian, the idea of a defined lesbianism
as a banner to rally round to ask for equal rights makes it difficult to articulate those rights because one cannot decide upon the parameters of its constituency. In this way, Lisa exposes the sham of communitarian rhetoric.

A functional system must mediate the demands of both redundancy and variety in order to secure systemic success. The mass media provides the individual psychic system as well as the collective with new tropes and new information over time. Once digested by an audience, these tropes (i.e., butch lesbians) become old-hat and begin to lose their unique status; no longer are they informative, and we forget their significance. This isn’t a problem because the mass media, by virtue of operational systematicity, can provide new or refreshed tropes ad infinitum–this is its job. Here, Madonna, the media genius and (pen)ultimate provocateur, should spring readily to mind considering the almost unparalleled success of her auspicious self-recreations that have spanned more than three decades. However, this does not mean that absolutely any trope can be produced; signifiers or tropes exist in a diacritical network and emerge based upon prior selections (contingently). The mass media operates selectively with recourse to two specific timelines. Time exists both in futural trajectory and also in the creation of residua. Time in the mass media is thus an unfurling of purely singular moments, a series of retentions and protensions in a chain of communicative signification that ultimately resists presence even though the mass media produce and maintain a fluid reality to which we may all refer. Accordingly, Moeller says that mass media

... have to be highly selective and not only forget about what they did not select in the first place, but also transform what they do select in to that which they no longer select in order to provide social space and time for new selections. The
mass media system constructs memory through forgetting, not through recollection! (136)

Remembering through forgetting, the mass media produces Lisa but expel her – wither because she does not fit or because she becomes noise or old information.

The mass media operate according to three systemic programs: entertainment, advertising, and news. *The L Word* is clearly entertainment, the purpose of which is to provide viewers with a doubling of reality that “conforms to certain conditions and from which perspective the usual ways of life appear as real reality” (2000a, 51; quoted in Moeller 133). Real reality is not destroyed by this double reality; instead it is “back-grounded for the duration of the entertainment” (Moeller 132). The entertainment event has a beginning and an ending, which means that at some point someone made a choice about content which then kick started a chain reaction of selections that create this second world (Ibid. 133). So, in *The L Word*, we see women in love with women, and we then all learn about the ways in which society perturbs their romances, both positively and negatively. Recursive selectivity allows that each selection triggers yet another selection that depends upon or makes sense based upon prior selections. In this way, each selection is necessary while it is also contingent: the constructed second world arises to create a televore of personalities, types, characters, histories, and futures that all arise in connection with the selections that came before. The mass media allow individuals to self-fashion by offering up personalities to its viewers, its systematic programs presenting us with a proliferation of varying personalities in various media strands (Moeller 157). We can be hard as nails like a crime fighter, deductive geniuses like Sherlock Holmes, rebel space cowboys like Han Solo, or roguish, altruistic dykes like Shane McCutcheon –
unique characters that are thoroughly imitable. Without these selections and without our self-fashioning, we would not be able to communicate our *unique imitability*; it would be very difficult to signal, communicate, and be understood. In *The L Word*, lesbian sexuality, very scandalously, has really very little to do with actual lesbianism or lesbian politics but much more to do with communicating individualities from the personality types that the mass media provide. Therein, novel individualities emerge to become tested (accepted/rejected). If accepted, these novel identities become part of a general consensus or knowledge base from where all viewers draw and make sense of phenomenon. We know a woman, butch, femme, softball player, etc. are lesbians; in *The L Word*, we test out new lesbianisms.

*The L Word* is also affected by and participates in a dynamic of “mutual borrowings” (Luhmann 2000a, 63; quoted in Moeller *Explained* 133) where all three media programs can "cross over and mix in many ways" (Moeller 133): we are all accustomed to product placement in film and television, which is an example of how advertisement is seamlessly integrated into entertainment. In *The L Word*, entertainment touches upon news and advertisement, too. There are a number of factors that make a something a news item: it is factual and must be able to withstand scrutiny, on the one hand, but, on the other hand, it may also contain surprise, conflict, and/or norm violations to make it appealing. Lisa the lesbian-identified male, a character and a sexuality that make no sense to characters and viewers alike, is the embodiment of all three; her insistence on lesbianism despite her biology comes as a shock, is scandalous, and produces conflict in her group, inspiring debate about lesbian authenticity. *The L Word* also functions like advertising, because, while advertisements openly manipulate, we take
their insincerity at face value. We do the same with Lisa: we are never really duped by an advertisement and the lesbian-identified male never really dupes the audience. We are suspicious of all media, however, in their remove from “real reality” and the realities that we enjoy. The dupe of advertisement is significant because it authenticates the other programs (Moeller 136). As Luhmann notes, advertisement foists “the deadly sin of the mass media upon itself” allowing viewers to openly detect insincerity “as if in so doing all other programs might be saved” (Luhmann 2000a 44). Moeller sums this up nicely, equating this point with (pre-TIVO) TV viewing. When we watch a television show it is broken up into segments, and those segments are filled with commercials: Moeller notes, “We all know this is just a stupid commercial—thus it is not real and not even very entertaining (we have already seen it a hundred times), but if this is so, then the previous news was really real and the following movie will be truly entertaining” (130). We can understand Lisa thusly: we know that she is an inauthentic instantiation of lesbianism because the show, on its own terms, leads us to believe that she is odd and an outcast, that her brand of lesbianism was considered, broke up the narrative, and has been rejected. However, because she is burdened in this way, Lisa is a programmatic device that allows us to tacitly avow what the show assumes we already know: lesbians must be women. But, not even – the lesbians on the show are aesthetic models of physical perfection. Viewers know that the beautiful actors are not lesbians either but are individuality types. Each is a variation on a hyper-stylized lesbian theme. Viewers know that real lesbians, let alone real people, do not look and act as do the lesbians on the screen.

*The L Word* televerse presents its viewers with an extra-ordinary lesbian topology. The lesbians and lesbianisms that the show presents to its viewers are caricatures and
stereotypes (i.e., the sporty dyke is a tennis pro) or they are remarkable fictions (i.e., the vampire). We are hard-pressed to find these types outside of the program. For example, in one of the outtakes from Season 1, a true to life lesbian was interviewed and told the cameraperson that she was into “Shanes.” Of course, lesbian Shanes hadn’t existed until some 6 months prior – and now, versions of that fiction are everywhere – in bars, clubs, parades, etc. The producers created lesbians like Shane as commodities for an audience that uses those identity constructs to frame their sexuality after the fact. The audience is not looking at a mirror; instead, the visibility paradigm is warped, and the show is self-fulfilling, producing its audience. People who quest after Shanes, for instance, may only find dissembling approximations in their everyday life. An individual could always continue their quest to find better Shane-lesbians. This desiring economy is self-perpetuating and even though *The L Word* was cancelled, the creative team still profits from the project, baiting the audience to keep on questing after the “real” and the “really real,” which makes its reality-TV series spin-off, *The Real L Word*, absolutely necessary as a highly profitable niche.

The show’s preoccupation with authenticity comes to the fore with Lisa. Lisa’s identity can be evaluated in terms of risk, which will expose the show’s conservatism and challenge its almost unquestioned pioneering status. On the level of her individuality, Lisa’s coming out entails risk and rarely is she taken seriously as the principle actors’ eye-rolling, smirking, and sheer bewilderment indicate. Recall, of course, that Kit said that if Lisa wanted to give up her privileges than the group should embrace her and take her seriously. This type of affiliation should be productive and reshape (expand) the identity contours of *The L Word* lesbianism come about. Unlike a hoaxter, Lisa is honest
and sincere. Lisa calls herself a lesbian-identified man – and, it’s true. Lesbians do identify her as a heterosexual man and therefore thoroughly non-lesbian. Part of the sheer fun of this character is that she is so incredibly masochistic. She wants to be rejected. Lisa is looking for a lover who wants to have lesbian sex: so she needs a woman who likes “lesbian” (nonreproductive) sex – oral sex and sex toys. However, Lisa risks being ridiculous when she says that she is a lesbian-identified man. Identified by lesbians as a man, Lisa will probably not get any sex whatsoever from lesbians, if we consider a lesbian to be a biological female who has sex with females who share the same inclinations. (The definition is reductive.) In the long run, if a lesbian is what Lisa is after, Lisa will fail because she wants to be targeted by a lesbian. She wants to be seen by lesbians. Lisa is a man who wants to be objectified as a lesbian – it is not enough for Lisa to look as a subject and objectify women. Instead, Lisa perverts the paradigm so that Lisa tries to force lesbians to recognize “him” as a lesbian, knowing that the operation will fail perpetually because lesbian desire is barred to Lisa. This doesn’t mean that desire fails (and here we switch registers from Luhmann to Lacan); instead, it is ceaseless, opening up to a critique of phallic jouissance. A Lacanian reading of phallic jouissance would go something like this:

There is a barrier between my desire for something as formulated or articulated in signifiers (S) and what can satisfy me. Thus, the satisfaction I take in realizing my desire is always disappointing. This satisfaction, subject to the bar between the signifier and the signified, fails to fulfill me— it always leaves something more to be desired. That is phallic jouissance. Just as one cannot take the lack out of Lacan, one cannot take the failure out of the phallus. (Fink 160)
Lisa’s desire to be desired is always disappointing and so open to more desire – which seems to be somewhat analogous to the way the mass media operates and sustains its own autopoeisis in Luhmann. (This is not to suggest or elaborate on a direct correlation between systems theory and Lacanian psychoanalysis but to point out that the desire and the media operate and are sustained by a similar rhythm. Desire needs new and more objects, and the mass media operate by generating more and new objects.) Lisa appropriates an identity that is presented as being wieldable, and, in so doing, Lisa is a microcosm of the dynamic of desire in the show as it presents lesbian sexualities in the proliferate to be lusted after, coveted, and adorned so as to achieve recognition, to be the object of the other’s desire.

What do lesbians see when they look at Lisa? They see Lisa perform lesbianism according to gross stereotypes, taking her cue from social scripts. Lesbian viewers also see how badly Lisa misreads people. She is attracted to Alice, a bisexual. Alice wants to have transgressive sex but ultimately wants to have penetrative heterosex. Lisa, however, insists upon using sex toys. Alice asks for intimacy from a man, and Lisa gladly provides it – but goes too far and provides too much of it. Even though Lisa is privy to social clues about lesbianism, she does not have the tools and heuristics to identify as or like a lesbian. This does not mean that Lisa is not affiliated with lesbians nor does it mean that she is incapable of sharing proximity. It does mean that she is heterosexual, however, with a lesbian fetish, in many ways representing or serving as the textual embodiment of the 18-45 white male demographic that tunes into the show. Lisa takes a leap of faith in her performance – the biggest risk of all—and comes up with the least amount of pay off: not only does Alice break up with her, but also Lisa never returns to the narrative.
Lisa’s expulsion from the narrative is more than a simple admonishment for the heterosexual male viewers who watch the show and even sympathize with minoritized lesbians. She is a cipher. Lisa is a lesbian by virtue of the stereotypes that she occupies: lesbians can reject or accept her. The same logic goes for the show – lesbians see that *The L Word* perform its lesbianisms by virtue of stereotypes in puts forth or the deployment of an unreal lesbian typology (it oscillates). The result is that the audience can like it or not, accept it or reject it. Like Lisa, the show takes risks—Showtime took a risk to create a market. The creators of the show expanded the market by testing out more and new sexuality/gender constructs as the vast generality of the “L” allows anything to align with it so long as that person “talks, laughs, loves, breaths, fights, fucks, cries, drinks, rides, wins, loses, cheats, kisses, thinks, and dreams.” The generality that *The L Word* courts illustrates that its producers have performed risk management by trying to appeal to all to sell a product to an audience that it also tries to create. This is not to damn the tactic of trying to appeal to all or the creation of lesbian commodities, for who can speculate as to their effect in future? However, lesbianism in this moment is not progressive or transgressive.

It is remarkable that lesbian self-determination is afforded the opportunity to appear in the media-scape. Its appearance, in fact, means that the world or reality has changed in no small way. Because of this, we still may hope for better or more adequate representation in the future, though we realize that the gesture is perpetually frustrated. However, by trying to self-determine televisually, we become the homogenous “them”. Lesbians may hold fast to the dream of political potency in the televisual world as part of what Cary Wolfe calls the “desire . . . to extend liberal advantages to an ever larger
community,” but it only takes a character like Lisa to highlight the dark underbelly of this desire because “those advantages are possible for some only because they are purchased at the expense of others.”

While the L in The L Word wants to be open to future sexual difference, the way that the show functions illustrates not the operativity of sexuality but the operativity of binary gender (Lisa, after all, is a male). Gender subsumes sexuality and dissolves the category. According to Judith Roof, binary gender

refers to culturally available interpretations of individual positionings in relation to desire and sexual difference, both through various social interpellations and sexuation, an intra-psychical process outlined by Jacques Lacan, through which individuals link mind and body in relation to sexual difference as both a social structure and the scaffold for possible desires (i.e., how one responds to castration). (Remaking 16)

The ways in which sexuation is interpreted “provide some of the feeling of coherence among the fictions of individual identity, social roles, bodies, and desires” where “these fictions are organized by and into apparently unified, redundant institutional formations aligned with one another around a single axis of oppositional (read sexual) difference (male/female, masculine/feminine, capital/labor)” (Ibid.). Roof suggests that “even though the broad taxonomies of masculinity and femininity exist as a range of expressions displayed through an elaborate lexicon of styles and behaviors,” which we see proliferate in The L Word, the reduction of gender to the binary male/female has the effect of limiting and defining “the terrain of individual sexual desires.” (Ibid.) Yet, Roof notes, “Individuals . . . interpret their own relation to desires and fantasies in multiple and
conflicting ways, so that even if cultures tend to be rigidly heteronormative, a wide range of sexual desires and identities operate” (Roof Remaking 16) – making room for Lisa the Lesbian-identified male. Finally, “the alignment of binary concepts of sex/gender with socio-cultural meta-narratives provisionally recontains this range of desires.” Lisa is a man attracted to women. *The L Word* looks like it is open to everything but this openness papers over the mechanism that makes some versions of sexuality visible (and others invisible). Lesbian sexuality in the show comes about when it performs, enacts, and creates its own signifying codes for a configuration that is inarticulable in a heteronormative system of signification, further perpetuating the identity dynamic but leaving lesbian desire in its wake. Lesbian desire may appear as an outsider erotic, but its power evaporates when it is subsumed by gender and heteronormativity as in *The L Word*. The lesbian and her desire may reappear in other forms that are still what we might recognize as lesbian (here, Shane the rouge with the heart of gold is the epitome of the outsider erotic), but the term vanishes because it both draws forth and violates the order of the heteropatriarchy attached to the term itself. And, because of this, every female character in the show is punished, a narrative organized around the breast.

**4.5. Visibility Politics Gone Awry: The Crime of Punishment**

The S&M nature of the narrative becomes glaringly apparent in the fourth season of *The L Word* and makes the show completely inadequate as a site of positive lesbian visibilization. Seasons 1 through 3 of *The L Word* are run-of-the mill soap staples—marriage, infidelity, child birth, unemployment, death, etc.—colored by issues close to the lesbian community—coming out, gay bashing, clubbing, DADT, DOMA, etc. In the
fourth season, however, Jenny writes a book and then directs a film about her life with her LA lesbian circle of friends. From that moment on, Jenny’s art takes over the plot, and the narrative focuses on Jenny’s retelling of the first three seasons and her friends’ angry responses to her redescriptions. So, as The L Word provides viewers with a second reality, the characters are also provided with a second reality, which is a third reality for the viewers who have to watch a return of the same. The return of the same and retelling of a story is indicative of trauma, signaling that lesbianism in The L Word is in crisis. The crisis is not necessarily one of determining lesbian authenticity as much as it is about the inability of a predominant the mass media code, heteronormativity, to cope with some of the unruly sexuality constructs that it attempts to deploy. The narrative device that marks the beginning of this mise en scene emerges in Season 3, in perhaps the most important moment in the program, when Dana has a double mastectomy; at the same time, Max decides to have top surgery, step one in his quest for F2M reassignment surgery.

Cutting the breast is the downward spiral of too many lesbian narratives, in which mutilation and mutation uneasily co-exist, inscribing the desire to cut, maim, punish, and discipline the pathologized female body. That lesbian themed art and media events degrade into narratives about breast cancer or mutation comes as no surprise to Penelope Engelbrecht, who has written about lesbian narratives that devolve as such, in S&M Sapphic erotica in particular, which neatly aligns her study with the present analysis.

In the erotic spaces that Engelbrecht explores, mastectomies are indicative of aportias, where the cut, what Engelbrecht calls the un/mark, on the lesbian body functions simultaneously as mutilation and mutation. The wound can be both a scar and a badge of honor. For Max, a F2M top surgery is positive and a matter of volition, so the cut and its
scars are positive. But, Max never gets top surgery, though he decides to live as a trans
man anyway. Max experiences the absence of the cut and experiences trauma
embodied by a psychological cicatrix that is always present. While Max is struggling
with his gender identity, Dana develops breast cancer and ends up dying. Before
Dana’s illness, her moments on the screen revolve around her character’s materiality. The
camera performs close-ups, tracking Dana’s body as she trains, fasts, and competes in
professional tennis matches, recording each grunt and each bead of sweat. Dana’s body is
the image of athletic perfection, so when her body fails her, the psychological impact is
devastating. If, according to Engelbrecht, agency is constituted through lack, where “one
can only conceptualize itself when it is mirrored back to itself from the position of
another’s desire” what, then, can we make of the Dana/Max mastectomy mirroring,
Engelbrecht’s un/mark?

On the one hand, Dana wants the impossible, to recover her breasts, which to her
mean wholeness, wellness, and authenticity via femininity; on the other, Max wants to
remove his breasts, which to him means wholeness, wellness, and authenticity via the
masculine. Both situate their sense of self and well-being around and through the
materiality of their bodies and the gender performance they expect these attributes to
represent; both women’s agencies are structured around the overwhelming desire to
overcome the lack that is heightened by being in one another’s presence. Dana
storms out of Max’s top surgery fundraiser because Max makes comments about how
disgusting his breasts make him feel in front of the ailing, breastless Dana. In turn,
viewers may use this ambiguous moment to structure our understanding of the show, our
bodies, and our sexualities. The breast as a mark or sign has slippery referents, and our
desire would be for the breast to refer to only one, overarching principle: wholeness. Posited in this manner, the dynamic of consumption or desire fuels the subjective quest for objet petit a: the subject is the empty placeholder seeking to regain a wholeness that was never there to begin with, and the polymorphous aspects of untamed sexualities are reinvested on the lesbian body, making the lesbian body the “function of the cut,”

edited and narrativized by the camera whilst metaphorized in the loss of the breast, real or fantasized. The program punishes lesbians for having special access to the breast (one's own and another's) in a way that the infant and the het male may never possess, receive, nor gift. Because of this, Dana dies, and Max is denied.

The L Word is an exceptionally violent program; in its S&M economy, every character is punished, maimed, or psychologically tortured. Dana dies from breast cancer, and her Trans twin, Max, is alienated for his difference. The abused and orphaned Shane, who once turned tricks for food, finally tracks down her dead-beat father who has replaced her with a child whom he loves and will not grant her access to. The cutthroat egoist, Jenny, succeeds despite the odds and lands a movie deal, yet a duplicitous doppelgänger ruins her. Alice runs an idea past the has-been Jenny, who ends up stealing the idea to rise from the ashes once more—only to die. Every principal character, at the end of the series, is a suspect in Jenny’s murder, and this spills over into webisodes where the intense, often-cruel interrogations of the principal players is put on display for Internet viewers after the program’s cancelation. Trying to understand the show’s violence, one may note a rather conspicuous absence of fathers in the text. However, when these fathers finally arrive on the scene, they are perverse, spiteful, ashamed, and bigoted. In many ways, then, The L Word could be read as a story about self-fashioning a
new family unit, redefining the role of the father even, but it fails at this re-creation.

There is never a need for re-creation of the father; he abides. Those who abide by the heteronormative schema, i.e., lesbian couples like Bette and Tina, suffer less from the fantastic, unbelievable plot twists. Their problems are banal: infidelity, money, and custody. Bette is ill suited for the role of head of household, and she represents the imp/potency of the Father in every plot twist. She is successful, beautiful, smart, and well off, but, as viewers realize, there is always someone more beautiful, someone with more wealth and success – Bette will always desire more. Bette heads up her family, and, in so doing, she is powerful; however, Bette is no anchor or center in this configuration of sexualities, because, she is often left powerless and alone. The fictive world of these women is a nightmare of sexual relativism, alienation, and impotence.
Exclusion as an Alternative to the Identity Model

5.1. Deliberate Exclusionary Practices: Separatism and the Van Dykes

Community involves inclusion, but inclusion is demonstrably problematic in that it may exclude, despite one’s best intentions. We have looked at this issue in identitarian lesbian political groups. The most obvious alternative to the deterministic identity schematic, then, may be voluntary exclusion. During the 1960s and 1970s, going off the grid as such was an option that a number of identity groups considered at one time or another – from the environmentalist to the women’s libber to the Black Panther and the homophile. Separatism was also a viable option for lesbians who grew frustrated with society and with those identity groups with which lesbians had felt solidarity but were met with alienation. According to Lillian Faderman, there were thousands of lesbian feminist separatists in the 1970s who insisted upon their difference from mainstream society, and, in so doing, devoted their energies to creating personal palliatives rather than cultural correctives, replacing male-define social patterns with female ideals to “bring about integrity, nurturing the needy, self-determination and equality of labor and rewards into all aspects of institution-building and economics” (Odd Girls 220). Jill Johnston, author of Lesbian Nation: The Feminist Solution (1973), urged separatism, noting,

Once I understood the feminist doctrines, a lesbian separatist position seemed the commonsensical position, especially since, conveniently, I was an L-person.

Women wanted to remove their support from men, the ‘enemy’ in a movement for reform, power and self-determination.
Because, as Radicalesbians Rita Mae Brown succinctly put it, “You can’t build a strong social movement if your sisters are out there fucking the oppressor” (Phelan 46).

Separatist organizations, farms, communes, co-ops, music fests, bookstores, presses, and retreats popped up all over the country. Heather Murray remarks that a separate economy “provided a sense of lesbian space, culture, and politics alike” where “cultural goods, creative writing, art, and music held a fundamental place in the articulation of lesbian feminism as a politics and identity” (253). Murray calls their strivings “utopic” in the search for “a kind of contemporary industrial republicanism, and their consumption reflected a desire for comfort, community, and even protection” (bid.). In this way, lesbian separatist culture “illuminates the yearnings of a group of women who did not fit into conventional society not just in their sexual preferences but in their work lives and creative desires” (Ibid.). Insisting that we acknowledge the complexity of lesbian experience, Murray notes, “the lesbian feminist movement was not just about sexual experimentation or a consciously chosen sexuality but about the longing for a more satisfying work, leisure, and daily life as well as creative fulfillment” (Ibid.). A few notable groups include the D.C. based Furies, Radicalesbians, and Lavender Menace; the Seattle-based Gorgons; SEPS (the Separatist Enraged Proud and Strong) in San Francisco; the Clit Collective in NYC; and the Canadian Van Dykes (Ibid.). Lesbian separatist Lamar Van Dyke observed:

We were everywhere ... We found Women’s Land in North Carolina, Florida, Texas, Arkansas, New Mexico, Arizona, a lot of Women’s Land in California and Oregon. You could actually go all around the country from Women’s Land to Women’s Land and you met all these other women who were doing the same
thing. You would run into people in New Mexico that you had seen in Texas . . .

It was a whole world. It was the Lesbian Nation. (Quoted in Levy, no pagination) Each occurrence of what activists called Dyke Heaven or Women’s Land had its own particular ethical investments as well. Some looked forward to creating and nurturing a woman’s economy that would run along side and perturb traditional economic structures. The Olivia Record Company (circa 1973), for example, was fiercely separatist, perhaps to its own detriment, refusing to work with main streamers such as Yoko Ono and budding pop phenol Melissa Etheridge. Unable to compete with the music industry, Olivia Record Co. folded by the 1990s, but, ever the opportunists, the company stakeholders tuned the label into a successful lesbian family cruise line. Other separatists were interested in complete separation, and some radicals such as Valeria Salinas, the woman who shot and subsequently stalked Andy Warhol, called for a direct, violent rebellion against all males. Depending upon theoretical predilection, lesbian feminists would not associate with men, straight women, or even those lesbians sympathetic to heterosexuals.

One of the problems with separatism, however, was that most women were thoroughly dependent upon men, which made separatism impractical:

Although we choose to live as lesbians, we are obliged ... to stand in relation to the patriarchal economy.... to stand in relation to men, especially to secure food, water, shelter, clothing, and frequently, for the goods and money that must be exchanged for such commodities. (Allen 8) belle hooks reports on the “bourgeois class perspective” that comes out in separatist discourse: “Most women do not have the economic freedom to separate from men
because of economic interdependence. The separatist notion that women could resist sexism by withdrawing contact with men” is fallacious and insincere (hooks 5).\textsuperscript{cxcii}

Allison Jaguar explains:

... a politics of total separatism is necessarily classist and racist no matter how far classism and racism are eradicated inside woman culture. In part, it is classist and racist because access to the woman culture is more difficult for poor women and women of color, just as it is more difficult for such women to be exclusively lesbian. On the most fundamental level ... total separatism is classist and racist because it denies the importance of class and race divisions.... Consequently, it can never be effective in bringing about far-reaching social transformation.

(11)\textsuperscript{cxciii}

These contestations are reminiscent of Dan Savage’s parrhesiastes position and his lone concession for passing. Until one is solvent (one grows up), one is forced to play the game to secure life and limb. While it would be injudicious to argue against the legitimacy of the aforementioned contestation, this does not mean that separatism is a complete wash, especially if those who embraced the strategy to curtail the heteroeconomy embraced stigma, poverty, and social alienation. Of the women who got of the grid, one group in particular embraced poverty and eschewed the idea of property, abandoning their own Woman’s Land, while skating on and over the contours of the grid.

In 1977, Heather Elizabeth Nelson, sold her women-owned farm in Canada after having met the vagabond feminist, Ange Spalding. Nelson and Spalding hit the road in a van, picking up lesbians as they moved from women’s commune to coop to city shelters. Embracing the nomadic lifestyle, the woman who joined the mobile lesbian commune
adopted the last name *Van Dyke* and traveled around the Americas in a van (full of dykes – thus the sobriquet). The core group of women (i.e., Sky, Thorn, Judith, Lamar, and Birch Van Dyke) was not wealthy yet showed extreme resourcefulness – scavenging fruits and vegetables, trade labor for food, manufacturing items for barter, and trading their wares. In this way, the Van Dykes shunned ties to patrilinearity to create new intimacy patterns and community organizations: free love was the theme and a practice, separatism a mantra, and movement a must. Inactivity implied literal ossification, and the Van Dyke’s lesbian counteralignment was too wild and too unruly for coding (Levy, no pag.).

Refusing to succumb to the strictures of monogamy and heteronormativity, ringleader Lamar Van Dyke, was stridently lesbian separatist and remains so to this day, telling journalist Ariel Levy, “Your generation wants to fit in. That’s your deal: ‘I want to be just like you.’ The last thing I want to be is just like you.” Lamar Van Dyke does not want to be pigeonholed nor identify with others similarly. As Todd May suggests, “there is a way of seeing the world that does not consist of identities that form or reform themselves” as Lamar’s comment suggests. Instead, May investigates the alternative, “swarms of difference that actualize themselves into specific swarms of identity…From their place within identities, these forms of difference assure that the future will be open to novelty, to new identities, and new relationships among them” (114). The Van Dyke’s version of lesbian separatism maintained its connection to lesbianism and lesbian identity but did so in a manner that put into question the category itself, merely by virtue of the group’s constant flux, movement, and instability. Difference is terrifying in that it does not fit in neatly with established functioning of society, to those things that “make
sense” (i.e., Levy’s generation, according to Lamar). Because the Van Dyke’s were off grid, they were better equipped to circumvent “the repressive apparatus” that tries to code, homogenize, and annihilate difference (Deleuze No Pag.)\textsuperscript{xcvii} The dialectic of identity, for example, deals with the unruly by developing sense-making axioms, rules, and signals to pigeonhole difference (one often wants to fit in) or recode the strange and estranging phenomenon. Dominant forces that circulate in the socius aim to spur on their autopoeisis to freeze and stabilize process to control flows while some “manipulate the code a little, so as to make room for flows that are also dangerous” (Ibid.). Perhaps this is the best way to conceive of the Van Dykes, as a wedge that made room for dangerous processes and events. Codes are not all-encompassing and overdetermining. As Gilles Deleuze jokes, “all of a sudden, there are young people who do not respond to the code: they insist on having a flow of hair which was not expected, what shall we do now?” The answer, of course, is that society tries to code these new flows according to its axioms, which are playing catch up, or it develops different axioms that ossify: “we will try to recuperate [the surprise event] but then [if] there is something within it that continues not to let itself be coded, what then?”\textsuperscript{xcviii} Recall the susurrations of surprise that the femme triggered in the 1940s and her seemingly inherent ability to pass, that thing “that continues not to let itself be coded” – what then, indeed.

The Van Dyke’s story ends in disappointment and stagnation, unfortunately. The Van Dyke’s perambulations led them from Canada to Mexico to Houston and the Great Northwest to San Francisco, finally, at the height of the lesbian BDSM movement. Here, the separatist sex positive radicals turned to leather fetishes and role-playing, while
disbanding to re-enter the world. The antinormative element of the migratory practice lost its luster as it crystalized through the anti-pornography/sex-positive dispositif.\textsuperscript{cxcix}

5.2. BDSM – The Suspension of Lesbian Activism

Lamar Van Dyke emerged from her van in San Francisco ready to combat the heteropatriarchy, adopting \textit{hypersexual hypervisual} homosexual strategies of resistance, which added fuel to the fire of the anti-pornography wars that raged in the 1970s and 1980s. Sex positive lesbian feminists such as Pat Califia and Gayle Ruben attempted to reinvest lesbianism with sexuality, most particularly in the form of lesbian BDSM (alternately referred to herein is as S&M), which roused the hackles of anti-pornography sexual conservatives Andrea Dworkin, Gloria Steinem, Adrienne Rich, Catharine Mackinnon, Susan Brownmiller, and Karla Jay. Erotic transgression as the epitome of the anti-philosophical act had been an attractive concept deployed on high by the likes of Sade, Genet, Artaud, Bataille, Miller, Nin, etc. and those associated with the literatures of excess and transgression. Aligning with that trajectory, Ruben and Califia capitalized on the political power of taboo-violation, emphasizing sexuality, exaggerating to visibilized power and conventions, role-playing, BDSM, exhibitionism, etc. as integral components to a politicized erotic. Questioning the “blanket equation of objectification with violence,” sex-positive lesbian feminists saw sexuality as “a source of power rather than victimization” (Stein16). Scandalous and salubrious, sex positivity was meant to titillate while confounding lesbian stereotypes. Reader Yvonne Zylan describes the moment in her “Letter to the Editor” in \textit{Out/look} in 1990 (no. 8, 4):
Lesbians are doing and talking about things we have never done or talked about before. We are moving beyond the realm of Sisterhood into the realm of the nasty, the tasty, and the sexy. We are pushing the boundaries of what is acceptable lesbianism. We use the word 'fuck' like the boys used to, we wear lipstick, and we lust openly and pridefully . . . It is not simply that we are finally able to voice certain questions about desires that the self-righteous atmosphere of political correctitude and erotophobia we called lesbian feminism [e.g., the Daughters of Bilitis] kept us from uttering: our new culture is actually producing new desire.

(No pag.)

Lesbian S&M got a lot of ink in the 1980s, especially after the 1982 Barnard Conference on Sexuality, because S&M "provided an endless supply of fantasy images" - that is, it provided more types - in a world heretofore devoid of sex and women positive lesbian images. It also provided “a gendered archetype for the sort of erotic tension required by the emerging model of lesbian sex” that reversed the notion that master/slave and butch/femme roles “were simply reflections of patriarchal values” (Stein 31). Lesbian feminist and writer, Sarah Bright, a principal player in the west coast erotica movement, contributed to the creation of the parodic On Our Backs (1984-2006), an erotic lesbian rag written as a counterpoint to the radical feminist magazine Off Our Backs (1970-the present). Bright remarks about the movement and the magazine: “Everyone assumes we started the magazine because we were nymphomaniacs” but, she insists that we locate the movement in the larger frame of reference of women's health care reform, with sex and sexuality being severely important though theretofore neglected components that finally came to the fore in light of sex-positivity (quoted in Stein 21).
BDSM is a sticking point for feminists because it brings up issues of consent. Elaine Scarry holds that pain leads to destruction and runs counter to the imperatives of liberalism – “human beings will seek to minimize the risk of being hurt, deprived of liberty, subjected to the degradation of captivity” (Weait 74).<ref> BDSM sex positive women find BDSM promising because it upsets convention, thriving in a contrived space where identities are donned and doffed in what Jonathan Dollimore calls a “perverse dynamic.” This dynamic evokes the uncanny where what is enacted is radically different from the template it subverts and threatens but, at the same time, it is part and parcel to it. In this way, BDSM take on the function of art in that it is jarring and defamiliarizing, the ruminations of the political and aesthetically affective democratically addresses the issue of consent immediately: practitioners must communicate their needs and negotiate boundaries, parodically visibilizing power implicit to sexuality and gender performances in the sex act itself. Consent is present in every moment in real-time negotiations.

S&M picks up traction in the social and reflects current legal biases. Remembering Roof’s point about selections (and the myriad of alternatives not selected per the strictures of a given discourse), we see that the law protects only “expressions of autonomy and consent that cohere with the sexual values the law seeks to affirm”, according to Will Stockton. To offer an example, Stockton references an essay written by British legal historian Matthew Weait, who locates this penchant in a case tried before the House of Lords in 1994, R v Brown, where

…the appellants — gay men whose consensual sadomasochistic activities included branding — were participants in a “cult of violence” to which the defense of consent was not adequate. In the 1994 case of R v Wilson, however, the
same court upheld a husband’s right to brand his wife at her request … the
difference between these acts of consensual violence is that the latter took place
between a heterosexual couple and was not explicitly performed for sexual
gratification (the court preferring sex and violence to remain distinct). (Weait
391)

Homosexual BDSM is a threat to convention, as Stockton points out: embracing irony
and the parodic, tops occupy the position of the law and “bottoms ridicule the power of
law by actively enjoining the top to engage in the discipline and ritual humiliation upon
which the law depends for its authority” (Ibid.) In so doing, **gay male** BDSM becomes
“the law’s greatest threat” (Ibid.).

We have seen the argument that BDSM can be a virulent mode of resistance in
Sue-Ellen Case’s butch-femme aesthetic. Case’s aesthetic ended up failing as her lesbian
construct capitulated to the demands of the Law. Despite the flaws in Case’s argument,
we may speculate about the potency of a female BDSM experience. According to Slavoj
Žižek, lesbian sadomasochism (his analogue to BDSM) has particular relevance as a
counteralignment to hegemonic forces. Žižek insists that patriarchal power (or the Law in
Case) is no longer a problem, arguing that the patriarchy is increasingly impotent,
especially as we witness the demise of the nuclear family in the 20th century. With the
father in absentia and the family unit dissolving (which become important very shortly),
“the subject experiences himself as freed from any rational constraints, lacking any
internalized symbolic prohibition, bent on experimenting his life and on pursuing his life-
project” (344). Despite the subject’s freedom, it stills complains of determination and
misrecognition. To explain the phenomenon, Žižek asks, “what if the disintegration of the
public (‘patriarchal’) symbolic authority is paid for (or counterbalanced) by an even stronger disavowed ‘passionate attachment’ to subjection” (345) where “regulatory power mechanisms remain operative only insofar as they are sustained by the very elements they possess” (Ibid.). Žižek’s “sado-maso” lesbian couples engage in and follow the Master/Slave code, where the “top gives orders and the bottom obeys” (Ibid.). In Hegelian fashion, if a bottom wants to be a top, she must go through a sexual apprenticeship with the top to learn the ropes. In this space, reminiscent of Sue-Ellen Case’s butch-femme theatre, the couple “find libidinal satisfaction in choosing [the] S&M scene” (Ibid.). Contra Case, however, this sexual expression is not a direct assault on the patriarchy; instead, it is “public social relations among free individuals where ‘passionate attachment’ to the form of repression becomes the very form of transgression . . . the obscene supplement to the public sphere of freedom and equality” (345). As Julie Codell explains, “. . . in a reflexive society the symbolic father of the uncompromising ‘No!” is in retreat, the void is filled with ersatz authorities . . . that make transgression or perversion of the Law a rule in the service of enjoyment” (59). With sado-maso lesbian coupledom, power is in the enjoyment of the ersatz, the fraud, and the hoax.

But, why women—and, why lesbians? S&M lesbianism may be one sexual modality that troubles, if not scrambles, the over-powering forces that come to dominate the masculinist experience of publicity. Yet, the “theatricality” of sado-maso lesbianism remains perplexing – is this a moment of self-actualizing power for the lesbian? – and sheds light on why this particular modality cannot possibly work. Žižek admits that the transgressive nature of sado-maso lesbian relationships is based on its legality – partners enter into a “contract” and play in “accepted roles.” But these roles are problematic
because they are reductive and are products of the regime they intend to critique. They have been repeatedly selected over time in various registers and discourses to represent transgression but, in so doing, the S&M selection becomes a master narrative of transgression that excludes other potential transgressive elements. Authority is present though it is invisible. The hegemony is so normal and so pervasive that it does not stand out, unless it emerges in different vestiges, even in the counter-discursive. Stressing theatricality, Žižek acknowledges the performative aspect of sexuality, and, if S&M sapphism is to be liberating, then one needs to establish just where the power comes from. If these acts are preformed in private for the benefit of the individuals involved, Žižek could not know about them unless he was a sado-maso. In this way, the sado-masochist lesbian couple is not made visibilized; instead, the couple comes into existence because they are seen, having no real presence of their own. Žižek, here, is the observer whose subjectivity is supported by fantastic lesbianism. Placing sole emphasis in sex act performativity may be problematic in that BDSM lesbians may have come close to producing what Ariel Levy calls “raunch culture” where lesbians internalize sexualized, heteronormative views of lesbians and take those desires as their own.

Over and over, heterosexual sex is visibilized – even if used for parody – which means its selection is occluding other selections, a process that reinforces ruling hegemonic paradigms such as heteronormativity. BDSM is particularly unproductive when it “ceases to function as point of resistance and a principle of disruption” (Weaite122). The Van Dyke’s migratory drift was a counteralignment, a flow or mode of visibility, however ephemeral, in an unsustained yet thoroughly unpredictable critique of the hetpat norm –but when the Van Dykes stepped out of their caravan and settled in
San Francisco, their stasis became symbolic. BDSM was the last big *lesbian* phenomenon that was only lesbian because it captivated the attention of lesbians not because the practice has an inherent connection to lesbianism.

### 5.4. Exclusion

Žižek points to a very interesting idea: what if we start a discussion on identity and politics from a point of freedom and radical exclusion from the social? The types of social inclusion that are possible depend upon how we understand society to be structured. Societies can be organized in a number of ways, of course, but, for our purposes, we can begin with a very basic split, the difference between premodern and modern social organization. Foucault, for one, has commented extensively on the epistemic shift that occurred in the 1800s in his *The Order of Things*. Not one to celebrate strict causality in light of his genealogical understanding of history, Foucault never mentions exactly why this radical societal shift occurs, and, while his scholarship has been questioned by historicists who often revel in the casual, many of Foucault’s scions remain undeterred in light of the criticism his “slapdash” scholarship has generated. Though Foucault remained remiss in pinpointing exactly why the epistemic shift occurred in the 1800s that changed the way we understand words and things, Luhmannian social constructivism provides an answer, and that answer is functional differentiation (Luhmann *Love* 4-6).

In order to understand functional differentiation, we may visit the premodern. Very generally, premodern Western society is organized in segmentary (clans or families) or stratified units (castes or estates). In both segmentary and stratified societies, people
get their identity by belonging to families, which determine a person’s role in their community. The family is the seat of multiple discourses and powers. Religion, economics, legal considerations, education, art and patronage, etc. coalesce in this base unit. Here, the rhetoric of commonality can be found with its emphasis on autochthony, blood, lineage, and kinship. Individuals bereft of these ties are barely legible in the culture proper. They are outside and excluded, paving the way for a fledgling politics of exclusion to occur, as is Derrida’s point in his *Politics of Friendship*. Thinkers as diverse as Foucault, Agamben, Nancy, Derrida, and Luhmann have pointed out that the encroachment of modernity makes palpable a *politics of exclusion* aimed at specific groups of people that came about with the rise of the “territorial estates and guild organizations who ostracize, condemn, or attacked social groups who refuse to play by their rules” (Braeckman 69). Without connections, survival can be tenuous, so it benefits individuals to belong to a group and to obey its edicts all in the effort to perpetuate bloodlines, clans, and kingdoms. Even though stratification presumably entails organizational complexity, more so than in segmentary societies, stratification or hierarchies are nonetheless heavily dependent upon the family unit: one is born into a family, which is fixed in a stratum or a caste. Mobility between strata is not commonplace (Schwanitz 140).

During the Middle Ages, according to Luhmann, people such as minstrels, scholars, beggars, runaways, and mercenaries exist outside of societal bounds and whose exclusion was exceedingly visceral precisely because solitary figures like those aboard Foucault’s *stultifera navis* were the exception and not the rule. What matters in the premodern is that an individual belonged to a family, clan, or caste completely; if not, the
individual was excluded from society and lived on the fringe. In modern times, exclusion is the rule rather than the exception, and this happens when society organizes itself by way of functionally differentiation. The idea of functional differentiation is quite coherent. As societies get more complex with advances in trade and technology, for example, systems emerge to deal with that complexity. Communicating according to what type of functions they preform, systems like the economic, political, mass media, psychic, the legal, the educational, the intimacy, etc., are laid out linearly, i.e., none is to be privileged, though it would seem that the economic system is much more robust than the other function systems for us. Ideally, these systems are autonomous and not over-determined by any other, and, as Antoon Braeckman notes, “The autonomy of these [systems] does not mean that they are completely independent of one another (autarky), but that they are mutually independent with respect to the development of the function domain of which they are in charge” (71). What this means is that if I am removed from the equation, the economic, media, and academic systems do not fail or come to a grinding stop, which points to an individual’s systemic exclusion. Removing male heirs from premodern families, however, could decimate cultures.

Modern individuals do not start off inside or as apart of a society or social system but are excluded, and, in this exclusion, lies their freedom from systemic over-determination, at least, in theory. What Braeckman is suggesting is that inclusion, not exclusion, is a modern problem. Under the aegis of neo-liberal rhetoric, everyone should have the right to participate equally in every system - “to receive education, to do scientific research, to exercise political power or to enjoy medical care, etc. – a circumstance that, according to Luhmann, has its semantic counterparts in the modern
concepts of ‘freedom’ and ‘equality’” (Braeckman 70). The assumption is that freedom and equality are achieved when everyone can access every function system. We should feel no shame in feeling adrift as modern individuality shows us that we have not true mooring. And, as Braeckman notes, because we feel as though we do not belong to society, we then question our relationship to society, which, is the point of Kantian idealism. Because societal structuration creates the disconnection between individual and systems, Luhmann holds that it is pointless to ask society to provide a remedy. In this respect, alienation and identity become problems that the individual has to deal with (Luhmann, 1989: 226, 229–30). (What we find happening is the individual self-fashions its identity and borrows from the descriptions that systems have generated.)

Braeckman points out the obvious: societal integration does not have to be aligned with societal inclusion:

there is no one rule that will make inclusion the same for everyone in society however we have terms like civil and equal rights that imply that all people should be included in the same way – these terms also try to make up for the loss of inclusion as the premodern gave way to functional differentiation (73)

The rhetoric of inclusion is logically totalitarian and works by excluding modes of exclusions. But exclusions are useful and may enhance difference and systemic complexity. If we think of a perfect society as one that includes everyone with no exclusions, we then see real “forms of exclusion either understood as residual problems or attributed, in a socio-critical vein, to identifiable powers of oppression in society” (Ibid.)—usually, the white het male or the ruling political parties. As Luhmann notes:

With the functional differentiation of society, the regulation of the inclusion/
exclusion relationship is transferred to the function systems themselves, and there is no longer a central agency that supervises the subsystems in this respect (however much politics would like to see itself in this role). (Luhmann, 1997: 630)

This is not to say that people, systems, and institutions do not exclude. Nor is this to say that communications reach every individual – one cannot communicate economically nor reap the benefits of the economic system if one is not solvent. As we have suggested, insolvency led to harsh exclusions for lesbians and women of all stripes; concurrently, lack of economic virility made it impossible for women and lesbians to exclude themselves (separate) from economic system, which men traditionally resonated with as the purveyors of wealth. When separatists created their own micro-economies within the larger economic system, we can understand the phenomenon as a recursive interaction: separatist economies are a reaction to the heteroeconomic, but we might suggest that the heteroeconomic system grew more complex, branching out and communicating with/through *more, new, and different* individuals and thereby securing its operational fitness, to deal with the complex and changing environment of which separatist lesbianism was an integral component.

Systems operate by discriminating, making choices, and selecting yet the inclusion model has us direct our attention to a figurehead. There must be someone out there oppressing us – the man, Obama, the Tea Party, the Law, the Father, etc. If, as Žižek suggested, the source of oppression is in retreat and not locatable, then we should look into how exclusion operates. Rather, all exclusions cannot be thrust upon one nodal
point because doing so papers over the way modernity works. The inclusion/exclusion game is much more complex:

…forms of exclusion, which occur at the margins of some function systems, with negative repercussions for the possibilities of inclusion in other systems, as a result of which, as time goes by, smaller or larger parts of the population are excluded from major domains of society (Luhmann, 1997: 630)

Exclusions will occur and they are unpredictable. Some forms of exclusion are valuable – insisting that lesbians are biological women (not men) who have sex with other biological women allows lesbians to make relevant communication about oppression to organize as a group and fight to attain the legal status of a protected class, for example (a designation reserved for race, religion, pregnancy, sex, disability, etc. in the US). In this way, “identity politics” based on exclusion is relevant and recoverable.

The problems with identity politics models presented are straightforward: social inclusion is important as is being open to difference. However, inclusion leads to ideas of authenticity (a fiction) and what follows is marginalization or homogenization. Lesbian activist developed alternatives to the mis/recognition model. The alternatives shared qualities as well: the demand for recognition of lesbian in terms of equal rights to positive mass media visibility; the distrust of feminist positions that demand disavowal lesbian desire in lesbian discourses; the assumption that lesbians start from a position of misrecognition; the assumption that lesbians will become socially integrated through positive visibility and attention (thus the popularity of consciousness-raising activities); and the assumption that all “normal” people are socially integrated, that they start from a position of inclusion. The alternatives proposed existed in proliferate: separatism
(problematic because of its apoliticality and classism); hypersexualization (problematic for its ties to liberalism); the lesbian continuum (problematic for its reduction of lesbianism to feminism); and, the lesbian erotic (problematic because of its fetishization of identity). All of these disparate models cohere and fail because they share in identity politics belief in social inclusion.

The alternative that I propose is indebted to separatism, which is not about physically removing oneself from culture but evaluating cultural communications. Political lesbians believed that the constructedness of the social made lesbians visible in terms of the hegemony, which meant that they could not self-actualize properly. To deal with this overdetermination, lesbians had recourse to other measures that toyed with the identity-visibility nexus such as passing and hoaxing to scramble heteronormative, identity reinforcing codes. This is evidence that lesbians are and have been savvy communicators. However, lesbian activists did not believe that they started from a point of systemic exclusion; instead, the Radicalesbians, for example, held that lesbians were situated within the social but defined against the masculine. In this, lesbians lived inauthentically. Heteronormativity in the other identity groups excluded lesbian exclusion – they forced lesbian members to downplay or disavow their desire in the name of something other (hegemony) – so much so that lesbianism was blacklisted for its apoliticality.

Understanding exclusion in this manner distinguishes MacMaster and Lisa from the lesbian who passes. MacMaster and the lesbian passer lie, hoax, and pass. MacMaster appropriated using his privilege. For lesbians, passing is an important exclusion as it is as a survival strategy. For MacMaster, and, to a lesser extent, Lisa, passing as lesbian
fetishizes the lesbian, making it a spectacle and taming the unruliness of lesbian desire. Lisa was forthcoming about her sexual preferences and so acted as a parrhesiastes, but the function of truth is warped. Lisa gussied up her heterosexuality and her heterogenderality using lesbianism tropes. She also manipulated the definition of lesbianism because the discourse of identity demands inclusion of all. Lisa lived her truth, but that truth was based on the assumption that gender and sexuality attributes are wieldable in a world of seemingly unlimited choices. This statement is partially true – via the regime of identity, gender and sexuality get broken into attributes. These attributes are used to code an individual, who signals her uniqueness with these forms. However, Luhmann's work on the mass media shows us that the "infinite" choices in this particular game are contingent and only give rise to choices made available by that contingency. Gender and sexuality are not liberating in this respect but part of a regime that has ossified selections that occur repeatedly in various registers. Lisa does not challenge the hetpat regime; she is but one of the choices made available by past contingent selections - choices that exclude by excluding other important choices. This is may explain why the hundred-footer or real lesbian never appears on the screen in *The L Word*: the lesbian is fantastic.

The evidence presented herein suggests that the best way to scramble or frustrate codes may befall us or come as a surprise, as we saw with femme in 1940s. Of note, however, is Richard Rorty’s suggestion to feminists in the notorious Tanner Lectures, where he emphasizes the importance of astonishment and the taking of “imaginative leaps” as the pragmatic response to the hegemony. The overwhelming distrust of the tactic from the feminist ranks may be indicative of social conservatism that requires
determinism, ossification, and stability, reinforcing the reign of feminist hegemonies. The fight against heteronormative forces is an important fight that must be performed over time and in every instance. Each battle depends upon an individual’s contingency. In a world that demands honesty and identification at every turn, toying with that code when passing, for example, entails paying attention to each circumstance and evaluating risk in every situation, which is perhaps the most honest pose that we may strike.
Borrowed from Michel Foucault, a genealogy “is a historical perspective and investigative method, which offers an intrinsic critique of the present. It provides people with the critical skills for analyzing and uncovering the relationship between knowledge, power and the human subject in modern society and the conceptual tools to understand how their being has been shaped by historical forces. Genealogy works on the limits of what people think is possible, not only exposing those limits and confines but also revealing the spaces of freedom people can yet experience and the changes that can still be made . . . . genealogical analyses challenge traditional practices of history, philosophical assumptions and established conceptions of knowledge, truth and power. Genealogy displaces the primacy of the subject found in conventional history and targets discourse, reason, rationality and certainty. Foucault’s analyses are against the idea of universal necessities, the search for underlying laws and universal explanatory systems, the inevitability of lines of development in human progress and the logic that we learn more about things and become better at dealing with them as time goes on. Instead, genealogy seeks to illuminate the contingency of what we take for granted, to denaturalise what seems immutable, to destabilise seemingly natural categories as constructs and confines articulated by words and discourse and to open up new possibilities for the future” from Úna Crowley’s *International Encyclopaedia of Human Geography* entry, “Genealogy, method” (MS number: 443). Web.


Gay men passed as well but were not saddled with the two-for-one burden of gender and sexuality discrimination: lesbians passed into the invisibility of the feminine in a
socius marked by male-defined practices that ignored them anyway. For that matter, each identity-based group has a history of passing and discomfort with it.

Mattachine as well as ONE, Inc., created by former Mattachine affiliates, had encouraged lesbian participation and even helped many lesbian activist groups and presses get off the ground (Gross 25-7).

Cf. Feminism Unmodified, 126.

Of particular relevance, Shane Phelan illustrates the ways in which lesbian activism materialized in response to the homophilic and feminists identity-based movements to evaluate the profound impact that the discourse of liberalism had on all three. Cf. Identity Politics: Lesbian Feminism and the Limits of Community (1990).

Cf. “Rethinking the Public Sphere.” Social Text. No. 25/26. (1990), 56-80.

In Walter Benn Michaels’ The Shape of the Signifier (2006) and Kenneth W. Warren’s So Black and Blue (2003), for example, the authors argue that identity is a cultural construct that is a problematic foundation for politics because identitarian rhetoric reinforces the reign of the subject (Michaels) or is too indirect to shape policy (Warren). Rather than coming up with more non-essentialist post-identitarian modes of being, both authors suggest that we focus on where and how identitarian rhetoric is mobilized to cultivate politically engaging statements that tend to the specificity of each situation.


According to Larry Gross, “Homosexuals in the second half of the century came together as a conscious group by adopting the peculiarly American identity of a minority
akin to (but overlapping with) the racial, ethnic, or religious minorities that are a dominant feature of our cultural and political topography” (261). Gross goes on to suggest that “by asserting minority status—claiming, on the loose reading of Kinsey, to be 10 percent of the population—gay people were able to fit into a set of familiar theoretical frames, decrying discrimination and demanding equal rights under the law. With perseverance and growing numbers, attitudes began to change, barriers began to fall . . .” (Ibid.). However, lesbians were some of the last of the minoritized to petition for rights: of those denigrated groups that lesbians formed coalitions with, the NAACP (founded in 1909), national women’s suffrage organizations (around since the mid19th century in America and earlier in Europe), and male homophilic organizations (the Mattachine Society founded five years prior to the first lesbian organization, the Daughters of Bilitis) pre-dated lesbian-centric identity-politics groups. In the 20th century, US laws like the sodomite statutes criminalized homosexuality and forced it underground, and infighting between groups with competing interests crippled attempts at national coalitions, so nurturing “dense social networks and organizations” like other protest groups had done was a near impossibility for a unified lesbian movement (Ibid.). According to Mary Bernstein, in her essay, “Identities and Politics: Toward a Historical Understanding of the Lesbian and Gay Movement” (2002), lesbian feminism may have modeled its efforts from the civil rights template but did not have the same cultural context and presence to use the measure to their full force: “. . . the Civil Rights movement emerged in the 1950s because of the increased strength of the black church, black colleges, and the NAACP in the South, which provided the resources and set the stage for the movement’s emergence (McAdam 1982; Morris 1984)” (552).
Lesbian feminism housed important yet diverse thinkers from all around the US such as Del Martin, Phyllis Lyon, Barbara Grier, Barbara Gittings, Rita LaPorte, Helen Sandoz, Jaye Bell, Shirley Willer (all affiliated with the Daughters of Bilitis) as well as radical lesbian feminists Rita Mae Brown, Karla Jay, and Charlotte Bunch. Adrienne Rich, Audre Lorde, Marilyn Frye, Mary Daly, and Sheila Jeffreys are also lesbian feminists.

One of the founders of the National Women Scholars Association (NWSA), Tucker Farley notes: “The “gay-straight splits” tore apart close friends and political comrades, and strained the capacities of those in the association and other feminist organizations to function together . . . . progressive women for the next few years were to argue, as Amy Swerdlow did at a women's studies meeting in Maryland to prepare for the 1975 International Women's Year conference in Texas, that no struggle should be put forward around lesbian issues; that could wait until later. While this position might be understood as a strategic move to advance the women's rights movement, it was perceived as being as much a slap in the face as when male leftists told women they would have to wait until “after the revolution.”” (36-7) Cf. Farley’s “Speaking, Silence, and Shifting Listening Space: The NWSA Lesbian Caucus in the Early Years.” Cf. *NWSA Journal* 14.1 (2002), 29-50.


Movement An On-line Archival Collection Special Collections Library, Duke University.


xiv Excerpted from Brownmiller’s *In Our Time: Memoir of a Revolution*; quoted in Levy.

xv Cf. Karla Jay’s description of the lesbian feminist approval ratings during and immediately after the meeting of the National Organization for Women’s (NOW) *Second Congress to Unite Women* in NYC (142-3). Additionally, the mantra “feminism is the theory, lesbianism is the practice” is attributed to Ti-Grace Atkinson.


xviii Lesbian feminist Karla Jay locates this moment after NOW’s *Second Congress to Unite Women* was held in New York City in 1972. Jay reports in her *Tales*: “The Second Congress to Unite Women got under way on May 1 at 7:00 PM at Intermediate School 70 on West Seventeenth Street in Manhattan. About three hundred women filed into the school auditorium. Just as the first speaker came to the microphone, Jesse Falstein, a GLF member, and Michela switched off the lights and pulled the plug on the mike. (They had cased the place the previous day, and knew exactly where the switches were and how to work them.) I was planted in the middle of the audience, and I could hear my co-conspirators running down both aisles. Some were laughing, while others were emitting rebel yells. When Michela and Jesse flipped the lights back on, both aisles were lined with seventeen lesbians wearing their Lavender Menace T-shirts and holding the placards we had made. Some invited the audience to join them. I stood up and yelled, "Yes, yes, sisters! I'm tired of being in the closet because of the women's movement." Much to the horror of the audience, I unbuttoned the long-sleeved red blouse I was wearing and
ripped it off. Underneath, I was wearing a Lavender Menace T-shirt. There were hoots of laughter as I joined the others in the aisles. Then Rita yelled to members of the audience, "Who wants to join us?" "I do, I do," several replied. Then Rita also pulled off her Lavender Menace T-shirt. Again, there were gasps, but underneath she had on another one. More laughter. The audience was on our side” (Jay 143).

Lillian Faderman explains the phenomenon thusly: “"Lesbian" describes a relationship in which two women's strongest emotions and affections are directed toward each other. Sexual contact may be a part of the relationship to a greater or lesser degree, or it may be entirely absent. By preference, the two women spend most of their time together and share most aspects of their lives with each other” (Surpassing the Love of men Introduction).


Rich argues: “The denial of reality and visibility to women's passion for women, women's choice of women as allies, life companions, and community; the forcing of such relationships into dissimulation and their disintegration under intense pressure, have meant an incalculable loss to the power of all women to change the social relations of the sexes to liberate ourselves and each other” (244). Cf. The Lesbian and Gay Reader, ed. Henry Abelove.


One of the founding members, Barbara Gerber, details those initial meetings in January 1977: “. . . there seemed to be basic agreement on intentions and goals. That is, there was agreement on substance, but less agreement on the process we should follow.
Utilizing a methodology of bringing resolutions before the assembly for debate, amendment, and final approval, we were able to craft the foundation for the first NWSA constitution. We did agree that we were to be inclusive of all women; we agreed to have a national organization, with a subset of semi-autonomous regional groups; and we agreed upon a broadly representative leadership group to be known as the Coordinating Council (CC), comprised of representation from geographical regions as well as subsets of under-represented women in the organization” (4).


Kimberle Crenshaw locates *intersectionality* at the point of convergence between different axis of identity such as race, class, sexuality, etc., which produce a crosshatched subject. Each axis is interrelated, as are all forms of oppression, which make complex subjects as well as complex systems of oppression. Cf. “Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color” in *Stanford Law Review*. 1991. 43:6, 1241–1299.

Black lesbian feminists Barbara Smith, Demita Frazier, and Beverly Smith wrote the famous *Combahee River Collective Statement*, which came about over the course of three years (1977 – 1979). The identity political *Statement* insists that race is the main source of oppression and even factors into the way other progressivist identity groups such as feminism and lesbian feminism conceived of personhood, womanhood, and lesbianism: “Feminism is...very threatening to the majority of Black people because it calls into question some of the most basic assumptions about our existence, i.e., that sex should be a determinant of power relationships...The material conditions of most Black people
would hardly lead them to upset both economic and sexual arrangements that seem to represent some stability in their lives. Many Black women have a good understanding of both sexism and racism in their lives, but because of the everyday constrictions on their lives they cannot risk struggling against them both.” Web. Excerpted from The Combahee River Collective Statement at http://circuitous.org/scraps/combahee.html.

January 14, 2014. The Statement also argues against lesbian separatism, insisting that black women must learn to live with black men to nurture and heal the black community.


Cf. “Waves, Tangles, and Loops.”

Solanas published SCUM Manifesto in 1967, and, in it, she called for the enslavement and/or elimination of the male gender. A year later, in June 1968, Solanas shot Andy Warhol in his Factory and spent time in a mental hospital as punishment. Upon Warhol’s recovery, Solanas proceeded to stalk Warhol well into the 1970s, when she was arrested for the offense.

Roof identifies Gayle Green, Judith Newton, Marjorie Pryce, Elaine Showalter, Deborah Rosenfelt, and Hortense Spillers as feminist thinkers who have unfairly marginalized lesbians and lesbian feminists: “Black and lesbian are to white straight women as women are to men.... Feminist critics battle male theory and ... the analogical patterns employed in feminist anthologies recreate the same oppositional battle scenario. . . through the insistent use of binary analogies” (226). Non-white lesbian feminists “threaten to take them ‘white heterosexual academics] out of their own center, sense of
identity and habits of academic practice” (230) (Cf. “All Analogies Are Faulty: The Fear of Intimacy in Feminist Criticism” in A Lure of Knowledge.

Rich argued that lesbian experience was political, first and foremost, and lesbianism was not about desire or sexuality but was a counteralignment to the hetpat regime. Therefore, a woman who had an intimate (even non-sexual) connection with other women could be lesbian-identified and use this connection as a basis for her politics. See my discussion above.

Scott and Nichol are critical of lesbian or "cultural feminism” because its adherents stressed an essentialist agenda where woman's experience was postulated as being incongruous with male experience. Scott challenges the idea that lesbian experience is transcendent and universal, the premises used to prop up separatism. Echols was "the first to parse feminism into liberal, cultural, and materialist; her low regard for cultural feminism became enormously persuasive. Once the criticism of cultural feminism was launched by smart, influential commentators like Echols and Scott, abandoning its tenets became popular for feminists and lesbians swayed by poststructuralism’s sexier terms and outlook” (Dolan 207). Cf. Dolan's “Feeling Women’s Culture: Women’s Music, Lesbian Feminism, and the Impact of Emotional Memory” in Journal of Dramatic Theory and Criticism. 26:2. Spring 2012.

Claims of systematic obscuration of the lesbian and lesbian feminism are made in the works of Judith Roof (A Lure of Knowledge, All about Thelma and Eve, Come as You Are, etc.), Dana R. Shugar (Separatism and Women’s Community), Jane Gallop (Around 1981), Richard Meyer (Outlaw Representation: Censorship and Homosexuality in Twentieth-Century American Art), Stephanie Gilmore and Elizabeth Kaminski (“A Part

Lesbian feminism was not above reproach, of course, and activists very often deserved criticism, especially the status quo-affirming, heterogenderal lesbians who tried to “unman” butch and working class lesbians in favor of a heterosexualized model of feminine lesbianism to which they adhered. In the 1950s and 1960s, the Daughters of Bilitis “expressed embarrassment over butch and femme roles, which by their obviousness, encouraged the stereotype of the [feminine] lesbian among heterosexuals” (Faderman 179).


The nature thematic was wrested from the essentialist narrative the suture women to the natural, irrational, etc. in the hope that lesbian feminists film would change the way viewers see the world.

Hammer is referring to the anti-pornography movement that polarized women’s and lesbian activism in the 1970s and 1980s.
David Duke wrote using the pseudonym Mohammed X African Atto (1973); Asa Earl, another Klan member, wrote The Education of Little tree using Forrest Carter; Danny Santiago is a WASP from Yale.

Given the push to embrace multiplicity, lesbians and their queer compeers found themselves yoked under antinormative meta-categories such as *queer* in the 80s, *LGBTQIA+* or *trans* in the 1990s, and, more recently, *postlesbian*. Teresa de Lauretis locates this trend in her disavowal of *queering*, which became problematic when the process was used to homogenize cultural forces with an agenda based upon the needs of gay male men, as evidenced in the work of Act UP and Queer Nation and in the works of Michael Warner, Lee Edelman, Eve Sedgwick, Jack Halberstam, and Lee Bersani, for example. Shelia Jeffreys’ most recent work highlights how the medical, psychiatric, and scientific communities now use *transgenderism* (rather than *queering*) to invisibilized homosexuality. Here, transgenderism “is a practice in which persons who do not adhere to the correctly gendered practices that have been placed upon the biological sex are considered to have something called Gender Identity Disorder and they’re expected to cross over into the other sex” (no pag.). Jeffrey’s notes that medical procedures and the use of hormones in trans-identified patients as young as four years old sterilizes these patients, an overwhelming amount of whom identify as homosexuals (70%), and so contributes to the genetic annihilation of homosexuality “eradicating [it] at its very origin” (Ibid.). Jefferies argues that the “subordination of women has to be supported in order for transgenderism to be supported. Transgender as a phenomenon is the clearest possible indication of the strength of the structures of the male domination going on right now. Of course, we know that in Iran homosexuals are routinely transgendered because

With the Barbara Hammer example, we might tease out a fundamental problem built into identity politics models: the overriding tendency to map an identity group's theoretical worldviews onto issues external to it. And, while there is no Archimedean lever from whence to holistically interpret an issue correctly, the blind spot created by identity political groups' single-mindedness makes it very difficult to pay attention to difference - not just to difference, however, because, in identity politics terms, the commonalities shared between minoritized groups are the distinctions that separate them from the status quo, making each group essentially the same although each remain packaged in a different wrapper. And, this is not to say that non-identitarian difference does not exist; to the contrary, one must pay close attention to difference, differences that make a difference, and the conditions whereby differences become important, as illustrated in Hammer's reading of the sex/biology juxtaposition against the feminist lens of understanding.

As the frenzy over the AIDS pandemic died down and tolerance/empathy for homosexuals increased, the media began publicizing gay positive images and stories in TV, film, papers, and news programs—so much so that Larry Gross dubs the last decade of the prior century as the “Gay 90s.” No matter how gay the 90s were, the US government busied itself managing gay and lesbian bodies and restricting civil liberties
with the enactment of DOMA, the Defense of Marriage Act (1996) and the Clinton-era (1994) Don’t Ask Don’t Tell (DADT) policy. DADT did not ban gays and lesbians from serving in the military, but it forced them into the closet and so directly invisibilized homosexual service members.

xli The dialectic is but one way to talk about how societies code and repress. Given the regime of identity at play in the activist discourses under consideration, the dialectic or quasi-dialectics are an appropriate mode of analysis because processes of disappearance, i.e., minoritization, heterosexualization, whitewashing, etc., function by sublating the not-me or the so-called outside or exterior. Dialectic forces incorporate difference only to domesticate it, which, of course, is a problem if one wants to court an open, polyvalent community. While the dialectic is affected by that which perturbs it, its accumulating content may change: what matters, however, is that the process continues to operate smoothly, motoring toward a realizable telos: thesis vs. antithesis = synthesis or new thesis, etc. The thesis/antithesis/synthesis formula may inform the LGBT+ acronym as it has the potential to co-opt and code, assuming a very real and natural master narrative of “anti-normativity.” For a quick, concise discussion on the operation of the modern dialectic, see Hans-Georg Moeller in The Radical Luhmann (New York: Columbia, 2012): “Hegel, in the Phenomenology of Spirit, attempted to describe the necessities of the life of spirit or the experience of consciousness. This experience was to be understood as being constituted by critical turning points and in this sense it was to lose it contingency. A complete self-understanding means a complete transformation of the state of our experience from being seemingly contingent and accidental events into a meaningful and necessary whole (Identity). Hegel aspired to perform such a
transformation of contingency into necessity . . .” (44). Niklas Luhmann, however, “approaches social theory in a very different way from Western mainstream philosophers . . . who often promised they might find some meaningful (normative or natural or rational) foundation for the social reality. The modern state, for instance, could be seen as necessary reaction to the crisis of what Hobbes famously called the ‘natural’ war of all against all. Social institutions, like politics, the economy, the family, and so on, could therefore become necessary in a Hegelian sense for main stream modern theoreticians . . . Luhmann questioned the necessity, viewing society instead as a complex dynamic system in which meaning is always contingent and subject to construction” (46).


xliii During her 2010 Larry King interview, the former first Lady said of same-sex marriage: “I think that we ought to definitely look at it and debate it. I think there are a lot of people who have trouble coming to terms with that because they see marriage as traditionally between a man and a woman, but I also know that when couples are committed to each other and love each other that they ought to have the same sort of rights that everyone has.” Cf. CNN’s transcript page for Larry King Live: Interview with Laura Bush. Original airdate 5.11.2010, 8 pm ET. In 2011, Laura’s daughter, Barbara Bush, proved that the apple doesn’t fall far from the tree, releasing a public service announcement in conjunction with the *Human Rights Campaign,* urging New Yorkers to legalize same-sex marriage. Barbara’s assertion of independence or rebellion from the tyranny of patriarchic forces may highlight the redefinition of what it means to belong to
a family, group, culture, and state. Young, urban, hip, and liberal, Barbara started a
nonprofit concerned with global health issues, and heretofore she has never been solicited
for her opinion regarding political issues, making her foray into the same-sex marriage
debate so striking, though her college classmates attest that she has always had gay
friends and, as such, has always been gay-friendly. Cf. Alexandra Petri’s ComPost article
on the Washington Post online, “Why Barbara Bush's support for gay marriage is no
surprise.” Web. 2.1.2011, posted at 5:32 PM ET.

The modern art system may be a fitting example here. Nicklas Luhmann insists that
premodern art can be distinguished from the modern in that its emphasis on aesthetics did
away with the Aristotelian concept of mimetic representation: in these terms, a
manufactured piece did not have to mirror the world to be considered art. In the 17th and
18th centuries, aesthetics instead became tied up with perception, subjective cognition,
and the sensual apprehension of the world in the emerging autonomous art system.
Cognition, however, proved limiting insofar as it depended upon the senses and thus had
to admit its secondary status in a hierarchy of subjective schemas (transcendental
apperception being the apex, if we use a Kantian frame of reference). In short, the tension
that developed from this veritable chiasmus (mind vs. senses) was expressed in art as the
beautiful or the ideal. In someone like Hegel, this tension was a sign of a transitional
stage in the dialectical self-realization of Spirit. The fundamental tensions, oppositions, or
distinctions that art sought to resolve—extensia vs. cogitans, for example—ended, for
lack of a better word, in Identity, or Spirit’s attempt at self-reflection and self-realization. According to this logic, every distinction and difference was brought within the purview of the all-encompassing dialectical realization of Spirit, reflecting the identity of ruling forces. Post modern art (a distinction that makes no sense in Luhmann’s schema) lives in the wake of these conflicts: there is nothing else one can do in art because everything has been done and one is hard-pressed to innovate in a social system that repeatedly signals that it has exhausted itself conceptually. Our recourse to repetition, borrowing, and parody—poaching from different periods, genres, areas, media, and even systems—and stripping these concepts from their historically situated contexts and evolutionary trajectories, makes the stakes of art all the greater, for, we are forced to ask if such appropriation is legitimate and what we lose or gain by poaching as such.


xlix I adhere to Joan Nestle’s understanding of the historical significance of the riots. Nestle writes: “I certainly don't see gay and lesbian history starting with Stonewall ... and I don't see resistance starting with Stonewall. What I do see is a historical coming together of forces, and the sixties changed how human beings endured things in this
society and what they refused to endure.... Certainly something special happened on that night in 1969, and we've made it more special in our need to have what I call a point of origin ... it's more complex than saying that it all started with Stonewall” (Deicher 74).

Larry Gross notes, “The core narrative of lesbian and gay identity at that time – and it hasn’t entirely changed–was that of coming out, to oneself, to other gay people, to family, friends, and the world at large. Post-Stonewall ideology was public self-disclosure” where “the open avowal of one’s sexual identity, whether at work, at school, at home, or before television cameras, symbolized the shedding of the self-hatred that gay men and women internalized, and consequently it promised an immediate improvement in one’s life” (69).

Positive representation and its implied correlative, social inclusion, are of monumental importance in gay and lesbian communities, as evidenced in the mission statement of one of the nation’s most powerful watchdog groups, The Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation (GLADD): “We are in the business of changing people's hearts and minds through what they see in the media. We know that what people watch on TV or read in their newspaper shapes how they view and treat the gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender people around them. And we have a responsibility to make sure those images foster awareness, understanding, and respect.” Cf. www.gladd.org. Web retrieved 12.12.11.

Visibility implies different types of reading strategies, which means different positions from which one may observe. The focus of this paper is to critique hetpat appropriations of lesbianism that masquerade as progressive discourses and render lesbianism apolitical. However, quite a lot of ink has been spilled theorizing the possibility of a counterhegemonic lesbian gaze. Focusing on how we observe, record, and report, Julia Kristeva, recapitulating the gender inversion argument, links lesbianism to “male” processes of visibility where a lesbian observes bodies with an unavoidable masculine slant: “I am looking as a man would for a woman; or else, I submit myself if I were a man who thought he was a woman, to a woman who thinks she is a man” (*Chinese Women* 87). Going back some 40 years, Laura Mulvey puts together a similar thesis, suggesting that images of women and lesbians make both passive agents fetishized by and for the male gaze. Image consumption consists of two parts, objectification and identification. When the viewer objectifies, and distances himself or herself from the image, the viewer derives pleasure from glimpsing into what has been effectively cordoned off. The viewer may then identify with the image as it becomes familiar and in so doing “effectively possess all that women or lesbians possess” (10). In the 1980s, Jackie Stacy used Mulvey’s work as a springboard but focuses on how women may respond differently than men in spite of what Raymond Bellfour called the “Hollywood Anthropocentric male machine.” Stacey argues that when lesbians consume images of other lesbians, it does not amount to the creation of a female or lesbian gaze but a way of looking that is a becoming rather than a possessing. In keeping with the thematic, Mary Ann Doanne insists upon radical difference between the sexes, arguing that since women deal with lack and the phallus differently than men do, women are not motivated by
voyeurism, so our desire is always already structured differently from a man’s desire.

From the sex wars in the 1970s and 1980s to Eve Sedgwick’s call for reparative reading practices to the installation of the post-lesbian as an aesthetic multiplicity that demands ceaseless interpretation, according to Claire Farquahar, lesbian representation and image consumption have been central and thoroughly contentious issues in lesbian studies for decades.


Christopher Castiglia and Christopher Reed have argued that Jack’s camp is a legitimate expression of the power of male homosexuality and an appropriate response to the heterosexist theme that courses through the program. Cf. Christopher Castiglia and Christopher Reed’s, “‘Ah yes, I remember it well’: Memory and Queer Culture in Will and Grace.” Cultural Critique. 56, Winter 2004, 158-188.

In the Encyclopedia of Feminist Theories, Sarah Lucia Hoagland notes, “Heteropatriarchy ensures male right of access to women. Women’s relations - personal, professional, social, economic - are defined by the ideology that woman is for man. Heteropatriarchy is men dominating and de-skilling women in any of a number of forms, from outright attach to paternalistic care, and women devaluing (of necessity) female bonding. Heteropatriarchy normalizes the dominance of one person and the subordination of another. Carol Pateman argues that social contract establishes men’s political right
over women and orderly access to women’s bodies. The logic of heteropatriarchy includes the invisibility of lesbians, the construction and tolerance of dominant male violence together with intolerance of female violence against abusers, blaming the ‘feminine’ victim, and targeting a group of men as predators against whom dominant men can ‘protect’ chosen women, most notably in peace-time USA, black men.”

We find multiple instantiations of the importance of the nuclear family theme recurring in many contemporary lesbian texts like Lisa Cholodenko's 2010 film, The Kids are Alright, and the ABC Family channel’s lesbian dramedy, The Fosters (2013-the present).

According to Foucault, from the 18th century onward, biopower is marked by the “an explosion of numerous and diverse techniques for achieving the subjugations of bodies and the control of populations” (Security, Territory, Population 378). The analysis of the emergence of the biopower entails observing “the set of mechanisms through which the basic biological features of the human species became the object of a political strategy, of a general strategy of power, or, in other words, how, starting from the 18th century, modern Western societies took on board the fundamental biological fact that human beings are a species” (Ibid. 1). Biopolitics involve governmental techniques that channel biopower, “Where discipline is the technology deployed to make individuals behave, to be efficient and productive workers, biopolitics is deployed to manage populations; for example, to ensure a healthy workforce” (Kelly 59).

In Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times (Duke 2007), Puar “interrogates the connections among sexuality, race, gender, nation, class, and ethnicity in relation to the tactics, strategies, and logistics of war machines. This project critiques
the fostering, managing, and valorization of life and all that sustains it, describing the mechanisms by which queerness as a process of racialization inform the very distinctions between life and death, wealth and poverty . . . Race, ethnicity, nation, gender, class, and sexuality disaggregate gay, homosexual, and queer national subjects who align themselves with US imperial interests from forms of illegitimate queerness that name and ultimately propel population’s into extinction. Terrorist assemblages foregrounds the proliferation, occupation, and suppression of queerness in relation to patriotism, war torture security, death, terrorism, detention, and deportation, themes usually imagined as devoid of connection to sexual politics in general and queer politics in particular. Impelled not only by this folding of queer, national subjects into the biopolitical management of life, out toward death, of queerly racialized "terrorist populations," biopolitics delineates not only which queers live and die . . . but how queers live and die” (Puar xxi).

Indicative of the rise of the modern nation-state, the confluence of social attributes like shared race, religion, language, etc. have concretized as cultural hegemonies. Groups with influence and power “. . . institutionalize their own cultures as national cultures, thereby generating a range of subordinated and minority groups who must find a place in an alien world” (Adam et al. 5). Following Raymond Williams in his *Marxism and Literature*, hegemony is a process where by subordinated and minority groups spontaneously consent to their own domination by ruling classes. Power is secured though a number of public and private programs (advertisements to education; laws to fashion trends). While monolithic, hegemony is certainly not static: it “has continually to be renewed, recreated, defended, and modified. It is also continually resisted, limited,
altered, challenged by pressures not all its own” (Williams 113). Furthermore, Williams notes, “the decisive hegemonic function is to control or transform or even incorporate [resistance]” (113). Here, hegemonic culture “at once produces and limits its own forms of counter-culture” (Ibid.) in a way that is analogous to Foucault’s understanding of power. This does not mean that hegemony is necessarily all-encompassing and thoroughly deterministic – breaks can and do occur: “if we develop mode of analysis which instead of reducing works to finished products, and activities to fixed positions, are capable of discerning, in good faith, the finite but significant openness of many actual initiatives and contributions” (114).

Ian Halley, in his influential essay, “Queer Theory by Men” (2004), situates queerness as follows: “… postmodernism arrived on the United States intellectual scene, bringing with it a whole array of new (to the left/liberal United States intelligentsia) brainwaves. The anti-foundational, libertine, irrationalist, ecstatic, anti-moralistic tendencies in postmodernism pro-vided powerful new insights that seemed to promise a return to critical and radical potential. The postmodern critique of the enlightenment subject brought the already uneasy fit between identity politics and liberal individualism into question . . . . The postmodern critique of deontological moral claims and, in particular, of the dignified liberal individual as historical and political artifacts called into question the sufficiency of moral outrage and individual or group dignity as a basis for political work. Where identity and subordination and moralism come under left critique, we find a rich brew of pro-gay, sex liberationist, gay-male, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, and sex-practice-based sex-radical, sex-positive, anti-male/female model, anti-cultural-feminist political engagements, some more postmodernizing than others, some feminist, others
not. The term “queer theory” is often invoked to describe this complex array of projects” (14-15).

lxiii Cf. Foucault’s repressive hypothesis in *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction, Vol. 1*. Trans. Robert Hurley. (New York: Random House, 1978): From the 17th century onward, sexuality was restricted and silenced, but, along with this repression, there was “a steady proliferation of discourses concerned with sex—specific discourses, different from one another both by their form and by their object: a discursive ferment that gathered momentum from the eighteenth century onward … an institutional incitement to speak about [sex], and to do so more and more; a determination on the part of the agencies of power to hear it spoken about, and to cause it to speak through explicit articulation and endlessly accumulated detail” (18). Gradually, the state entered into the private domain: “one had to speak of [sex] as of a thing to be not simply condemned or tolerated but managed, inserted into systems of utility, regulated for the greater good of all, made to function according to an optimum. Sex was not something one simply judged; it was a thing one administered” (24).

lxiv Biology, gender, and sexuality were fused in these discourses, which, according to Foucault, established allegedly (hetero)normative behavior that the subject internalized and, in so doing, self-regulated, a process that Freud attributed to the super-ego.

lxv Lillian Faderman notes: “Perhaps the most important element in encouraging young college women in their escape from domesticity was a new form of what had been termed romantic friendship, which was called in college life “smashes,” “crushes,” and “spoons.” These passions were described in an 1873 Yale student newspaper: “When a Vassar girl takes a shine to another,” the Yalie observed, “she straightway enters upon a regular
course of bouquet sendings, interspersed with tinted notes, mysterious packages of
‘Ridley’s Mixed Candies,’ locks of hair perhaps, and many other tender tokens, until at
last the object of her attentions is captured, the two women become inseparable, and the
aggressor is considered by her circle of acquaintances as — smashed”(19). By the 1970s,
however, these romantic relationships were cast in a negative light, and the Seven Sister
schools were seen as hot beds of lesbian activity. In the media and in academic circles,
lesbianism was blamed for reduced enrollment and financial hardship, and stodgy
college-board members, and even the National Women Scholars Association (NWSA)
campaigned to rid women’s colleges of the taint of homosexuality. Mismanagement
proved to be the stumbling block of these colleges, however, and numerous attempts
were made to get the NWSA to disavow lesbian scapegoating with very little success.
Tucker Farley, former chair of the NWSA’s Lesbian Caucus, provides an example of the
discriminatory practices supported by the NWSA and the warped, baseless reasoning,
reporting on a feminist conference in particular, backed by the NWSA, as follows: “One
element was The Feminist Scholarship Conference, which had taken place 28 February-3
March 1978 in Champaign, Illinois. At a session devoted to “The Problems in Women's
Studies,” the stated problems included: needy students who want counseling, not
academic work; conflict between street Women's Studies and real Women's Studies;
and—lesbians. Why lesbians? Because of lesbians, women's colleges were closing: Sarah
Lawrence was in trouble, Bryn Mawr and Smith were to follow, those in comfortable
niches were discomfited, and students were scared away from fear of being seduced”
(Farley 421-).
In the early to mid 20th century, sexologists were influenced by the tenets of Social Darwinism, or survival of the fittest. Because of a supposed congenital defect, inverts suffered from hereditary, unavoidable, and even pitiable afflictions. Homosexual behavior was blamed on bad genetics, producing a “lesser” species that could not naturally reproduce and would die out of its own accord. However, as Faderman notes, in a time of oppression for females and lesbians, the congenital theory was sometimes a boon. Natalie Barney, an American lesbian and 20th century autobiographer, wrote in her journals: “I considered myself without shame: albinos aren’t reproached for having pink eyes and whitish hair; why should they hold it against me for being a lesbian? It’s a question of Nature. My queerness isn’t a vice, isn’t deliberate, and harms no one” (Faderman 58).


Sexology’s ties to psychoanalysis probably explain why Faderman is so dismissive of psychoanalysis. Nonetheless, Faderman’s research is relevant to this dissertation, which is grounded in Lacanian concepts, because the work provides an historical context for the genealogy explored herein, one that illustrates the problematic link between identity, visibility, identification, recognition, and desire, despite Faderman’s obvious bias.


Cf. Weeks’ Sexuality and Its Discontents: Meanings, Myths and Modern Sexualities.
Cf. the Radicalesbian’s 1970 manifesto, “Woman-identified Woman,” wherein authors Karla Jay and Rita Mae Brown write: “It should first be understood that lesbianism, like male homosexuality, is a category of behavior possible only in a sexist society characterized by rigid sex roles and dominated by male supremacy. Those sex roles dehumanize women by defining us as a supportive/serving caste in relation to the master caste of men, and emotionally cripple men by demanding that they be alienated from their own bodies and emotions in order to perform their economic/political/military functions effectively. Homosexuality is a by-product of a particular way of setting up roles (or approved patterns of behavior) on the basis of sex; as such it is an inauthentic (not consonant with "reality") category. In a society in which men do not oppress women, and sexual expression is allowed to follow feelings, the categories of homosexuality and heterosexuality would disappear.” Web retrieved. (http://library.duke.edu/rubenstein/ascriptorium/wlm/womid/). April 4, 2013.

Djuna Barnes’ Robyn Vote in Nightwood and Ernest Hemingway’s Katharine Bourne in his posthumously released The Garden of Eden are two characters that embody this thematic. Vote, who at novel’s end prefigures the Deleuzian becoming-animal, and Bourne, driven to madness in her Dionysian desire to become Other, show us that the insistence on identity and categorization are insufficient ways to think about humanity. We might suggest that these bohemian resistances innovate by pushing the idea of a discrete “humanity” to its conceptual limits.

Even today, the tendency to link homosexuality to terrorist forces and then to subsequently call for its monitoring, treatment, or abolition, is social reality. As notorious anti-porn advocate, Holocaust denier, and some time advisor to the US Departments of Education and Health and Human Services, Dr. Judith Reisman suggested in 2004 that the wave of sexual unruliness that the Kinsey reports -or “homosexual recruiting handbook”- unleashed is just as damming as the 9/11 terrorists attacks and “responsible for 50 years of cultural terrorism.” According to Robert J. Corber in his “Rethinking Sex: Alfred Kinsey Now”, homophobes were particularly critical of Kinsey: “Particularly troubled by Kinsey's evidence showing that homosexuality constitutes a normal variant of human sexual expression, these critics have argued that Kinsey distorted his findings by incorporating the sexual histories of prostitutes and sex offenders, who were more likely than other Americans to engage in homosexual behavior; thus, they argue, Kinsey could not generalize his findings to the whole of American society. These attacks have intensified with the 2004 release of the biopic Kinsey, a largely sympathetic treatment of the pioneering sex researcher, by the Academy Award–winning director and screenwriter Bill Condon. Citing James H. Jones's 1997 biography Alfred C. Kinsey: A Public/Life, which revealed that Kinsey had numerous homosexual encounters while conducting his research and experimented with sadomasochism, groups such as Concerned Women for America and the Family Research Council have questioned Kinsey's objectivity as a scientist and have claimed that Kinsey deliberately distorted his findings to normalize his own supposedly abnormal sexual behavior” (463) Cf. American Quarterly. 57.2 (2005) 463-474.

Cf. Bacon, 251.


The Motion Picture Production Code of 1930 or Hays code, named after chief censor Will H. Hays, delineated censorship guidelines in an otherwise lax field of American cinema, forbidding overt reference to homosexuality and lesbianism (Russo 28).

Macarythism may have initiated waves of round ups, but gays and lesbians were no stranger to capricious imprisonment. Gathering in taverns for decades and paying off the local police to remain in existence, homosexuals were nevertheless victim to the whim of political factions in nearly all of America's major cities during the 20th century. At midcentury, thousands of workers flocked to Los Angeles to work in the burgeoning defense industry, and gay and lesbian women followed suit. In the 1950s, LA’s gay scene was flourishing. However, under the reign of police chief William “Wild Bill” Parker, newly transplanted gay and lesbian professionals were subjected to dehumanizing interrogations and blatant homophobic targeting. According to Craig M. Loftin, “The potent mix of Chief Parker’s dreaded vice squad, the McCarthyite atmosphere, and a growing sense of gay community came together in the formation of the country’s first two gay civil rights organizations, the Mattachine Society in 1950 and ONE, Incorporated


In his 2006 book, *Contacts Desired: Gay and Lesbian Communications and Community, 1940s – 1970s*, Martin Meeker proposes that three interconnected factors – the homophile movement, the mass media’s attention to gays and lesbians, and the popularity of self-publishing – changed not only the face of the lesbian and gay subculture, but it impacted the way modern communications function *in toto* – the importance of the *network* in cultural communication was and, in many respects, remains all-important. The homophilic movement with its emphasis on dissemination and individual self-selection of relevant information (which leads to communication’s perpetuation if relevant to multiple parties) is an excellent model for Meeker’s network theory of communication.

Cities from various regions in the US and around the globe have been meccas for gays and lesbians in the 19th and 20th centuries. This observation can be readily appreciated in both Walt Whitman’s and Horatio Alger’s portrayals of New York as well as in Harlem during its 20th century flowering; in early to mid 20th century Canada, Ottawa, Toronto, and Quebec were foci of gay activity; and, pre-war Berlin proved the Germans erudite and hospitable to the Gay Gilded Age (Gallo xxxii - xxxv).

In 1966, Shirley Willer, then president of the ten year-old national lesbian organization, the Daughters of Bilitis, pointed out that a fundamental difference between gay men and lesbians in terms of discriminatory practices. Willer noted that gay men were typically the subject of state-sanctioned brutality, entrapment, and criminalization,
while lesbians, certainly not insusceptible to these practices, faced problems that they shared with women in general, work place discrimination and custody issues being the primary areas. Willer’s observations mark a tangible moment when the influential Daughters of Bilitis became more feminist than lesbian-centric, setting the “accommodationist” tone for a number of lesbian activist groups throughout the 60s and 70s. Willer does not note the class aspect, however. Working class women who dressed as butch lesbians and drank in public faced the same types of problems that gay males did. Cf. Willer’s “What Concrete Steps can be Taken to Further the Homophile Movement?” in *The Ladder*, Nov. 1966, 11:2, 1.


lxxxvi Lesbian groups did not emerge from a vacuum, nor were they exclusively a direct reaction to social oppression. During World War II, there was a vast network of lesbians in the officer corps and in the ranks of the enlisted, especially in the WAC units. These women were often closeted and were risk-aversive but networked with one another nonetheless. At the same time, working class women cultivated bar cultures in cities around the country and were glaringly visible to local police forces and mob bosses who stood to profit from the operation and control of the questionably legal bars that catered to gay and lesbian clientele (Faderman 189-90).


Regarding the pronunciation of the organization, please see Gallo, 75.

Often starting from humble beginnings with women volunteering or working for very little pay in apartments, collectives, and storefronts, these presses include *Daughters, Inc.* (Vermont/NYC), *Out and Out Books* (Brooklyn, NY), *Metis* (Chicago), *Women’s Press of Chicago* (Illinois), *Moon Books* in Berkeley (CA), *Persephone* in Watertown (MA), and *Diana* (Baltimore, MD). However, as the women’s and gay liberationist movements grew, many of presses (*Daughters*, in particular) began fairly and even richly compensating their authors, contributing to the development of robust niche markets for both women and lesbians. However, this trend was the exception and certainly not the rule, as a majority of publications were run thanks to charitable volunteers. Cf. Trysh Travis’s “The Women in Print Movement History and Implications.” *Book History.* Vol. 11. 2008, 278 – 280.


According to Barbara Gittings, editor of *The Ladder* from 1963-66, the Daughters were hesitant to use the word *lesbian* because of its negative connotations. By the 1960s, however, DOB readers were demanding more from the editorial staff and wanted to
engage with politics in a way that was at odds with the tempered mission statement of the DOB. Raids on gay bars and the humiliation afflicted on the incarcerated forced the DOB to become much more activist. Gittings even put the word *lesbian* on the cover of *The Ladder*. However, once editor Barbara Grier removed the term from the title (*The Ladder: A Lesbian Review*), membership increased—and lesbian sexuality was once again pushed to the margin (Gallo 147-8).

xciv Cf. Michel Foucault in his *History of Sexuality, vol. 1*: “The appearance in nineteenth-century psychiatry, jurisprudence, and literature of a whole series of discourses on the species and subspecies of homosexuality, inversion, pederasty, and “psychic hermaphroditism” made possible a strong advance of social controls into this area of “perversity”; but it also made possible the formation of a “reverse” discourse: homosexuality began to speak in its own behalf, to demand that its legitimacy or “naturality” be acknowledged, often in the same vocabulary, using the same categories by which it was medically disqualified” (174). This dissertation examines the vocabulary deployed by identity discourses.


xcvii For a comprehensive account on ageism, see B. Cooper in “Over the Hill: Reflections on Ageism Between Women.” (Freedom, CA: Crossing Press, 1988); see also “Fat Liberation Manifesto” written by Judy Freespirit and Vivian Mayer in 1973 (reprinted in Schoenfelder and Weiser 1983).
Cf. Each issue of *The Ladder*; Quoted in Katz 426.

When the DOB was distributing internationally, the organization kept their subscriber list confidential (Faderman 149). The paranoia about detection was well founded. Since the beginning of the homophile movement, the heads of the FBI and CIA, J. Edgar Hoover and Roscoe H. Hillenkoetter respectively, made it a point to monitor Anti-American agitation. Each had been keeping tabs on the “Daughters of (sic) Belitas”, mistakenly considering the DOB a subsidiary of the Mattachine Society. The feds were not far afield with their suspicions of subversion within Mattachine, however: founder Henry Hays' wore his socialist sympathies on his sleeve (Gallo 33-4). Because the DOB was affiliated with Mattachine, the group was a likely target for the feds, and the founders of the DOB felt as if they were being surveilled. Some twenty years after the founding of Bilitis, Lyon and Martin's suspicions were confirmed when the *San Francisco Examiner* published an exposé detailing a former CIA agent's confessions of covert espionage over the course of several decades in the ranks of the nation’s largest homophile organizations. An unsuspecting professor, invited to give a talk on homosociality, had invited the male agent to the DOB’s first national convention in San Francisco in 1960. The agent noted that although the convention women took no real interest in him, the DOB was much more than a “poetry club,” the alter ego that Martin and Lyon devised for the group in the likelihood of detection (Gallo xviii). In light of the *Examiner* article, Martin requested the FBI files on the DOB, which she received a year after the exposé was published, noting that it was "incredible that the government would waste so much money on such nonsense" (Ibid.). The nonsense that Martin was referring to was the assumption that homophiles tended to be communist. In homophilic circles,
the DOB was considered to be the very model of middle of the road American
conservatism, and its charter thoroughly forbid communist alliances. To underscore their
inherent conservatism, Martin and Lion deliberately picked a naming convention used by
another famously conservative US organization, the *Daughters of the American
Revolution* (DAR), whose motto “God, Country, Home” betrays a nationalistic drive to
establish a divinely inspired American autochthony. Members of the Daughters of the
American Revolution prove their ancestral ties to the “first” Americans, often
revolutionary-era patriots, and so establish a “pure” American cultural heritage that
entails a history of elitism, nepotism, and outright racism that we cannot easily overlook.
The women of Bilitis traded upon this rhetoric to lend credence to their cause, but we
might also remember another motive: throwing off prying eyes. Autochthony reads like
Derridean auto/immunology here: Racist accusations plagued the Daughters of the
American Revolution throughout the 20th century. Eleanor Roosevelt resigned from the
Daughters when she learned that the group would not allow African Americans to be part
of its audience for performances in federal buildings. In the 1980s, an African American,
Lena Lorraine Santos Ferguson, was denied membership in the DAR Washington
chapter. At the time, Daughters’ President General Sarah A. King, criticized for the
snub, offered this gem as an explanation: “Being black is not the only reason why some
people have not been accepted into chapters. There are other reasons: divorce, spite,
neighbors’ dislike. I would say being black is very far down the line ... There are a lot of
people who are troublemakers. You wouldn't want them in there because they could
cause some problems” (1). Cf. Ronald Kessler's March 12, 1981 article in the
*Washington Post*, “Black Unable to Join Local DAR.”
According to Barbara Gittings, editor of *The Ladder* from 1963-66, the Daughters were hesitant to use the word *lesbian* as it had negative social connotations. By the 1960s however, DOB readers were demanding more from the editorial staff and wanted to engage with politics overtly in a way that was at odds with the tempered mission statement of the DOB. The straw that broke the camel’s back was the raids on gay bars in San Francisco in the 1960s, and the organization became much more activist. Gittings was an unabashed lesbian feminist who nurtured the *écriture feminine* that graced the pages of *The Ladder*. Never forgetting the importance of activism, Gittings even put the word *lesbian* on the cover of *The Ladder*. However, once editor Barbara Grier removed the term from the cover, membership actually increased—and lesbian sexuality was pushed to the margin (Gallo 147-8).


From the first volume of *The Ladder* (1:1. 1956: 2-3.): “… the name "Daughters of Bilitis" is taken from "Songs of Bilitis," a narrative love poem written by Pierre Louys [sic] and published in 1894. Bilitis would seem to have been a contemporary of Sappho on the isle of Lesbos, and the poem is purported to be a translation from the Greek. Although it has been more or less conclusively established that the poem is not authentic, it presents a sensitive and searching picture of Lesbian love.” (Quoted in Schultz’s “Daughters of Bilitis Literary Genealogy and Lesbian Authenticity” in *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*. 7.3 2001, 381.)
Founders of the DOB, Martin and Lyon, note in *Lesbian/Women* (1972): "We thought that the Daughters of Bilitis would sound like any other women's lodge . . . like the Daughters of the Nile or the DAR. 'Bilitis' would mean something to us, but not to any outsider" (219-20) (Quoted in Schultz, 379).


Images of gays and lesbians in the cultural surround are abundant, the accuracy of the depictions notwithstanding. Despite the proliferation of images and interactions with gay and lesbian people, homosexuality is still anxiety producing. When homosexuality is seen as a threat to a heteronormative way of life, it may be deemed “controversial by the mass media” and being controversial “invariably limits the ways lesbians and gay men—or political and religious “deviants”—are depicted in the media . . . [which] shapes the effects of such depictions on the images held by society at large and by members of these minority groups” (Gross 13). Ergo, anxiety breeds anxiety. A number of theorists grant concessions, however. As Peggy Phelan suggests, “There is a difference between being called to the table and not being addressed at all” (12).

However, liberalism is problematic because it tries to evoke two contradictory principles simultaneously: it posits a *politics of dignity* where all humans are equal, while insisting upon a *politics of difference* that tries to account for human uniqueness, which holds that individuals are different and unequal. The former offers up a politics of nondiscrimination which the latter violates, even and especially when performed in the name of heterogeneity. We might suggest, too, that emphasis on the superstructural as has been the case so far also detracts from the very real economic conditions that support oppressive hegemonic practices. Critiquing identity politics as such, Nancy Fraser
suggests that a balanced context dependent attack that allows for redistribution of wealth, rights, and privileges as well as a politics of recon ion will target both base and superstructural anomalies. While being careful not to emphasize the master narrative foisted upon or adopted by of any group, which for Fraser is nothing less than the reification of identity (Fraser 202).


cviii Biopolitics involve governmental techniques that channel biopower: “Where discipline is the technology deployed to make individuals behave, to be efficient and productive workers, biopolitics is deployed to manage populations; for example, to ensure a healthy workforce” (Kelly 59). Examples provided in the next chapter (see my Biden discussion).

cix From Althusser: “what thus seems to take place outside ideology (to be precise, in the street), in reality takes place in ideology [...] That is why those who are in ideology believe themselves by definition outside ideology: one of the effects of ideology is the practical denegation of the ideological character of ideology by ideology: ideology never says, “I am ideological”” (Lenin 118). He continues, “the individual is interpolated as a (free) subject in order that he shall submit freely to the commandments of the Subject, i.e. in order that he shall (freely) accept his subjection, i.e. in order that he shall make the gestures and actions of his subjection ’all by himself’” (Lenin 123).

cx Reviewing *The Ladder* in its entirety gives a much clearer, much more detailed picture of the disarticulation between the DOB’s stated agenda and both its subscribers’ and
contributors’ wildly heterogeneous attitudes housed within *The Ladder’s* pages. These attitudes often conflicted with the official party line, but strength of conviction forced the conservative hegemony within the organization to deal with and, in many instances, accept less prejudicial positions. For example, Del Martin and Phyllis Lion had discouraged lesbians from dressing like men. However, in 1959, when a New York fashionista reported that all women from the age of 2-92 would be wearing pants in the upcoming spring season, Martin wrote a misfortunately titled article called “Women in Pants – The Coming Thing” (January 1959)—(a title upstaged by an April 1959 article called “Your Doodle and What it Means,” an account reporting on a very well-intentioned Jungian named Dr. Helen Smith, who delivered a lecture discussing the links between handwriting and homosexuality). In the article, Martin was quick to point out that since all society women would be wearing pants, lesbians, too, could adopt the dress so long as they wore pants that were age-appropriate (i.e., capris and shorts for children and young women; ankle length slacks for the older, smarter set). Martin and Lion were averse to working class lesbians who participated in the butch-femme dynamic, frequented gay bars, drank, and often got arrested. However, evidence suggests that Martin supported gay bars, so long as their proprietors were disciplined. In February 1958 issue of *The Ladder*, Martin printed a favorable review of “Gay Bar,” a book written by Helen P. Branson. Branson’s work did not trade upon the negative stereotypes associated with gays bars nor did it try to pass these stereotypes off as truth; instead, Branson focused on the community-building aspects of the bar scene. Later on that year, in April, Martin printed an open letter to Ann Aldrich, who had also released a book on the topic of gay bars. Martin took Aldrich to task for reporting on stereotypical lesbians
and not on those lesbians “who have full and rich lives – with varied interests and pursuits, least of which may be the gay bar” (5). In December 1959, Del Martin’s article “The Gay Bar – Whose Problem is It?” reaffirmed a more lax and accepting position: the DOB would never condone loose morals like having sex in public but, since most gay bars did not approve of such behavior, the DOB lent its support to those community-building establishments (10).

cxi According to Toni McNaron, in her article “Mirrors and Likeness: A Lesbian Aesthetic in the Making” (1993), “most (male) literary representations of lesbians have long perpetuated this construction by “substitute[ing] a phallic situation or rhetoric for the absent penis, [and] leaving the reader/viewer undisturbed in his or her comfortable habit of seeing all human relationships through such a limited filter” (294). This filter is that of sexual difference as it is conceived within phallocentric discourse, which insists on the presence of the phallus in all situations of sexuality, whether in actual or symbolic form.

cxii Case taught theater and English at UCLA at the time of the publication of her butch-femme manifesto, which was published in Theatre Journal, where Case had served as editor. Cf. www.tft.ucla.edu/faculty/sue-ellen-case/. Web. Retrieved 2.1.2011.

cxiii Sontag lists 58 theses in her Notes on “Camp,” published in 1964, linking gay male homosexuality to an aristocratic snob taste now vacant in modern times. Sontag suggests that homosexuals “have pinned their integration into society on promoting the aesthetic sense. Camp is a solvent of morality. It neutralizes moral indignation, sponsors playfulness” (Thesis 52) Web. Retrieved 5.15.2014. 

This move is reminiscent of the DOB’s heterogenderality that Case points out in her essay on the butch-femme aesthetic: Case upbraids the DOB for recruiting a gay male to queer-eye a butch lesbian, using a man (albeit a gay one) to mediate the woman’s sexuality and gender identity.

In his interview “Confession of the Flesh” in Power/Knowledge (1980), Michel Foucault defines the episteme thusly: “I would define the episteme retrospectively as the strategic apparatus which permits of separating out from among all the statements which are possible those that will be acceptable within, I won’t say a scientific theory, but a field of scientificity, and which it is possible to say they are true or false. The episteme is the ‘apparatus’ which makes possible the separation, not of the true from the false, but of what may or what may not be characterized as scientific” (197).

Epistemes are systems of thought or the “historical a priori that conditions of the possibility of knowledge” (Foucault OT 168).


Cf. Foucault, HS1: “It is this distribution that we must reconstruct, with the things said and those concealed, ... the variants and different effects – according to who is speaking, his position of power, the institutional context in which he happens to be situated ... it is in discourse that power and knowledge are joined together” (100).

From Butler, Gender Trouble 43-44; quoted in Boucher 116.

The use of the word diacritics evokes Derrida’s reading of Ferdinand d’ Saussure’s Course in General Linguistics (1916). Therein the Swiss linguist revolutionized our understanding of how language works, proposing that a word and its referent were not
associated via Platonic forms or even divine mandate; instead Saussure conceived of the “sign” as being composed of both signifier (acoustic sound-referent) and signified (idea). The connection between the two is arbitrary and contingent – a product of culture and chance. Furthermore, Saussure explained that all signs become meaningful because they belong to a system, which means that signs come into being diacritically (a la Derrida) via their place in a network. (The word cat denotes its referent because it is not a bat, hat, log, frog, etc.) In this network, however, one cannot locate a positive meaning, so meaning is nowhere; however, that doesn’t mean that meaning is everywhere. The meaning of a sign is determined diacritically in relation to what it is not. Recall what the incomparable Miles Davis said of jazz: “it’s the notes that you don’t play that matter.”

Cf. Boucher: “The subversive repetition of gender norms in unprecedented contexts, in other words, displaces and denaturalizes the hegemonic universality of heterosexuality, constituting a practical deconstruction of the politics of gender normalization” (117).

According to the speech act theory of J.L. Austin, performative statements can be described as “utterances function[ing] as actions” (Yoshtake Masaki 28) where “admitting to accept a woman as one’s wife by saying, “yes, I do,” in the wedding ceremony; or naming a ship the Queen Elizabeth by saying, “I name this ship the Queen Elizabeth,” with a bottle smashed against the stem. Proposing that uttering a sentence includes actually doing things, Austin makes a distinction between constative and performative: The former is an utterance-as-description view and the latter is an utterance-as-doing view. Performative utterance is not a matter of being “true” or “false,” which are believed to be the characteristics of description and statement, according to Austin (1962)” (28). (Cf. “Critique of J. L. Austin’s Speech Act Theory: Decentralization

cxxiii The dialectic is but one way to talk about how societies code and repress. Given the regime of identity at play in the activist discourses under consideration, the dialectic or quasi-dialectics are an appropriate mode of analysis because processes of disappearance, i.e., minoritization, heterosexualization, whitewashing, etc., function by sublating the not-me or the so-called outside or exterior. Dialectic forces incorporate difference only to domesticate it, which, of course, is a problem if one wants to court an open, polyvalent community. While the dialectic is affected by that which perturbs it, its accumulating content may change: what matters, however, is that the process continues to operate smoothly, motoring toward a realizable telos: thesis vs. antithesis = synthesis or new thesis, etc. The thesis/antithesis/synthesis formula may inform the LGBT+ acronym as it has the potential to co-opt and code, assuming a very real and natural master narrative of “anti-normativity.” For a quick, concise discussion on the operation of the modern dialectic, see Hans-Georg Moeller in The Radical Luhmann (New York: Columbia, 2012): “Hegel, in the Phenomenology of Spirit, attempted to describe the necessities of the life of spirit or the experience of consciousness. This experience was to be understood as being constituted by critical turning points and in this sense it was to lose it contingency. A complete self-understanding means a complete transformation of the state of our experience from being seemingly contingent and accidental events into a meaningful and necessary whole (Identity). Hegel aspired to perform such a transformation of contingency into necessity . . ..”(44). Niklas Luhmann, however, "approaches social theory in a very different way from Western mainstream philosophers
... who often promised they might find some meaningful (normative or natural or rational) foundation for the social reality. The modern state, for instance, could be seen as necessary reaction to the crisis of what Hobbes famously called the "natural" war of all against all. Social institutions, like politics, the economy, the family, and so on, could therefore become necessary in a Hegelian sense for main stream modern theoreticians...

Luhmann questioned the necessity, viewing society instead as a complex dynamic system in which meaning is always contingent and subject to construction" (46).


during her 2010 Larry King interview, the former first Lady said of same-sex marriage: “I think that we ought to definitely look at it and debate it. I think there are a lot of people who have trouble coming to terms with that because they see marriage as traditionally between a man and a woman, but I also know that when couples are committed to each other and love each other that they ought to have the same sort of rights that everyone has. (Cf. CNN’s transcript page for Larry King Live: Interview with Laura Bush. Original airdate 5.11.2010, 8 pm ET.) In 2011, Laura’s daughter, Barbara Bush, proved that the apple doesn’t fall far from the tree, releasing a public service announcement in conjunction with the *Human Rights Campaign*, urging New Yorkers to legalize same-sex marriage. Barbara’s assertion of independence or rebellion from the tyranny of patriarchic forces may highlight the redefinition of what it means to belong to a family, group, culture, and state. Young, urban, hip, and liberal, Barbara started a nonprofit concerned with global health issues, and heretofore she has never been solicited...
for her opinion regarding political issues, making her foray into the same-sex marriage debate so striking, though her college classmates attest that she has always had gay friends and, as such, has always been gay-friendly. (Cf. Alexandra Petri’s ComPost article on the *Washington Post* online, “Why Barbara Bush's support for gay marriage is no surprise.” Web. 2.1.2011, posted at 5:32 PM ET.


cxxviii Cf. Lorde: “The erotic is a resource within each of us that lies in a deeply female and spiritual plane, firmly rooted in the power of our unexpressed or unrecognized feeling . . . . Of course, women so empowered are dangerous. So we are taught to separate the erotic from most vital areas of our lives other than sex . . . .” (*Erotic* 53-54)


cxxx This one-size fits all acronym even includes allies (heterosexuals), betraying a convergence of normative and antinormativity, a point raised in the work of Bruce LaBruce, Lisa Power, Mark Simpson, and Peter Tatchell.

cxxxi Cf. Jenny Wilson’s *Times* online article, “A Gay Girl in Damascus: Lesbian Blogger


Cf. Flock and Bell.


Cf. Esther Addley's article in the *Guardian*, "Syrian Blogger is Revealed Conclusively to be a Married Man," where Addley quotes MacMaster's blog: "This experience has, sadly, only confirmed my feelings regarding the often superficial
coverage of the Middle East and the pervasiveness of new forms of liberal Orientalism.


cxliii Among the numerous articles, blog posts and interviews on this topic, please refer to autostraddle’s blog post by “Sarah” on February 16, 2010, “Much Ado About Bisexuality” (http://www.autostraddle.com/is-everyone-bisexual-33339/) and afterellen.com founder, Sarah Warne’s, interview in jezebel.com’s “Tila Tequila: Good or Bad for Bisexual Women?” written by Jessica G. and published on Sep. 04, 2008. (jezebel.com/5045532/tila-tequila-good-or-bad-for-bisexual-women).

cxiv “Good, Giving, and Game,” an expression coined by Dan Savage, defining the “best” type of sexual partner as one who has their partner’s best interests at heart and is willing to experiment.

cxiv New Yorker cartoon (July 5, 1993), "On the Internet, nobody knows you're a dog,” where one dog is interfacing with a computer, while, in an aside, instructing another dog with this maxim, hinting at the anonymity and freedom that the web provides.

cxvi Yet, we fear what will happen in the interim – before truth is uncovered – when we could, however, think of journalistic diligence as a temporizing device that allows us to come to terms with incongruous contrivances like sophisticated lesbian hoaxes.

cxvii As in the Vicar and Virago case, MacMaster actually took this position in his blog post explaining his fraud: “I never expected this level of attention. While the narrative voice may have been fictional, the facts on this blog are true and not misleading as to the situation on the ground. I do not believe that I have harmed anyone — I feel that I have
created an important voice for issues that I feel strongly about. I only hope that people pay as much attention to the people of the Middle East and their struggles in this year of revolutions. The people living them on a daily basis are shaping the events there. I have only tried to illuminate them for a western audience. This experience has sadly only confirmed my feelings regarding the often superficial coverage of the Middle East and the pervasiveness of new forms of liberal Orientalism.” (Cf. http://www.metroweekly.com/news/last_word/2011/06/two-influential-gay-female-blo.html.)


cxii Macmaster’s hoax is not the first of its kind, suggesting that this hoax is solidifying into a genre. See the Bilitis hoax and the Vicar and Virago hoax, covered in the introduction. See also Scott Long (2005), a leader in the lesbian and gay community, was of accused of creating an Islamic sock-puppet to give him street cred with which he sought to lambast and slander a fellow activist.

Roof notes: “whatever the hoax offers—profits, valuable objects, miracles, impossibilities—so much that they are willing to ignore common sense, contribute their own resources, and hope against hope despite the utter unlikelihood of delivery. The lure is irresistible and victims pay so much attention to this lure that their other faculties are paralyzed” (Oddball 1).

See Abbot and Love, 95; quoted in Faderman Return.

Cf. my footnote 5, Chapter 2.


On a different note, in the third season, the writers introduce a “butch” character named Max. Max, however, is a transgendered individual.

“Visibility matters” is the slogan of afterelton.com, a popular web-page dedicated to lesbian pop culture, public awareness, and activism, the popularity of which later spurred the creation of the website afterelton.com. The L Word’s creator, Ilene Chaiken, has also suggested that lesbians are invisible in pop culture, saying that we are essentially “starved for representation” and it is with programs like The L Word that our visibility is rendered
tangible. (Cf. gay.com’s “An Interview with Ilene Chaiken” by Beth Callaghan & Jenny Stewart at <http://www.gay.com/entertainment/interview.html?coll=pno_entertainment&sernum=693&page=4>). Whether televisual tangibility is something other than what Robyn Weigman has called the vampiristic commodity aesthetitization of the lesbian is still a matter of dispute (Cf. The Lesbian Postmodern).


clxiv Alice creates OurChart, a hub-model written on a whiteboard that tracks her friends’ sexual exploits.


clx We will not be able to appreciate the full breadth and complexity of Luhmannian social systems, the mass media as a social system, and information theory within the confines of this paper; however, we may broach these topics in order to ascertain the operational strategies that the mass media deploy in general. For our purposes, I am not interested so much in the role of the observer (be it first or second order), nor do I want to engage in a full-fledged or detailed summarization of general systems theory and information theory; rather, I want to focus on how a system like the mass media operates. To do so, however, we must first agree to buy into certain assumptions of general systems theoretical analysis: that systems exist or that the emergence of modernity entails the emergence of functionally differentiated systems, that systems are autopoietic and autonomous (borrowing from the vocabulary of the Chilean biologists, Humberto Maturana and Francisco Varela), that systems are also interdependent on other social systems, and that the mass media is a system are the cornerstones of my interpretation. Also key to this investigation is the cybernetic and systems theoretical desire to evacuate
the question of ontology (most readily called up for us in the problematic of subject/object binarism) in order to replace it with functionalism or what Luhmann has remodeled as the system/environment distinction.

clxii By virtue of systemic autopoeisis, systems produce their own boundaries and in so doing systems are said to be closed operationally. In this sense, all of the occurrences within a specific system happen in that system and do not match up with the operations of that which is exterior to it (Moeller14). Moeller puts it nicely when he says that “. . . [Systems] are self-producing “organisms” of communications that consist of the connecting of system-internal communication with system-internal communication. Economic communication, for instance, can only connect to economic communication—otherwise it ceases to be economic communication. Once a system has established itself, be it biological or social, it can only continue its autopoeisis by its own operational means. It cannot import other means without losing its systemic integrity and its “membrane” and thus its reality” (15). This doesn’t mean, as Moeller is quick to point out, that systems do not take into consideration (or observe) the happenings of other systems.

clxii Autopoiesis is grounded in the relationship between the structure and organization of the system. The system’s organization, i.e., “those relations that must exist among the components of a system for it to be a member of a class” (Maturana and Varela 47), must remain the same lest the system should become something other. However, on the level of structure, which is nothing less than “the components and relations that actually constitute a particular unity and make its organization real” (Ibid.), may change. Maturana and Varela offer an example of the organization-structure relationship
concerning systemic integrity: “. . . in a toilet the organization of the system of water-level regulation consists in the relations between an apparatus capable of detecting the water level and another apparatus capable of stopping the inflow of water. The toilet unit embodies a mixed system of plastic and metal comprising a float and bypass valve. This specific structure, however, could be modified by replacing the plastic with wood, without changing the fact that there would still be a toilet organization” (47). Parts or systemic components are essential only if they have functional utility, and, in order for the system to autopoeitically re-produce itself, the system is said to be “open on the level of structure but closed on the level of organization.” Parts may be interchangeable, but the organization of the system—the network by which it produces itself—cannot be manipulated or changed; in doing so, the system itself becomes something other than it is. To put it another way—say in terms of the political—it doesn’t matter if I (a structural part) vote, so long as there are other voters who exercise the franchise. The political system will not crumble if you vote and I do not, but it would change dramatically (and become something other than the political as we know it) if we cut out voting all together.

Luhmannian systems theory has come under criticism for being itself a universalizing discourse or map of the world. Luhmann acknowledges this on several occasions but suggests that every theory is a product of an observation within a specific system and it is in this way that “. . . it must account for the self-implicative nature of its own observations: a general theory of social systems must deal with everything social, including itself as part of the contingent reality that it describes” (Knodt xiii).
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clxxiv
The concept of unmappability should call to mind Alford Korzybski’s famous
dictum, “the map is not the territory,” where, for us, the map is the system and the
territory is the system’s environment.
clxxv

One could assert that, based on the analysis so far, all systems operate on this code

information/non-information.

clxxvii

According to systems theory, the mass media “generate a constantly renewed

willingness to be prepared for surprises, disruptions even. In this respect, the mass media
"fit" the accelerated auto-dynamic of other function systems such as the economy,
science and politics, which constantly confront society with new problems” (Luhmann
2000a, 22; quoted in Moeller 135).
clxxviii

Cf. The outtake reel on Season 1 DVD box set.

clxxix


clxxx

From The L Word theme song, written and performed by Betty: “Girls in tight

dresses/Who drag with mustaches/Chicks drivin' fast/Ingenues with long lashes/Women
who long, love, lust/Women who give/This is the way/It's the way that we live/Talking,
laughing, loving, breathing, fighting, fucking, crying, drinking, riding, winning, losing,
cheating, kissing, thinking, dreaming./This is the way/It's the way that we live/It's the
way that we live/And love.” (http://www.elyrics.net">eLyrics.net</a>.) Web. Retrieved
3.11.11.
clxxxi

Cf. Wolfe, Cary. Critical Environments: Postmodern Theory and the Pragmatics of

the “Outside.” Theory Out of Bounds 13. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press,
1998).

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Roof notes: “An obvious example of this recontainment occurs when same-sex desires are defined as sexual “inversions,” or when same-sex partners interpret their own roles within a relationship as male/female or masculine/feminine” (Remaking 16).

Cf. “Bodily Mut(ill)ation: Inscribing Lesbian Desire” in PostModern Culture, 7.2, 1997. (http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/postmodern_culture/v007/7.2engelbrecht.html#foot1)


The L Word has been accused of rampant transphobia. A good example of transphobia occurs in “Latecomer,” Season 3, Episode 8. Here, Alice ends up employing Max to run administer the website version of OurChart. During his tenure, Max uses OurChart to blog about his FTM transition, much to Alice's chagrin:

Alice: Max, you invaded my space to put out your own agenda and it wasn’t cool at all. But here is what I will do, you can blog once a week. I’ll put you in your own little box on the homepage- not with the guestbians [guest lesbians bloggers].

Max: Why not with the guestbians?

Alice: Because it’s a lesbian site, Max. And I just don’t want to get bombarded by a bunch of dykes flipping out about this transgender thing.

Max: You can’t segregate trans people out of the lesbian community.


Not only is Dana killed off but she is also forced to die alone after Alice kept constant vigil at her bedside. Leaving for a moment, Alice returns to her best friend and
former lover, toe-tagged, denied solace, almost arbitrarily. The lesson seems to be that we may never know when violence will strike, and we will never know why. The sacrifice of the two innocents amounts to nothing but TV ratings, a fact that producers of the show were reluctant to disclose—although they didn’t fail to let viewers know that Dana’s death generated a million-dollar anonymous gift to breast cancer research.


cxc Cf. Heather Murray’s superb essay, “Free for All Lesbians: Lesbian Cultural Production and Consumption in the United States during the 1970s” in Journal of the History of Sexuality. 16.2 (2007) 251-275. Therein, Murray cites a public service announcement written by one of Olivia’s founders that explains Olivia’s objectives: “Olivia operates as a collective. That means there is no authoritarian structure; it is a feminist business both in its product and in the way it functions. The records made by Olivia all meet one criterion: they express some aspect of the new self-aware women's culture, and indeed, they often serve to help define the new culture created by women
who are seeking to redefine themselves. . . After [Olivia artists'] concerts, workshops are convened to allow the audience to have direct exchange with the artists, . . . thus destroying the artificiality of the star mystique. Olivia hopes to serve as an inspiration to all women, to encourage them to take the initiative and start businesses of their own, to gain self support for projects that benefit women everywhere. We have chosen to do it through music, but our structure could be applicable . . . [to any organization] helping to create a non-sexist, non-racist, non-ageist, non-exploitive world” (270-1).


cxcii Cf. bell hooks’ Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center (Boston: South End Press, 1984), 73.


Roof explains gender as follows: “In so far as genders express a subject’s positionings and desires within the range of possible expressions, they also never succeed in this expression. In so far as genders’ appearances signal everything from a subject's socio-cultural position to its biological reality, genders are always mis-taken, operating on the objective plane of the fantasies of others. Although subjects express, their appearance is never what they think it is. In short, genders are not only noncompliant and disparate; they are also approximations, open to perpetual adjustment. This approximate quality makes it difficult to define genders as we never think we are defining what we think we are defining. Genders slip out. In the end we guess, we categorize, hence the comforts of a clean binary certainty” (Remaking 3).

According to Michel Foucault, a dispositive is “a thoroughly heterogeneous ensemble consisting of discourses, institutions, architectural forms, regulatory decisions, laws, administrative measures, scientific statements, philosophical, moral and philanthropic propositions— in short, the said as much as the unsaid. Such are the elements of the apparatus. The apparatus itself is the system of relations that can be established between these elements." (Cf. “The Confession of the Flesh” interview (1977) in Power/Knowledge Selected Interviews and Other Writings, ed. Colin Gordon (1980), 194–228. Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben adds that an apparatus is “anything that has in some way the capacity to capture, orient, determine, intercept, model, control, or secure the gestures, behaviors, opinions, or discourses of living beings. Not only, therefore, prisons, madhouses, the panopticon, schools, confession, factories, disciplines, judicial measures, and so forth (whose connection with power is in a certain sense evident), but also the pen, writing, literature, philosophy, agriculture, cigarettes,
navigation, computers, cellular telephones and--why not--language itself, which is perhaps the most ancient of apparatuses--one in which thousands and thousands of years ago a primate inadvertently let himself be captured, probably without realizing the consequences that he was about to face." "What is an Apparatus?" in *What is an Apparatus? and Other Essays*. (Stanford: StanfordU Press, 2009), 14.


cci BDSM ossifies into recognizable forms – some that are socially accepted, and some that push the envelope. In her essay “Beyond Safety: Erotic Asphyxiation and the Limits of SM Discourse,” Lisa Downing argues that BDSMers look for more and new ways to open up BDSMM. Erotic asphyxiation (“hypoxophilia”) or breath play, for example, exists on “the edge of physical safety” as well as “a discursive limit: that which pushes the boundaries of the accepted and included terms of SM and brings SM qua discourse into focus as a self-regulating phenomenon” (122). Part of the thrill of hypoxophilia is it closeness to death — which means that some forms of BDSM cannot be contained in the liberal model of consent, freedom, and avoidance of pain, which puts into questioning the extent to which “a liberal society — which traditionally privileges male, heterosexual (as well as white, upper-class) subjects — make room for perverts?” (Ibid.).
Braeckman notes, citing Luhmann’s research: “In the 18th century, this policy is supplemented with measures of social discipline (based on labor), whose mercilessness ... contrasts strikingly with the Enlightenment ideals of humanity, which apparently were meant only for the included part of the population” (Luhmann, 1995b: 245; 70).

Deitrich Schwanitz notes, “...society is no longer regarded as the sum of its parts, but as a combination of system-environment differentiation, each of which reconstructs the overall system as a unity of the respective subsystem and its specific environment according to the internal boundary of the subsystem” (144). What Schwanitz is getting at is the articulation of a (sub)system’s autonomy, which is the maintenance of its boundary. Its autopoeisis or ceaseless self-production that effectively secures for itself the boundary between the “outside” (the environment or/as other systems) and the system’s internal organization. As Eva M. Knodt succinctly puts it, each system “...reproduces itself recursively on the basis of its own system-specific operations. Each of them observes itself and its environment, but their unique perspective marks whatever they observe, by the selectivity of the particular distinctions they use for their observations. There is no longer an Archimedean point from which this network could be contained in an all-embracing vision...” (xii). A system, then, is like a cell because it is a self-regulating network whose internal dynamics are defined as the interconnection of its “parts” or components and the processes by which they components are organized. A system may be open on the level of structure but closed on the level of organization: if it is open on the level of organization and the processes change, the system would change. However, one may substitute different types of parts – an LED light for an antique bulb. A system generates the very conditions of its possibility by reproducing its processes, and
so maintains its autonomy by performing a function diacritically as a network of parts and flows where no one part or flow provides an originary foundation of meaning or causality; instead, Luhmann emphasizes the importance of contingency, systemic operations, and the outside. The inside or what is included, of course, depends on the exterior as we had mentioned earlier, and a system can only perpetuate itself in relation to its environment.

"Rather than a focus on the family, modern society values the career, because “As a structure, which fits in perfectly with functional differentiation, it gives room to the growing significance of individual decisions, offers a framework for their potential self-definitions and at the same time, leaves open how these will be implemented or tolerated psychically” (Braeckman 73).


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