

AN ARCHIVE OF SHAME: GENDER, EMBODIMENT, AND CITIZENSHIP IN  
CONTEMPORARY AMERICAN CULTURE

A Dissertation

by

REBECCA LYNNE HARRIS

Submitted to the Office of Graduate Studies of  
Texas A&M University  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

May 2012

Major Subject: English

An Archive of Shame: Gender, Embodiment, and Citizenship in Contemporary

American Culture

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Approved by:

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## ABSTRACT

An Archive of Shame: Gender, Embodiment, and Citizenship in Contemporary  
American Culture.

(May 2012)

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In this dissertation, “An Archive of Shame: Gender, Embodiment, and Citizenship in Contemporary American Culture,” I use the affect of shame in its multiple forms and manifestations as a category of analysis in order to examine complex relationships between gender, sexuality, the body, and citizenship. Through chapters on incest, gender normalization, and disease, I build an “archive” of the feeling of shame that consists of literary texts such as Sapphire’s *Push: A Novel*, Jeffrey Eugenides’s *Middlesex*, Tony Kushner’s *Angels in America*, and Katherine Dunn’s *Geek Love*, as well as materials from popular culture, films such as *Philadelphia*, court cases, and other ephemera such as pamphlets and news coverage. In order to construct this archive, I bring together seemingly disparate materials and create readings of American culture that illustrate how the category of citizen is produced by the shaming of women, the gender non-conforming, and the diseased. Using feminist theoretical models, I critique previous discussions of citizenship, the state, and the body in queer theory, which have reified the privilege of whiteness and maleness by evacuating the bodies of women, the

gender non-conforming, and the diseased of their radical potential to undermine oppressive state institutions.

The texts I analyze in this project interrogate normalized processes of documentation and archiving, and through their subject matter as well as their form, these texts participate in the archival process—theorizing and exploring alternative methods of documentation, collecting, and historicizing and so illustrate how the discourses produced by mainstream history are built upon the maintenance of social hierarchies. By bringing these texts together, I am developing a theory of the archive and its processes, its bodies, and its feelings. Archiving as a practice collects and documents, and in that collection, develops a coherent narrative about a particular event or history. Critical theory is also a process of making meaning through the collection of events, documents, and texts into a cohesive set of terms in order to make particular abstract claims. This process is often obscured both in archiving and in theorizing by naturalizing the selection of the materials that matter. The alternative archives in this dissertation make that process explicit in order to foreground its erasures and elisions; they register material difference and the ways in which the archive is reproductive of social relations. The transient and unstable nature of the archives produced within the texts of this project makes them difficult to pin down and make coherent, but that is what makes them powerful and transformative. I read these materials as sites where questions about the official histories of the nation, which are constructed through race, gender, and sex, might be played out. The archive of shame I compile in this project, therefore, can be read as a collection of partial sites of struggle against oppressive power relationships.

*For Ronny Harris*

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What others might have called “obnoxious,” they thought of as “strong-willed” or “independent,” and their encouragement is reflected in the methods of critical inquiry in all of my work. I would also like to thank the rest of my family, including my siblings, Jared, Elizabeth, and Rachel, and my grandmothers, Frieda Sawyer and Linda Harris, for being a great cheering section. A special debt of gratitude is owed to Shawn W. Moore for listening to my rants, talking me off the ledge, keeping my spirits up, and sharing meals with me for the past two years.

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## CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION: ARCHIVING TEXTS, BODIES, AND CITIZENS: A

## GENEALOGY OF SHAMEFUL HISTORIES

*The body manifests the stigmata of past experience and also gives rise to desires, failings, and errors.*

*Foucault, "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History"*

*Order is no longer assured.*

*Derrida, "Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression"*

In *Bodies that Matter*, Judith Butler articulates how the sexed body is produced through and is a product of discourse about the body. She argues, "what constitutes the fixity of the body, its contours, its movements, will be fully material, but materiality will be rethought as the effect of power, as power's most productive effect" (2).<sup>1</sup> The body, though it has a substance and matter, is also a product of discursive practices that call it into being. The matter of the body, as Butler argues, has a history. Furthermore, the naturalization of dichotomous sex and gender through discourses about the body also produces an "exclusionary matrix by which subjects are formed" which "requires the simultaneous production of a domain of abject beings, those who are not yet 'subjects,' but who form the constitutive outside to the domain of the subject" (3). This exclusionary matrix occurs because the discursive system of sex privileges some bodies and identifications while at the same time rejecting others. Thus, the privileged body is

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This dissertation follows the style of *Contemporary Literature*.

<sup>1</sup> Of course, Butler does not mean that there is no material of the body, only that its manifestation as form is read as an effect of power. History will operate here in much the same way. It is not that events do not *happen*, but that they are recognized only through their discursive meanings and effects.

produced as subject, is naturalized, and is dislocated from its relationship to the history of the power relations that mark some bodies as Other. Taking as my starting point Butler's material body produced by power, this dissertation seeks to understand the relationship of the body to official national histories and archives which produce the citizen and his body while at the same time producing an "outside" to the domain of recognized citizen-subject. These national histories and archives rest on an understanding of particular bodily identifications as "natural," and thus they are made invisible, while the hyperembodiment (to use Lauren Berlant's term)<sup>2</sup> and materiality of other bodies marks them as radically other and excludes them from the benefits of official discourse. The production of these Other bodies as outside and abject through sex, gender, and race allows for the construction of the official citizen-subject in official history, but their presence also marks that category as unstable. This dissertation is concerned with the "alternative" archives produced by those raced, gendered, and sexualized bodies that seemingly are excluded from or do not matter except as Other to official national histories.

Formally speaking, the texts in this dissertation function as alternative archives. They act as collections of materials and narratives that exist outside the sanction of official discourse. Through their collection of materials, the texts I analyze in this project preserve relationships and make meaning in ways alternative to official national

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<sup>2</sup> See Lauren Berlant, "National Body/National Brand: *Imitation of Life*."

discourses. Furthermore, the work of this dissertation (as with all critical texts that assemble materials and make relationships between them) is also to produce an archive of these alternative histories. For the purposes of my project, these archives will be organized around the affect of shame and its relationship to the sexed, gendered, and racialized body and its exclusion from citizenship. Whereas official histories and archives are easily locatable in that they are “housed” in normative and sanctioned national sites—such as museums and libraries—the alternative archives of this dissertation (fictional and otherwise) are located in more transient and unstable “domiciles.” They are located elsewhere: in and on the body, in and with the family, through feeling. The transient and unstable nature of the archives produced in the texts of this dissertation makes them difficult to pin down and make coherent, but that is what makes them powerful and transformative. As Butler suggests about the sexed body in *Bodies That Matter*, the “task will be to consider this threat and disruption not as a permanent contestation of social norms condemned to the pathos of perpetual failure, but rather as a critical resource in the struggle to rearticulate the very terms of symbolic legitimacy and intelligibility” (3). These textual archives and my readings of them therefore do not attempt to be a complete undoing of the ideological and discursive systems of sex, gender, and race that govern the body. It is the attempt to be universalizing and to undo the whole of oppressive power relations in one act that produces the problematic exclusions found in other critical and theoretical texts discussed in this dissertation. I see these resources instead as sites where questions about the official histories of the nation as they are constructed through race, gender, and

sex might be played out and as a collection of partial sites of struggle against oppressive power relationships. In this introduction I undertake a discussion of Katherine Dunn's *Geek Love* as one of these sites of struggle and as a place where the methods and reading practices of this project may be demonstrated. I then discuss the theoretical underpinnings of the archive and my own formulation of it as well as further elaborate the critical reading practices of the dissertation as whole. Finally, I give a brief overview of the chapters of this project and the texts they will engage as partial sites of struggle and as attempts to rearticulate the exclusions of some bodies from the national scene.

### **“Freaks”, Women, and the Archive in Katherine Dunn’s *Geek Love***

In Katherine Dunn's novel about a “grotesque” carnival family, *Geek Love*, Olympia, an albino dwarf, narrates her family's stories and compiles an archive of their lives in the family carnival, the Fabulon. Spaced throughout Olympia's writings, which are themselves being compiled to pass on to her daughter, Miranda, are reproductions of the notes of a reporter named Sanderson, as well as newspaper clippings, transcripts of interviews with her family members and carnival participants, as well as other ephemera associated with the Fabulon. Olympia says that she will sometimes “take it all out when I want to think back” (189). This familial archive allows Olympia to remember her past as well as construct a future for her daughter—producing a set of relations based in “illegitimate,” “shameful,” and “grotesque” histories. In the archive one can find sex, birth, death, deceit, shame, vengeance, love, and a host of other emotions associated with

familial relations. That this archive concerns the happenings of a family of “freaks,” however, is not insignificant to the points Dunn is making in her novel about gender, sexuality, queerness, and the body. The compilation of an archive of feelings and relations by a so-called “freak” woman highlights the ways in which the concept of the family and “official” archives are intertwined and produced through the power differentials of gender and sexuality.<sup>3</sup> In her analysis of *Geek Love*’s attention to familial history, Rachel Adams suggests “if we no longer have recourse to nature or essence to make ethical claims about the body, the continual retelling of tales and tails becomes our only means of working through the past to invest our bodies with the weight of history and memory” (288). Through this practice of retelling, Olympia’s familial archive attempts to divest history and memory of its naturalized relationship to certain modes of power, since history and memory have historically been dominated by male claims to superiority and to the production of knowledge. When Olympia constructs her familial archive for Miranda, she is compiling artifacts, stories, and perspectives that exist outside of sanctioned histories and national memories.

Though the circus or “freak show” might be considered as already existing outside of official national discourse, Olympia’s archive points out the ways in which

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<sup>3</sup> “Official” here denotes historical archives and sites that are constructed from privileged viewpoints and are easily read as archives—they are “housed” in a traditional location such as a museum or library, they are organized and classified categories determined by discourse and yet seemingly excluded from them, their materials are understood as significant to the national, social, or political narrative, etc. However, I also mean “official” history to stand on a smaller scale—one that is contiguous with the national—but is handed down on the familial, local, or communal level by a voice that is privileged by the discourses of national history.

the female body as “freak” exists even further outside those structures.<sup>4</sup> According to Adams,” “the ‘true life’ pamphlets that frequently accompanied exhibits provided a biographical description of the subject, his or her physical oddities, ‘official’ endorsements of authenticity by doctors and scientists, and, in more exotic cases, descriptions of geography and native people of the freak’s country of origin, which were often grossly exaggerated or patently untrue” (279). Thus, there is a kind of official history of the freak show that is descriptive, it is *about* the participants and not created by them, and so the history—even when falsified—is imposed from without. Furthermore, the falsification of that history erases actual difference. By making up a history about the bodies of “freaks,” the pamphlets decontextualize those bodies from their specific, material histories as well as their relationships to actual institutional forces. The “official histories” of the freak show (the pamphlets, the certifications of authenticity) and their falsification correspond to national “official histories” which erase women, people of color, indigenous histories, and cover over events in order to produce an official national narrative. By erasing difference and heterogeneity from discourse, “official” histories establish a dichotomous power relationship between the white male abstract ideal citizen and his history and its others. When difference is articulated in official history, as in the example of the pamphlets that accompany the “freak” show, it is often falsified in such a way as to erase the material and discursive

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<sup>4</sup> See Les Harrison’s treatment of the relationship between the official American museums of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and P.T. Barnum’s circus. He argues in *The Temple and the Forum* that these two sites were coproductive of American ideology in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Thus, there exists a history of understanding these discursive traditions alongside one another.



conditions which produce the body in history in order to naturalize power relations along lines of gender, race, and sexuality. Difference therefore works in official history to construct and abstract the white (masculine), heterosexual, and able-bodied subject while at the same time naturalizing that category by establishing that subject as “normal,” and his others as “freak.” The alternative archive(s) compiled by these “freaks” circulates in and around national histories, but is “housed elsewhere” and is not easily locatable or identifiable in the same ways. Olympia draws attention to this transience when she is looking at the materials in her trunk: “This fragile, flammable heap is all that’s left of my life. It is the history of Miranda’s source. She soars and stomps and burns through her days with no notion of the causes that formed her. She imagines herself isolated and unique. She is unaware that she is part of, and the product of, forces assembled before she was born” (40). The forces that Olympia refers to here are both national and familial—national in the conditions that produce “freakness” through privileging of the able-bodied subject, and familial through Arty and Al’s domination and creation. However, Olympia’s assemblage of these materials and her desire to pass them on to Miranda illustrates her reworking of these forces into a new narrative, an alternative archive.<sup>5</sup> The alternative archive produces knowledge that contests official histories that seek to decontextualize the gendered, racialized, and sexualized body from their relationship(s) to institutional power. The insistence on the importance of the body and understanding its relationship to history is one of the features that marks this archive,

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<sup>5</sup> One of the ways we can understand this archive as “unsanctioned” by Al and Arty is the fact that Olympia’s favorite portrait of the family is one that Al excluded from the show (41).

and it is what Olympia most wants Miranda to know, arguing that while Miranda might be “flip” about her tail, “She is ignorant of its meaning and oblivious to its value. But something in her blood aches, warning her” (40). Olympia’s emphasis on not seeing the body as isolated, reading the body in relationship to “forces,” underscores its importance to the story she is telling. When Olympia compiles her own archive, it is two times removed from national official discourses, first by exclusion because of her “freak” status, and then by exclusion by her father and brother because of her gender. Olympia constructs her archive in order to establish a version of history that includes her and her female progeny. The history that Olympia constructs stands not only in opposition to the official discourses of the nation or the circus pamphlets, but in response to her brother’s cult which dismembers the body and robs it of its history and context.

The story of Olympia and Miranda frames that of the carnival and her father and Arturo’s domination. By situating the narrative of her family within her own story, Olympia is voicing her own version of that story; she is controlling the terms of the history she provides. Olympia describes the way her father and Arty controlled the carnival—her father with his experimental “roses” for children, whom he crafted with the use of drugs during his wife’s pregnancies, and Arty with his skillful rhetoric and his cult. In particular, Arty’s needs and desires tend to dominate Oly’s life as well as her family’s and he assumes the traditional role of the patriarch through coercion and force. Olympia is always at Arty’s side willing to subordinate her needs to his in order to have some measure of his affection: “I crawled up beside him and snuggled close, my belly to his back. This was my reward for endurance. He would never ask for my arms

around him but at times like this he would allow me to warm myself against him” (104). Arty’s hold over Oly is tied to her desire for physical affection and familial connection in a family where she is too “normal” as an albino dwarf to be valuable in the carnival as anything but a labor force. Olympia’s character is completely dominated by these men in the interwoven portions of the story, and yet in the frame narrative of her relationship with her daughter, it is Olympia who has become the center and the provider for both her mother and her daughter. Olympia comes to realize the necessity of framing her own history by compiling the archival materials of her family relations and by writing a history of her body into the archive. Throughout her narrative, both Olympia and Miranda are insistent on describing their own bodies and the bodies of other “freaks.” Whereas her father and Arty dismissed Olympia and her body as not freak enough and the world dismisses her as freak, Olympia’s bold and straightforward descriptions of her own body bear her concomitant shame and pride about it. When she is forced onstage at The Glass House, for example, she revels in the audience’s response to her nakedness, refiguring her body as privileged: “How proud I am, dancing in the air full of eyes rubbing at me uncovered, unable to look away because of what I am. Those poor hop-toads behind me are silent. I’ve conquered them. They thought to use and shame me but I win out by nature, because a true freak cannot be made. A true freak must be born” (20). It is clear from the text, however, that not everyone sees Oly as a “true freak,” particularly Al and Arty. Thus, the status of “true freak” for Olympia is not just about the body but about praxis, about the body’s contextualized relations to other bodies. It is these relations that Olympia’s collection of artifacts and stories attempts to represent.

The text itself stands as a kind of archival product for the reader, and the stylistic appearance of “reproductions” of newspaper articles, interviews, and other materials allows the reader to act as constructor as well. The archive of feelings produced by *Geek Love* not only contains evidence of the relationships and feelings produced by the Binewski family, but also acts as a repository for the readers’ emotions about shame, the body, and the grotesque. In this text that juxtaposes collecting and history against surgical amputations and disfigurement, the contextualization of the “matter” of the body—including gender, race, and sex—within history is paramount.

Both Arty Binewski, Olympia’s brother, and Miss Lick, a rich woman who wants to “cure” Miranda of her tail, attempt to rid themselves of the binary opposition between bodies that matter and those which don’t by ridding society of one of the terms of the binary, the one they see as most destructive, through a process of surgical transformation of the body. In Arty’s case, he uses his charm as a performer to preach against the “norms” and to encourage “normal” people to undergo surgery to remove their limbs in order to be more like him. In becoming like him, Arty argues that these “norms,” his word for “regular,” able-bodied people, can free themselves of the oppressive structures of their everyday lives. To Norval Sanderson, a reporter living amongst the Binewski Fabulon, Arty writes: “I get glimpses of the horror of normalcy. Each of these innocents on the street is engulfed by the terror of their own ordinariness. They would do anything to be unique” (223). Arty furthermore sees his advocacy of surgical amputation as “corrective” to the problems of “normal” society (231). What Arty exposes here is a fundamental contradiction in American thinking—the simultaneous

desire to see oneself as an “individual” with individual rights and liberties, while at the same time one is required to conform ideologically to certain normative strictures. In advocating transformation into a “freak,” Arty not only feels that he is collapsing the binary opposition of the norm/freak body, but also undermining a system that privileges a fictional kind of normal in the first place. However, as Katherine Weese points out, the cult Arty starts “implicates him in an economy of the same, creating copies of himself in Dr. Phyllis’s surgery trailer, described as a kind of assembly line where the Arturans line up to have fingers, toes, arms, legs, breasts, and testicles amputated. . . . The cult renders Arty himself a ‘norm’ of sorts, in physical appearance and in traditional attitudes. ‘Arturan’ thus becomes synonymous with ‘conformist.’” (352). Thus, in attempting to undermine the conformity and pain Arty himself feels in being excised from society because of the body, his “masculine artistry,” as Weese names it, of other bodies exacts the same toll and is successful in developing only a new kind of “norm.” While Arty uses the simultaneous desire for individualism and normativity to expose the dominant culture’s insistence on able-bodiedness, he creates a new norm instead of transforming the process by which the freak/norm binary is enacted. Furthermore, the surgical amputation of limbs and the erasure of the body that Arty’s cult enacts also eliminates difference and places the body outside of its own and cultural histories. Arty, in his attempt to make everyone like him, attempts to privilege the “freak” end of the norm/freak power differential, but he ends up producing a new norm in which he himself is the standard and the source of power. He distances himself from the institutional conditions that privilege the able-bodied and the “normal,” but in making everyone like

him and assuming the power of being the standard to which everyone else must adhere, Arty reduces the category of “freak” to appearance and empties it of any radical potential it might have. For example, his acolytes keep lists of people who are “already freaks” that are excluded from the voluntary amputations that Arty advocates. These are convicted felons, the chronically ill, the congenitally deformed, the accidentally mutilated, the elderly, and the physically weak (228-9). This list in Sanderson’s notes makes explicit the relationship of the nation to freak status through the mention of “convicted felon,” but presents these categories of exclusion as discrete entities with no relation to Arty’s freaks. Arty’s theorization about “norms” and his cult produce a certain kind of freak whose relationship to other freaks is obscured by Arty’s dominance as the new norm. By advocating bodily sameness as a resistance to ideological conformity, Arty actually erases the histories of oppression that the binary itself inscribes. Dunn, I think, is pointing to this by including the majority of Arty’s theorization about his cult in the sections of the work that are taken from Sanderson’s notes. By situating Arty’s theories within an archive of family history, Dunn is pointing to the embeddedness of the body within the archive itself and also to the ways in which erasure of that body undermines potentially transformative acts.

Miss Lick has a similar methodology of ending gendered oppression as Arty does for ending oppression of the “freak” body. Miss Lick goes to the club where Miranda, Oly’s daughter, works with others who have a “special talent” of some kind. The “Glass House” where Miranda works is a club for exotic dancers who have one kind of physical abnormality or another, and who thus in the “Glass House” are put on display for the

purposes of titillation of the customers.<sup>6</sup> Miss Lick sees in beautiful women and in these abnormalities an opportunity to play out and test her own gender politics. Arguing that women are always the objects of sexual desire and are thus not taken seriously as intellectual equals with men, Miss Lick advocates the removal of whatever parts of their body men might see as sexual so that women can enter the world on even footing. Miss Lick considers herself a disciple of Arturo's philosophy (160) and advocates it for women, because she believes that in turning away from seeking male approval, they will be able to activate their minds and compete out in the world free of their sexuality and thus sexual oppression. Unlike Arty, Miss Lick takes "freaks"—categorized as beautiful women or women who are sexualized in some way—and further attempts to enfreak them by removing the things that make them objects of sexual desire. By operating on beautiful women or women who are overtly sexualized in some way—as Miranda is by her tail—Miss Lick believes that she can help them expose their "true potential" independent of their sexual objectification. Miss Lick's impulse, like Arty's, is to combat oppression of the body by erasing its potential to be objectified as other. They seek to combat oppression not by undermining the actual ideological structures that produce said objectification, but by ignoring them. While Miss Lick and Arty's changes to the body produce new *experiences* for their projects, by ignoring the institutional factors that maintain "freakness," they simply maintain a new version of the normal

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<sup>6</sup> The name the "Glass House" might also be a tongue-in-cheek way of undermining the binary categorization of "freak/norm" that is so central to the text. As in the colloquialism, "People who live in glass houses should not throw stones," one might also argue that the concept of the possibility of a "normal" or "perfect" body is being interrogated here.

without addressing what is normative and normalizing about the ideological structures that produce the unequal power relation in the first place. Their changes to the body are simplistically about appearance, and in the alteration of the body through elimination and reduction—of limbs, of beauty, of sexual desirability—Arty and Miss Lick make the body smaller and smaller until its materiality and thus its history is erased.

In contrast, Miranda's medical drawings and Olympia's familial archive stand in contrast to these efforts to erase the body and thus its difference. Miranda's drawings of the exposed, abnormal, or surgical body record its incongruities. In particular her drawings of exposed internal body parts and the altered physiques of body builders illustrate how the body is constructed through its exterior and naturalized in particular ways. When looking at her drawings, Oly describes these drawings almost as loving portraits, even the "joyous nude of the blobby news vendor from the corner. He is hunched on a stool, pudgy hands propped on knees like sagging pumpkins, his acorn head thrown back in surprise on what passes for a neck. I don't understand the drawings or why they move me. I want to cry, loud and wet with the pain of love" (25).

Miranda's drawings of the body are moving for Olympia because they chronicle the body in its difference.<sup>7</sup> There is a frankness about the drawings that indicts the "naturalized" body as unnatural and outside of material history. One of Miranda's teachers compares her drawing to that of a "mass murderer," implying that she dismembers the body with her "unartistic" rendering of its natural state. She does not, however, sacrifice the parts for the whole of a perfect, naturalized human being. In fact,

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<sup>7</sup> Miranda's drawings also disturb Olympia and make her angry, but this anger, like her pride and love, is also rooted in their stark depiction of the body as it is.



she claims to “hate that ditsy crap...Inchy little lines like the hesitation cuts on a suicide’s wrists” (25). Miranda’s art, unlike Arty’s cult or Miss Lick’s projects, confronts the body in art as it is, resisting the binaries of ugly/beautiful, natural/unnatural, fat/thin, and therefore resisting shame. Katherine Weese argues that Miranda “makes moving pictures to touch hearts rather than locating her subjects within a norm-freak binary, rather than violently remaking them in her own image by performing radical surgery” (358). Miranda, therefore, practices an integration of the materiality of the body into art without collapsing its difference or erasing its history. Olympia’s compilation of her own story and construction of the family archive further situate the gendered experiences of her own body within a history of her family and the carnival.

Olympia’s body is a source of constant comment and conflicting feelings within the text. The mixture of shame and pride that accompany her body and the narratives she has been told about it by Arty and by her daily interactions with “norms,” serve as a backdrop for the narration of her own tale. Before going swimming, for example, Oly meditates on her own body and its appearance: “I look old. I have always looked old. The hump is not a youthful thing and the nakedness of my scalp and my hairless eyelids and brow ridges creak of something ancient” (151). Olympia’s emphasis on the apparent age of her body underscores her relationship to its institutional markers. Furthermore, because she utilizes her bodily difference to befriend Miss Lick, as “leverage” (151) to get to know her, Oly recognizes the power of her own body for engendering discourse. Oly’s refusal to shy away from the perceived ugliness of

appearance, either in this scene or at The Glass House, illustrates the ways in which she sees her body as working on and through various histories and discourses. Oly's "old" looks, like Miranda's art, situates the stark nakedness and difference of the body in a position of privilege without normalizing it as Miss Lick and Arty do. I am arguing that this bodily difference might be written within the archive, which would also serve to illustrate its construction by and embeddedness in history. The fact(s) of the body are not taken as a prediscursive given, but as a product of the terms that produce it which make materiality itself. In other words, I am arguing that the insistence of the materiality of the body to the archive and to history does not undermine the fact that all of these terms and the knowledge produced by the discourses that surround them are constructed. Rachel Adams argues that *Geek Love's* "vacillation between essentialist and constructivist understandings of the body" is not "a logical inconsistency," but "paradigmatic of how Americans attempt to manage the problem of bodily difference that has persistently troubled the nation's social and legal structure" (278). Using Diana Fuss' "strategic essentialism" as a touchstone, Adams argues that difference in and on the body must be situated contextually and made relational to other bodies and to the institutions that hail them. By situating the body within the archive and within history, the social and affective relations of the body can be read in more complex ways.

*Geek Love's* archive maintains what might be called the "grotesque" difference of the body in the carnival and Binewski familial relations in order to illustrate how the nonnormative body produces conflicting affects of disgust, shame, recognition and love in the reader/viewer. These affects circulate around and on the body within history, and

the alienation of the body from its difference does not in fact change the nature of oppressive relations, it only exacerbates them by producing the appearance of sameness and neutrality. In this introduction and in the chapters that follow, I am developing a theory of the archive and its processes, its bodies, and its feelings. The texts contained in this dissertation are part of an alternative archive and act as case studies for questions about the body, history, and feeling. All of the texts in this project interrogate normalized processes of documentation and at the same time work to produce alternative histories that exist outside the mainstream history of the United States. These texts in terms of their subject matter as well as their form participate in the archival process, theorizing and exploring alternative methods of documentation, collecting, and historicizing. Further, the texts, by reworking the structures of documentation, history, and the archive, illustrate how the discourses produced by mainstream history are built upon the exclusion of certain bodies and the maintenance of social hierarchies. The archive, here, is therefore as much about process as it is about materials. Archiving as a practice collects and documents, and in that collection, develops a coherent narrative about a particular event or history. Theory is also a process of making meaning through the collection of events, documents, and texts into a cohesive set of terms in order to make particular abstract claims. The process is often obscured both in archiving and in theorizing by the naturalization of the selection of the materials that matter and what the alternative archive does is to make that process explicit, to foreground its erasures and elisions. An alternative archive, however, that situates and foregrounds the body and the affects that are produced by and around it registers material difference and the ways in

which the archive is reproductive of social relations and has a hand in producing the future.

### **A Theory of the Body in the Archive**

Like Miranda and Olympia, this dissertation seeks to resist binary opposition and the flattening of difference that occurs when the presence of the bodily difference is erased. I resist feminist and queer theoretical models which attempt, like Arty and Miss Lick, to invest only singular acts or aesthetics with the ability for radical change. Like Arty and Miss Lick, these theoretical models obscure the material relations of the body to institutional power by “cutting off” the discourses that situate the body within fields of difference such as gender and race. An archive that reproduces the ideological structures of sexism, racism, and imperialism in the official archive but calls itself “alternative” has failed to seriously undermine how those ideological structures reproduce social relations. Likewise, a politics that acknowledges *only* “transgressive” or “alternative” acts and aesthetics in some ways acknowledges the naturalness of the normal and therefore fails to intervene in the discursive conditions that produce the

normal in the first place.<sup>8</sup> The importance, therefore, of finding those bodily others in the archive rests precisely in the fact that they exceed it and cannot be contained by it, providing an important intervention in official histories that erase difference. In Derrida's 1994 lecture "Archive Fever," published in *Diacritics*, he asks what counts as an exterior place in which to house memory as archive: "What does 'exterior' mean? Is a circumcision, for example, and exterior mark? Is it an archive?" (15). This provocative question central is to this essay about what constitutes both the archive and the impulse to destroy it. Taking Derrida's question literally for a moment, we might argue that the circumcision is in fact a bodily archive that indexes a number of fields. It is first of all a religious archive, gesturing at the major monotheistic religions of the west. It is an archive of medical practices largely carried out in Europe and the United States. It is a site for an archive of the aesthetic questions of a "normal" male body. In other words, as a repository for memory, circumcision does a lot of work. Derrida thus argues that

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<sup>8</sup> I address many of these theoretical models throughout the dissertation—including those of Michael Warner, Lee Edelman, Judith Halberstam, Leo Bersani, and others. Though I often find their political critiques very compelling, I fear that they have (perhaps unwittingly) reiterated the privilege of masculinity and whiteness by ignoring how their own critical work recapitulates historical privilege. As Susan Fraiman argues, the problem with these models is that they "may slip from seemingly neutral uses of the terms "queer" or "homosexual" to what is then revealed to be male sexuality in particular, only to move back out to ostensibly universal claims, which remain underwritten by masculinity" (129). I would add to her critique that they are also underwritten by whiteness and an understanding of sexuality as masculine, and that by not acknowledging these ideological underpinnings, they not only reproduce those political and social structures they seek to combat, but produce shame for those whose bodies, acts, and aesthetics do not conform to the new norm.

the archive, as printing, writing, prosthesis, or hypomnesic technique in general is not the only place for stocking and for conserving an archivable content *of the past* which would exist in any case, such as, without the archive, one still believes it was or will have been. No, the technical structure of the *archiving* archive also determines the structure of the *archivable* content even in its very coming into existence and in its relationship to the future. The archivization produces as much as it records the event. (17)

The “domicile,” to use Derrida’s word, or location of the archive, its processes of collection, of record-keeping, determines the nature of the content that exists within it and therefore has a hand in producing our knowledge of the event itself.<sup>9</sup> There must be, therefore, elisions in the archive as an ideological space that construct not only the archive but the subject matter of and subjects produced by the archive. In this project I seek to expose how particular bodies and subjects are produced through the archive as official domicile and repository of national history and memory. By foregrounding the ways in which the body itself works to inscribe history and how the textual form of archiving might work, I argue in this dissertation that alternative archives that are housed “elsewhere” draw attention to the processes of archiving and meaning making that are naturalized by dominant historical and theoretical models. Archiving and its processes are central to this project and to my construction of an “archive of feeling,” to use Ann

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<sup>9</sup> In this dissertation, there is some intentional slippage between “archive” and “text” because the texts treated in this dissertation—both literary and critical—themselves work to produce and document histories. In order to further deprivilege the “official” archive, the slippage of that term with “text” underscores the differences of domicile or location that are a constitutive factor of the alternative archive or history.

Cvetkovich’s phrase, which seeks to understand how one bodily affect—shame—can be circulated through bodies and through history to construct an archival space on and through the body itself.

Cvetkovich makes clear in her introduction to *An Archive of Feelings: Trauma, Sexuality and Lesbian Public Cultures* that the archive she builds is not intended to “constitute an exhaustive survey but to represent examples of how affective experience can provide the basis for new cultures. It is organized as ‘an archive of feelings,’ an exploration of cultural texts as repositories of feelings and emotions, which are encoded not only in the content of the texts themselves but in the practices that surround their production and reception” (7). For Cvetkovich, these feelings are most easily found in “ephemeral and unusual places” where the archive is not constructed through major national trauma, but in the traumas that circulate in everyday life.<sup>10</sup> Thus the archive is made up of many kinds of materials and genres—literature, film, festival ephemera, documentary, etc.—that call attention to “how publics are formed in and through cultural archives” (9). Her aim is to “forge methodologies for the documentation and examination of the structures of affect that constitute cultural experience and serve as the foundation for public cultures. It is important to incorporate affective life into our conceptions of citizenship and to recognize that these affective forms of citizenship may fall outside the institutional practices we customarily associate with the concept of a

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<sup>10</sup> Cvetkovich focuses on trauma as a constitutive factor in lesbian experience. “National trauma” here might signify something like war or attack, and she is reading everyday trauma against these totalizing narratives of trauma in order to foreground lesbian specificity. Where she focuses on trauma, I am focusing on “history” as a term that is also totalizing, one that the alternative archives of this project seek to combat with insistence on the specificity of bodily difference.

citizen” (11). Cvetkovich’s focus on lesbian cultures therefore argues that the affects produced by the archives of national public culture are not representative of the practices and traumas of the bodies against which it constitutes itself. Though Cvetkovich’s aim is largely to reinvest in public sexualities that are excised from the national political scene, which builds its conception of self upon the absence of or denigration of its others, these archives of national public culture are built along similar lines of racialized and gendered difference as well. If what is produced by the archives of national memory is something like “the citizen” and his emotions, we must also strive to understand how that citizen is constituted by the oppression of other histories and affects. It is important, however, to note that Cvetkovich’s project is not necessarily an additive one of “recovery” or “filling in the gaps” or locating a queer subject *within* already existing national archives. In other words, the project is not to make visible subjects that are seemingly excluded by simply rereading accepted historical “evidence.” As Anjali Arondekar has pointed out about the colonial archive, implicit in recovery projects that use existing source materials is still the understanding that the national archive “in all its multiple articulations, is still *the* source of knowledge” about the past. The question of finding the queer or homosexual subject in the archive is still an effort to find its legitimation in presence, in the past. Arondekar suggests against this model “a theory of reading that moves away from the notion that discovering an object will somehow lead to a formulation of subjectivity—from the presumption that if one finds a body, one can recover a person” (21). The purpose of this project, then, is not to recover a person or subject in the archive, but to create an alternative archive not only for the subject who



has been left out, but one that uses source materials and is housed in “domiciles” that are left out of traditional knowledge production. This project is not invested in recovering the gendered or queer subject in the gaps of history and “legitimizing” that person’s right to exist and his or her role in historical development. I take the existence and right to existence and recognition of other bodies as a precondition to the alternative archive. I construct an archive of feeling through the body, which instead delegitimizes mainstream narratives of official history built upon the national archives’ exclusionary and oppressive practices.

### **Abstraction, Shame, and the National Imaginary**

As much about the present as about the past, the official discourses of national public history are always in the process of producing a citizen and his body. Public discourse since the early Republic has maintained a fictionalized, abstract white citizen produced through print culture and archival documentation. In his essay “The Mass Public and the Mass Subject,” Michael Warner describes how in the early stages of the nation, public subjectivity was largely connected to the anonymity of print in political public discourse. This anonymity required an abstraction of the self into a non-identity, and thus a rejection of the body and its particularities. By rejecting the body’s particularities, the mass subject was able to disguise the fact that publicity and citizenship were implicitly coded as white, male, heterosexual, and privileged. In televisual culture, however, Warner argues, the ongoing and constant display of bodies

in the mass media creates a mass subject who is “not that body,” and thus can still retain access to a disembodied ideal of publicity. By investing certain bodies with particularity—in his example victims of disaster or AIDS patients—people can still enjoy the benefits of disembodied public subjectivity. Though any particular body can enjoy this public subjectivity, political power is still dependent, it appears, on the concerns dictated by white male privilege. So, for example, if a woman obtains a position of public power, this does not mean necessarily that the ideological underpinnings of power have been erased, but rather that she has found a way to articulate her claim to power through one of its structuring premises. Dana Nelson explores a similar phenomenon in her book, *National Manhood: Capitalist Citizenship and the Imagined Fraternity of White Men*, in which she navigates the narrative of the nation itself as it was equated with white masculinity through historical and literary accounts—creating a narrative of the nation as an imagined fraternal order of white men. Drawing on David Theo Goldberg’s description of the “archive of Otherness,” Nelson establishes that through this nationalist archive, white men “tabulate racial characteristics in the production of racial taxonomy as an epistemological exercise in power/identity” and that in doing so, they displace their anxieties onto gendered and racialized bodies (66). In both Warner’s and Nelson’s arguments, whiteness, maleness, heterosexuality, and privilege are abstracted out of the particular bodies participating in the political process and reformulated into the ideal, but impossible to embody, citizen. In this sense, as Nelson argues and Warner implies, national citizenship and its history

are constructed in opposition to the particularity of certain bodies—i.e. those that are racialized and gendered.

Shane Phelan adds to this critique by examining not only the process of how this abstraction occurs, but how it operates materially to the exclusion of certain bodies from the national imaginary. In the case of her argument, these are the bodies of gays, lesbians, bisexuals, and the transgendered. She argues that "objections to the equal citizenship of lesbians, gays, bisexuals, and transgendered people are constituted and articulated through concerns for the integrity of the heterosexual masculine individual, the heterosexual family, and the body politic. Understandings of citizenship have always been dependent upon particular notions of what sort of bodily integrity is needed and how that integrity is maintained; these notions operate at the level of both the individual citizen body and the body politic" (39). Citizenship, she argues, is based not only on rights and privileges associated with the democratic process, but is also located in recognition within the national imaginary and acceptance in a dialectical process of citizenship. Thus, as in Derrida's formulation of the archive, the citizen body is produced by the official discourses about it—discourses that are produced by a national archive of knowledge—that work against those "Other" bodies upon whom the archive of the citizen is built. This project calls attention to those bodies within an archive of feeling in order to, as Cvetkovich argues, understand new ways that citizenship can operate. The archive of the citizen is not only productive of the present, but of a national future. By imagining an archive of feelings that exist unsanctioned by mainstream conceptions of history and the citizen, I argue that the texts in this dissertation mark the

emergence of different and queer futures. The central project is therefore to construct an archive of texts which are themselves archives of particular histories, bodies, and feelings normally left out of “official” discourse.

Shame is the central feeling controlling my construction of the archive in this project. Why shame? As Jennifer Biddle argues, “shame seeks to confess. To be heard, to be borne by another, to find a witness—shame seeks to be allowed the very conditions denied it in its rupture—recognition by another. For shame arises from a failure to be recognised” (227). The texts engaged in this dissertation illustrate that it is the failure to be recognized as a body that matters that produces shame. Furthermore, shame is an emotion that is specifically borne on and provoked by bodily and physiological reaction, such as the blush, which thus demand shame’s recognition. Unlike other emotions that register on the skin, however, the physiological and psychological reaction to shame are socially produced, and shame complicates the dichotomy of public/private by violating the boundaries of the self. Biddle argues that “the skin, the epidermis, is understood in more traditional figurings of the body as the outer covering of the material body; the limit, as it were, to the bounded individual self” (228). This bounded, individual self that is contained by the skin is the very individual whose body is abstracted into the ideal citizen. But the shamed body, the one who feels shame, is unable to contain affect within the body and breaks with dichotomous inside/outside formulations of self. Because shame manifests and is readable on the imagined borders of the body, such as the skin, shame circulates through processes of physical recognition and reaction. Shame in this project will be treated as what Kathleen Stewart calls an “ordinary

affect." Ordinary affects, like power itself, are neither singular nor monolithic; they do not emanate from one central location, but move between bodies, subjects, objects, and institutions. Ordinary affects "are more directly compelling than ideologies, as well as more fractious, more multiplicitous, and unpredictable than symbolic meanings...[they are] a problem or question emergent in disparate scenes and incommensurate forms and registers; a tangle of potential connections" (3-4). As such, for the purposes of this project, there can be no singular definition of what "shame" means, of what it means to feel shame, to be "ashamed," or to be "shamed."

Shame is always contextual and thus relational, but always embodied. Because anything can cause shame—a look, a word, a snub—shame must be found in its effects. Because the affect of shame is visible through its bodily manifestations and in many instances is actually caused by particularities of the body coded as shameful, the recognition of it requires a reading of and interaction with the body. Shame points to the ways in which affect can be seen as a radical embodiment of identification; when "I" speak, I am not only "I," but the "we" of collective and relational affect. As Eve Sedgwick has argued in her efforts to center shame as a category of analysis for queer theory, shame has a particular ability to "make identities" through its social circulation. By making identity, shame also establishes affective connections and relations between others, not by a simple conversion of shame into pride, but a complex system of recognition and affirmation. On the political level, affect operates to motivate action and is the space where meaning adheres, as Sara Ahmed argues in her book *The Cultural Politics of Emotions*. Beliefs, being rooted in affect, are for Ahmed located in the

relationship among and between bodies: “Emotions are relational: they involve (re) actions or relations of ‘towardness’ or ‘awayness’ in relation to...objects” (8). The bodily and circulatory nature of affect is, for the purposes of this project, what makes it useful as a political and analytical tool. If affect can be used to motivate subjects politically and is also radically embodied, then the acknowledgement of embodied particularity in the political sphere can lead to more just power relations.<sup>11</sup> The abstraction of the citizen body within official discourse and the naturalization of that body as white, male, heterosexual, privileged *a priori* subject must be recognized so that it can be undermined. The body must be understood as a production of discourse and history and contextualized within its relationships to material power. It is my argument that by focusing our analysis on alternative histories of affect as embodied, we can begin to see how the body is situated in relationship to institutional forces. When affect moves between subjects, then perhaps those institutions of domination and oppression that exist in the political sphere can be undermined in a significant way. For example, “sex panics,” as they have been named by Gayle Rubin and others, often politicize and move conservative factions and the state against sexual minorities. Sex panics therefore shame certain bodies and practices in order to consolidate the moral “rightness” of other bodies and practices, to consolidate which bodies matter. These circumstances are obvious examples of a negative emotion mobilizing public feeling to act in political ways, and

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<sup>11</sup> In my conclusion I will attempt to lay out some ways I think these just power relations might be brought about. At this point, I will state that the emotions that tend to be politicized are mostly negative—on both the right and the left—and I am interested in how the politicization of positive affects through queer discourse might work for social change.

most of our examples of how feeling operates publicly in American Culture are similarly negative as they are most often associated with fervent disavowal of an othered group. However, as I illustrate in my third chapter about caregiving for strangers in the context of the AIDS crisis, which itself caused a kind of sex panic, emphasizing the process of care for a diseased body and cultivating intimacy there among strangers would perhaps lead to new ways of understanding the relationship between emotional rhetoric and politics.

It is my argument that the bodily affect of shame can and should be found in an “archive of feeling” which does not fill in the gaps of official discourse, but actively resists that discourse and attempts new strategies for political and social belonging. The feeling of “shame” in this dissertation is tied to gender, to sexuality, and to race in a myriad of intersecting and sometimes antagonistic ways. In this project, I hope to show how affect and relation within an archive of feelings produce new social relations through what Carolyn Dinshaw has argued is a “queer touch” of the past and the present.<sup>12</sup> The archive constructed in this project is made up of texts that themselves come up next to and push against the past in queer touches that seek to reformulate official discourse—the texts discussed in this project contain within them an archival impulse unto themselves, an impulse which results in the reproduction of fictional materials as a place where anxieties about the body and shame are manifest but resisted by the narrators’ and characters’ own testimonies of bodily shame. This impulse toward collecting and pushing back against official histories is a kind of research practice that

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<sup>12</sup> See Dinshaw, Carolyn. *Getting Medieval: Sexualities and Communities, Pre- and Postmodern.*

insists on the body and it is the impulse that motivates this project. As in my reading of Katherine Dunn's *Geek Love*, the contiguous reproduction of histories—one sanctioned, the other shameful—serves to draw attention to bodies and the flattening of difference that occurs at their excision and oppression.

Finally, this dissertation seeks to interrogate the archive of “queer theory” as a discipline and the archive(s) of texts and feelings it constructs. As Dinshaw articulates, when one compiles a critical book or a critical archive, a queer touch and relation is made. It is my argument that the relational touch made by these constructions is not only reproductive of a past and a present, but also imagines queer futures.<sup>13</sup> Judith Halberstam has characterized the “traditional” queer canon in the following way:

The gay male archive—because it is limited to a short list of favored canonical writers—

is also bound by a particular range of affective responses. And so fatigue, ennui, boredom, indifference, ironic distancing, indirectness, arch dismissal, insincerity, and camp make up what Ann Cvetkovich has called “an archive of feelings” associated with this form of antisocial theory. This canon occludes another suite of affectivities associated, again, with another kind of politics and a different form of negativity. In this other archive, we can identify, for example, rage, rudeness, anger, spite, impatience, intensity, mania, sincerity, earnestness, overinvestment, incivility, and brutal honesty. The first archive is a camp archive, a repertoire of formalized and often formulaic responses to the banality

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<sup>13</sup> This is the case, as I argue in my first chapter, even for those theorists who advocate for negative or antirelational methods of queerness.



of straight culture and the repetitiveness and unimaginativeness of heteronormativity. The second archive, however, is far more in keeping with the undisciplined kinds of responses that Bersani at least seems to associate with sex and queer culture, and it is here that the promise of self-shattering, loss of mastery and meaning, unregulated speech, and desire is unloosed. (824)

This second archive, for Halberstam, does not reproduce the same structures of what might almost be called a *lack* of affect in the gay male canon traditionally associated with the negativity of queerness. The second archive instead represents affective violence and loss at the injustices of queer life. While I think Halberstam and others—Heather Love in her work on loss is one example—have brilliantly expanded, often through the categories of gender identification and race, the range of emotions associated with queerness, these emotions still run to and often result in the negative. Work on loss, anger, and rage is crucial to an understanding of queer life and history, as well as the presences of queerness in the archive. However, the production of negative emotions through the critical construction of queer archives is also in danger of participation in the reproduction of negativity in the present and the future. While these emotions are indeed structuring to queerness itself, might it not also be time for a consideration of how

negative affects such as shame might turn to a politicization of something like love or intimacy?<sup>14</sup>

Attention to shame in the archive of queer feeling violates the boundaries of the body and exceeds the archive. The texts analyzed in this dissertation and textual archives they enact through their form of collecting, as well as the process of archiving and theorizing performed by me in the writing of this dissertation, work through the feeling of shame at the same time that they resist and push back against those institutions that produce shame. If to shame is a feeling that results from being unrecognized and manifests itself in the body, it is also that body which is seen and gives testimony. Thus, within shame there is attention to loss, rage, indifference, violence and all of the other emotions that accompany queerness within the archive, but shame, in demanding recognition and perhaps reciprocation, also makes a place for the circulation of those affects alongside love, intimacy, and belonging. Shame as an affect resists the binarizations of positive/negative, past/future, inside/outside, public/private. Shame is locatable in the archive, in these texts, and in the archives of these texts through Foucault's sense of the genealogy. As a genealogy of shame, the archive-building function of this project is mostly in the present and the past tenses of the novels and films analyzed here. Foucault argues that the construction of genealogy "is to identify the accidents, the minute deviations—or conversely, the complete reversals—the errors,

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<sup>14</sup> Other scholars such as Lauren Berlant have analyzed how intimacy works in the public sphere to rehearse emotions associated with disenfranchisement from citizenship. However, I think that a broader and more nuanced understanding of how intimacy might work relationally—not just publicly, but in "private"—would resist the valences of "feminization" that seem negatively, if implicitly, associated with intimacy in even the best queer scholarship.

the false appraisals, and the faulty calculations that gave birth to those things that continue to exist and have value for us; it is to discover that truth or being does not lie at the root of what we know and what we are, but the exteriority of accidents” (81). Both shame and the affects it activates in these texts are most often the result of “mistakes”—mistakes of birth, of gender, of sexuality, of class, of race, mistakes of being something other than “normal”—and in these experiences the values of that “normal” historical teleology are challenged and displaced. The archive of shameful feelings and its concomitant affects in the chapters that follow seeks to “expose a body totally imprinted by history and the process of history’s destruction of the body” (Foucault 83).

### **Building Alternative Archives: The Scope of the Project**

In Chapter I, “Jamie Leigh Jones, Narratives of Incest, and the Sexual State of Exception,” I have brought together narratives of father-daughter incest—fiction and non-fiction—together with a discussion of the Jamie Leigh Jones court case against Halliburton. I bring these “texts” together in order to demonstrate the underlying constitutive factor in the relationship of women to the state—a relationship that is predicated on the structure of paternal incest. This relationship puts women as a group in a queer relationship to the state through what I call the “sexual state of exception” where their bodies and their lives exist outside the law, even when those laws seemingly exist for them. Surveillance of women is produced by laws that intend to protect them, and more often than not those laws actually prevent women from seeking justice and

having their stories heard. As in the case of Jamie Leigh Jones, what is actually produced by these laws is a silence for women imposed by laws that would seemingly make space for their testimony. Thus, I argue that women—in having their sexual and gendered experiences silenced by the machinations of patriarchal law—exist in a permanent “sexual state of exception” that positions them, through the excess of their embodiment, in a queer position in regard to the state. One facet of their embodiment that particularly marks them as queer is their reproductive potential. Though reproductivity and investment in the future have been positioned as antithetical to queer concerns and politics, particularly in the theoretical texts of “queer negativity” such as Lee Edelman’s *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive*, this positioning of reproductivity creates a false political antagonism between queer concerns and those of women.

I argue in this chapter for a new understanding of reproductivity and reproductive potential as queer in my discussion of the Jones case, Sapphire’s novel *Push*, Dorothy Allison’s *Bastard Out of Carolina*, and her memoir *Two or Three Things I Know For Sure*. I discuss the Jones legal proceedings in order to establish a patriarchal relationship of women to the state that places them outside the law in a permanent sexual state of exception. When Jones attempted to use laws—sexual harassment and assault laws—that were seemingly designed to protect her, those laws were placed in direct conflict with concerns of the national security state. Thus, not only were Jones’s concerns subordinated to those of the military and the state, but the laws that were seemingly designed to protect her actually exposed her to sexual surveillance and practices of

sexual shaming. The same structural relationship to the state can be found in Sapphire's novel *Push* where the main character, a victim of incest, is subject to the constant surveillance of a state that needs her to construct itself as white and moral; yet that surveillance exposes her to shame and negative state interventions that seek to categorize her as "Other." In *Bastard Out of Carolina*, Bone's family as the underclass are put in a similar position as Precious to the state, where their lives are the subject of speculation and ridicule. The incestuous relationship of Bone to her father and Allison to hers demonstrate a lack of feminine power in relationship to the father and to the law, which operates through the father. In all of these texts, incest is used to produce shame about the body and sexuality through surveillance, which closes off the future for these women. Thus, in attempting to establish a future through the potentiality of the body and through the inclusion of the body in an archive that demonstrates the painful and shameful feelings associated with sexual violence, women are able to enact moments of protest, or "diva citizenship," that can undermine narratives of patriarchal state violence and the sexual state of exception. By understanding women and their reproductive capacities as queer, a politics can be established that includes a future for all those who exist outside the law through their queerness.

Chapter II, "Resisting Normalization: Radical Privacy in *The L Word* and *Middlesex*," builds on the first chapter's discussion of queerness as it exists outside the law and extends it to a discussion of privacy in relationship to gender non-conforming bodies. In this chapter, I argue that discussions of privacy and display within queer theory have neglected to understand the ways that privacy can be radical for those with

bodies that exist already outside the structures of the law and thus whose relationship to privacy would not be juridical. I interrogate discussions of the family and privacy within queer discourse in theoretical texts such as Warner's *The Trouble with Normal*, which attempts to position marriage, the family, and privacy as outside a queer political scope, and in right-wing discourses that seek to limit the rights of family to the heterosexual in order to argue that both of these discourses demonstrate an anxiety about penetration and thus about feminization. I argue that privacy and the family are feminized but that this feminization can make way for a nuanced discussion of privacy and gendered violence that is associated with shame about the body. Though arguments such as Warner's are compelling when it comes to a denaturalization of heterosexual family life, I want to ask what exactly is accomplished in terms of the systematic oppression of queer bodies by "going public." I want to nuance his argument with a conception of public-privacy that is negotiated on a local, familial, and community scale. This public-privacy pays attention to the affective needs and desires of the queer body and negotiates a political relationship to sex within the sphere of the family and the community. In this relationship, I argue, there is a radical relationship to privacy because it obscures the question of penetration and who is being feminized, thus undermining the shame traditionally associated with that position and opening up new kinds of familial and social formations that are not controlled by gendered oppressions.

In my discussion of *The L Word*, I critique the political script of the show that insists on a migration from the rural to the urban, from the family to the public, and insists on a clear definition of "lesbian" as unproblematically female, well-educated, and

economically solvent. The transgender character of Max/Moira presents a challenge to this narrative in her refusal of the aesthetic and economic codes of the other lesbians on the show. The narrative of political and social migration that positions the Midwest and the family as “backwards” and positions the gender non-conforming as somehow regressive is part of a political script that attempts to undermine what is perceived as “traditional” family values. However, the character of Max/Moira resists the impulse to publicize his sexual orientation and sex life, which enacts a challenge to perceived sexual codes and anxiety about who is the “girl” in his relationships, thus making a space for a challenge to the script of migration that seems to be mandatory for entrance into the community of lesbians on the show. I discuss the show alongside Jeffrey Eugenides’s Pulitzer prize-winning novel, *Middlesex*, which also begins in the Midwest and ends in the locus of the “traditional” family. Like Max/Moira, the main character of the novel Cal/Callie resists a script of migration from the Midwest to the coast, from the family to an urban community, and from one gender non-conforming body to one with a fixed sex and gender. Cal’s relationship with his girlfriend Julie remains “in the dark” in order to resist categorization and thus oppressive sexual surveillance. I argue that these two texts present a view of private sexual relationships that exist outside the law and are therefore not subject to the same kinds of juridical privacy that scholars like Warner and Berlant have argued against, but rather can enact a radical public-privacy through their affective relationships with others. In making the body present, but not displaying it or divulging the details of the sex act, and aligning it with queer affective relationships, I

argue that privacy can be a guard against sexual shaming that occurs when trying to fit into a “naturalized” script—queer or straight.

Chapter III begins in a place that is seemingly always constructed as private and inherently resistant to the machinations of state and legal intervention—the sickbed and the deathbed. This chapter, “In Sickness and Death: HIV, Viral Infection, and the Citizen Body” examines narratives of the diseased body produced by the HIV/AIDS crisis. HIV/AIDS provided for the state a particular moment in which to delineate whose lives counted and whose did not by intervening in medical research and condemning those whose bodies were seen to be visibly shamed by the disease and by homosexual “lifestyles.” Thus, HIV/AIDS is cast outside the purview of official citizenship, as an illness which is always “over there,” away from the mainstream of American life. The diseased body comes to occupy in peculiar ways a relationship to the national body, a national body that perceives an internal threat and seeks to intervene in that threat by legislating and surveilling the medical decisions and private lives of those infected with HIV/AIDS. I examine the film *Philadelphia* and Tony Kushner’s play *Angels in America*, which stand as examples of the few “mainstream” texts to shed light on or personalize the AIDS crises and to talk back to insidious right-wing discourses of containment and extermination. I argue that these texts illustrate the way that the AIDS patient has been excised from the public sphere and yet they also attempt to reestablish him as citizen who is integral to state and social life despite his disease. These texts reestablish masculine rights to citizenship in spite of the diseased body by returning them to their proper role and removing state intervention from the supposedly private



aspects of their lives. Unlike in the discussions in my second chapter, privacy here *is* juridical and repositions masculine citizenship as a condition of private life. Though many queer theorists and gay male activists have done excellent work in arguing for research and treatment for victims of HIV/AIDS, these narratives have sought to restore male rights of abstract citizenship through narratives of “dignity” in sickness and death.

In juxtaposition with these narratives are the ways the bodies of women as caregivers and as people infected with the disease become excised from political discussions of HIV/AIDS in an attempt to reintegrate the gay male body as citizen. Furthermore, the barebacking community as sexual minority also operates in what I will argue is a feminized position to the masculine rhetoric of citizenship that reintegrates the male citizen-subject into the state. I analyze a novelized memoir of a female caregiver whose body as caretaker and activist is eliminated from the political scene by texts like *Philadelphia* and *Angels in America*—their struggle often subordinated even in the narrative scene. Rebecca Brown’s *Hospital Time* acknowledges and is written by a woman who figures as caregiver and this acknowledges the importance of her participation in the movement, but not necessarily the labor of her body or women’s presence as patients with the disease.<sup>15</sup> I also analyze Tim Dean’s book *Unlimited Intimacy: Notes on the Subculture of Barebacking*, which, while it is largely a theoretical text, operates in some ways as a memoir and archive of a movement and a community. These texts present an archival account of the diseased body and the emotional toil of HIV/AIDS and caregiving, and yet also point to the problem of formulating theoretical

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<sup>15</sup> *The Gifts of the Body* is a novel, but is written in the style of the memoir of an unnamed female healthcare worker.

and political interventions along lines of gender or race as antagonistic to sexual orientation, which is often problematically the only category of analysis in the discourse about HIV/AIDS. There is therefore an erasure of the female body and the barebacker on the right, where anti-gay rhetoric really only deals with preventing male homosexual sex, and in left-wing gay rights discourses which seek to reintegrate the gay white male body into the public sphere of citizenship by protecting his private “dignity” from state intervention, a dignity that is upheld through the labor of female caregivers and the invisibility of women with the disease. Despite the rapidly growing populations of women and people of color who are being infected with HIV/AIDS, the face of “recovery” or “living with” the disease still remains white and male. Though the body is broken down and he is temporarily “expelled” from the so-called mainstream public sphere, through narratives of respectability, however, the white male body is recentered and is reconfigured as rightful citizen. Both the impulse to rage and the impulse to argue for care exist simultaneously, and though care is necessary and does not necessarily require assimilation, it nonetheless assimilates the disease of the body (which must be ‘cured’) into the context of whiteness and maleness. This chapter, therefore, reexamines these narratives of disease and care and foregrounds the bodies and labor that go unnoticed in HIV/AIDS discourse on the left and the right through the gendered practices of caregiving and barebacking. Though I by no means want to undermine the struggle for medical care and legal rights by gay men, I want to nuance these discussions with attention to the bodies of women, people of color, and “sexual minorities” upon whom arguments for citizenship rest. In this chapter I establish an archive of the guilt,

shame, and sorrowful feelings associated with the HIV/AIDS crisis and attempt to illustrate how those feelings are played out on the body through narratives of sickness. I argue for new modes of political intervention that position the gay male body alongside these “other” bodies, and thus use their queer relationships to the state and the “shame” of their bodies to conceptualize new political relations to the citizen and to disease.

Finally, in my conclusion chapter I connect the disparate ideas and locations of shame discussed in the chapters above in order to outline some potential counternarratives to the problems of political disenfranchisement exemplified by the texts and events discussed, as well as evidenced in daily political life for so many Americans. While I have argued that shame cannot operate coherently across situations, relationships, and categories, in the conclusion I show how shame’s status as an “ordinary affect” is essential to constructing an affective politics. As theorists of affect such as Sara Ahmed and Janice M. Irvine have illustrated, “emotions braid through and legitimize structures of domination” (Irvine 2). But if emotions, and particularly emotions about real bodies, move through and often motivate political action in the service of oppression, they can also be used to legitimize the dismantling of structures of domination. It is my argument that attention to political subjects who are shamed by institutions and the state can result in an acknowledgment of the need for an embodied citizenship that pays attention to the materiality of oppression and domination in contemporary American culture. The conclusion discusses contemporary examples of the way that emotion and emotional rhetoric are used negatively—for example in patriotic militia movements that position themselves in direct opposition to the very

bodies I call for analysis of here—to further the ends of oppression, but also focuses on how emotional rhetoric and affective relations as they are articulated through the body, if embraced and acknowledged, can be used towards progressive feminist and queer ends.

The ultimate goal of this dissertation is to intervene in academic and political discourses about gender, queerness, the body, and the citizen in ways that undermine the negative stigma of the “feminization” of certain bodies and practices in the political sphere. Through analysis of how both disembodiment and hyperembodiment work to produce otherness cast as feminine on both ends of the political spectrum, I hope that this project intervenes for the queerness of the feminized body in relationship to the archive, the state, and the state’s archives of official history and discourse. The citation of Derrida that is the epigraph to this essay, “Order is no longer assured,” takes on a new meaning, for when one understands “archive fever” not as the destructive drive contained within, but the fever of creative understandings of history and discourse, what emerges is a disorder of binaries and hierarchies. As stated previously, this is not a project of recovery, but of creation, production, and reproduction. The labor of this project and the texts contained within it are not to establish the legitimacy of feminized and queer bodies and practices in official history, but to forge new possibilities through critical attention to affect and the body in the construction of discourse.

## CHAPTER II

JAMIE LEIGH JONES, NARRATIVES OF INCEST, AND THE SEXUAL STATE OF  
EXCEPTION

*Some people tell a story 'n it don't make sense or be true. But I'm gonna try to make sense and tell the truth, else what's the fucking use? Ain' enough lies and shit out there already?*

-Claireece Precious Jones, *Push: A Novel*

*Inherent in our new analysis must be a commitment to left analysis and left politics. [...] Proceeding from the starting point of a system-based left analysis, strategies built upon the possibility of incorporation and assimilation are exposed as simply expanding or making accessible the status quo for more privileged members of marginal groups, while the most vulnerable in our communities continue to be stigmatized and oppressed.*

-Cathy Cohen, "Punks, Bulldaggers, and Welfare Queens: The Radical Potential of Queer Politics?"

In 2001, the passage of the USA Patriot Act (an acronym for the more cumbersome but arguably more humorous Uniting and Strengthening America by Providing Appropriate Tools Required to Intercept and Obstruct Terrorism Act), created new laws and procedures for apprehending citizens and non-citizens alike for crimes against the United States. The unprecedented expansion of government power enacted by this legislation put a new emphasis on the kinds of speech that were appropriate for true "patriots" in this country in the wake of the 9/11 terrorist attacks. One's speech could be monitored (in many cases without a warrant) in any form of communication from letters to email to offhand comments. An individual could always be suspected, under the terminology associated with this act, of not being a loyal citizen, not just through action against the state, but through speech. The narrative of "patriotism" produced by this bill is part of an ongoing tradition in the United States of linking love

of country and citizenship to silence and surveillance, evidenced not only by the Patriot Act but by our country's history of McCarthyism, internment, and other measures that manufacture political consent. In this sense, one of the defining features of contemporary democratic participation appears to be silence imposed by the absence of a counter narrative to state power and violence.

I intend to argue that silence, which is produced through surveillance of the body, is the primary political condition for women in the United States. Though something like the Patriot Act seems as if it would equally silence men and women in its increase of surveillance, one need only look at the refusal to hear cases of sexual assault believed to have occurred under the banner of private military contractors such as Haliburton, so recently discussed in the Jamie Leigh Jones case and the Franken amendment, to understand that this silence is heavily gendered. The silence produced by "national security" directly led to a sexualized silence in the case of Jamie Leigh Jones and for so many of the women, American and otherwise, in Iraq and Afghanistan who have suffered rape and assault at the hands of American "patriots." The mandatory silence imposed on Jones and the other women who have come forward claiming they were assaulted sets up the concerns of women in direct opposition to those of the state and therefore it enacts legislative and judicial measures to police their bodies and their sexuality.

The gendered and sexualized silence produced by surveillance of the female body through the policing of sexuality positions all women, through their embodiment, in a non-normative position to the state. I will argue that the position of women in

relationship to the state is inherently queer, no matter their stated sexual orientation or the sexual acts in which they engage.<sup>16</sup> “Heteronormativity” is a concept, therefore, not associated with the heterosexual sex act, but is intersectional with other kinds of state oppressions—sexism, racism, classism—in such a way that privileges maleness and whiteness. As Julian B. Carter theorizes in her book on the co-constructedness of whiteness and heterosexuality, “being one of the normal people means being defined by reference to what you already are and so slides easily into the (empirically inaccurate) conviction that one’s own position is simply natural and devoid of political meaning. Normality therefore implies a limited and ideologically corrupt perspective” (22). It is in the intersection of heterosexuality with whiteness, and in my argument maleness and middle class economic status, that the concept of “heteronormativity” emerges. What is outside of “heteronormativity” in this sense is all sexual activity and expression that does not conform to state-sanctioned ideologies of the normative. As Cathy Cohen illustrates, queer can be constructed as a term to describe all of those “who embody sustained and multisited resistance to systems (based on dominant constructions of race and gender) that seek to normalize our sexuality, exploit our labor, and constrain our visibility” (440). It is just this position that I argue women as a group occupy in relationship to the state. The heteronormative is invested in the reproductive and the heterosexual, but heteronormativity is also a question of privileges and benefits. Queerness inheres in relationship to institutions and in a lack of institutional power. Heteronormativity is

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<sup>16</sup> I do not mean to insinuate that all women perceive themselves as queer or that they work towards queer political ends, or even that they cannot participate in the silencing of queers. I am instead arguing that the relationship of women as a group to the state is a queer relationship.

associated with privilege, and within some queer theoretical frameworks, that privilege has been collapsed into the heterosexual sex act (or the assumption of it) and the capacity (or instance) of reproductivity.<sup>17</sup> However, this formulation cannot fully account for women in their relationships to heterosexuality as heterosexuality is not a system that is designed to privilege them. One must ask, then, to what end does a woman's reproductivity benefit her? To what end does her participation in the heterosexual sex act serve her? In this sense, as feminists have been arguing since the first wave, heterosexual marriage and reproduction are not really "for" straight women either. Queerness for women occurs not only on the individual level of their specific relationships and practices but inheres for women as a class in their disenfranchisement from the state and institutional power precisely through those "privileges" of heterosexuality. I do not mean to say that the specific oppressions associated with so-called "deviant" same-sex sexuality are not in and of themselves worthy of analysis. The purpose of this project, however, is to extend the definition of queer beyond the sex act itself into an analysis of power differentials in relationship to the state.<sup>18</sup> One queer activist in the anonymous publication *Queers Read This* argued that straight people own

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<sup>17</sup> Though I think many queer theorists intend for the heterosexual sex act to only stand in for heteronormativity's power, in positing specifically queer sex acts as the "opposite" of heteronormativity, theorists such as Lauren Berlant, Michael Warner, Lee Edelman, and Leo Bersani make the mistake of reinforcing the idea that heteronormativity is about sexual practices at all. In fact, heteronormativity covers over the multitude of sexual practices that occur within "straight" sex and produces ideological silences about privilege that cannot be undone by simply publicizing certain queer sex acts or rejecting reproductivity. Heteronormativity-as-heterosexuality does not do justice to the myriad of ways that heteronormativity seeks to maintain the oppression of women of all sexual orientations and all people of color.

<sup>18</sup> Cathy Cohen has been particularly influential to my thinking on this topic, as has José Esteban Muñoz.



the world because they can “fuck without fear.” But what does it mean in a culture that places the female body under constant surveillance to “fuck without fear”? Can any woman “fuck without fear”? Policing the sexuality of women by engendering fear and shame is, I argue, an essential part of the state’s operation and this policing produces what I will discuss as the “sexual state of exception.”<sup>19</sup> Understanding the machinations of the sexual state of exception and its relationship to reproduction and the female body is essential to a progressive feminist and queer politics of feeling. Furthermore, in understanding women as queer in their relation to the state, I also argue that the politics and theory that must account for them is therefore a queer politics. The recent trend of advocating a queer politics of negativity is problematic for ensuring that women’s bodies are present on the political and social scene. I argue that a politics of queer negativity cannot fully account for how women are constructed as non-citizens precisely because of the ways in which their potential for reproductivity can undermine state-sanctioned narratives of ideal citizenship.

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<sup>19</sup> Jasbir K. Puar has discussed American (and queer) sexual exceptionalism, which allows U.S. citizens to be seen as “sexually exceptional” in their “management of life in regard to a *people*” which is set up in direct opposition to the sexual and gendered identities of an Arab-Muslim other. Though both Puar and I are influenced by Agamben’s theory of the state of exception and I am compelled and influenced by Puar’s understanding of the relationship between sexuality, political power, and U.S. exceptionalism, my term “the sexual state of exception” should not, as we shall see, be conflated with her very useful theoretical term.

## The Future is Whose Stuff?

In his seminal book *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive*, Lee Edelman argues that queerness is “intent on the end, not the ends, of the social” and that it “insists that the drive toward that end, which liberalism refuses to imagine, can never be excluded from the structuring fantasy of the social itself” (28).<sup>20</sup> In other words, since Edelman sees that the death drive is always already projected onto queers, the purpose of queer theory and politics should not be to undo that projection or resituate queerness in a new relationship to the social but to embrace its position as sociality’s limits. In his emphasis on the death already associated with queerness, he therefore cogently points to the problems for queers of attempting to negotiate a culture centered on futurity and the Child as emblem for the nation’s welfare. As Lauren Berlant points out, the fetal/infantile citizen of the present national imaginary is “a *stand-in* for a complicated and contradictory set of anxieties and desires about national identity.” Further, “the abstract image of the future generated by the national culture machine also stands in for a crisis in the present: what gets consolidated now as the future modal citizen provides an alibi or an inspiration for the moralized political rhetorics of the present and for reactionary legislative and juridical practice” (6). What Berlant and Edelman rightly point out when they criticize the image of the future figured in the national fantasy is

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<sup>20</sup> I use the term “seminal” intentionally as a sort of rejoinder to Edelman’s anti-future polemic. The fact that his book has given “birth” as it were to so many new manifestations of queer politics is indicative of the theoretical erasure it is required to make in its own participation in knowledge reproductions, a point I will address later in this chapter.

that the child, or infantilized citizen, makes possible the hysteria associated with state-sponsored policies that punish those whose sexuality is nonnormative. However, I, along with Cathy Cohen, would add that there are nonnormative versions of sexuality that are in fact procreative—as is the case of the welfare mother—whose practitioners come under attack through this heteronormative image of futurity, which is centered on the white, middle-class, nuclear family. Furthermore, I would argue that additional nuance must be added to the image of futurity itself. When Edelman argues that we embrace queer negativity and “Fuck the social order and the Child in whose name we’re collectively terrorized” (29), we must remember that there is a child (and a woman) who is always already being fucked, and she is not the white, middle-class product of heteronormativity constructed in the national fantasy.

It is through an exploration of narratives of women who are violently “fucked” in both the political and literal sense by the state and female children who are victims of incest that I hope to draw some conclusions about futurity and the queerness of women’s relationship to power and the state. This Child, the child of incest, calls queer negativity and a rejection of futurity into question because she already has no future and her reinvestment in the system of reproductivity, especially through reproduction with her father, only draws her farther away from what Edelman sees as the benefits of “pro-natalism”: “It’s registered in the universal confirmation of one’s standing as an adult and in the accrual of social capital that allows one a stake in the only future’s market that ever really counts” (156-7). The women in the narratives I explore in this chapter are never allowed “standing as an adult” or the “accrual of social capital” because their

bodies are always invisible even from the scene of procreation, and their labor (both literal and figurative) is in service of a future that cannot imagine them—that of white male capitalist imperialist patriarchy. The child who is a victim of incest and the woman she grows up to become if she is allowed to live are damaged precisely by heteronormativity in its collapsing of whiteness, the nuclear heterosexual family unit, middle class economic status, and Christianity into the ideal citizen. This child does not benefit from the oppositional politics of queer negativity precisely because society already imagines her into oblivion. The argument for her future and the future of women’s gendered bodies is not to perpetuate the system of heteronormativity that Edelman imagines is invested in reproductive futurism, but is to instead recognize the gendered bodies of those whose queerness rests precisely in their ability to reproduce and thus “fuck the social order” by their very presence.<sup>21</sup>

In this chapter I will not, however, be arguing that women should apply to the state for *protection* from sexual surveillance, silence, shame, and assault, but instead I

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<sup>21</sup> Edelman in some ways foresees the critique I will make in this chapter. Resistance to his theory, he claims, “will assail the bourgeois privilege (variously described, in identitarian terms, as “white,” “middle-class,” “academic,” or most tellingly, “gay male”) by which some will allege my argument here is determined” (157). His lack of sympathy for this objection aside, it is nonetheless one I intend to make. That his forty or more photographs in the book as well as the archive he constructs consist solely of white people is, I think, telling of the limits of his theory (a point also made by Judith Halberstam and José Esteban Muñoz at an MLA roundtable discussion). I question it not simply because it seems to me bourgeois or ahistorical, but because it performs yet another theoretical erasure of gender and race that is so characteristic of the academy when it is forced to acknowledge otherness. Edelman’s dismissal of this elision as coincidence or as being due to the necessity of “the parsing of the category to identify their differences” aside, his theory in fact *does* rest on dismantling the fiction of the subject—a fantasy which I would argue women and other oppressed groups have not always had the luxury to imagine.

am interested in analyzing how power functions in the relationship between women and the state and how this analysis can lead to versions of politics that are not simply about legislative or juridical power. In fact, I would argue that the laws themselves produce silence about incest that serves to reinforce sexist, racist, and classist versions of citizenship since even child protection laws, as Gillian Harkins argues, are not enforced in the presence of compelling narrative or even empirical proof in many cases. Though my analysis focuses on the realms of the familial and the political—and the places where those two categories are intertwined—I see no solution to these problems in appeals to the law. Rather, this chapter will posit an affective politics that is not related to juridical forms of power, but relies upon a reformulation of the national imaginary through mutual recognition and dialectical citizenship.

Like rape and the secrecy and shame associated with it, incest is one of the primary technologies of surveillance that produces this sexualized silence for women—a technology that is intimately tied to political conscription into state-sanctioned narratives of democratic citizenship and father-love. Incest might be understood as the ultimate form of sexual silencing because not only does the father in the incest narrative act as a proxy in many of these texts for all state institutions, but he also closes off futurity for the daughter.<sup>22</sup> Incest, in its narrative manifestation, is more than just a metaphorical trope of patriarchal control—it represents patriarchal anxieties about who controls the

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<sup>22</sup> By “futurity” here I mean a future life but also a reproductive future, but I do not see futurity as necessarily invested with the negative attributes that Edelman ascribes to it. Thus, when I argue that incest “closes off futurity” I am arguing that this closure is a result of an investment in patriarchy, racism, and heteronormativity that specifically seeks to maintain collective control of female bodies and their capacity to reproduce.

future through sexual access to the bodies of female children. Incest is on the theoretical level the root of all incidences of sexual assault and it underscores all acts of sexual violence because of the desire of the perpetrator to control not only the body, but also the mind of the victim in order to control her future—to dominate her interactions with the world. Under patriarchy, male-on-female sexual violence can be psychoanalytically tied to the father's desire to possess the daughter. Though Freud's Oedipal paradigm would cast desire wholly on the side of the daughter who would then learn to transfer her desire to another appropriate male figure, I would argue that the father equally (if not more so) desires to possess and control the daughter. The father-daughter Oedipal paradigm is less an inherent structure of the mind than it is a social structure under patriarchy. The daughter does desire a relationship with the father because he holds power; the father desires the daughter because he desires power over her and he desires to absorb the reproductive power of her body. The father must possess other daughter figures and must allow his daughter to be possessed by other "fathers."

Further, the violation of the incest prohibition in the home produces a gendered silence, as the "privacy" of the modern home is a protection for the male patriarch.<sup>23</sup> Thus, the privacy of the modern home that is afforded by heterosexual privilege is not a protection of the actual sex acts of heterosexuals so much as it is a way for gendered power differentials that exist at the state level to play out in the microcosm of the family unit and be sanctioned by legislative and judicial policy. Evidence of the relationship among silence, patriarchy, and power can be found in the fact that the credibility of

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<sup>23</sup> See: Nelson, Deborah D. *Pursuing Privacy in Cold War America*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2002. Print.

incest narratives has come under attack from reviewers, academics, and mental health professionals in recent years. In media ranging from *The New Republic* to the False Memory Foundation, the authenticity of incest narratives has been challenged and women have been repeatedly told to “hush up,” to keep their secrets, and by extension preserve the power of the father.<sup>24</sup> Thus, even among feminist literary critics there have been moves to “justify” the narrativization of sexual assault and to reinforce the credibility, innocence, and purity of its authors. In this chapter I make no such authentications or justifications because, as I will show, incest and sexual violence—real or imagined—are at the root of gendered and political relationships because the law of the father has thus far required no authentication or justification. Some memories of incest may in fact be “false memories,” but I would hesitate to declare that they are not “real.” Since the structure of male-female relationships is dominated by this paradigm, it does not seem at odds with my argument that even those who experience no physical assaults might feel its psychic effects. As to the subject of the daughter’s complicity and the subject of her “innocence,” I argue that we are all complicit in the pleasure of the rule of the state and the father, and that the political impact of the narratives discussed in this chapter is in the very exposure of that complicity and the contingency of terms like “innocence” upon the father’s law.

Silences similar to those produced by incest are also produced by other kinds of sexual assault as rape cases continually go unreported. I will argue that incest, as the primary paradigmatic structure for male-female sexual assault, is also the primary

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<sup>24</sup> Gillian Harkins has discussed this phenomenon at length in her book *Everybody’s Family Romance: Reading Incest in Neoliberal America*.

paradigmatic structure of the woman in relationship to the patriarchal state and to her meager ability to participate in state functions. The "father" at both the familial and the state level is always enacting his fantasies on a "daughter." This social father-daughter relationship, I argue, is at the root of gender relationships in the modern political structure of the United States. As such, the "father-daughter" relationship in the venue of the family mimics the relationship of women to the patriarchal state. The silence, therefore, produced by the shame of incest and of sexual assault more generally, is co-produced with the silence expected of women in the face of the state's requirement for "patriotism" which is a linguistic stand in for adherence to a white, male imperialist future.

Additionally, I intend to call attention to the way that the production of silence through surveillance is specifically tied to women's bodies and to the way that U.S. citizenship is constructed as an adherence to the power of whiteness, maleness, heterosexuality, Christianity, and the abstraction of these categories into an ideal citizen. The modern militia movements that have sprung up in the last decade and increased exponentially after the election of Barack Obama grasp hold of the idea that the abstract ideal citizen is under threat from the politically vulnerable subjects that do not embody this ideal. It is because women of any race (though race will also be a factor in this discussion) do not conform to this masculine, patriotic ideal that their silence is required. The women in the narratives I intend to discuss in this chapter, however, do not accept silence or the shame that produces it as their only potential political option. Through lesbianism, testimony, witnessing, writing, and communal living with



other women, the victims of incest in these stories produce a counternarrative not only to the father's control in the family, but to his control of the nation as well as the love of him that results in "patriotism."

### **Jamie Leigh Jones and the Enforced Silence of the Sexual State of Exception**

Jamie Leigh Jones was a 19-year-old employee of defense contractor Halliburton/KBR stationed in Iraq in 2005. Jones claimed that her supervisor, Eric Iler, forced her to exchange sexual favors for better assignments knowing that her mother was very ill, and that while she was transferred after reporting this to her superiors, the matter was swept under the rug and Iler was even allowed to put a bad recommendation in her file. Jones was then transferred in July of 2005 to Camp Hope in Iraq, where she shared living quarters with men, whom she reported as sexually harassing her and other female employees to her superiors and nothing was done. Jones then alleges that several male firefighters drugged her and gang raped her, leading to severe injuries and reconstructive surgery on her chest to repair her ruptured breast implants and torn pectoral muscles (Jones, et. al., Filing 7). Though Jamie initially reported her attack in 2005, it took the workings of her family as well as congressman to ensure her safe return from Iraq, and even then she found that in the fine print of her employment contract with Halliburton/KBR, she would have to settle her case in private arbitration, as Halliburton's status as a defense contractor prevented her from accusing her attackers in public, criminal court. As far as a private investigation by the company or the

Department of Defense is concerned, a rape kit with DNA samples was collected, but subsequently lost when handed to KBR officials: "KBR says it began an investigation but was 'instructed to cease by government authorities because they were assuming sole responsibility for the criminal investigations.' The Justice Department now says it can't comment on the case because of the ongoing proceedings" (*Dallas Morning News* 2007). Furthermore, despite repeated requests for information on this case from House Representatives and Senators in 2007, no satisfactory information was provided, and Jones had not been allowed her day in court.

Finally, in 2007, Jamie Leigh Jones filed a lawsuit in Beaumont, TX against Halliburton/KBR, detailing the assault and claiming that Halliburton/KBR as "parent" company had failed to protect her from sexual violence. Halliburton/KBR put forward the following partial list of affirmative defenses in this case: "Plaintiffs' claims are barred by the Defense Base Act, the Longshore Harbor Workers Compensation Act, and the War Hazards Compensation Act," "Plaintiffs' claims are barred because the alleged injuries to Plaintiff were incurred during combatant activities in time of war involving the United States military and defense contractors, and are therefore barred by 28 U.S.C. § 2680(j)," "Plaintiffs' claims are barred by the government contractor defense pursuant to the discretionary function exception under 28 U.S.C. § 2680(a)," "Plaintiffs' claims are barred because the alleged injuries to Plaintiff occurred on foreign soil as part of work for a defense contractor supporting the United States military, and is therefore barred by 28 U.S.C. § 2680(k)," and "Plaintiffs' injuries were caused while Plaintiff,

Jamie Jones, was intoxicated" (Jones, et. al, Filing 20).<sup>25</sup> In July of 2011, Jamie Leigh Jones lost her civil rape case against Halliburton and one of the men named as her attacker. Once again, a wide range of media outlets raised the issue of Jones's credibility along the lines of her "mental health," whether or not she was drunk at the time of the attack, and whether or not she was seen "flirting" with one of the men she has accused of assaulting her.<sup>26</sup> Furthermore, the news reports and statements made by public officials in her civil case that argue that this loss, if based on Jones's "lack of credibility," make all rape cases harder to prove only underscores the ways in which rape laws are not only not intended to protect women, but how the burden of proof in these cases or the discourse of "he said, she said," where "he said" is nearly always held up, produces silence and shame about sexual violence. Halliburton/KBR has consistently

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<sup>25</sup> The sections of the code to which this court case refers are Title 28, U.S.C.— which governs judicial proceedings and Section 1362(b) which covers claims against the U.S. It reads as follows: "Subject to the provisions of chapter 171 of this title, the district courts, together with the United States District Court for the District of the Canal Zone and the District Court of the Virgin Islands, shall have exclusive jurisdiction of civil actions on claims against the United States, for money damages, accruing on and after January 1, 1945, for injury or loss of property, or personal injury or death caused by the negligent or wrongful act or omission of any employee of the Government while acting within the scope of his office or employment, under circumstances where the United States, if a private person, would be liable to the claimant in accordance with the law of the place where the act or omission occurred." Section 2680 outlines exceptions to the preceding code. Those cited in Jamie Leigh Jones case are: "(a) Any claim based upon an act or omission of an employee of the Government, exercising due care, in the execution of a statute or regulation, whether or not such statute or regulation be valid, or based upon the exercise or performance or the failure to exercise or perform a discretionary function or duty on the part of a federal agency or an employee of the Government, whether or not the discretion involved be abused, (k) Any claim arising in a foreign country, (j) Any claim arising out of the combatant activities of the military or naval forces, or the Coast Guard, during time of war."

<sup>26</sup> See, for example, "Why Jamie Leigh Jones Lost Her Rape Case" in *Mother Jones*.

and publicly maintained that Jones's allegations are "unsubstantiated," such as her allegation that she was imprisoned in a shipping container, or, what Halliburton calls a "secure living trailer."<sup>27</sup> The Jamie Leigh Jones case sets in direct opposition a woman's right to give public testimony and seek justice against her attackers and the state's concerns about "national security" in a time of war, as well as highlights the problems associated with seeking justice in the legal system more generally.

What bearing, exactly, does Jamie Leigh Jones's gendered and sexualized silence have on national security? One might argue that Jamie Leigh Jones's rights to judicial recourse were suspended because of the "laws of war" in order to prevent criticism of the U.S. government when it requires special measures to fight its enemies. Jones, however, is a citizen of the United States, not an "enemy combatant," and it would seem that her assault does not undermine the alleged case of the United States against Iraq, but would rather single out individuals who were not suited to perform their duties abroad, thus reinforcing the United States' supposedly superior claims to democracy and freedom. In other words, it would seem *beneficial* to the Justice Department and to Halliburton under the "law of war" to remove other employees who could not maintain the standards of conduct appropriate to their situation and to preserve the integrity of Jones as an employee and citizen. This, however, was not the case. Giorgio Agamben has argued that the "law of war" is different from the "state of exception," in which the sovereign

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<sup>27</sup> See *Slate's* "Why is KBR So Afraid of Letting Jamie Leigh Jones Have Her Day in Court?" I do believe Jones's allegations and her story of her sexual assault, but I would also be quick to add, however, that what is as issue for my argument is the narrative(s) about sexual violence that emerge when women and their bodies are positioned in direct opposition to state interests.

can suspend the rule of law for the public good and whose "characteristic property is a (total or partial) suspension of the juridical order" (23). What Agamben concludes, significantly, is that the "state of exception" has become in modern Western governments a prolonged status that continually seeks to remove the individual rights and liberties of the citizen. On the Patriot Act, Agamben writes, "what is new about President Bush's order is that it radically erases any legal status of the individual, thus producing a legally unnameable and unclassifiable being" (3). In the case of Jamie Leigh Jones we can certainly see the workings of the "state of exception" which has removed her voice in order to privilege the voice of the state and the major corporations with which it contracts.<sup>28</sup> However, given that this is a case of sexual assault, I argue that we can extend Agamben's definition to include a "sexual state of exception" which is a much more enduring, insidious, and foundational condition for women in the United States. What interest, in any case, does the United States have in protecting its employees from accusations of specifically sexual crime?

Agamben views the state of exception as a legal gap in the juridical order. The state of exception occurs when a leader or group of leaders declares not only that there is

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<sup>28</sup> Jones has been given the opportunity to testify publicly through the passage of the Franken Amendment. I think it should be noted, however, that all of those Senators who voted against this amendment, which would bar private companies from settling claims of sexual assault outside the public's view by appealing to U.S. wartime provisions, were men. They were: Alexander (R-TN), Barrasso (R-WY), Bond (R-MO), Brownback (R-KS), Bunning (R-KY), Burr (R-NC), Chambliss (R-GA), Coburn (R-OK), Cochran (R-MS), Corker (R-TN), Cornyn (R-TX), Crapo (R-ID), DeMint (R-SC), Ensign (R-NV), Enzi (R-WY), Graham (R-SC), Gregg (R-NH), Inhofe (R-OK), Isakson (R-GA), Johanns (R-NE), Kyl (R-AZ), McCain (R-AZ), McConnell (R-KY), Risch (R-ID), Roberts (R-KS), Sessions (R-AL), Shelby (R-AL), Thune (R-SD), Vitter (R-LA), Wicker (R-MS).

an “emergency,” but also decide how that emergency should be handled. The state of exception is furthermore about the permanent control of biopower in the name of security through measures such as illegal detention and even fingerprinting. For the purposes of this chapter, the sexual state of exception assumes that women always already exist in the legal gap of the juridical order even prior to the political movement of Western governments after the Second World War towards the permanent “state of exception.” Though there are numerous laws that specifically concern women and their bodies—rape statutes, abortion laws, sexual harassment laws, etc.—these laws serve only to subsume the body of the woman into the function of state oppression. As the Jones case illustrates, women’s testimony about sexual assault is directly related to their perceived “credibility,” which is always already suspect *because they are women*. The laws, which ostensibly seek to protect them—as the “state of exception” in Agamben’s formation is intended to protect citizens from threats of security—actually undermine their ability to testify on their own behalf, and put on them the burden of sexual silence. The sexual state of exception, through the surveillance of the specifically female body, operates to maintain silence on issues like rape or incest that on the surface appear to be entirely within the juridical realm. As is the case with Jamie Leigh Jones, whether or not women are victims of sexual violence seems as if it would be of concern to a state that appears to be invested in the protection of women, as they are the “vessels” of future generations of workers, soldiers, and citizens.<sup>29</sup> However, what becomes clear in

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<sup>29</sup> Gillian Harkins describes the child protection laws that grew out of second wave feminism’s appeals to the state. These statutes leave “detection, verification, and prosecution at the discretion of various state and social actors” while at the same time

examining cases like that of Jones and narratives like those discussed in this chapter, is that sexual violence against women is by its nature extra-judicial in that to seek redress from the state for such crimes requires a narrativization of the act itself, a narrativization which is prevented by the imperative to silence imposed by surveillance and shame under the law of the father.<sup>30</sup> Thus, when women like Jamie Leigh Jones, Claireece Precious Jones in *Push: A Novel*, and Bone Boatwright in *Bastard Out of Carolina* attempt to give voice to their experiences, they come up against a system they understand to be both negligent of their well-being and overtly interested in the control of their bodies for state purposes.<sup>31</sup>

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“these statutes make it difficult to detect, verify, and prosecute sexual acts within the domestic household or family unit” (64-5). Paradoxically, appeal to the state for protection has resulted in a reinforcement of parental (paternal) rule. In my argument, this paradox occurs because of a sexualized silence that places women continuously outside of the juridical realm. Laws that appear to protect women often have the opposite effect because their ambiguity and appeal to the “authority” of disciplinary powers as they are coded through the father further places women under surveillance and make them the objects and subjects of shame.

<sup>30</sup> Several reports and cases of the rape of U.S. female soldiers by their male colleagues emerged as contemporaries of Jamie Leigh Jones. There are also numerous instances of rape of Iraqi and Afghani women, including the Mahmudiyah Killings, and those recently publicized by Wikileaks. What all of these cases highlight is the absolute disinterest of the state and its actors in protecting women from sexual violence.

<sup>31</sup> I do not mean to conflate rape and incest as acts or even to conflate their long term psychological effects, but instead I suggest that the rape of Jamie Leigh Jones, not by the actual perpetrators but by the state who ignored her is ideologically linked to the patriarchal right to incest. The failure of paternal state to “protect” Jones from sexual violence and to in fact inflict it upon her mirrors the relationship of Precious and Bone to their own fathers. The flagrant failure of the state to be genuinely interested in the welfare of its “daughters” illustrates that women are constantly under a “state of exception” in which the narrativization of sexual violence does not call into action the laws that are intended to protect or prosecute but instead returns shame and silence back to the daughter.

Because the state is both overtly interested in the surveillance and control of women's bodies and at the same time wholly disinterested in their welfare or in their enfranchisement as citizens, the survival of sexual violence and testimony must be seen as political. Rosaria Champagne claims:

In contrast to silence, politicizing a lived moment connects that experience to the social

orders of language, history, and critical theory, frames that make that experience material and recast men and women as political agents, not labels, tools, or victims. This does not mean that experiences only really happen if we have the language to name them, but rather that experiences have psychoanalytic and feminist meaning only when we can name them openly and “exchange” these meaning in an interpretive community. Politicizing incest makes personal healing contingent on progressive feminist change. (3)

The idea that healing is contingent on progressive feminist change is part of a feminist and queer commitment to left analysis and left politics. Politicizing incest and sexual violence does not mean that women should seek redress from the state for grievances because, as already demonstrated, the state's juridical system is plagued with tensions concerning women and their embodiment and women's embodiment is by nature extra-judicial because of the silence and shame that inhibit narrative and speech. Thus, when I claim that survivorship must be political, I do not mean that women should necessarily address their narratives to the courts, but rather to the “interpretive communities” about which Champagne speaks. What is important in these cases is not so much the laws—



which are ostensibly set up to “protect” the women and children of this nation and yet do not—but the national imaginary itself.

The child of the national imaginary that Lauren Berlant and Lee Edelman claim is the symbol for protectionism and the exclusion of certain sexual identities from the public sphere is not in fact the child who is being molested in *Push* or *Bastard Out of Carolina*, nor does she grow up to be the mother of that child of the national imaginary. Though *Push* and *Bastard Out of Carolina* are about female children who are survivors of incest, it is my claim that the father-daughter relationship in these texts is mirrored in the state’s relationship to its female subject as evidenced by the interactions of women with the state which are always a violation, and I intend to draw some theoretical conclusions from *Precious* and *Bone* about how women are socialized to interact with the father and the state that is intended to protect them. Thus in politicizing the survival of incest, this chapter seeks to politicize the narratives of all women in their queer relationships to the state; to encourage women not (only) to address the courts and the legislature, but to enact what Berlant calls “Diva Citizenship” which “takes on as a national project the need to redefine the scale, the volume, and the erotics of ‘what you can do for your country’” (224).

The diva citizen interrupts the national fantasies of maleness, whiteness, heterosexuality, and Christianity by calling attention to her own body and its exclusion and erasure from the scene of political life; she “breaks the sanitizing silences of sexual privacy in order to create national publics trained to think, and thus to think differently, about the corporeal conditions of citizenship” (239). Politicizing narratives of

survivorship as well as their academic analysis produces these moments of diva citizenship where national and sexual affect meet. In these moments where one is forced to listen by the physical embodiment and presence of women, an affective politics that recognizes and affirms the extra-judicial nature of the female body can be the result of progressive queer feminism which through its testimony, theory, and practice calls attention to the violation produced by state power and removes shame from the body of the daughter and directs it towards the state.

### ***Push, the Queer Welfare Queen, and the State***

In the novel *Push* by Sapphire, Claireece Precious Jones is an African-American sixteen-year-old narrator living in poverty who has been repeatedly sexually abused by both her father and her mother. Precious gives birth to the first of her father's two children at the age of twelve and the second at the age of sixteen. It is at this time that she is asked to leave her current high school because she is pregnant and she begins attending an alternative school called Each One, Teach One where she meets Ms. Blue Rain, a black lesbian teacher who insists that Precious and her classmates become literate and tell their own stories. The novel details Precious's traumatic life as a victim of sexual violence, her disenfranchisement from state and local institutions, her pregnancy and AIDS diagnosis, and her struggle to find a voice. Throughout the novel, witnessing through writing provides the only way for Precious, and the other women with whom she is associated, to begin to heal the wounds inflicted not only by their

father, but also by the state. Each of the characters that Precious encounters in her new class have suffered—as victims of sexual assault, as addicts, as teenage mothers, as racialized victims—but most importantly as victims of a political system that only wants to forget their individual existence. Precious is herself a victim of incest perpetrated by both her father and her mother. Her mother’s sexuality became tied to the abuse of the father in such a way that even in his absence her mother continues to force herself on Precious. It is as if Precious became his proxy, a representative of his fatherly desire and the imagined power that results from it; his power as the father is such that his presence is not required for his violence to continue. Not only is Precious impregnated by her father, but she also contracts HIV from him. She often wishes she had a boyfriend to love her and her children, but her HIV and her father’s children have cut off some of her options for “traditional” romantic relationships—more evidence that what incest seeks to maintain is control of the future.<sup>32</sup> Precious’s interactions with the healthcare industry and with the welfare office mirror her abusive relations with her family and one is allowed to stand in for the other.

In the novel it is made clear that Precious’s abuse at school is psychologically linked to her abuse at home. When Precious narrates her father’s rape of her as well as her mother’s compliance, she states that “She bring him to me. I ain’ crazy, that stinky hoe give me to him. Probably thas’ what he require to fuck her, some of me” (24), which illustrates that her mother’s sexual identity is also tied to the practices of paternal

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<sup>32</sup> HIV/AIDS and single motherhood of course are not inherently deterrents to love or to meaningful partnerships. The text *presents* these as prohibitive to normative (normal) sexual relationships in order to highlight that Precious’s heterosexuality or heterosexual practices are not state-sanctioned.

shaming. Precious is aware that the sexuality of both her parents is tied to her own trauma. Furthermore, she is aware that her sexual trauma is directly linked to her institutional identity. In the subsequent pages following her description of the rape by her father, she goes to Each One, Teach One to see if she can begin school. It is here that she encounters the other master narrative of her life—her file:

I wonder what exactly do file say. I know it say I got a baby. Do it say who Daddy? What kinda baby? Do it say how pages the same for me, how much I weigh, fights I done had? I don't know what file say. I do know every time they wants to fuck wif me or decide something in my life, here they come with the mutherfucking file. Well, OK, they got file, know every mutherfucking thing.

So what's the big deal, let's get it on. (28)

This passage illustrates that Precious connects institutional knowledge, the fact that there is a file that contains her life story, with her own lack of information. Part of her silencing is the unawareness of what is in her file. Precious understands that her file, and therefore her institutional identity, is constituted by her body and her sexuality. Having been removed from her school because of the physical, visible fact of her pregnancy, she then makes the connection to the incest that began the process of her exclusion from “normal” life. Pregnancy, in this case as in all cases, is read as a public act open to comment, sanction, approbation, and institutional action. Whereas “privacy” would seemingly be the cover under which the patriarchal sin of incest would occur because of its ostensible protection of heterosexual family life and sex acts, Precious’s status as an “at risk” youth with a very thick file makes her body, her family, and her

sexual relationships constantly available to “public” knowledge and surveillance but not to protection. Privacy is not a concept with which Precious is familiar. Precious therefore reads publicity as one of the conditions of her invisibility.

Before her pregnancies even come to term, Precious is read as the “welfare queen.”<sup>33</sup> Anne Balsamo has argued that “a foundation has been set in place to de-individualize the notion of pregnancy and make women’s reproductive health a matter of *public* health policy” (110). Though this move would seem to place pregnant women’s bodies within the juridical sphere and violate the sexual state of exception, in fact the willingness of the state to co-opt the rights of the mother in favor of the protection of an as yet unborn fetus reduces women to a collective embodiment that excludes them from the normativity of individualization and subjecthood. Because her pregnant, female embodiment excludes Precious from a “normal” life, Precious reads her lack of institutional power as a result of her *invisibility* as a black female teenager to her teachers, the schools, and even her parents. When discussing the results of a standardized test, Precious concludes “The tesses paint a picture of me wif no brain. The tesses paint a picture of me an’ my muver, my whole family, we more than dumb, we invisible...Don’t nobody want me. Don’t nobody need me. I know who I am. I know who they say I am—vampire sucking the system’s blood. Ugly black grease to be wipe

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<sup>33</sup> Patricia Hill Collins and Dorothy E. Roberts have been instrumental in describing the ways in which black women’s reproductive potential and their status as “welfare mothers” have been used to legitimate state practices of welfare reform—to reduce the scourge of “crack babies” and women who allegedly reproduce for the sole purpose of receiving state support—and reproductive practices intended to sterilize and remove reproductive potentiality for black women. The population of black “welfare queens” and their children is already marked for death and their capacity for a future is integral to queer political projects that critique capitalism, racism, and sexism.

away, punish, kilt, changed, finded a job for” (30-1). The state-sanctioned standardized test that becomes a part of her file is public, which for Precious further renders her invisible. Precious understands the facts of her femaleness, her blackness, her class, and even her fatness as that which renders her invisible and yet monstrous at the same time to the institutions of power—the state and her father—that are most important: “My fahver don’t see me really. If he did he would know I was like a white girl, a *real* person inside” (32). Precious rightly ascribes true visibility as it constitutes enfranchisement to whiteness, but the reality is that Precious, through her body, is visible and necessary to the system as its radical and shameful other. This necessity is evidenced by the file that follows her around throughout her life. The file maintains a record and creates a picture of Precious that paints her as a laborer, an unfit mother, and a drain on the system. It is precisely real files like Precious’s fictitious one that allowed for the enactment of Reagan era welfare reform policies that actively sought to reduce aid to poor mothers. The system requires Precious and the perception of the shame of her perpetual pregnancy, ignorance, and poverty in order to enact legislation that benefits the white and wealthy. This, however, is an evacuation of her actual body and person into a specter of collectively dangerous and irresponsible black motherhood.

When Precious finally claims her own agency through her storytelling and steals her own file, she finds out exactly how visible she is to the system as a body and what it requires of her:

The client talks about her desire to get her G.E.D. and go to college. The time and resources it would require for this young woman to get a G.E.D. or into

college would be considerable...Precious is capable of doing work now...In keeping with the new initiative on welfare reform I feel Precious would benefit from any of the various workfare programs in existence. Despite her obvious intellectual limitations she quite capable of working as a home attendant...She has a history of sexual abuse and is HIV positive. (119)

Precious's file links her value as a member of society to the physical labor of the black underclass and also to her sexual history. Despite the fact that Ms. Weiss assured Precious she would not put the facts of her sexual abuse or diagnosis in the file, the sexual facts of Precious's case are necessary to the justifications of state oppression. Under the sexual state of exception, Precious's file must speak for her of her embodiment and her sexuality by deindividualizing her and making her part of a larger social "epidemic." Precious's file describes not an individual citizen of a democratic government, but rather illustrates the sexual state of exception as, to quote Agamben's theory of the political state of exception, "the original structure in which law encompasses living beings by means of its own suspension" (3). The law is suspended for Precious as her father was never prosecuted for rape and the white patriarchal system requires that it must be so in order to maintain the illusion that the father as the state's stand-in is infallible. Furthermore, the absence of Precious's father for her and for her children with him underscores the picture of the black father painted by the Moynihan

report, which further marginalizes and penalizes black women.<sup>34</sup> Precious's body has indeed been encompassed by the state in its demand for her as a menial worker, but also in its criticism of her status as a teenage mother on welfare. Precious is therefore the subject of the constant surveillance of her body, which in its production of shame then serves to disenfranchise her from the very system that requires her for its own ideological sustainability. Without Precious's body and the bodies of her children, the white patriarchal state has no model against which to construct its own future. It is precisely because Precious is not male, not white, not thin, not "beautiful," that she must be the object of shame and surveillance and in the end be marked for death.

However, when she begins to write her own story in the context of her class at the alternative high school, Precious is finally able to claim a small but important stake in her own agency. It is in giving voice to her experiences that Precious is able to violate the sexual state of exception and to politicize her survivorship. Whereas her father had previously controlled her access to sexuality and information, her group of female peers and her female teachers help her to reject shame, to learn to use her own voice and demand her place in the world. It is no coincidence, I think, that the first time Precious writes the alphabet and chooses a word to represent each sound, that the word represented by "V" is "vote." At the end of the novel, there is a collection of writings produced by the women in Precious's class. I would argue that we should understand

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<sup>34</sup> Though many male critics and theorists have argued that the Moynihan report does the most damage to the black community in portraying black fathers as perpetually absent, I would argue that since the Moynihan report ascribes this absence to an overpowering black femaleness, in fact black women are forced to bear the ideological burdens of accounting for any perceived failures of black communities to gain respectability and status within the white national imaginary and citizenry.



this collection not as an appendix to the novel, but as its culmination. This collection of writings, in its testimony and revisions of literary masters, represents that these women must write or witness the body into being, must witness themselves into dialectical relationships and political consciousness. In these stories, the girls describe their lack of institutional power—their unawareness of the location or necessity of their birth certificates, the racism of school teachers and employers, their views of Marcus Garvey and Louis Farrakhan, the failing healthcare system—as existing in direct relationship to their interactions with male father-figures whose abuse mirrors that of the system itself. The texts contained in the group of “Life Stories” at the end of the novel bear an affective relationship to one another that demands recognition of embodiment and enacts theory as praxis in the day-to-day lives of women. Each story demands the revision of the narrative already being ascribed to her. In Precious’s poem at the very end of the collection, she interrogates the “lessons” of those who have come before her: “HOLD FAST TO DREAMS/Langston say. / GET UP OFF YOUR KNEES/ Farrakhan say. /CHANGE/ Alice Walker say” but the conclusion Precious and her classmates come to is their own: “go into the poem/ the HEART of it/ beating/like/a clock/a virus/tick/tock.” The mention of the heart and the virus in conjunction with the artistic nature of poetry writing calls attention to the relationship between the body, theory or learning, and art. Precious and her classmates understand the intersection between theory and practice to be located in the politicizing of their own stories and bodies. The texts collected at the end of the novel represent an “archive of feeling” that expresses both the shame of sexual trauma and the victory of its survival. Thus, it is not in Precious’s children that

we are to understand her futurity because those children are also marked for death under current dominant political modes, but in the textual archive that represents the rejection of gendered, sexualized, and racialized shame.

It is important to call attention, however, to the fact that this “victory of survival” is about politicizing and narrativizing the survivorship of sexual violence, since we have no indication that Precious will “survive” her HIV or her poverty. Understanding the importance of Precious’s voice is not about allowing narrative redemption stand in for social change. As Gillian Harkins articulates, in “the contemporary literary moment, in which narratives of heroic survival are marketed as a consumable spectacle of redemption, to tell a story of survival is not necessarily to interrupt the conditions of its production. And without such interruptions, the transformative potential of this literature can too easily be contained, leading to a romantic heroics of literary survival that fetishizes ‘everyday reality’ while leaving it relatively unchanged” (187).

Sapphire, the author of the novel, has come under fire from critics such as Ishmael Reed since its publication and in particular when the film adaptation came out, for portraying Precious’s black father as a rapist. Critics such as Reed have argued that *Push* and the film *Precious* contribute to an understanding of black families as pathological—in particular black men as pathological dangers to society. Reed argues in a response to an editorial by Sapphire that “Black men have been murdered and lynched and massacres have occurred in U.S. History as a result of a false rumor of rape” (“Obsession”). While the specter of black male rapists (a trope, I might add, like Precious’s story, that has been critiqued and dramatized by fiction and film) is certainly another tool used by the state to

maintain white power and institutional systems of oppression, it does not negate the fact that there are black women like Precious who are pathologized not only by the state, but by their communities and the intellectuals who represent them because they are unwed, “diseased,” fat, “lazy,” and a source of shame. As Sapphire argues in her response to Reed, “African-Americans have the highest rate of heterosexual H.I.V. infection in the United States. While the effects of sexual abuse are traumatic for any group of women, black women more often than any other ethnic group must deal with being infected with H.I.V. by our perpetrators. Silence will not save African-Americans” (“Need to Be Told”). Sapphire—a name chosen purposefully to invoke the image of an overpowering, castrating black woman—is herself the model for the teacher in the book, Ms. Blu Rain, and as she has stated in numerous interviews she did encounter women like Precious and her classmates in her work as a teacher. Sapphire’s book has drawn the response from critics like Reed that perhaps her choice of name anticipated in advance. While Reed is perhaps rightly concerned with the portrayal of black men as pathological, Sapphire’s text that the existence of racism towards black men does not mitigate the racialized and gendered oppression of black women—particularly welfare mothers and those infected with H.I.V. Ishmael Reed suggests that the white media and white audiences, and even Sapphire herself, are fascinated by the supposed “redemption” Precious earns as a result of her education in the novel and the film. “Some redemption,” he argues, when Precious is still infected with H.I.V., still a poor unwed mother of two children, one of whom has down syndrome, and still likely to die. This incomplete and unsatisfying redemption, I would argue, is precisely Sapphire’s point in the text. What the archive at

the end of *Push* makes obvious is not that testimony itself provides narrative redemption or a feel-good reaction from the audience who in listening believes they have participated in larger social change. The ending of *Push* does not signify public acceptance or freedom from the strictures of patriarchal and heteronormative privacy that have kept Precious's trauma invisible.

Precious is always already queer in her relationship to the state precisely because she is ideologically visible in her individual invisibility, under constant surveillance, necessary to the state's definition of itself, and this visibility results not in the punishment or assignment of legal blame to those familial and institutional factors that have failed her. The archive at the end of *Push* is not, therefore, testimony to a sympathetic public who has heretofore been unaware of her story, but a revision of the kind of publicity Precious has been subject to her entire life. What Precious seeks throughout *Push* is not social visibility and redemption, or even legal retribution, but the accountability of the systems that shame her, even if that accountability is only to herself or to the people in her interpretive communities. What exists at the end of the novel is not the legal, juridical "file" that gives testimony, but the voice of Precious and her classmates themselves. The radical potential of this archive is not in how it will enact legal change at state and social levels by calling attention to young, queer women of color, but in its reformulation of the nature of change itself. Change in this sense is not a change in the law but a change in the national imaginary through the removal of shame from the bodies of women and the demand for accountability from the state that

oppresses them while at the same time desiring their de-individualized sexual and economic labor.

### **Making People Nervous: Dorothy Allison, Bone Boatwright, and a Fatherless**

#### **Existence**

The central shaping concern of Dorothy Allison's novel *Bastard Out of Carolina*, about the white underclass in the 1950s rural South, is the matter of Bone Boatwright's paternity. Throughout the text, it is made clear to Bone and to her mother, Anney, that the lack of a father's name on her birth certificate marks her for shame, but in also marks her for surveillance by other regulatory institutions—the state and the community.

Anney understands this when she continually tries to change the stamp of “ILLGITIMATE” that marks Bone's birth certificate: “The stamp on that birth certificate burned like the stamp she knew they'd tried to put on her. *No-good, lazy, shiftless*” (Allison 3). As J. Brooks Bouson argues, the novel “tells of Anney's repeated humiliations at the public re-exposure of her shame and social stigma before a representative of the official white culture, the courthouse clerk, whose eyes laugh as he furnishes Anney with a duplicate of Bone's original birth certificate” (106). This official representative of white culture sees Anney not as an individual, but as the embodiment of white trash women who are not proper white citizens. The inability of Anney to claim a father for Bone creates a narrative of shame for Anney based on class, but also

produces a narrative about her sexual availability. Allison articulates in her memoir *Two or Three Things I Know For Sure* that shame about class and about an unidentifiable lineage create the impression of sexual availability, even when sex is unwanted: “there were stories about us in Greenville, South Carolina...The football players behind the bleachers, boys who went on to marry and do well. ‘Hell, it wasn’t rape. She never said no. Maybe she said stop, but in that little bitty voice, so you know she wants you to love her, hell, love her for ten minutes or half an hour. Shit, who could love a girl like her?’” (*Two* 36).<sup>35</sup> The illegitimacy of the Boatwright women and the Gibson women, Allison’s family upon whom this semi-autobiographical novel is based, creates the impression that there is no protector in the guise of a father-figure, either in the family or from the state or community who will prevent their sexual violation. That men who sexually assault these women “go on to do well,” implies that the Boatwright and Gibson women act as fatherless receptacles for the proper, white male citizens of Greenville County. Thus, in some ways these women are sexual “practice” for the making of proper white male citizens, and it is upon their sexual and economic labor as social others that their society is based.

It is specifically Bone’s fatherlessness that also makes her sexually available to domineering father figures such as Daddy Glen. Bone is the victim of incest and sexual violence at the hands of her stepfather but her sister Reese is not, and this seems to be

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<sup>35</sup> There is a story in Allison’s memoir about how when her “more beautiful” sister was pregnant, the father of the baby got all of his friends to circulate that it could have been any of theirs, thereby painting her as sexually promiscuous and denying any culpability in her welfare or the welfare of his child.

tied to her lack of a father and therefore her identification solely with the Boatwright family, particularly the women. Daddy Glen is always watching Bone, whose physical features are often compared to the other Boatwright women, but not to her father. It is this identification with the other “wild” Boatwright women that Glen seems to find troubling: “his eyes sliding over me like I was a new creature, something he hadn’t figured out yet how to tame” (Allison, *Bastard* 142). Glen’s sexual violation of Bone is associated with her unidentifiableness, with her fatherlessness and for Bone the status of her lineage is both powerful and what makes her a victim. Bone’s cousin, Butch, says of the Boatwright women that they “got caustic pussy” that “polishes babies up so they all pretty much look alike, like we been rinsed in bleach as we’re born” (54). The description of the sex organs of the Boatwright women goes beyond the destruction of the men in their lives, which Butch also ascribes to them, and marks of all of their children with a physical and social uniformity that denies paternity whether or not the women are married. Bone, according to Butch, “has a man-type part,” but even this is not unusual as “Boatwright women come out that way sometimes” (Allison, *Bastard* 54). Bone’s identification with the Boatwrights specifically and not with any paternal figure is what makes her irresistible to Daddy Glen, because she represents the power of their romantic outlaw status, but also makes her his victim.

As Gillian Harkins points out, Daddy Glen in this novel does not stand in entirely for the law of the state and Bone’s abuse by the law and her abuse by Daddy Glen are not co-extensive. Rather, what we see in *Bastard Out of Carolina* is “a very different figure representing the rule of the ‘father’—not the phallic symbol of legal agency, but

the metonym for those condensed relations between kinship, labor, and sexualized violence that will constitute the domestic scene of working class narration: Daddy Glen's hands" (168). The legal system sees Bone and her family as fatherless and unworthy of any personalized attention; like Precious, Bone and her family are represented only to the state in their deindividualization, as a class of "illegitimate" degenerates useful only for statistical purposes in determining the best course of action for dealing with the rural poor. Thus, I argue that when Glen marries Anney and attempts to give her children a "father" he is not enacting a simple one-to-one relationship between the state's paternal rule and the law of the father in the home. Rather, his repeated declarations to Anney and her girls of "You're mine," serve as his attempt to bring them into normative individualized visibility in the face of state and social institutions. Despite frequently being read as working class, Daddy Glen is in fact of the middle class, and his marriage to the Boatwright legacy can be read metaphorically as an attempt to mark them as legitimate, even to make Bone "legitimate" in the eyes of the state. This enterprise is doomed to fail, however, because Bone is already marked by her Boatwright lineage and through her embodiment as a white trash Boatwright woman she exists in the permanent sexual state of exception—invisible in her visibility as an exemplar of the white underclass. As Harkins argues, "Allison writes survival as tragedy when it must take shape through dominant modes of representation" (187). Thus, the tragedy for Bone is similar to the tragedy of Precious, and to some extent it is also the tragedy of Anney, Daddy Glen, and Precious's mother—there is no way for them to claim "legitimacy" within state-sanctioned narratives of



normalcy and proper citizenship because there is no way for these women to exist outside of the social and juridical sexual state of exception. For Bone, as for Precious, incest is in some ways the *best* outcome of their familial situations, the most benevolent tragedy, because it allows them to claim fatherlessness and resist in part the relationship to patriarchal oppression that had been written for them.

Incest in this novel and in Allison's memoir produces shame about the body, a hatred of the body that prevents these daughters from enjoying their own sexuality and carving out a future for themselves. The "ugliness" of these women is a designation produced coextensively by the state and community because of class and by their father figures because of their sexual violation. Shame about the body and its processes is one of the ways in which the state and the father maintain control of their daughters. In her memoir, Allison declares: "Let me tell you a story. Let me tell you the story that is in no part fiction, the story of the female body taught to hate itself" (49). Hatred of the body for Allison is tied not only to the sexual violation of women by men, but also to the institutional violation that poor women experience from the state. The story of women taught to hate their bodies is the only story in either the novel or the memoir that Allison claims is entirely true and not partially a creation of memory, narrative, and actual experience, evidence that the female body taught to hate itself is an institutional ill that exists for women not only in their personal relationships, but in the larger schema of social powers. In Allison's novel, Bone's hatred of her own body is invoked by her sense of her own worthlessness as a woman, a daughter, and by her impoverished economic situation. Bone even goes so far as to attribute Daddy Glen's physical and

sexual abuse to her own perceived shortcomings: “It was just me, the fact of my life, who I was in his eyes and mine. I was evil. Of course I was. I admitted it to myself, locked my fingers into fists, and shut my eyes to everything I did not understand” (110). Like Precious, Bone understands that it is her very existence that results in shame, but does not make the connection between the institutional power of patriarchal oppression and her own victimization. What is important here is that there is no other way for Bone to be or to exist within dominant narratives and modes of gender, class, and heteronormativity. Like Precious, Anney and Bone are the necessary other to the state’s sanctioned citizen—it is their physical and sexual labor that is required to perpetuate and solidify the state’s properly white, heterosexual citizens. The othering that Bone experiences and her inability to be assimilated into Daddy Glen’s middle-class vision of the family is what causes her to understand herself as evil and to feel shame in her own body.<sup>36</sup>

What happens when the female body is taught to hate itself is that it must then learn to love itself, and this can only occur, for Allison, in creating an embodied archive

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<sup>36</sup> It is interesting that Allison’s novel, set in the South of the 1950s but published at the tail end of the Reagan/Bush era and Sapphire’s novel, set in the 1980s, both address as subjects and are published within time periods where there was a resurgent interest in “family values.” As discussed in the section on *Push*, the narrative of the welfare queen and crack mother was used during the Reagan era to enact programs that further disenfranchised non-white people and punished non-marital procreation. *Bastard Out of Carolina* similarly highlights not only the impossibility of the white middle-class ideal, but also the ways in which class functioned as a way to ensure the political domination of families like the Waddell’s, whose marital (religious) procreative sex was encouraged by the state in such a way that whiteness and heterosexuality were not only coconstructed, but reified as properly American. See Julian B. Carter’s book *The Heart of Whiteness* for a more nuanced look at the ways in which whiteness and heterosexuality become coextensive.

of women's stories. Furthermore, it can only happen when women return the shameful gaze to the state and social institutions that are invested in their death. Bone's masturbatory fantasies of having others watch when Daddy Glen abuses her and she remains silent reflect her desire to insist on her own visibility:

Someone had to watch—some girl I admired who barely knew I existed, some girl from church or down the street, or one of my cousins or even somebody I had seen on television. Sometimes a whole group of them would be trapped into watching. They couldn't help or get away. They had to watch. In my imagination I was proud and defiant. I'd stare back at him with my teeth set, making no sound at all, no shameful scream, no begging. Those who watched admired me and hated him. I pictured it that way and put my hands between my legs. It was scary, but it was thrilling too. Those who watched me, loved me. It was if I was being beaten for them. I was wonderful in their eyes. (Allison, *Bastard* 112)

Bouson, who despite acknowledging that Bone's fantasies to afford her some kind of pride, nonetheless argues that they are evidence of the "scapegoat identity" that she has internalized. I would argue, however, that Bone's desire to have others bear witness to Daddy Glen's abuse and to her own defiance is not so that she can demonstrate her status as social and familial scapegoat, but rather so that she can throw off the "shameful scream" and force others to see Daddy Glen and the institutions of power that ignore her for what the abusers that they really are. Bone desires to return shame to those who have

attempted to shame her.<sup>37</sup> Bone wants to force others, particularly other women—some of whom, through the allusion to her “white trash” cousins, we might assume have undergone similar sexual violation—to acknowledge her visibility. In “going public” with her shame in her fantasies—as Jamie Leigh Jones does in reality with her court case—Bone forces others to acknowledge the nature of her existence within the sexual state of exception. As with Precious, however, it is important to note that Bone’s fantasies do not appeal to legal or juridical justice, which is always already impossible for her. Bone understands that juridical power is part of the official white culture that has already de-individualized her and shamed her, as is evidenced by the fact that she refuses to speak her trauma aloud to the sheriff after Daddy Glen has raped her at the end of the novel.

When exhorted by the sheriff to name her attacker, Bone simply remains silent: “His voice was calm, careful, friendly. He was Daddy Glen in a uniform. The world was full of Daddy Glens, and I didn’t want to be in that world anymore” (Allison, *Bastard* 296). Bone rejects the representative of state institutions that are coercive of her testimony not because they genuinely want to help her—because she exists within the sexual state of exception—but because they want to further dehumanize her and deindividualize her as evidence of the ills that plague her class. The sheriff always expected the Boatwrights to be in this situation, and so giving testimony about her trauma to the sheriff and to the official white citizen culture would only serve to further

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<sup>37</sup> For a more in-depth discussion of Bone’s masochistic masturbatory fantasies, see: Hart, Lynda. *Between the Body and the Flesh: Performing Sadomasochism*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1998. Print.

marginalize her. Bone's future, and to some extent Allison's own future, can only be ensured by other "readers" who understand the archive of their shame and trauma as an appeal not to judicial recourse, but as an attempt at social change through an acknowledgment of their collective embodiment.

As stated in the previous section, this emphasis on textuality is not to perform an erasure of the material and social work that must be done to undermine the power of fathers in the state or in the home, but it is one of the ways in which women can ensure their own futures. Building an archive of women's stories, testimonies, and bodies is a necessary step in ensuring their future in the face of state institutions interested in dehumanization and death. Whereas the state and the father are interested in evacuating women from the reproductive scene through marking by shame and death, queer antisociality which asks women to deny their futures similarly makes impossible this embodied textual archive by denying its own culpability in relational meaning making and knowledge production.<sup>38</sup> Queer antirelationality, particularly as it is exemplified in Lee Edelman's book *No Future*, has performed a necessary erasure of the theoretical moves it is required to make—i.e. making relationships between things and guaranteeing

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<sup>38</sup> As David McWhirter has illustrated in his article "Fish Stories: Revising Masculine Ritual in Eudora Welty's 'The Wide Net,'" the trope of men's disgust with or denial of women in the reproductive scene is also evidenced in literary, psychological, psychoanalytic, and anthropological discourses. McWhirter maintains that modernist constructions of masculinity are premised "on a horrified flight from female sexuality, an especially from the abjection attributively embodied—for Eliot's questing Perceval, as for Quentin Compson and Joe Christmas and Nick Adams—in manifestations of women's reproductive functions including menstruation, pregnancy, childbirth, and abortion" (37). My analysis in this chapter seeks to link this modernist conception of masculinity to state interests as well as to queer discourses which evacuate women from their politics or, as Susan Fraiman has illustrated in *Cool Men*, position them as heteronormative "mothers" against a paradigm of cool masculinity.

these relationships a future. It is just this erasure that has deep implications for gender, race, and class in the context of queer theory and politics. Edelman's desire to dismantle the culture of futurity actually engenders—albeit unintentionally, I think—the same result as the most conservative and bigoted political projects, which is the erasure of marginalized populations such as those represented by Jamie Leigh Jones, Precious, and Bone. Furthermore, I argue that in failing to recognize nonnormative procreative sexualities—such as those of Precious and the Boatwrights—that are invested in the future precisely because they do not have a present or a past, Edelman and other proponents of queer negativity and antisociality do not account for the ways in which they belong to this white future through their participation in capitalist global economies. For in fact, Edelman himself is both (re) and pro-ductive.

“Pro-natalism,” as discussed previously, “is registered in the universal confirmation of one's standing as an adult and in the accrual of social capital that allows one a stake in the only future's market that ever really counts” (156-7). But for whom? Who is the stakeholder in this future's market? The argument for investing in the future of gendered bodies and racialized bodies is not to perpetuate the system of heteronormativity that Edelman imagines is invested in reproductive futurism and pro-natalism, but is to instead recognize the bodies of those whose queerness rests precisely in their ability to reproduce and thus “fuck the social order,” to use Edelman's terminology, by the fact of their bodies and the assurance of their futures.

It is precisely here—in his construction of the archive—that I think we can understand Edelman participating in a (re) and pro-ductive futurism that is implicated in

the same white capital and its structures of power as that of the state, for in fact the archive itself is always relational and looking towards the future, and the archive to which Edelman gives birth is Western, white, and male. For Dorothy Allison and the fictional Precious, on the other hand, the archive of the stories we tell ourselves must include the collective female body—and for there to be a body there must be a future. In her memoir, Allison recalls how she is repeatedly asked why she must talk about and discuss her own sexual trauma, to which she answers that it is something that must be told and written down in order to be processed: “I had to learn how to say it, to say ‘rape,’ say ‘child,’ say ‘unending,’ ‘awful,’ and ‘relentless,’ and say it the way I do—adamant, unafraid, unashamed, every time, all over again—to speak my words as a sacrament, a blessing, a prayer...evil is the act of pretending that some things do not happen or leave no mark if they do, that evil is not what remains when healing becomes possible” (Allison, *Two* 44). Allison’s story, like Precious’s class book, like Bone’s fantasies, requires witnesses and “readers” who can acknowledge the power of an embodied archive, who do not seek to erase the bodies and futures of those already traumatized by institutional and social violence. The construction of an archive creates relationships of meaning and knowledge that help us to determine how we see ourselves and the social order to which we belong, and furthermore it participates in the reproduction of capital by perpetuating the purchase and production of certain kinds of materials with certain kinds of political, social, and cultural investments (and contributes to the success of the people who make/teach/write/create/produce those materials). The children of Edelman’s archive, for example, are Hitchcock, Gide, and Proust, among

others. Edelman's construction of the white canonical archive is a production of a textual body, but more importantly it is the reproduction of certain material bodies, though they may be displaced, and in Edelman's case this body is Western, white, and male. Though this kind of reproduction might not participate in the "pro-natalism" of actual childbirth, it participates heavily in the accrual and the production of capital—social and economic—and also fails to recognize how the accrual of that capital exists in relationship to "queer grown-ups." Allison, on the other hand, herself a "queer grown-up" mother, understands that the archive must start from the body, must first exist in a blank, fatherless space before it can begin the work of doing social justice.

While I think Harkins is right in arguing that textual catharsis cannot stand in for actual activism or work and that these texts can be used to serve neoliberal political ends that reify a white heteronormative social order, I would argue that in some ways she also misses the point about the importance of starting from scratch and producing an archive of shameful feelings that is entirely about the body. When Bone receives her birth certificate from her mother at the end of *Bastard Out of Carolina*, "it was blank, unmarked, unstamped" (309). Juxtaposed with Bone's injured body after her rape, the importance of this blank document and her silence in the face of the sheriff who would coerce her testimony cannot be understated. By throwing off the shame associated with her "marking" through gender and class in the face of official white institutional power, Bone becomes "fatherless" in a way that is productive for her. Bone, in her relationship with her lesbian Aunt Raylene and in the absence of male "father figures" can become truly "fatherless" and thus begin to archive the experiences of her own body and learn to



love. “Two or three things I know for sure,” Allison writes, “and one is that I would rather go naked than wear the coat the world has made for me” (*Two* 71). If the tragedy of *Bastard Out of Carolina* is in always having the traumatic narrative be subject to the modes of power that have been oppressive, then it is Bone’s blankness, or Allison’s desire to be naked, that seeks to undermine those modes of oppression and start from scratch to build an archive of stories and testimony that pay attention to the materiality of women’s bodies. Allison herself argues for the importance of this archive: “That our true stories may be violent, distasteful, painful, stunning and haunting, I do not doubt. But our true stories will be literature. No one will be able to forget them, and through it will not always make us happy to read of the dark and dangerous places in our lives, the impact of our reality is the best we can ask of our literature” (Allison, *Skin* 166). Thus, in “giving birth” to an archive about the female body and its relationship to social and institutional violence that is “distasteful” to those very structures of power, women can ensure their own futurity. It is not, therefore, the case that the archives of feeling and the body that Allison, Bone, and Precious construct serve as a stand-in for real political change or even that they in some idealized version of the social order can spur change, but their archive guarantees presence and a future, which is at least an important political step for those bodies who are, in Bone’s words “born to shame and death.”

### **Conclusion: The Ideological Relationality of Jamie Leigh Jones, Claireece Precious Jones, and Bone Boatwright**

What, then, is the relationship between these three seemingly disparate narratives—one real, the other two fictional—of sexual violence? Jamie Leigh Jones’s experiences of sexual violation and lack of public justice illustrate that the sexual state of exception exists in the service of patriarchal, heterosexual heteronormativity. This becomes obvious in the state’s redress to the protection provided by war statutes in order to avoid criminal prosecution of her male assailants. In aligning the interests of state power with the sexual silence of women, the Jamie Leigh Jones case illustrates that the interest of national security in silence and shaming through sexual violation is constitutive of women’s relationship to the state. Precious’s narrative underscores the gendered and racialized dimensions of the sexual state of exception through highlighting the state’s non-interest in prosecuting incest and its investment in both closing off the futurity of black female bodies and regulating their potential as laborers. Bone’s story highlights the persistent failure of the ideal citizen to produce his ideal family because of the sexual silence and complicity required by women, but also demonstrates, as do Jones and Precious, the importance of giving testimony.

Though the Jones case does not seem to obviously deal with the question of futurity, I would argue that it is precisely what constantly haunts and motivates the machinations of the state. Jones is silenced and shamed by her claims of sexual violence in order to protect the future white imperialist aims of the United States in their conflicts abroad. When Edelman argues that we should “fuck the social order and the Child in

whose name we are collectively terrorized,” he makes the assumption that the laws intended to protect children and women as vessels who carry those children do in actuality perform their stated function against the image of queers and in the service of “reproductive futurism.” What he elides in this statement, however, are the ways in which this future is constructed and protected as white and male at the expense of the bodies of women and people of color. In her essay “Better Dead than Pregnant: The Colonization of Native Women’s Reproductive Health,” Andrea Smith illustrates how birth control and the feminist struggle for reproductive rights have resulted in the forced sterilization of Native women and the subsequent erasure of Native peoples from both the feminist struggle and the national political stage. I would argue that Edelman’s emphasis on queer negativity in *No Future* extends this sentiment to all women—their bodies are “better dead than pregnant” because he fails to understand that control of the reproductive capacity of their bodies has never belonged to them.<sup>39</sup> Reproductive futurism as he constructs it works in the service of white male subjectivity and thus his desire to “fuck” the fiction of this subjectivity only works in the absence of the gendered and racialized bodies upon which it relies for its ideological coherence. In ignoring the radical potential of reproductivity for these gendered and racialized bodies, Edelman

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<sup>39</sup> Edelman’s text asks gendered and racialized bodies to be the “beasts of burden” whose erasure reassures white, male Western modes of thought that they gave birth to themselves, that desire and fantasy exist in a mind that functions apart from the social, free of the incessant demands of otherness. Rather than undermining the conservative political projects that perpetuate heteronormative reproductive futurism and pronatalism, queer antisociality, particularly in *No Future*, contributes to the Western white male’s most enduring vision of the future—riding off alone into the sunset of the frontier, escaping the “civilization” he has built and the oppressive social structures he has created in the service of capital—in other words, he seeks to escape his relation to it.

performs an erasure similar to that of the state that marks these populations with the shame and death for which they were always already intended. José Esteban Muñoz argues that the version of the future that Edelman critiques is “indeed ‘winning,’ but that is all the more reason to call on a utopian political imagination that will enable us to glimpse another time and place: a ‘not-yet’ where queer youths of color actually get to grow up” (96). I include Bone, Precious, and Jamie Leigh Jones in this utopian non-yet of the future. Their futures are essential precisely because they have no place to exist in the past or the present. Recognizing the radical potential of embodiment and reproductivity for women, always queer in their relation to the state, allows us to imagine a relational politics of futurity that “resists mandates to accept that which is not enough” (Muñoz 96). To imagine that Bone and Precious are the images of the future social order that brings terror to the queers Edelman describes is to do them a serious political and theoretical disservice and performs a further erasure of their already invisible bodies. As Precious so powerfully articulates, “Ain’ enough lies and shit out there already” without asking women to bear the ideological burden of giving up their future in the service of either conservative state-sanctioned demands of ideal citizenship or progressive queer politics of negativity?

## CHAPTER III

RESISTING NORMALIZATION: GENDER NON-CONFORMITY AND RADICAL  
PRIVACY IN *THE L WORD* AND *MIDDLESEX*

*Consensual gender is respecting each others' definitions of gender, and respecting the wishes of some to be alone, and respecting the intentions of others to be inclusive in their own time.*

*Consensual gender is non-violent in that it doesn't force its way in on anyone.*

*Consensual gender opens its arms and welcomes all people as gender outcasts—  
whoever is willing to admit to it.*

*-Kate Bornstein, Gender Outlaw: On Men, Women, and the Rest of Us*

The issues at the center of this chapter are *normalization* and *naturalization*, both of which are produced through shame. Normalization occurs on both sides of the political spectrum—from a conservative standpoint that argues that there are two genders, based on sex, that also constitute desire, and from a liberal/progressive/queer standpoint that posits a particular linear narrative for the “gender queer.” Both of these narratives and the normalization and naturalization that accompany them are related to a fear of feminization that has become associated with rights and privacy discourse. In this chapter I seek to undermine the association of privacy with feminization, and also to undermine the negative connotations associated with this “feminization” and the emotions concomitantly associated with it. The arguments I make in this chapter may therefore seem contrary or conservative in the face of current formulations of Leftist politics in queer theoretical circles. I hope, however, to make clear my Leftist allegiances through a newly articulated affective queer politics that resists normalization and naturalization at both ends of the political and sexual binary. In this chapter I

undertake a discussion of transgender bodies and the intersexed in the popular narratives of Showtime's *The L Word* and Jeffrey Eugenides's 2002 novel *Middlesex*, as well as in mainstream political and social discourses. Through an examination of sex, gender, and desire in these narratives, I argue that the violence of naturalization—both metaphorical and physical—rests in the linkages of these categories produced by both left and right analyses that seek to name, to induce linearity, and to determine subjectivity. I further argue that the epic journey of the “hermaphrodite” Cal/llope in Eugenides's *Middlesex* provides a potential counternarrative to this normalization through his/her narrative de-linking of the systems of sex, gender, and desire that produce such a normalization. Though it may seem counterintuitive to posit that a novel which ends with a “man” engaging in a domestic relationship with a “woman” and returning to the realm of the family has radical potential for a queer affective politics, I think in the subtleties of Eugenides's work, just such a reading emerges when one is willing to “confront” the impossible of queer diaspora, queer families and homes, and a disidentification with the binaries of sexual desire.

Let me first be clear that it is not on material intersex bodies or persons that I intend for the burden of resisting the binaries of gender, sex, and desire (or their intimate linkages) to rest. As Emi Koyama states in her guidelines to writing about the intersexed, “intersex people are no more responsible for dismantling gender roles or compulsory heterosexuality than anyone else is” (Koyama, [intersexinitiative.org](http://intersexinitiative.org)). Thus, when I posit the narrative of intersexuality in *Middlesex* as a potential resistance to certain hetero and queer normalizations, I do not mean for the fictional story to stand in

for the voices of intersexed persons or for the lived experience of intersexuality. However, I do hope to find affective metaphorical and political inspiration in Eugenides's text that resists the naturalization of the links between gender, sex, and desire. I am interested in talking about the construction of the main character's gender/sex/desire specifically as narrative in ways that resist political and academic normalization and as part of this project's commitment to a textual and political archive of feeling. Intersexuality, therefore, is not necessarily or only what is important to this chapter, but rather the potential for political affect that exists in Cal/liope's own particular identifications and disidentifications.

Like the other texts discussed in this dissertation, both *The L Word* and *Middlesex* produce textually an archive of queer experiences and feeling. In *The L Word*, the introductory segment of the show which introduces a sexual or romantic relationship between two gay or lesbian people in the past serves as a touchstone for the episode's themes and also provides a historical touchstone for a repository of queer feeling the show. In *Middlesex*, the medical documents, historical narratives, and family histories reproduced by Cal/Callie produce an archive that is not linear, which emphasizes Cal's relationship to the past, but also the circularity of the nature of family and national history. Both of the alternative archives produced by these texts present queer feeling as circular, pervasive, historically present, fluid, public and private, etc. The presentation of queer feeling through the narrative of alternative histories and the production of knowledge in unsanctioned archives in this chapter is directly related to

non-normative gendered experiences and the ways in which those experiences can undermine both normative and queer formulations of the family and privacy.

### **Rights Discourse, The Family, and Queer Theory**

As Lauren Berlant has demonstrated, the family and the nation are both heavily sentimental spheres.<sup>40</sup> Privacy is sentimental. When debates about privacy enter into the public sphere, Berlant argues that “at moments of crisis persons violate the zones of privacy that give them privilege and protection in order to fix something social that feels threatening. They become public on behalf of privacy and imagine that their rupture of individuality by collective action is temporary and will be reversed once the national world is safe, once again, for a return to personal life. Sentimental politics in that idiom works on behalf of its eradication” (22). The sentimental private that becomes public is, in Berlant’s formulation, the feminine sphere of the domestic space. When this space enters into political circulation, the feminine enters as well. It seems to me, therefore,

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<sup>40</sup> See her book *The Female Complaint: The Unfinished Business of Sentimentality in American Culture*. Berlant argues: “The sentimental bargain of femininity is, after all, that the emotional service economy serves both intimates and the woman herself, who receives her own value back not only in the labor of recognition she performs but in the sensual spectacle of its impacts. In this discursive field, the emotional labor of women places them at the center of the *story* of what counts as life, regardless of what lives women actually live: the conjuncture of family and romance so structures the emergence of modern sexuality, with its conflation of sexual and emotional truths, and in that nexus femininity marks the scene of the reproduction of life as a project” (19-20). Feminine narratives of emotion, love, family, and romance thus circulate in an intimate national public where “the political sphere is more often seen as a field of threat, chaos, degradation, or retraumatization than a condition of possibility” (11).



that privacy and its contingent politics are feminized, and as I will argue in this chapter, rejected in part because of that feminization. Though Berlant is addressing the intimate publics produced by sentimental women's writing in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, I believe we can see similarities between her formulation and the current advocacy for gay marriage on the left—an advocacy that violates the supposed privacy of the white bourgeois home in order to form an intimate public in favor of a particular kind of political action that would reinstate a temporarily lost juridical privacy. The hyperemotionalism of the debates for and against gay marriage are after all at their roots, sentimental. Because of the production of rhetoric that associates sentimentality and the private with the apolitical and the feminized, there has been a backlash against LGBT discourses about the family, marriage, and queer reproductive models from within queer politics and theory that responds to the “shame” of feminization, but which also produces shame in the naturalization of publicly queer sexual models and the linearity of resistance to the family, to ethnic communities, and to “marriage.” Queer theory and politics have failed to account for the ways in which privacy and the family are radical for queer people and also for the ways in which speaking about the desire for privacy and family from the unintelligibility of the margins undermines the feminization of rights discourse by the radical Left and the social death of queerness espoused by the Right. Because so many of the theoretical formulations about privacy, sex, and the body occur in discourse about gay marriage, I will undertake an extended discussion of it here. Though the texts I engage do not deal directly with marriage, I hope to illustrate how discussions of

domestic and familial privacy within gay marriage debates have serious consequences for queer familial and social formations.

Many queer theorists and activists have made very compelling arguments against the agitation for marriage rights that has become the primary aim of LGBT organizing in the United States in the last two decades. These critiques legitimately point out the association of arguments for gay marriage with neoliberal frameworks of capitalism and citizenship, as well as their rhetorical and ethical affiliation with neoconservative “family values” regarding sexuality. Michael Warner’s careful critique of these paradigms within LGBT organizing in *The Trouble With Normal* astutely points to the problems of queer political engagements which do not address a wide range of oppressions, particularly oppression of non-normative sexual desires from within LGBT rights organizations. He argues that a queer resistance to marriage has “centered on the need to resist the state regulation of sexuality” (88). He does, however, concede that “It is possible, at least in theory, to imagine a politics in which sex-neutral marriage is seen as a step toward the more fundamental goals of sexual justice: not just formal equality for the law, based on a procedural bar to discrimination, but a substantive justice that would target sexual domination, making possible a democratic cultivation of alternative sexual identities” (90). Nevertheless, Warner’s text attempts to resist “respectable” formations of LGBT sexuality in favor of a queer politics of sexual inclusion. Along these same lines, Warner, Lauren Berlant, and other feminist and queer theorists have been instrumental in contributing to our understanding of how legally sanctioned privacy

works to punish queer sex acts and to produce a culture of sexual shame. Sex, in other words, has been the loser in LGBT organizing for privacy and marriage under the law.

However, I would like to return to Warner's formulation of a kind of marriage, family, or queer kinship that would make room for "a substantive justice that would target sexual domination, making possible a democratic cultivation of alternative sexual identities" (90). Would queering privacy and the domestic space make room for this democratic proliferation of sexual identity and association? In this chapter I argue that underneath these careful and cogent critiques of privacy from the left and the resistance to the inclusion of LGBT people in legal marriage from the right is an anxiety about who is being penetrated by whom, when, with what, and thus who is being feminized by this penetration. By attempting to establish a queer notion of privacy that carefully negotiates the boundary between public and private space, particularly with readers, I hope to demonstrate how domesticity and privacy in a queer sexual context can work for sexual justice and resistance to sexual shame.

Since Catherine MacKinnon's groundbreaking study of privacy in legal discourse in *Toward a Feminist Theory of the State*, privacy has largely been considered a suspect term for women, and further queer critique of the underlying bias towards heterosexuality in MacKinnon's work has extended this critique of privacy to queer theory and politics. In her chapter on abortion, MacKinnon discusses how privacy, as an arm of male-dominated political and social forms, functions to oppress women even when it appears, as in the case of reproductive rights, to benefit them. She states that privacy doctrine, in liberal governments, operates as if "no act of the state contributes to

shaping its internal alignments or distributing its internal forces, so no act of the state should participate in changing it” (190). Therefore, the state’s conception of “privacy” only actually protects those (men) who already have access to its autonomy, moving women further away from beneficial state intervention and from being able to see reproductive rights not as a privacy issue, but an issue of sexual equality. She concludes, then, that the “private is public for those for whom the personal is political” (191). In this text, MacKinnon is discussing the legal position of women under heterosexuality and male-dominated political and social rule, and queer theorists have critiqued her for not examining the underlying assumptions of heterosexuality in her text. Lauren Berlant, for example, argues that in the 1960s, heterosexual intimacy entered into the constitutional scene through claims of privacy and that

constitutional theorization of sexual privacy is drawn from a lexicon of romantic sentiment, a longing for a space where there is no trouble, a place whose constitution in law would be so powerful that desire would meet moral discipline there, making real the dreamy rule. In this dream the zone of privacy is a paradigmatic national space too, where freedom and desire meet up in their full suprapolitical position, a site of embodiment that also leaves unchallenged fundamental dicta about the universality or abstractness of the modal citizen.

(135)

For Berlant, therefore, the fantasy of legal privacy is always complicit with the heteronormativity of national space, “registering with symptomatic incoherence a more general struggle to maintain the contradictory rights and privileges of women,

heterosexuality, the family, the state, and patriarchalized sexual privilege” (143). Against this image of heterosexuality, Berlant and Elizabeth Freeman posit that queerness resists privacy and the banality of intimacy under sexual privacy laws. They argue that “crucial to a sexually radical movement for social change is the transgression of categorical distinctions between sexuality and politics, with their typically embedded distinctions between public, private, and personal concerns” (149). Furthermore, they argue that the “queer body—as an agent of publicity, as a unit of self-defense, and finally as a spectacle of ecstasy—becomes the locus where mainstream culture’s discipline of gay citizens is written and where the pain caused by this discipline is transformed into rage and pleasure” (155). While I find their vision of queer politics both inspiring and productive in many ways, several questions arise.

What, exactly, is the “queer body”? How is the queer body related to the disciplined “gay citizen”? In other words, are the queer body and the gay citizen coextensive? How does breaking down the distinction between politics and sexuality necessarily break down the split between public/private? What, exactly, is “public”? And finally, how does one enact or what is a “spectacle of ecstasy”? In most formulations of this version of queer politics, including Berlant and Freeman’s own, “public” is constituted by urban spaces, often commercial, or by urban spaces specifically intended for gay performance.<sup>41</sup> These public spaces are not exactly or necessarily the opposite of “private” as it is constituted by the domestic as both of these

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<sup>41</sup> In their article “Sex in Public,” Warner and Berlant describe scenes of queer sexuality such as a performance of erotic vomiting in a leather bar. Though I am sure this experience might be sexually and personally liberating, my question is about how this individual act affects normative political systems.

spaces imply certain geographical positioning and as Ki Namaste has pointed out, often they require certain performances of gender. Furthermore, the “queer body,” though it may evoke the gay citizen, is often positioned as the opposite of gay domesticity or privacy (see Warner). The queer body, in the case of *Queer Nation*—the example that Berlant and Freeman choose—is mostly the body of white middle class gay men. How, then, can this formulation of queer politics account for the bodies of the gender non-normative, whose life may or may not be conducted in the urban publics of queer theory? Are there more nuanced examples of public and private than are accounted for here? Is there a kind of public privacy that is negotiated within domesticity in narratives of the gender non-conforming? In examining these narratives, can different relationships between urban/rural, family/queer community, and public/private be imagined?

While critiques of privacy still hold true in a legal sense, the concept of privacy can be critically engaged by a queer politics of feeling where privacy is not protected by official legal discourse, but finds legitimacy in an archive of feeling that remains unsanctioned by mainstream culture. There is an official and legal discourse about privacy that is in fact detrimental to gender and to queer sex, but the opposite of that discourse of privacy is not necessarily or only to make sex “public” as Berlant, Warner, and Freeman argue, where “public” is associated with specific urban spaces and communities. We must also understand the ways in which queer familial privacy as an affective state can radically undermine the shame and violence associated with queerness in the narratives discussed in this chapter. Furthermore, while the resistance to and

critique of legal privacy from a queer standpoint holds true, the resistance of the *space* of privacy—the home—is related to a resistance to the feminization associated with domesticity and “private” family life. When Michael Warner critiques privacy as complicit in the culture of sexual shame, the figure he most often mentions with derision and against queerness is the man “making dinner for his boyfriend.” This oppositional logic of the domestic or sentimental and the queer is, I think, dangerous for our formulation of queer politics because it ignores the ways in which the domestic, as a public-private space, might be used to radical ends. And while constitutional privacy law will perhaps always remain antagonistic to both queerness and gender, rhetorically speaking there is radical potential in a kind of “public privacy” for queerness. Because the domestic space is feminized, it is also the object for surveillance and therefore is never really private even when the law pretends that it is. Public privacy, a result of surveillance as well as self-articulation and narrative, is furthermore constituted along similar lines as Berlant’s “intimate public,” but I want to resist the implication that the circulation of narratives and familial affect fail to be political. To return to MacKinnon’s supposition, “the private is public for those for whom the personal is political,” will be true for queer persons, but might not only necessarily result in “going public” in the traditional sense.

A careful rhetorical analysis of right-wing discourse on gay marriage and LGBT parenting and family structures reveals that it is in fact the “privacy” of the situation that is perceived as able to radically undermine the institution of marriage as a neoliberal and neoconservative organizational framework. According to right-wing media, gay

marriage and its constitutive privacy for gay and lesbian couples will undo the peace between genders, the distinction between species, the sanity of children, and the structure of western civilization as we know it. Let's hope so. In other words, in Right-wing discourse, extending privacy to queers would result in a kind of moral relativism in which "anything goes" behind closed doors. The desire implicit in this logic is not to create private spheres safe from government protection, but rather to create political distinctions between heterosexual and homosexual in order to produce fictional knowledge of *exactly* what happens in the bedroom. Thus, Right-wing legal privacy discourses are not used to protect the plethora of heterosexual practices that most certainly occur in the heterosexual bedroom, but rather to perpetuate the fiction that a knowledge of who is being penetrated by what and when is not only possible, but a part of the fabric of "decent" society.<sup>42</sup> That this version of privacy is juridical seems only incidental to the larger argument implicit in right-wing rhetoric, which is more about producing the fiction of sexual knowledge of the heterosexual bedroom and therefore the possibility of shame for homosexuals. Furthermore, what is missing in the critique of privacy from Warner, Berlant, and Freeman is an understanding that the "public" spaces they envision for queer sexuality—the leather bar, the mall in the case of Queer

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<sup>42</sup> For example, in the Family Research Council's anti-gay marriage polemic, "The Slippery Slope of Same-Sex Marriage" as well as Senator Rick Santorum's missives against gay marriage in the Senate and the Media demonstrate anxiety not about gay sex in particular, but about the lack of knowledge about sex practices that might be confirmed by allowing LGBT marriage. Santorum and the FRC pamphlet both link gay marriage with the possibility for incestuous marriages as well as marriages between humans and animals. The equation of these two things is not necessarily about gay sex practices, but the fiction of knowledge produced by heterosexual juridical privacy laws and patriarchal rule.



Nation—are also juridically protected zones through claims to free assembly, capitalist practices, and even privacy. For example, in Berlant and Warner’s article “Sex in Public,” the juxtaposition of the leather bar as “public space” to the privacy of the heterosexual bedroom or the privacy desired by those claiming rights to LGBT marriage is somewhat of a false dichotomy. The leather bar—though it may be a zone of targeted prejudice by right-wing groups or even Mayor Giuliani in their example—is still a space constitutionally, and thus juridically, protected by legal rights to free assembly and the exercise of urban capital. Thus, the theoretical constitution of these publics is not the opposite of zones of heterosexual domestic privacy, but rather a different exercise of juridical freedoms made available by capital and by geography.

The narrative of “public” sex which has become a foundation for queer political practice has produced narratives that ignore the ways in which any kind of privacy for queers and women is extra-judicial because, as I argued in my previous chapter, women and queers inhabit spaces already outside the law. The zones of privacy I am discussing and arguing for through the narratives in this chapter are not about seeking juridical privacy or exercising the juridical right to assemble publicly, but rather interpersonal public-private spaces negotiated between the subject and the “reader/viewer” where the political and the personal are always already indistinguishable and extra-judicial. The zones of privacy I discuss in this chapter are already “outside” the law because there is no room for the subjects they involve to exist inside the law. Thus, their appeal to discourses of privacy is not an appeal to the law, but an appeal to their communities and families for a reprieve from shame through zones of affective private relations. Though

the arguments of Warner, Berlant, and Freeman are compelling when considering a subject's position in relation to the law, their exhortation to "go public" with queer sex ignores the ways in which private, domestic relations can be radical for the gender non-conforming and furthermore this proscriptive political narrative that in some senses requires urban capital and gender normativity also produces a culture of "sexual shame" for those it seeks to represent. Because of the association of the private with the domestic, and thus with feminization and by extension, penetration, in both queer and right-wing discourses, I seek in this chapter to expose how "going public" with sex can be productive of the same sexual shame that Warner, Berlant, and Freeman seek to critique, as well as examine how a zone of familial, sexual, and affective privacy can be radical for queer formulations of sexuality.

### ***The L Word, the Midwest Migration, and Transgender Pregnancy***

In Showtime's popular six-season series *The L Word*, the transgender character of Max/Moira presents an interesting juxtaposition and complication to the other urban, mostly wealthy, lesbians on the show. Max/Moira comes from the Midwest and when we are first introduced to her she self-identifies as a "butch" lesbian. Lucas Cassidy Crawford, in his essay "Transgender Without Organs: Mobilizing a Neo-Affective Theory of Gender Modification" explores Max/Moira's narrative along with others that might resist the urbanizing impulse of queer communities. He argues that most narratives of gender non-conformity demand "metaphors of sovereign territoriality as

well as literal movement from place to place by those who practice it” (129). Crawford, then, wants to “deterritorialize” this model “of the transgender or transsexual subject, if only because this increasingly coherent model of the subject entails practices that demand medical, sub-cultural, and financial resources often unavailable to (or undesired by) some rural gender-fuckers—and probably many urban ones as well” (139-40).

Crawford wants to disentangle the migratory narrative that culminates in a rooted sense of place from experiences of gender non-conformity. This scripted migratory narrative for the rural queer is exemplified in *The L Word's* treatment of the Max/Moira character. According to the internal logic of the show and the examples set by the other Midwestern characters Tina and Jenny, Max/Moira's migration to the coast from rural Illinois is supposed to signal an unshackling of the heterosexual, familial, and economic values of the Midwest. However, Max/Moira does not appropriately become urban and lesbian, and instead understands himself as transgender. Max is the only major representation of transgender identities on the show and he is clearly meant to be read as “representative” of a growing concern with transgender issues in the GLBT movement and the writers' awareness of that concern. Despite this representative impulse, most of the story arcs involving Max indicate that his transgender identity in fact produces shame and violence, the antithesis of the “appropriately” urban lesbians on the show. To be an “appropriate” lesbian, it is implied in the narrative of the show, is to be unmistakably female as well as economically solvent. Moreover, the show's ideal lesbian is conversant in a particular social and political conversation about sexuality that sees masculinized women as somehow “retrograde.” Moira's rejection of the “butch”

label in favor of Max's transgender identity is therefore represented as a failure to become appropriately urban and lesbian. It is a failure to "migrate" from one "backwards" political context to another more progressive one. In embracing the aesthetics and values of transgender masculinity, which is portrayed as a desire for heterosexuality and normalcy, the logic of the show presents Max as a character who fails to understand the urban code of appropriate lesbianism. The narrative logic of the show then seeks to illustrate through Max's story arcs the ways in which this narrative is inescapable and furthermore the ways that Max/Moira will be forced to comply with gender norms and with the impulse to sexual publicity of the urban queer community—or else be shamed and excluded by those she would count among his peers.

Though her wardrobe and demeanor mark her as "working-class" and blue collar, Max/Moira actually works in the white-collar field of information technology. In the course of the show, Max/Moira comes to understand his identity as FTM transgender and engages in sexual relationships with both women and gay men. He takes testosterone and saves up money for top surgery, which he never completes due to an accidental pregnancy with his gay male lover, Tom. The show's portrayal of Max/Moira's identity as both butch and working-class points to the show's construction of feminine, educated, urban lesbianism as oppositional to this Midwestern, rural identity. When Bette, an Ivy-league educated art director, says that the language of "butch" is all that Max/Moira knows, she is articulating a scripted political narrative in which Max/Moira has migrated from Illinois to the coast in order to find a new language of urban lesbian identity that is antithetical to Midwestern economic and social

conditions. Max/Moira's initial lover when she comes to Los Angeles, Jenny Schechter, is an example of how this narrative works. When she arrives in Los Angeles from her Midwestern college, she is in a relationship with a man, Tim, but comes to discover her own lesbian identity and becomes increasingly urbanized in her wardrobe, career, and views. Jenny was a kind of "project" for these urban, lesbian women who set her on a path of self-discovery through the aesthetics and culture of urban West Hollywood, a path of discovery these women also intend for Max/Moira. Butch identity on the show is explicitly associated only with the working class and the rural—even when those whom the show identifies as butch live in L.A. The butch characters, of whom Moira is the only one of significance, are carpenters, contractors, and other blue-collar workers. The show's binary logic therefore posits that butchness is a marker of lower social class, educational status, and rural backgrounds, and is therefore the opposite of the desirable educated, stylish lesbian characters.<sup>43</sup> It is expected that Max/Moira will come to disassociate lesbianism from rural butchness and from the working-class in her associations with this new group of women. Time and again, therefore, Moira, in coming to understand herself as Max, is forced to justify his gender identity to the women on the show.

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<sup>43</sup> At one point, Moira refers to another of the main characters, Shane, as "butch." Though Shane is often portrayed as androgynous, she signals with an eye-roll that she is *not* butch. Her androgyny is figured as urban and lesbian in response to Moira's butch identity, which is construed as somehow less "polished," nuanced, or carefully articulated. Both Shane and Carmen scoff at the possibility of butchness, making fun of Moira and implying that her butch identity is rooted in a lack of knowledge about lesbian identities and an inability to read the sexual identities of this new urban environment appropriately.

In these encounters, violence—both rhetorical and literal—is done to him when his “privacy” is violated and she is shamed by other characters, as in the case where someone assaults Moira outside of a restaurant where she had used the women’s restroom. Since the other woman in the bathroom was unable to read her gender, she publicized Moira’s “freak” identity to her boyfriend, who reacted with violence. Furthermore, the implicit desire for knowledge exemplified by the Tom-Max story arc to know what exactly is occurring in Tom and Max’s bedroom is externalized through his pregnancy in the last season; this desire is an example of both the show (and its fans through blog posts and discussion forums) to know exactly “what’s going on” with Tom and Max, in other words, to know who is being penetrated, where, by what, and when. The narrative impulse and its viewers to somehow stabilize gender identity and sexual behavior along clearly articulated binaries is reflected in the discomfort with Max’s identity that occurs throughout the arc of the series and Max’s transgender identity is often figured as a “selling out” of urban feminized lesbian aesthetics.

On several occasions, for example, Moira/Max’s character encounters the reality that he would have more “success” as a man than as a butch or gender queer lesbian. When Moira is first looking for an IT job on the show, she applies to a Los Angeles firm where her employment record is well received and it is clear she is perfect for the job. However, the boss’s determination to know what Moira “is”—her gender and sexual identity—puts Moira in the position of having to defend not her employment record, but her private life. The desire of this boss to expose Moira’s sex life, to violate her privacy by knowing what exactly occurs in her bedroom, trumps her ability to earn capital—one

of the requirements for this new urban life in Los Angeles. In the urbanized space of Los Angeles, Moira's interaction with this employer suggests that there is no room for the identity that served her just fine economically in the Midwest. Though it might then be argued that urban Los Angeles is ironically more interested in stable gender identities, and that there might be more space for the destabilization of these binaries in the Midwest, this is not the way Moira's situation is presented. Her girlfriend Jenny suggests that Moira apply for the job as Max in order to expose the company's gendered and homophobic hiring practices. Max receives the job and is welcomed into the firm's "boys' club" and even begins to date the boss's daughter while identifying as a man. Though Jenny had hoped that Max would reject this job and expose the firm for its prejudices, Max finds it easier to earn the wage necessary to maintain the lifestyle of Jenny and her friends by living as a man. The writers of the show might have used this narrative arc as a moment to critique assumptions about political and social progressiveness on the coasts and illustrate Max's complicated self-identification, but instead the show uses Jenny's anger and disgust to point out that Max is not appropriately lesbian or feminist.

It is at this point in the economic and class narrative of the show that Max begins to understand his identity as transgender. Furthermore, gendered identity and earning power are placed in opposition to the demands of Jenny and her friends' lesbian-feminist views, setting up what might be argued is the "classic" war between gendered concerns and queerness. Though the seemingly leftist feminism of these women is intended to be (and often is) very appealing to female viewers, their relationship to capital on the one

hand and to Max's gender non-conformity on the other sets up a conflict between the demands of urbanized identity politics and Max's own self-articulated gender identity.<sup>44</sup> That Max might resist publicizing his gender and suing his firm for discrimination is seen by the other characters on the show as a failure of interpretation and imagination. That he might be *want* to be a man is figured as a betrayal to lesbian identity itself. Lesbian identity is therefore set up as public, urban, and political, whereas Max's trans identity is seen as an investment in the Midwestern, working class values of private life.

On other occasions, strangers perceive Moira as a man, such as when he and Jenny are moving from the Midwest to Los Angeles. One stranger who is helping them with their car trouble assumes they are husband and wife, welcoming them into the private domesticity of their mobile home. In the restaurant scene referred to earlier, a teenaged girl asks Moira to leave the women's restroom at a fast food restaurant. Upon Moira's confession, "I'm a girl," the girl calls her a "freak" and her male friend physically assaults Max until Jenny shoots the boy with a Taser gun. The juxtaposition of these two scenes in Moira's episode of migration illustrates that though Moira might "pass" as a boy and does under certain circumstances, her confession of gender and gender non-conformity result in physical violence. When Max is a "boy," though people may look closely at him, he is able to resist violence, but when his privacy is violated—often not of his own volition—and his gender non-conformity comes to light, violence is the result. The show's illustration of what could be called butch lesbianism or female

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<sup>44</sup> I am reading this context in the subtext of the show. It is not presented as a conflict—rather Max is presented as hopelessly backwards by the other characters on the show.



masculinity implies that there is no room for gender non-conformity and it is even frowned upon by the white, elite lesbian characters. The narrative does not, however, allow for an escape from this social script through transgender surgery for Max. As a transgender person, Max is automatically excluded from lesbian identity and sociopolitical activity. Because Max's choice of masculinity rests on a previous rural butch identity, he must be excised from the urban, lesbian community.

Alice, one of the characters on the show whose migration from punky, boyish bisexual to sleek, urban lesbian, is another example of one who successfully completes the scripted political narrative Moira should follow and is one of the characters who continually makes it clear that she and Max do not speak the same language. She manages a popular website, radio show, and video podcast called "Our Chart." Max does the technical work for the website and for the podcasts, providing labor for the knowledge of sexual connections that "Our Chart" maintains create community in Los Angeles for lesbians. Though Max is a major support for this enterprise, Alice frequently relegates his participation to technical labor and a transgender "corner." Max appears on one of the podcasts in order for Alice to apologize to him because she said that Max—and other transgender people—do not belong in the lesbian community or on Our Chart. Even during her apology, Alice says she "apparently" said some things that were "kind of uncool," and further explains that the reason she thinks bisexuals are able to be included in her community is because they are more "natural" than transgender people. Though Alice had been critiqued by not only Max but also a major lesbian rights activist, her apology at best lacks genuine understanding of Max's situation.

Despite the fact that the audience is allowed to hear this critique of Alice's behavior, it is clear from the events of the rest of the episode that the viewer should understand that Alice's resistance to Max and her suspicion of him is well founded. Max's voice is almost immediately covered over by romantic events happening at their local coffee shop and the podcast is interrupted. Furthermore, it is in this episode where Max first begins dating and engages in a sexual relationship with Tom, a gay man. Though Alice gave Max an apology and agreed that her website should be more inclusive, the juxtaposition of this half-hearted apology with Max's involvement with Tom implies that perhaps Max does not belong in the same community as Alice. In coming to understand himself as a man, and even engaging in relationships with men, Max has failed to understand the correct lesbian, urban, capitalist narrative that the show wants its audience to desire. Though Max has moved from the Midwest to the coast, he has failed to internalize the proper wardrobe, career, and sexual scripts required for participation in Alice's community. In attempting to transition and to stylize his body as male, to solidify his gender as male, it is clear that Max does not meet the qualifications for belonging to the same community as the other lesbians on the show.

However, Max is not allowed to escape the inherent femaleness of his body, which draws further attention to the "mistake" he makes when he fails to internalize the values of this community. When Max goes to schedule his top surgery with his boyfriend Tom, long after he has begun to take testosterone, he discovers that he cannot have the surgery because he is four months pregnant. Though we are never quite sure what kind of sex Max and Tom are having in the "dark" of their bedroom, Max's

pregnancy externalizes and makes clear that not only is Max still a “woman”—illustrating the show’s ongoing discomfort with the possibility of gender non-conformity—but also signals to the viewer that Max was being vaginally penetrated by Tom. Max’s pregnancy, which many viewers thought was a pandering to the current headlines of the “pregnant man,” further highlights the discomfort present in the narrative of the show and the discomfort its viewers had with Max’s transgender identity.<sup>45</sup> The anxiety underlying the show, its characters, and its audience about Max’s failure to be appropriately urban and lesbian and to shake off his Midwestern identity, particularly as marked by the stylization of his body and wardrobe, is manifested in his eventual pregnancy with Tom. It is as if Max’s pregnancy can reassure the viewers what was really “going on” in Tom and Max’s bedroom, but also that the failure to internalize appropriate scripts about gender, sexuality, capital, and community will not necessarily undo those rules or those scripts, and that eventually those scripts will win out, even over the most unwilling participants. The pregnancy is, therefore, the ultimate violation of Max’s bodily and sexual privacy and externalizes that he is penetrable in a distinctly feminine way. Furthermore, this pregnancy illustrates that what might be read as Max’s adherence to the norms of masculinity is ultimately violable because his body cannot escape its association with feminization.

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<sup>45</sup> Blogs dealing with the show such as “Stuff Queer People Need to Know” and “The L Herd” reflect in their authored posts as well as comments the disgust viewers feel towards the Max narrative—particularly pointing to its affiliation with the “pregnant transman” Thomas Beattie. The most overwhelming number of questions on these sites inquired about the logistics of Max’s pregnancy and his sex with Tom, as well as defenses of Jenny who begins to call Max “she” again after the pregnancy comes to light.

The violation of Max's privacy that is the pregnancy—along with all of the other violations of his privacy—reinforces his association with the violence, both real and metaphorical, of the penetration of the public eye. Though the viewer is supposed to read the Midwestern Max as regressive in his desires for masculinity and see his belief that familial (or suburban) happiness might be desirable as retrograde, the continuous violation of Max's privacy by the show and its audience illustrates the way that shame is associated with the gender non-conforming. If Max were allowed the privacy he so desperately desires, not a juridical privacy, but a freedom from the prying eyes of his friends, his boss, and his supposed community, would that privacy be both queer and radical? Is it radical, then, to resist the urbanized, capitalist queer communities that Crawford critiques in his article? Furthermore, would a narrative that overtly resists this political script, even a narrative which on its surface might appear conservative, actually be arguing for this radical version of affective privacy that resists shame? I turn to Jeffrey Eugenides's *Middlesex* because it is a text that takes up many of the issues that *The L Word* seeks to resist or cover over in its depiction of Max/Moira. *Middlesex* is also a story about migration—global and local—that begins and ends in the Midwest, begins and ends in the seat of the family, and resists the political script of seemingly non-juridical publicity over affective privacy.

### ***Middlesex*, Migration, and the Family**

Jeffrey Eugenides's *Middlesex* provides a model of queer life that does not force its main character Cal/Callie to choose between the binaries of male/female and family/community, therefore resisting a corrective queer political narrative that demands publicity and reformulates sexual norms.<sup>46</sup> Though Cal/Callie's life might appear to be completely dominated by the norms of the heterosexual matrix, upon closer analysis we will find that his/her resistance to the medicalization normally required of transgender and transsexual persons, his/her investment in family and relational life, provides a model for queer life that focuses not simply on resisting or transgressing the dominant term in each binary, but instead uses relational affect to heal the wounds of the body and the heart experienced by so many of his/her gender ambiguous peers.<sup>47</sup> As Kate Bornstein articulates in her own narrative of transsexuality, "The choice between two of something is not a choice at all, but rather the opportunity to subscribe to the value system which holds the two presented choices as mutually exclusive alternatives. Once we choose one or the other, we've bought into the system that perpetuates the binary"

(101). The resistance to binary choice espoused by Bornstein supports an understanding

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<sup>46</sup> A brief summary of the plot: Cal's grandparents are brother and sister who flee Greece from the Turks and come to the United States to live with relatives. Their incestuous relationship and the subsequent marriage of their son to his cousin, results in a genetic anomaly that produces Callie's intersexuality. This anomaly is not caught at birth, but manifests when she is a teenager. Callie chooses to live her adult life as a male, and as an employee of the state department spends most of his adult life abroad.

<sup>47</sup> The usage of pronouns throughout the chapter is meant to underscore their ambiguity. At times I will refer to Cal/Callie, Cal, Callie, his, her, his/her, he/she, etc. However, I attempt to pay attention to how Cal/Callie perceives him/herself at that moment in the text.

that the public/privacy split as it is formulated in family/community or queer/non-queer is not only a false binary, but also an unproductive politics. Furthermore, the binary of public/private and queer/not queer is played out in racialized and gendered terms. I will argue that Eugenides's text and Cal/Callie's resistance to the choice between binary opposites, in terms of his/her genital sex and in the locus of the family, might provide a new model of queer affective life that fucks gender, the state, and normalization by the dominant culture and queer culture alike.

Resistance to normalizing narratives of gender, sexuality, and desire produces several sites of struggle in the text. The first of these sites occurs when Callie discovers the “truth” of her genetic makeup. Cal/Callie then refuses "corrective" genital surgery that would make him/her appear to be “wholly” male or “wholly” female. Because of the surgical nature of sex reassignment surgery, a person who wishes to alter his or her assigned gender must enter into a process of constant confession up until the point of his or her transition (or migration, to use Cassidy's term) from one gender to another, at which point a silencing of confession is required so that the newly altered transsexual can learn to "pass" naturally in his or her new gender. Kate Bornstein describes the process of surgical transition—illustrating that trans persons wishing to undergo surgery must go to several therapists before their surgery can be performed and that each therapist must recognize that the person wishing to undergo surgery has the appropriate "script." In most cases, this means that the transgender person must say that he or she has never felt at "home" in his or her body or assigned gender. Following the confessional entrance into medical discourse, if the "patient" is allowed to have surgery

(a process of approval made by doctors, not by the consent or desires of the patient), he or she is asked to remain silent about this extremely transformative and life-changing event. Bornstein describes how this silence, this imperative towards passing, is the way that "the culture uses transsexuals to reinforce the bi-polar gender system, as transsexuals strive for recognition within their new gender, and thus the privilege and chains of their new gender" (127). Gender is not necessarily stabilized by surgery itself, but by the imperative to silence required by current models of the surgical "normalization" of genitals. Cal's resistance to the medicalization of his/her gender, part of the "sanctioned" straight and queer narrative of migration from one gender to another, or ambiguous gender to "solid" gender—largely based on the gender of one's sexual object choice—enacts for Cal/Callie a way to negotiate both of the genders that would hail him as a member and refuses to make intersexuality and transgenderism palatable to straights or queers. What is most important is that Cal's gender is consensual, which is really the thing that distances him from the surgical processes that would seek to stabilize his gender.

When Cal discovers the truth about his ambiguous sex, his parents take him to see a specialist, hilariously called Dr. Luce,<sup>48</sup> who after extensive interviews and research wishes to assign Callie to the female sex/gender she was raised because he believes that gender identification rests solely on cultural construction and is established

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<sup>48</sup> It is my belief that Eugenides is referring here to Luce Irigaray whose book *This Sex Which Is Not One* refuses patriarchal control via embodied language. The text seems to argue that medicalization and the discourse it produces about bodies and sexuality is yet another language of patriarchal or phallogocentric language that seeks to maintain control over Callie's body.

early in life. Through entrance into this medical discourse, Cal observes that his genitals “have been the most significant thing that ever happened to me” (Eugenides 401). The narration of Cal's discovery that he is intersexed is largely based in medical discourses that closely resemble the "Optimum Gender of Rearing" model used by Dr. John Money and other sexological researchers at Johns Hopkins University beginning in the 1950s. According to Alice D. Dreger and April M. Herndon, "the optimum gender of rearing model (OGR) was based on the assumption that children are born psychosexually neutral at birth--that gender is primarily a product of nurture (upbringing), not nature (genes and prenatal hormones)--and that having a sex anatomy that appeared to match one's gender identity is necessary to a stable gender identity" (202). Similarly, Dr. Luce has Cal/Callie undergo a series of psychological and physical tests in order to determine her "true" gender identity, which he believes is "like a native tongue; it didn't exist before birth but was imprinted in the brain during childhood, never disappearing. Children learn to speak Male or Female in the way they learn to speak English or French" (Eugenides 411). In fact, Dr. Luce's work on gender is very similar to that of Dr. Money and his fellow researchers at Johns Hopkins whose work to bring into alignment perceived gender characteristics and exterior anatomy was largely based on interviews about object desire, sexual arousal (often through the viewing of pornographic films), and a general secrecy to the patient or the patient's parents about what the consequences of such reassignment surgery are. The critique of OGR from the intersex movement almost exactly parallels Cal/Callie's experiences with Dr. Luce. As Dreger and Herndon assert



Among the problems with the OGR model were these: it treated children in a sexist, asymmetrical way, valuing aggressiveness and sexual potency for boys and passiveness and reproductive/sexual receptive potential for girls; it presumed that homosexuality (apparent same-sex relations) and transgenderism (changing or blurring gender identities) constituted bad outcomes; it violated principles of informed consent by failing to tell decision-making parents about the poor evidentiary support for the approach; it violated the axioms of truth telling and 'first, do no harm'; it forced children to have their bodies adapted to oppressive social norms, using surgeries and hormone treatments that sometimes resulted in irrevocable harm; it generally involved treating psychosocial issues without the active participation of psychosocial professionals such as psychologists, psychiatrists, and social workers. (204)

Callie's experiences with Dr. Luce are very similar to those of intersex persons who were subject to the practices critiqued by Dreger and Herndon and have later spoken out against the practitioners of the OGR model, particularly for the interrogations and subsequent secrecy that resulted from their "abnormal" bodies. Callie feels trapped in her examinations by Dr. Luce and the audiences he frequently brings to see her: "And now Luce had me. In the examination room, he told me to get undressed and put on a paper gown...he had me lie down on a table with my legs up in stirrups. There was a pale green curtain, the same color as my gown, that could be pulled across the table, dividing my upper and lower halves. Luce didn't close it that first day. Only later, when there was an audience" (412). Callie does not understand the reason for these

examinations, only feels their violation and the separation these medical practices create between her body and her lived experience, exemplified by the curtain that literally divides her head from her sex organs. In the story of Angela Moreno that closely parallels that of the fictional Cal/Callie, she states "they told my parents some horror story about a girl like me who had peeked at her file once while the doctor was out of the room and then killed herself" (Moreno 138). Thus, one of the most damaging aspects of the entrance of the intersex body into medical discourses is the secrecy that surrounds the physicality of body, as well as the interrogation of object and sexual desire which codifies the normalization of gender roles. Callie states that "Luce felt that parents weren't able to cope with an ambiguous gender assignment. You had to tell them if they had a boy or a girl. Which meant that before you said anything, you had to be sure of what the prevailing gender was" (413). Secrecy in this situation is not a synonym for privacy—legal or otherwise—but is defined by medical intrusion and resistance to the "shame" of non-conforming sex characteristics and gendered behavior.

Thus, in the selection of either "male" or "female," the gender binary is ostensibly upheld, but these tests also seem geared at making sure that no person who is really a "man" would be assigned a female sex designation and therefore would be expected to perform as a woman in sexual relationships. The results of this questioning rely on gendered understandings of emotions and emotional states like aggression, passivity, sentiment, etc. The association of those emotions with certain gendered and sexed identities recapitulates the masculine/feminine binary in which masculine is the dominant term. The fear of feminizing real "boys" contributes to the silence that

accompanies these medical practices. Cal/Callie's experiences align with this in that it is her discussion of object choice and her admitted sexual penetration by a boy that enable Dr. Luce to assure her parents that she is a "girl," thus ensuring that penetration is still associated with feminization despite Cal/Callie's XXY chromosomal status. Cal discovers the nature of his sex when he secretly reads Dr. Luce's report. This medical document at the center of the text, reproduced in its fictional entirety, illustrates the simultaneous entrance of the body into medical discourse and the refusal to speak the way in which the intersex body is constructed by those discourses. These medical discourses operate in silence in order to maintain the gender binary and are what continue to link the systems of sex, gender, and desire (object choice) so that the primacy of heterosexuality remains intact.

When Cal declares to his mother that he is a boy—"I am not a girl, I am a boy" (Eugenides 439)—he is responding to the intense questioning of Dr. Luce that relates his gender to his sexual desires. Dr. Luce never allows for the possibility that Callie could be a girl and desire women *at the same time*, conditioning her response to assume that she is *not a woman but a man* because she desires women. As Dreger and Herndon have noted, gender constructivism does not always work for progressive ends, but sometimes reifies the gendered heteronormativity of the dichotomous sex system. However, it is also important not to assume that Cal perceives an essential gender about himself—he repeatedly says he decided to "live as a man"—and that his choice to do so is heavily informed by the entrance into medical discourse that reinforces a male-female heterosexual relationship. In Judith Butler's discussion of the John/Joan case, where a

child's circumcision was botched and female sex was reassigned, she cautions those that would read John/Joan's self-description of gender identity as evidence of an essential gender to consider the discourse of interrogation—based largely on heteronormativity and behaviors that are considered "masculine" or "feminine."<sup>49</sup> She argues that while John/Joan's self-description is to be carefully heard, "we also have a description of a self that takes place in a language that is already going on, that is already saturated with norms, that predisposes us as we seek to speak of ourselves" (Butler, "Justice" 630). Thus when Callie declares she is no longer a girl after reading her medical file and decides to live as Cal, he/she is interacting with and interpreting the discursive norms set up by Dr. Luce and the medical profession, as well as the larger social and symbolic norms that require the enactment of binarized terms, that do not open up the possibility for same-sex/gendered desires. Furthermore, Callie's refusal of surgery, to make herself "wholly" male or female, implies that he/she does not understand sex, gender, and object choice to be in direct correlation. Cal's choice to keep his genitals ambiguous, her enlarged clitoris or small penis, what he calls the "crocus," but stylize his body as male and pursue relationships with women may imply that his character understands social gender, but not necessarily sex or secondary sex characteristics, as being connected to

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<sup>49</sup> The John/Joan case was long used as evidence for John Money's OGR theory. Born a male but victim to a botched circumcision, John was reassigned as a female and raised as a girl. He/she was repeatedly interviewed by Money throughout childhood, questioned relentlessly about behavioral and sexual preferences, subjected to countless medical gazes, forced to watch pornography and simulate sex with his/her brother. John has subsequently been reassigned to his male birth gender. Critics have used this case to prove that there is something essential about gender, but Butler cautions us to consider audience. John's perception of himself as male occurs through multiple discursive levels.

object choice, but it also implies that he does not believe that there is a one-to-one relationship between these categories, and that the categories themselves are constructed as well open to interpretation, questioning, and resistance.

Debra Shostak reads Cal's decision to live as a man as evidence that the hybrid—the sexual and the citizen hybrid—as the "newly thinkable" is a failure in Eugenides's text. She argues that Eugenides's construction of Cal/Callie "gives priority in her self-definition to the crocus-penis and her chromosomal status, which has medically identified her as male. The option does not occur to her, however, to retain her 'uncorrected' anatomy and continue to live as a girl, a failure of imagination largely connected to her experience of erotic desire for another girl" (Shostak 404). What Shostak misses in seeing this choice as a "failure of imagination" on Eugenides's or Callie's part is that the way Cal's sense of himself as a man as it is produced in the narrative of the text is directly tied to the heteronormativity of contemporary medical practices on the intersexed. Eugenides's text underscores that gender identification is always relational. It is in response to an other, to an audience, that reads the body and from that reading assumes a sexed body beneath clothes. Cal/Callie's choice to leave his/her genitals ambiguous but to perform male points to his understanding of the sociality of gender—not to its essential nature. Callie feels that she should be able to live in the in-betweenness of sexual categories, deciding for him/herself which stylization of the body is appropriate to his/her own desires. Cal's status as hybrid does not mean he exists in the middle between "male" and "female," or that he is some combination of the two, but that since one cannot assume sex from gender performance,

he makes the oppositional poles always already impure and unstable. Shostak seems to be arguing that because Cal chooses a social gender he therefore chooses heteronormativity because the "interstitial body remains unspeakable" (407), and therefore Eugenides has failed to imagine gender in a non-conservative or heteronormative way. Eugenides does, however, have Cal speak his own body through the narration of his story and through the affective relationships he maintains with his family and with Julie Kikuchi, an American woman he meets while living abroad in Berlin.

Cal's entrance into discourse and the authorship of his own narrative in the genre of the epic autobiography entitles him to the use of the "I," and the "I" that is speaking is male and female, male or female, and male nor female, but is thoroughly implicated in systems of gender. As Butler articulates, "if gender is constructed, it is not necessarily constructed by an 'I' or 'we' who stands before that construction in any spatial or temporal sense" (*Bodies That Matter* 7). The "I" that Cal invokes at the beginning of the narrative is not, therefore, the prediscursive, gender ambiguous hermaphrodite who exists in between gender categories and is therefore not gendered, but it is an "I" that has already been socialized within gender, already has access to histories of gender, sex, and desire. The fact that Cal chooses to allow the ambiguity of his own "I" to remain intact

by refusing surgery allows him to also understand history as ambiguous and circular.<sup>50</sup> The form of the text, in its non-linearity and its mixing of actual historical events with the fictional tales of the family, further underscores the need to understand gender, sex, and desire as ambiguous. The circularity of the story and the doubtfulness of reliable historical records invoked by Eugenides's text point to the inability of any binary categories to be totally stabilized. Cal's use of the "I" also allows him to see his affective relations with his family and with Julie, his girlfriend, as being fluid, constantly changing, constructing and being constructed by the gendered, classed, and racialized discourses that dominate modern life in the West. In speaking the "I" as an intersex narrator, Cal is declaring himself intelligible and worthy of love. By existing at the margins of the speakable, Cal is making the same discursive move that Butler sees the real John/Joan making. The gap between the knowability of his body and his insistence on his own humanity outside of the norms of gender that would figure him as inhuman and monstrous is where he finds his own worth. Cal, as a first person narrator, accomplishes what Butler argues the real John/Joan is doing: "what he does, through his speech, is to offer a critical perspective on the norms that confer intelligibility itself" ("Justice" 634).

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<sup>50</sup> For example, a significant portion of the middle section of the book has Cal's paternal grandmother working for the Nation of Islam, which it is later revealed is founded by his huckster maternal grandfather Jimmy, posing as W.D. Fard. This retelling of history emphasizes a general attitude illustrated by the text about the solidity of narrative, particularly historical narrative. The text enacts a circular and fluid view of history that corresponds to Cal's circular and fluid body, gender expression, and relational life.

Cal also sees himself as a site for new possibilities, believing that no theory can account for him—neither Luce’s constructivism nor the essentialism popular with the intersex movement of the text—but instead finds both, much like genetics, inadequate for describing his material reality.<sup>51</sup> Cal does not always share the political aspirations of the intersex movement because to him they seem too insular. Though he is a member of the Intersex Society of North America and agrees with their general project of convincing pediatricians that genital surgery is not necessary, Cal chooses not to participate in the political demonstrations of his peers because they do not mesh with his understanding of himself as a non-political person. Though Cal claims that he is not himself political, the text and Eugenides make many arguments throughout that are intended to underscore that though Cal is not *overtly* political, his daily interaction with the world as an intersex individual can only be dangerous to institutions and ideologies—queer and straight—that seek normalization. In other words, Cal is political through his intimacies. This is not to say that Eugenides’s text figures the political as only personal, but that spheres of influence are overlapping and the text itself understands its relationship to the reader to be similar to that of the domestic space, a kind of queer touching, a public/private that does not rely on juridical protections of either the heterosexual bedroom or the capitalist queer public space. The relationship of Cal the narrator to the reader of *Middlesex* is one of public-privacy in which an affective

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<sup>51</sup> Cal’s understanding of the Intersex movement is limited and does not accurately reflect the actual policies of the movement or of the ISNA. I do not mean for Cal/Callie to stand in for actual intersex persons or the organizations that might represent them, but want to stress that Cal’s somewhat apolitical notion of himself represents a different kind of understanding of categorical inclusions than is perhaps available in mainstream or queer politics.



relationship that is both personal and impersonal connects the reader to the text in a queer touch. This touch is both personal and promiscuous in that the relationship appears to be private—the reader feels intimate with Cal alone—and at the same time it is promiscuous because the text and its narrative voice circulate amongst many readers, opening that intimate relationship to a kind of public. The familial relationship is likewise both personal and promiscuous in that the family is a space that is seemingly closed off from outside interference, and yet is thoroughly implicated and penetrated by politics and social discourse and at the same time penetrates the social. If that familial relationship is queer, would it not stand to reason that the political and social, and the other “families” that exist within in it are also being penetrated and touched by this queerness?

Cal sees that “a strange new possibility is arising. Compromised, indefinite, sketchy, but not entirely obliterated: free will is making a comeback. Biology gives you a brain. Life turns it into a mind” (Eugenides 479). In depicting the unrecognizability of his body or his own experiences in current forms of discourse—medical, sexual, social, familial, etc.—Cal is pointing to the experiences of the marginal person whose very existence questions the categories meant to contain him or her. Cal's use of the "I," therefore, is figured as a critical speech act that questions the very norms in which he ostensibly participates because his body and his desires are always on the verge of being unintelligible. Cal's domestic and private relationships with others, when he chooses to engage his "I" with another's, are queer in that they call into question how relationships can be configured and his affective engagement with both Julie and his family opens up

the intelligibility of desire to new possibilities. My emphasis here on interpersonal relationships and feeling is intended to politicize something like love or intimacy. As I will discuss further in my conclusion, queer theory's turn to affect has tended to privilege negative emotions—anger, loss, neglect, shame, etc. And while this work has been productive for thinking about queer life and experiences, as well as a motivation for politics, it is also important to recognize the *range* of emotions and experiences encompassed by queer lives and bodies. Leo Bersani and Adam Philips are two theorists who have attempted to politicize intimacy for queer ends, and while their analysis is productive in many ways for thinking through difference and identification, it does not in my view account for all queer bodies and experiences. Bersani's intimacy is impersonal, it is "intimacy without passion" (27), and rests on a potentiality of relations based on sameness.<sup>52</sup> While the call for impersonal intimacy is refreshing in many ways, in my view it fails to account for bodies (like Cal's, and perhaps because of gender and race, like Julie's) for whom the category of "the same" seems empty. What is "the erasure of people as persons" (Bersani 38) in intimate relations for those whose personhood is already in question because of the unrecognizable body? Intimacy, familial relations, and love in my formulation must recognize the critical "I" at the margins in order to work not only relationally, but socially and politically. While Bersani's articulation of intimacy works in many ways, "impersonal" and "erasure" are terms that can apply only to those whose subjectivity is already recognized by dominant

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<sup>52</sup> Bersani also addresses how sameness in relational systems might work politically in *Homos*.

systems of power. For those at the margins of personhood and recognition, the politicization of something like love is critical to relationships and to politics.

Cal's eventual sexual intercourse with Julie Kikuchi is predicated on full disclosure of his story, which is a refusal of the silence that Bornstein and others have attributed to the lives of the gender ambiguous, and though he is still filled with fear and inhibitions, Cal affirms that affect and personal connection are the only way to negotiate one's place in the social, political, and interpersonal realms: "It was like jumping into cold water. You had to do it without thinking too much. We got under the covers and held each other, petrified, happy" (514). A recent article by Merton Lee has argued that the sex between Cal and Julie at the end of the text, as well as their relationship more generally, illustrate a queer coming of age narrative where the outcome is ultimately a renunciation of queerness for a more adult "normalcy." He argues that because the sex in the text occurs in the "dark" both narratively and metaphorically, "the nude Asian body and the nude intersex body must remain concealed, implying that some excess of shame persists" (42). However, that shame does not in fact persist for Cal after the initial encounter with the medical document that describes his gender ambiguity. In fact, Callie spends several days alone in a hotel room exploring her body and when she emerges decides to live as Cal and retain her genitals as they are, but only after an acceptance of her ambiguous embodiment.

While Shostak and Lee see the relationship between Cal and Julie as sexually conservative, Cal's reservations about putting his body on display, and the text's silence about what actually happens in Cal and Julie's bedroom, allows the text to call into

question the insistence of queer political activists that a condition of queer politics is a visible “transgression” of the normal, particularly of “normal” sexual practices and relationship formations as they are constituted by domesticity. At one point in the novel, Cal has made the migration to the urban center of queerness as it is constituted in the popular imagination—San Francisco. It is here that Cal is first introduced to politics and to cultures of sexual display. Nightly, he performed in a sex show called “Octopussy’s Garden” in which he and other ambiguously sexed persons were underwater and customers could look at them through portholes. Here he also meets another intersex person, Zora, who introduces him to the political intersex movement and to theory more generally. Neither Zora nor Cal see their performance in this show as transgressive of norms or as liberating: “Five nights a week, six hours a day, for the next four months—and fortunately never again—I made my living exhibiting the peculiar way I was formed. The clinic had prepared me for it, benumbing my sense of shame, and besides, I was desperate for money” (483). Cal associates the medical practices he endured under Dr. Luce with the sex show in San Francisco, and in both cases display (even when it is entangled with performance) is for Cal externally imposed.

Cal questions the motivations of those who seek out this kind of performance and wonders at their dreams and preferences: “Viewers got to see strange things, uncommon bodies, but much of the appeal was the transport it involved. Looking through their portholes, the customers were watching real bodies do the things bodies sometimes did in dream. . . . There is no way to tell what percentage of the population dreams such dreams of sexual transmorgification. But they came to our underwater

garden every night and filled the booths to watch us” (486). Cal’s critique of the sex show and its viewers questions the way that visible performance and transgression have been figured in queer theoretical and political models. That the display of abnormal bodies and sexualities is a spectacle is clear—what is unclear is how that spectacle affects the system of heteronormativity that calls these bodies spectacular in the first place. Cal is grateful for his exposure to politics through Zora and for the time in San Francisco that allowed him to become acquainted with himself: “I wasn’t the only one! Listening to Zora, that was mainly what hit home with me. I knew right then that I had to stay in San Francisco for a while. Fate or luck had brought me here and I had to take from it what I needed” (489). Cal does experience an “awakening” of sorts in San Francisco, but it is through an interpersonal relationship with Zora, not through the space of public performance and transgression which seem sterile with their “chlorine smell” in comparison to the warmth of his discussions with his friend. Thus, the urbanized space is part of Cal’s journey, but it is not the end of it—he resists the narrative Crawford critiques by returning to the sphere of the family.

In light of Cal’s critiques of performance and display and their apparent lack of effect on viewers, we can understand that the silence that persists about what goes on in Cal and Julie's bedroom is not intended to extend the privacy of the heteronormative bedroom to this relationship, but to leave in tact the multiple ambiguities—sexual, historical, social—that the text has maintained throughout. Elisa Glick asserts that “sex positive feminism” and its outgrowth in queer theory have resulted in an aestheticization of politics such that “what was once ‘the personal is political’ has become ‘the political

need only be personal.’ By creating a climate in which self-transformation is associated with social transformation, the new identity politics has valorized a politics of lifestyle, a personal politics that is centered upon who we are—how we dress or get off—that fails to engaged with institutionalized systems of domination” (31).<sup>53</sup> Queer theory and politics in their valorization of transgressive sexual practices and in their subscription to a postmodern political aesthetic with “a focus on performance and display that avoids confronting political and economic processes as they function globally and are manifested locally” is exactly what the text combats in leaving Cal's bedroom in the dark, so to speak (Glick 39). A queer politics, in other words, that does not pay attention to the material conditions of the lives of those it seeks to represent but instead aestheticizes politics through visible displays of supposedly “transgressive” sexuality fails to account for the ways in which the sphere of the personal, in its engagement with the domestic as a national space in a queer public/private touching, might provide radical avenues for queer politics. Imagining Cal’s relationship with Kikuchi to be a failure to engage in queer politics or queer relational systems is to advocate for the dissemination of sexual discourses and “transgressive” sexual practices that close down affective and relational possibilities in ways that do not pay attention to the lived experiences of queer persons who daily engage their critical “I” with others on personal and political levels.

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<sup>53</sup> Glick’s discussion of queer theory as a postmodern aestheticization of politics is rooted in the sex-positive debates within feminism since the 1980s, particularly about issues of pornography, S&M, and sex work. Theorists engaged in this debate include Catherine MacKinnon, Andrea Dworkin, Pat Califia, Gayle Rubin, and Carol Pateman, among others. Glick argues that the dominant school of queer theory—represented by theorists such as Rubin—aestheticize particular “deviant” sex acts but fail to engage in a real way politically. The sex act, in Glick’s formulation and in mine, may be political and dominated by social and discursive norms, but it cannot stand in for a politics.

Eugenides's text allows Cal's body and his sex life with Julie to remain in the dark in order to resist the valorization and normalization of certain kinds of sex acts invoked by queer theory's aestheticized politics. Cal's "hidden" but not shameful body can therefore function as a site where an ethical queer politics might be played out through an interrogation of the politics or rhetoric of display.

When Cal's body is constantly under surveillance because it cannot be neatly categorized as male or female, what does it mean for him to put his body or his sexuality on display? What would it mean for him to choose gender ambiguity? Cal says of his own body, "unlike other so-called male pseudo-hermaphrodites who have been written about in the press, I never felt out of place being a girl. I still don't feel entirely at home among men. Desire made me cross to the other side, desire and the facticity of my body" (Eugenides 479). Cal lives and performs male not because he feels it to be his essential gender, but because his body is more in line with the *stylization* we assume to be male and his desires, as discussed previously, are conditioned by medical discourse such that he imagines the performance of male to also be tied to his desire for women. Cal's rejection of gender ambiguity in terms of stylization is a response to and confirmation of the sociality of gender. His chromosomal status, XXY, ensures that he will not have the body that Western culture deems as "female" and so he chooses to stylize his body as male not in order to conform to his chromosomal status or "natural sex," but in order to be able to operate socially. Cal's participation in the sexual "freak show" after running away from home allowed for the commodification of his ambiguous body, but he eventually refuses this kind of work and returns to the family and to an

ostensibly "normal" way of life. Cal's objection to the display of his body points to the ways that the body of the other—usually racially other, female, or “monstrous”—which is already excluded from citizenship, when on display is always in danger of commodification and fetishization. Glick, arguing against queer theoretical and political formations that advocate “transgressive” sex acts without examining what they actually *do* to ideology, states that “we cannot proclaim any cultural practices, sexual or otherwise, as resistant without examining how these practices function within the racist, imperialist, and capitalist social formations that structure contemporary society” (Glick 41). Keeping Cal and Julie's sexual relationship “in the dark” resists the impulse to valorize the sexual practice *itself* as a form of resistance. Furthermore, keeping it in the dark does not produce knowledge about who is being penetrated—perhaps both are?—which obscures the ability to feminize either Cal or Julie and thus assign a social role to them that participates in oppressive power relations. Their “private” sexuality resists social formations that result in gendered dominance based on the dichotomous relationship of impenetrable/penetrable bodies and thus resist privileging a penetrating masculinity over a penetrable femininity. Keeping their sex in the dark underscores the ways in which publicizing sexual practices alone do not undermine the ideologies that associate domesticity, privacy, and penetration negatively with feminization. Instead, the positive effect of this darkness is to illustrate how ambiguity might be productive of conversations about how to undermine the dominance of masculinity and heterosexuality within the domestic sphere. For Cal does not perform heterosexuality with Julie—in fact



she initially reads him as a gay man—but he instead calls into question through his relationship with her the ways that heterosexuality can even be performed.

In the section of the book called “The Last Stop,” we as readers are invited into Cal and Julie’s decision to enter into a sexual relationship. Julie is afraid that because of her body, which she claims can be read as boyish, she is often a “last stop” for closeted gay men. In expressing this fear to Cal, he answers “What I told you about myself has nothing whatsoever to do with being gay or closeted. I’ve always liked girls. I liked girls when I *was* a girl” (513). This statement presents several complicated assertions and self-definitions of gender, sexuality, and desire, which make clear the instability of their linkages. Cal desires women, dresses as a man, but retains ambiguous sex organs that might be read as either masculine or feminine. Furthermore, Cal articulates to Julie that “I might be your last stop, too,” implying that Julie’s sexuality and identity are destabilized in relationship to him. Is Julie a lesbian? Does Julie’s sexual relationship with Cal make her queer? These are questions that the novel deliberately does not answer, choosing instead to relish in the ambiguity of desire(s). Sex for Julie and Cal “was like jumping into cold water. You had to do it without thinking too much. We got under the covers and held each other, petrified, happy” (514). The entanglement of sexual categories and articulated identities—which are political—with emotional connection and happiness illustrates the ways in which affect circulates within political identification. Collapsing this scene into heteronormativity does an injustice to the multiplicities of desire, affect, and belonging. If one assumes a performance of heterosexuality from the stylization of the body, and thus a reinforcement of

heteronormativity, one closes down the affective and transgressive possibilities in a myriad of queer relationships such as butch/femme, FTM/MTF transsexual partnerships, etc. In choosing to return to what, according to some critiques of the novel is a heteronormative relational structure that relies on the privacy accorded the heterosexual bedroom, Cal is calling into question the effectiveness of a queer politics which positions itself only *outside* structures such as those of the family, relationships that I think Eugenides is arguing are centrally constituted by affect, not only by hegemonic political discourse.

Immediately following the scene where Cal and Julie “jump in” to their sexual relationship is the story of Cal’s homecoming on the occasion of his father’s death after Cal has run away to San Francisco. These two scenes are closely related in that Cal’s participation in his relationship and in his family is established through narratives of affect. Though complete unification or stabilization in either scenario is unnecessary and most likely undesirable, as it is with Cal’s sexual organs and gender identification, he is able to recognize that “Confronted with the impossible, there was no option but to treat it as normal. We didn’t have an upper register, so to speak, but only the middle range of our shared experience and ways of behaving, of joking around. But it got us through” (Eugenides 516). This sentiment is evidenced, for example, in Cal’s conversation with his senile grandmother near the end of the text. While Cal is somewhat glad that he and his father never had to work out their relationship after he started living as a man, though he says he believes his father’s love would have worked through these difficulties, Cal’s relationship with his grandmother is rooted in their

mutual queerness—Cal’s bodily and relational queerness, and the queerness of Desdemona’s marriage to her brother. The dance on the edges of memory and forgetting that Desdemona does in her old age mirror those of the history of race and gender articulated through Cal in the novel. Desdemona’s inability to remember the past and its “shame(s)” —incest, irregular bodies, etc.—allows her to love completely in the present. When she confesses to Cal that her husband, Lefty, was her brother, she is able to accept Cal’s transformations and his choices. The humor and sadness that define this narrative moment are characteristic of those that define the Stephanides family throughout the novel, and they are exemplary of the politics of the text itself.

Cal is advocating for bringing the realm of the “monstrous” into the “normal,” for incorporation of his unintelligible body and his critical “I” into the institution of the family based on a need for affective and ethical connections between persons. Cal’s reunification with his mother upon his father’s death illustrates how these negotiations continually play out: “Her expression was that of a mother watching a doctor remove bandages from a severely burned child. An optimistic, dishonest, bedside face. Still, it told me all I needed to know. Tessie was going to try to accept things. She felt crushed by what had happened to me but she was going to endure it for my sake” (520). Comparing his situation with the disfigurement of a burn victim is indicative of the “monstrosity” associated with gender non-conformity, a “monstrosity” that Cal’s family must, and does, come to accept: “After I returned from San Francisco and started living as a male, my family found out that, contrary to popular opinion, gender was not all that important” (520). In this moment, Eugenides’s text is not articulating that gender and

sex and sexual identity are not important categories of social organization or political belonging, but rather the disruption of normative and oppressive categories that can occur within the supposedly private space of the home. When one rejects the other, the text seems to be suggesting, one rejects those parts of the self that are disgusting and cannot be fully incorporated. By focusing on commonalities and love, the monstrous, the impossible, can confront the “normal” and reformulate it.

When moved beyond the limits of Cal and the text, *Middlesex* illustrates that through genuine affect when it occurs in a private domestic space, queered by acknowledgement of gender performativity, one arrives at new versions of queer life that rely on shared experience and love, but do not necessitate sameness or wholesale unification. Cal's “I,” in speaking his own desire and his relationships with Julie and his family, as well as his refusal of the linear script of surgery (moving from one gender to another in order to make his body “right”), is a way of disassociating sex from gender from desire from object choice and thus making critical interventions into the ways we think about heteronormative privacy and domesticity. Cal's relationship with Julie, in other words, is conservative and heteronormative only if we assume that to have a gender means that gender expression corresponds to genitals, and that object choice corresponds to sexual orientation, and that Cal's gender expression as male and his object choice of Julie necessarily imitates and reinforces the heterosexual matrix. To read Cal's gender performance and relationship as heteronormative, or to read Julie as only a step away from lesbianism, as Merton Lee has done, is to remain anxious about who is the “male” in the bedroom and about who has access to male power in the culture

at large. Heteronormativity in this critical conversation, in other words, is what produces the failure of critics and theorists to see Cal's relationship as anything but conservative because the theory itself relies on the binary of male/female and heterosexual/homosexual, and a faulty understanding of public/private in which public is seemingly only available in cosmopolitan, urban spaces.<sup>54</sup> Cal's ambiguous genitals—the “crocus-penis” or the enlarged clitoris—allow for an ambiguity of power relations in the bedroom and on the street. Thus Cal's refusal to have sex correspond directly to gender and desire reiterates the ways in which his gender expression is one of performance and stylization, not entirely voluntary, but not entirely dictated by culture either. One may be constituted by culture without being wholly determined by it.

Cal, and by virtue of his relationships with them, his family and Julie, are those whom Gloria Anzaldúa has called the *mestiza* or border-dwellers.<sup>55</sup> In Anzaldúa's formation, to live on the border of any binary is to constantly come into violent contact with those agents that seek to oppress and categorize; it is to be a wound that is continuously reopened. While this process is painful, she also believes that border-

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<sup>54</sup> Even when Cal does live in urban, cosmopolitan spaces, he tends to seek out the communal and the familial, even “traditional” spaces. In Berlin, for example, he is drawn to small Turkish neighborhoods where he can find the food of his youth.

<sup>55</sup> Though Anzaldúa is talking specifically about the U.S.-Mexico border in her work, she leaves space in her discussion of queerness for taking her work on the *mestiza* into other contexts—one of those contexts has been queer theory. Anzaldúa says of her own work: “The actual physical borderland that I'm dealing with in this book is the Texas-U.S., Southwest-Mexican border. The psychological borderlands, the sexual borderlands, and spiritual borderlands are not particular to the Southwest. In fact the Borderlands are physically present wherever two or more cultures edge each other, where people of different races occupy the same territory, where under, lower, middle, and upper classes touch, where the space between two individuals shrinks with intimacy” (Preface to the First Edition of *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*).

dwellers, including queers from all cultures, are necessary for ushering in new formations of social and political life: “Our role is to link people with each other—the Blacks with Jews with Indians with Asians with extraterrestrials. It is to transfer ideas and information from one culture to another. [...] We are a blending that proves that all blood is intricately woven together, and that we are spawned out of similar souls” (106-7). By allowing Cal to remain a border-dweller and rehearsing his interactions with others on a daily basis, *Middlesex* goes a long way to making gender and its performance consensual, and therefore safe, in the way that Kate Bornstein describes in the epigraph to this chapter. The safety of consensual gender in this sense is not to make family or politics or institutions safe *from* gender, but to make the gender outcast a feature of everyday social and political life, to make the gender outcast that is created by every failed citation of gender safe from normalization and violence of any kind. As Judith Halberstam argues, queer time and space might develop apart from institutions governed by heterosexuality, but I think that Eugenides’s novel is asking that we understand that separation as the only methodology for queer life will not lead to change or to enfranchisement for queers. Let me be clear that I do not think that Eugenides is arguing for assimilation or that this text is an effort to hegemonize sexual practices or relations, but that Cal and the text argue for an understanding that queer life in multiple contexts is based on a dialectical model where those claiming the seemingly impossible, the right for space, the right to be heard, are treated ethically through affective relations that produce the desire to care for and be accountable to others as well as the self.

**Conclusion: Negotiating Queer Identities**

The two narratives of the gender non-conforming discussed in this chapter share many affinities. In their portrayal of Midwestern and familial queer identities, both Max/Moira and Cal/Callie illustrate the difficulties of negotiating non-urban queer identities, but also open up the ways in which adherence to a non-judicial affective privacy, a privacy negotiated with families and communities of all kinds, might provide a site for radical resistance to state surveillance and rhetorical and metaphorical violence. As I argued previously in my discussion of Warner, Berlant, and Freeman, the impulse to publicize queer sexual acts comes from a place that seeks to resist sexual shame, but in ignoring the ways in which this access to publicity is both juridically protected and also relies upon certain gendered, geographical, and economic conditions, further sexual shame is produced for those who do not conform to its political script. Max/Moira's transgender character illustrates the ways that the discipline of gendered surveillance works from both conservative and queer ends. The desire implicit in the externalization of his penetration is indeed about a violation of privacy, the violation of privacy that would give us as viewers the fictional comfort of knowing "what's going on" in the bedroom—a comfort also desired by the Right in their arguments against gay marriage and rights. The critique of Cal/Callie as heteronormative also fails to understand how privacy for the gender non-conforming is radical. By resisting the impulse to publicity, to demonstrate who is being penetrated, by what, by whom, and at what time, these characters are resisting the association of privacy with shame and with the feminization

of domesticity. The domestic is not necessarily defined by the families in this chapter as coupledness or the traditional family—Max is a single parent, for example—and looking back to the previous chapter, the domestic realm is certainly not defined by the normative couple in the families and emotions of Bone or Precious. As for Cal and Julie, though they are a couple, I have attempted in this chapter to illustrate how the couple can be non-normative by resisting the gendered implications of penetration and feminization and thus an oppressive relationship. Max and Cal's narratives illustrate the complicity of political scripts that argue that "going public" is the only queer act with the desire to know who is "the girl," who is being feminized, and with the desire to devalue the ways in which gendered privacy might be radical. The archive compiled by this chapter illustrates the importance of private feelings and interpersonal relations, which might on its surface seem conservative in its familial and monogamous affiliations. However, in making the archive, as I have argued previously in this dissertation, a reproductive relationship is made. This relationship is queer and constituted by a queer touch of texts and events between time and space. In putting these texts into conversation with one another, I argue that new relationships can be formed that recognize the radical potential of the affective space of domesticated privacy—relationships that resist the negative shame attributed to feminization.



## CHAPTER IV

IN SICKNESS AND DEATH: HIV, VIRAL INFECTION, AND THE CITIZEN  
BODY

*To be truly radical is to make hope possible rather than despair convincing.*

*-Raymond Williams*

HIV/AIDS has discursively been cast as a disease that is “over there.” First, by its primary association with the homosexual male population, and after the 1990s by its supposed geographical location in the “Third World.”<sup>56</sup> Official histories and narratives about HIV/AIDS place the virus squarely outside the realm of mainstream American life. AIDS has been used as a marker of the shame of sexual and moral license, where those populations most affected by the virus are left to fend for themselves because of their cultural undesirability and unintelligibility. Even when discussions of HIV/AIDS are present in popular culture, they are neatly packaged as exoticized phenomena associated with “other” kinds of lifestyles. One such example is the performance by the cast of *Rent* at the Democratic National Convention in 1996. Their performance of “Seasons of Love” is characterized by shots of a mostly middle-aged, white, middle-class audience swaying their hands back and forth with smiles on their faces. The political context of the event as well as the potential political message of the play is

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<sup>56</sup> Several critics, including David Román, have discussed how the year 1996 is used in HIV/AIDS discourse as a kind of “end of AIDS,” despite the fact that “people continued—and still continue—to die” (xxiii). For example, Andrew Sullivan’s piece, “When Plagues End: Notes in the Twilight of an Epidemic” was published in *The New York Times* magazine in November of 1996.

obscured by this cheerful crowd and their reaction to the “Carpe Diem” thematics of the song that come out of its decontextualization from the play as a whole. Furthermore, as David Savran notes, the musical itself “takes up the kind of lifestyle politics that became so popularized during the 1990s (as a substitute for class politics) that regards one’s associations, pleasures, and purchases as volitional” (41). While it could be argued that *RENT*, its success, and its marginal presence at the 1996 DNC are indicators of a growing mainstream discussion of HIV/AIDS and the social and political factors that affect its treatment and pathways, in fact the play serves to exoticize and commercialize a “Bohemian” lifestyle associated with free sexuality and drug use, a lifestyle which for the hip, liberal audience member reads as a romance of the past.<sup>57</sup> Though Douglas Crimp has argued that HIV/AIDS itself has been “normalized” by its presence in popular culture because many movies and shows, for example, have a character with AIDS, I would argue that the widespread presence of these characters is part of the “over there” nature of the disease because if *they* have it, *I* do not. The staging of *Rent* itself makes this disavowal clear—by staging the play in a warehouse environment designed to look like the Village and marketing a lower-class, bohemian aesthetic, the play gave audience members an opportunity to purchase and tour this “other” lifestyle, clearly delineating it from their own. HIV/AIDS is not normalized as a presence in the life of “regular people,” but only as an ongoing problem “over there.” In other words, Crimp is right

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<sup>57</sup> There is a difference, I think, between the tensions that exist in the musical between the normalization of HIV/AIDS and its opportunities for community resistance, so aptly discussed by David Román (278) and the reception of *Rent* by its audiences, where as one reviewer put it “AIDS has been overlooked” (Roman 272) due to its saturation of the play.

about the political effects of this phenomenon in that plays like *Rent* most likely diminish political participation and advocacy, but I would not characterize the widespread presence of “AIDS characters” as a normalization or an internalization of HIV/AIDS. The Clinton (and subsequent) administration’s ambivalent and lukewarm responses to AIDS research and funding further underscore the feeling that HIV/AIDS was a problem of shameful “lifestyles” located squarely in the past—a problem that is fixed by integrating affluent homosexuals into official national discourses about safe sex and recasting the disease with an already shamed black, female, and/or impoverished face. This chapter will examine the complicated history of HIV/AIDS in medical, political, and textual discourse as a gendered, racialized, and sexualized phenomenon. By reading this history of HIV/AIDS in the context of discourses that foreground a male homosexual population as the originary demographic for the disease, I will illustrate in this chapter how “mainstream” masculinity is problematically compromised by the markedly diseased bodies of PWA and yet how these bodies are reintegrated through their whiteness and affluence into the citizen system.<sup>58</sup> Furthermore, I will argue how refocusing analysis on histories of two gendered behaviors—barebacking and caregiving—resists this reintegration through alternative histories and “sentimental” politics, which seek to keep the virus in the present as a constitutive marker of American political life.

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<sup>58</sup> PWA is a common acronym for “person with AIDS.” Another term that will appear in the chapter that might be unfamiliar to some readers is “seroconversion,” which that HIV has been transmitted into and detected in the bloodstream.

Both barebacking and caregiving seek to establish relational networks that are sentimental in their desire for kinship and physical care. Though many of the texts discussed in this chapter might seem to eschew what is traditionally thought of as emotional sentimentality and intimacy, in their portrayal of the desire for kinship is a kind of epiphanic, revelatory political project that has its roots in sentimentalism. There is, I will argue, a difference between the kind of revelatory politics of *Angels in America* and *Philadelphia* and those of *The Gifts of the Body* and Tim Dean's theoretical work. Whereas *Angels in America* and *Philadelphia* use revelation and sentiment in order to reintegrate the PWA back into the national imagination, the other texts use intimacy to resist dominant structures of kinship, belonging, and politics. Scholars such as Ann Cvetkovich resist the word sentiment and its associations with revelation and hyperemotion because, I think, of its association with feminization and weakness. As I have argued previously in this dissertation, association with feminization is often avoided at all costs in both left and right theoretical frameworks because of its associations with infantilization, disempowerment, normalization, and thus, shame. For the purposes of this chapter in particular, I argue that "hope" is feminized and cast as naive. But these texts that resist dominant structures of political belonging also resist the traditional denigration of sentiment and feminization. I argue that they invoke an ethical approach to HIV/AIDs which undermines how it has been figured rhetorically, and through this ethical approach they makes claims about structures of citizenship and family in America. These texts use affects like hope, love, eroticism, and sadness in sentimental and epiphanic ways which undermine both traditional political assumptions

about disease and the body, as well as current theoretical formulations of queer life and politics. It is my argument, then, that there is a difference between sentiment and catharsis, between hope and redemption. In this chapter I discuss the gendered history of HIV/AIDS discourse as well as the ways in which sentimentality has been figured in the political sphere and in relationship to HIV/AIDS in order to juxtapose texts that reintegrate the PWA into the citizen system with those which actively resist and seek to reformulate it.

### **Containment and Disease: HIV Discourses in American Culture**

Since its emergence into the national mainstream, HIV/AIDS has been figured by both right wing and activist discourses as either a gay male disease or an African one, with these two separate discourses almost never coming into contact with one another. Both, however, result in the dislocation of HIV/AIDS from mainstream American life, making it other and placing it squarely and explicitly as “over there”—not in “my” community/town/home/workplace, etc. In the US, figuring HIV/AIDS as a gay male disease has produced a gendered narrative about the virus, as well as a gendered response to it. In this chapter I will be undertaking a discussion of the narratives that emerged around HIV/AIDS and their response, arguing for a complex understanding of the constitutive presence of virus as other in the American body politic, a presence that is preserved by queer, feminized sentimental practices and ways of belonging.

As many theorists have observed, right-wing rhetoric from the emergence of the disease to the present has more or less used the HIV/AIDS epidemic to argue that homosexuality is shameful, unnatural, perverse, and (see?) deadly.<sup>59</sup> Ronald Reagan did not publicly utter the word AIDS until 1987. The Helms amendment severely limited the use of federal funds for AIDS education. Under the first Bush years, people with HIV were forbidden from immigrating to the United States. The body politic, coded as masculine, was being “infiltrated” by a disease that seemed unable to be contained. HIV/AIDS presented a crisis in mainstream American masculinity not only because of the nature of the disease in its attacks on the male body, but also in its perceived “exposure” of the presence of white men who were not properly heterosexual. The military rhetoric(s) of invasion and medical warfare employed during the Reagan 80s in response to AIDS and research about it further serve to masculinize the discourse. Moreover, the near absolute absence of discourse about HIV/AIDS prevention for heterosexuals and women illustrates the degree to which this “gay” disease was figured as masculine, both in documents that illustrate homophobia and those that sought to educate the public. In her discussion of the way that HIV is gendered, Paula Trencher argues that the construction of the gay male body in mainstream discourse about AIDS “is driven in part by the need for constant flight from sites of potential identity and thus the successive construction of new oppositions that will barricade the self from not-self. The homophobic meanings associated with AIDS continue to be layered into existing discourse (...) The virus ‘penetrates’ its victims; a carrier of death, it wears an ‘innocent’

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<sup>59</sup> A wide range of critics have discussed the right-wing response to HIV/AIDS in the 1980s, most notably Simon Watney, Douglas Crimp, and Cindy Patton.

disguise. AIDS is 'caused' by homosexuals; AIDS is 'caused' by a virus.

Homosexuality exists on a border between male and female, the virus between life and non-life" (37). Treichler's emphasis on protecting the self from the other underscores the masculinized rhetorics of proper heterosexuality and containment that permeate early HIV/AIDS discourse. Figured as a problem of deviant sexuality, the body politic can banish AIDS from its presence by marking it as a "gay" disease, one associated with shameful perversities, and thus outside the mainstream. This figuration of the disease resulted not only in a lack of funding for HIV/AIDS work, but also in misunderstandings about how the virus can be contracted and violence (or the threat of violence) towards those perceived to be infected. In his seminal essay, "Is the Rectum a Grave?," Leo Bersani cites a *News of the World* cover which displays a photo of a male preacher who is pointing a gun at his son, declaring he would kill him if he had AIDS. This photograph underscores the military and containment rhetoric used for the "elimination" of HIV/AIDS and the "at-risk" populations it was associated with, exemplifying the desire to push AIDS "over there," and out of the mainstream of American life. While Bersani is correct in his assessment that the mainstream media was, and is, most overtly concerned with the risk of the "invasion" of HIV for heterosexuals, the rhetoric of expulsion described here indicates a crisis in masculinity because implicit in that "invasion" story is the anxiety that one cannot *really know* who is "screwing around with guys" as Roy Cohn so aptly puts it in *Angels in America*. Otherwise affluent and fully enfranchised members of society could become physically marked by their sexuality in ways they had seemingly not been marked before.

HIV/AIDS is ideologically dangerous for male bodies because it threatens to expose the male body as a construction and to undermine its ideological superiority. As is the case with Andy in *Philadelphia*, discussed below, one of the fears of the AIDS epidemic was that one could not easily tell who was a homosexual and who was not, and thus the marker of male sexuality became overt displays of AIDS-related symptoms such as lesions. While one might argue that in terms of the body politic, this crisis in masculinity could be solved by simply expelling all homosexual men from the national scene, as illustrated by narrative's like Andy's and the many others like it, what AIDS exposed is that one could not perhaps recognize a "homosexual" until he already had "the virus," making the virus an implicit threat to masculinity and the body politic more generally. What happens then, at the level of narrative, is a reintegration of affluent, white male homosexuals into the national imaginary through a normalizing sentimental discourse of respectability and supposedly universal human rights.

After the disease became more widespread and more people started dying, sympathetic images of "respectable" men dying of AIDS were used by the media and some activist organizations to shore up support for AIDS funding and research. While the need for funding and research was (and is) great, the narrative of respectability and sympathy that begins to circulate around the white, gay male body desexualizes it, thereby making the threat of the virus a thing of the past or pushing discourse about it into the already othered and "over there" populations of women and people of color. For, as Douglas Crimp illustrates in his essay, "Melancholia and Moralism," an analysis of Andrew Sullivan's heteronormative and conservative work, "the continuing presence



of illness and death from AIDS” is “so repressed that every fact attesting to that continued presence is denied either reality or significance;” instead gay men are “living now in the world of normal grown-up responsibilities and genuine freedom—freedom from homophobic disapproval” (7-8). Or, to put this narrative somewhat more bluntly and perhaps crudely, a lot of nice (white) gay men died of HIV/AIDS because of their bad sexual practices, which were born out of necessity and a lack of “proper” education about relationships, but now that we’ve learned from them, the virus can be over because everyone will have fewer sex partners, invest in monogamy, and affirm the heteronormative, capitalist American dream of nuclear family life. This narrative desexualizes, normalizes, and makes respectable gay men, reintegrating them into a system they were mistakenly cast out of for some brief bad behavior and reifies the ideological superiority of heteronormativity as it is inflected by whiteness, affluence, and monogamous sexual behavior. This narrative of respectability for white, affluent gay men also serves to reinforce the disreputability of those other populations most at risk—women, people of color, and the poor—who are already outsiders to the discursive fashioning of mainstream American life.

I want in this chapter to contrast this narrative of respectability which is achieved through sympathetic and sentimental portrayals of nice white men with AIDS with a queer understanding of the virus as it is read through feminized practices of caretaking

and sexual promiscuity.<sup>60</sup> Whereas sentimental narratives about and images of gay men with HIV/AIDS tend to emphasize suffering in ways that ask for sympathy and recognition without direct political action, those that use sentiment in feminized and queer ways do so in order to mark “virus” as a constitutive factor in American political discourse and therefore a political issue. In other words, like women and minority populations who might stand in for masculinity’s other, “the virus” stands in for the other of a healthy body politic, one whose continual presence undermines and destabilizes the rigidity of the categories that make up the “healthy” state itself. Sentiment in the narratives that resist integration and affirmation of the desirability of dominant modes of kinship and affect in American public life bears close ties to feminized forms of knowledge and ethical practices, but instead of denigrating sentiment’s association with feminization, they make use of them in order to resist relying upon historical codes of exclusion and oppression. I want to read the sentiment of these narratives which resist dominant modes of political participation in light of the function of sentimental works, as described by Jane Tompkins in *Sensational Designs*, to advocate for a feminized transformation of *public* life.

In her discussion of 19<sup>th</sup> century sentimental fiction, Tompkins argues: “Rhetoric *makes* history by shaping reality to the dictates of its political design; it makes history by

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<sup>60</sup> Barebacking, as I will later discuss, is not generally considered to be “feminine,” and often its representative codes are hypermasculine. Dean himself might even resist the association with feminization I am arguing for in regard to his work. However, resistance to feminization is part of a larger problem of othering that maintains paradigmatic exclusions even within queer theoretical models. The emphasis in the subculture of barebacking on gift=giving, kinship, and affective networks is what I am reading in the context of a feminized revision of American public life.

convincing the people of the world that its description of the world is the true one...If history did not take the course these [women] writers recommended, it is not because they were not sufficiently political, but because they were insufficiently persuasive” (141). Sentiment, when it is productive, resists the normative in favor of something else, calling for direct action. In this chapter I argue that narratives of respectability for gay men use sentiment and epiphanic revelation to maintain the normative privileges of masculinity, whiteness, and affluence, but those which argue for a feminized understanding of ethics and kinship in regard to HIV/AIDS use sentiment and epiphany in ways that are tied to direct action and a reevaluation of relational modes in the public sphere. Richard Corber, discussing the politics of ACTUP in relationship to sentimental modes of political advocacy, states that “the question we should ask is not whether the sentimentalization of gay men is inherently dequeering, but whether the gay movement can counterdeploy sentimentality as effectively as militant AIDS activists counterdeployed capitalism’s spectacular modes of publicity” (128). My provisional answer to whether or not sentimentality can be deployed radically, and one which I hope the I will demonstrate in this chapter, is yes. While texts like *Philadelphia* might poignantly use sentiment in order to humanize gay men with HIV and argue for their civil rights, they do so through codes of affluence, whiteness, and in particular, the masculine right to citizenship, which leave in tact larger social structures of oppression. This version of sentimentality is, therefore, a resistance to the feminization of otherness and disease. On the other hand, the texts in this chapter which I argue resist traditional modes of belonging use sentiment to foreground the body, the erotic, and affective

kinship in ways that are productively and queerly feminized. Sentiment, affect, feeling, and epiphany can all be used to strategically undermine dominant narratives about disease and the body, but only when that sentimentality does not rely on its emotional effects through codes of normalcy, privileging instead a queerly feminized mode of kinship and political engagement.

**“Explain It to Me Like I’m a Four-Year-Old”: Epiphanies of Normalcy in  
*Philadelphia* and *Angels in America***

The film *Philadelphia* (1993) and Tony Kushner’s *Angels in America* poignantly examine the relationship between HIV/AIDS infection and American politics.<sup>61</sup> Both texts are heavily sentimental in their portrayal of the main characters—Andy Beckett in *Philadelphia* and Prior Walter in *Angels in America*—and these characters come to stand in for a set of negotiations about American citizenship and belonging that occur around the discourses of HIV/AIDS in the late 1980s and 90s. American history and politics are omnipresent in both of these texts, where the official and auspicious history of the U.S. is rendered legible through the architecture of Philadelphia, the “founding fathers,” the legal code and system, the Cold War, and the influence of the Reagan 80s. Both of these texts then negotiate this history through a character with HIV/AIDS who serves as a site of epiphany for other characters in the text and who inspires a revision to history by their presence. Both of these texts are interested in establishing the essential *humanity* of the

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<sup>61</sup> A miniseries of *Angels in America* was made by HBO. However, this chapter will be dealing primarily with the text of the play, unless otherwise noted.

PWA—against the mainstream shaming discourses of the disease—and the necessity of his presence in U.S. History as well as what might ultimately be called his normalcy as a citizen. While deeply moving pieces, *Philadelphia* and *Angels in America* perform an erasure of HIV/AIDS and the perceived concomitant stigma of sexuality, a kind of “cure” for the crisis of disease for masculinity and the body politic. Douglas Crimp has argued that the narrative about gay men and AIDS is as follows:

Prior to AIDS, gay men were frivolous pleasure-seekers who shirked the responsibility that comes with normal adulthood—settling down with a mate, raising children, being an upstanding member of society. Gay men only wanted to fuck (and take drugs and stay out all night and dance), and at that to fuck the way naughty teenage boys want to fuck—with anyone attractive to them, anytime, anywhere, no strings attached. Then came AIDS. AIDS made gay men grow up. They had to find meaning in life beyond the pleasure of the moment. They had to face the fact that fucking has consequences. They had to deal with real life, which means growing old and dying. So they became responsible. And then everyone else accepted gay men. It turns out that the only reason gay men were shunned was that they were frivolous pleasure-seekers who shirked responsibility. Thank God for AIDS. AIDS saved gay men. (4-5)

It is this narrative about gay men that allows the ideological underpinnings of abstract American citizenship to remain in tact in texts like *Philadelphia* and *Angels in America*. By reestablishing Andy’s and Prior’s relationship to the political sphere and naturalizing their participation through historical narratives of belonging, HIV/AIDS is in some ways

only a backdrop for normalizing arguments about the masculine right to dignity, privacy, and citizenship.

*Philadelphia* chronicles the story of Andrew Beckett, a successful lawyer at a prominent Philadelphia firm who conceals his sexual orientation and his HIV/AIDS diagnosis from his employers. After the mysterious disappearance of an important brief, Andy is fired by his firm allegedly for his incompetence, but he believes for his diagnosis. After approaching and being turned down by several lawyers, Andy is ultimately represented by Joe Miller, a black, overtly homophobic attorney who offers to represent Andy after he witnesses other patrons in a law library discriminating against him. In this scene, a white, well-dressed, obviously affluent lawyer staring at Joe, a casually-dressed African-American lawyer, with suspicion is juxtaposed with the stares of other patrons at Andy and the law librarian's suggestion that he might be "more comfortable" with a private research room. Andy is being asked to metaphorically "move to the back of the bus," and Joe's decision to represent him is portrayed (somewhat heavy-handedly) as a solidarity of discrimination and an issue of civil rights. Andy and Joe alternate reading the relevant portion of the law on HIV/AIDS discrimination together, looking directly into each others' eyes while classical orchestral music plays in the background. It is this scene which makes the clearest connection between discrimination against African-Americans and homosexuals, and thus seeks to establish through a history of civil rights discourse the presence of gay men alongside African-American men in their struggle to be perceived as "human." It is Joe who says aloud the portion of the law about the "social death" that accompanies HIV/AIDS, which

reads: “This is the very essence of discrimination; formulating opinions about others not based on their individual merits, but rather on their membership within a group with assumed characteristics” (Demme 1993). Having the African-American Joe speak these words aloud overtly associates the historical prejudices about black men with those facing Andy and allows Joe to experience an epiphany about the discrimination Andy is experiencing and his own racialized experiences, an epiphany accompanied by the swelling of the violin and the cello, which heighten the emotional resonance of this scene.

The move being made by the film is in line with many advocates for LGBT rights who equate the struggle for equality for homosexuals with those of other historically disenfranchised groups. Shane Phelan has asserted that “arguments for racial equality in a liberal framework generally argue for the essential sameness of people across groups while opponents appeal to something basic and immutable” (28). The film seeks to highlight the “essential sameness” of Joe and Andy in their experiences with hatred and discrimination in order to humanize Andy and his suffering for the audience. But as Phelan goes on to point out, in contrast to arguments about race, “public discourse about homosexuality finds advocates of equality arguing for immutability and opponents demanding sexual orientation is a matter of behavior that can and must be controlled. The ‘immutable difference’ of homosexuality is then, ironically enough, figured by advocates of equality as a basic difference that has no public consequences, while opponents present it as a contingent difference with the capacity to destroy society” (28-9). It is this distinction that is erased from Andy and

Joe's epiphanic conversation about AIDS discrimination, and a distinction that erases the specificity of Andy's sexuality and its relationship to discourses about HIV/AIDS.

Furthermore, it glosses over the construction of "proper" heterosexual relations, articulated through codes of race, gender, and class, against non-heteronormative sexualities in American political history. The erasure of Andy's sexuality, however, is crucial to the film and to its message about universal human rights for all "good" people.

Joe, throughout the film, is portrayed as a homophobe who takes Andy's discrimination and wrongful termination case out of respect for the dignity of the law, maintaining throughout that Andy and other homosexuals "make him sick." Thus, it is the African-American Joe who must experience the epiphany that Andy is a good person and deserves human rights, an epiphany that seems to come in spite of his homosexuality. Homosexuality, then, must be irrelevant to this epiphanic moment. The major epiphany of the film comes when Joe is at Andy's apartment following a party, trying to go over the strategy for Andy's testimony, when Andy becomes swept up by an aria, "La mamma morta." While translating and explaining the themes of love in this musical piece, Andy becomes very emotional and Joe feels, perhaps for the first time, Andy's full "humanity." Douglas Crimp has argued that this moment is the only legible sign of Andy's queerness in the entire film, and that "once displayed, it is divested of its queer specificity" (256). Crimp argues that "what Demme seems thus to be saying is that you have to dispense with what makes a queer a queer in order to get anybody else to feel sorry that he's going to die" (256). Thus, as Crimp points out, when this scene is over the audience does not see Andy getting into bed with his boyfriend Miguel after Joe



leaves, but instead sees Joe in the bosom of his family, cuddling his wife. This audience, according to Crimp, is “constructed by Demme’s film as straight and unaffected by AIDS” (155). Furthermore, it is clear from the emotional resonance of this scene that the film divests “humanity” of any sexual construction at all, articulating it instead only through familial relations and perceived moral rightness. Crimp is right in arguing that Andy’s queerness must be erased, but so too must the relationship of sexuality to the construction of American citizenship more generally. It is Joe’s epiphany brought on by the swelling movement of the music, Andy’s dancing with the visible marker of his impending death, the IV stand, and the themes of love and loss exemplified by ““La mamma morta,” which humanizes Andy for the spectator of the film who is thought to be unaffected by AIDS. Andy’s queerness is sanitized here by his lack of sexuality, and the sentimental reaction Joe (and by extension the audience) have about Andy is to love him and feel sorry for him *in spite of* his homosexuality. Homophobia is thus not “cured,” then, by the acceptance of queerness, but by erasure of it. Similarly, the “problem” PWA’s present to American conceptions of citizenship and the body are “cured” by an erasure of Andy’s queerness and a reintegration of him into the body politic through his whiteness, the fact that he is educated and cultured, and because ultimately, he does “belong” at the boardroom table with those men who wrongly fired him.

Joe’s recurring line, “Explain it to me like I’m a four-year-old,” is the perfect explanation for the politics of this heavily sentimental film. The audience has it explained to them that though nice, affluent white men like Andy might have made

“mistakes” in the past by having sex with strangers (it also important to note that the film presents this sex as a *singular* act for Andy), they can be redeemed by their dignity and their juridical and legal protection under the law. In other words, they have learned a “lesson” and will stop making these kinds of mistakes. Thus, the sentimental epiphanies of this film do not require the audience to make any real changes to their views of queerness or the treatment of HIV/AIDS patients. Instead, they are confirmed in the supposedly universal values of “good humanity” and dignity, values that will prevail because this disease will be eradicated by nice men like Andy and Miguel who will no longer be having promiscuous sex and will just try to be “normal.” The epiphany experienced by Joe and the audience is one of normalcy; Andy is (or can be) just like me, despite the fact that he has AIDS.<sup>62</sup> Andy’s specificity as a person and sexual subject is thus erased. The virus, then, is already in the past despite Andy’s dying body on the screen.

In describing the sentimentality of the film, Robert Corber has argued that “although sentimental reparation requires public recognition and apology for national homophobia, it leaves intact the very institutions and practices responsible for that homophobia” (114). In order to “reposition gays in relation to the discourses and practices of American national identity, discourses and practices that promise to liberate them from the social negativity of the stereotype by returning them to an unmarked

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<sup>62</sup> This is reinforced by the appearance and testimony of a woman who contracted HIV/AIDS through a blood transfusion at Andy’s trial. She claims that Andy, like her, is neither guilty or innocent, just a person, and should not be blamed for his illness because of his sexuality. While this is most assuredly true, the presentation of Andy as “just like” this heterosexual white woman underscores the film’s project of erasing queerness in favor of normalcy.

body, or rather a body whose markings have no political or social significance, Demme's film minimizes differences between them and heterosexuals" (Corber 110). By displacing Andy's queerness and confirming, through Joe's eyes, that he is "just like everybody else," *Philadelphia* uses the discourses of historical belonging and citizenship signified by the city of Philadelphia and its historical relationship to the legal and constitutional system in order to reintegrate HIV/AIDS patients like Andy into the national imagination without doing any damage to the structures that wanted their expulsion in the first place. Thus, I would add to Corber's analysis that it is the political maneuverings that seemingly make citizens out of black men like Joe—an extension that occurs in the rhetoric of the film because of the "evolution" of human rights discourse—which restore to Andy his rightful place in the national imagination. But this reintegration requires the exclusion of other kinds of queer bodies with HIV/AIDS whose "lifestyles" are not so easily accommodated—most notably women, people of color, and the poor. Andy "merely seeks access to the abstract personhood that is the basis of US citizenship. Such personhood promises to render his homosexuality irrelevant in the public sphere, thereby granting him a mobility currently unavailable to him because of the legibility of his sexuality" (Corber 117). By sentimentalizing Andy's illness and reintegrating him into the national public sphere for his "good behavior," the film undermines the actual threat to the national imagination that the virus presents by locating it squarely in a past of "misguided" and "youthful" sexual practices, erasing the omnipresence of sexual subjugation in American politics historically. The virus'

constitutive threat to masculinity and the body politic is therefore neutralized by desexualizing it and displacing it further from the “normal” public.

The overt project of *Angels in America* is very different than that of *Philadelphia*, although I am arguing that its effects are similar in the desexualization of its main character, Prior Walter, and his calling to bring gay men into the fold of US citizenship. While the characters of *Angels in America* are much more thoroughly embedded in queer culture and history than those in *Philadelphia*, Prior seeks to combine that history with the mainstream history of the United States. Unlike Roy Cohn, who remains closeted and actively works to promote right-wing agendas until AIDS marks him as overtly homosexual, Prior seeks to make visible homosexuals and connect their struggle to a normatively liberal agenda. Despite the presence of other queer characters of varying racial, ethnic, and class backgrounds, it is Prior who becomes the symbol for citizenship and the hope for gay men. Prior’s ancestors can be traced back to the Norman conquest and were colonists in early America and several of his “Priors” come to visit him in the text to warn him of the angel’s imminent arrival and his mission for America. That Prior, among all of these variously queer characters, is the one to represent gay citizenship is, I think, telling for the ways in which enfranchisement functions and the limits of the national imaginary when it comes to intersecting identities such as race, class, and gender.

Like Andy, Prior is affluent, white, otherwise “respectable,” despite his AIDS diagnosis. He lives off of a modest trust fund and is in a long-term monogamous relationship with his lover, Louis. The series of epiphanies that Prior experiences in the

play through his relationship with the other Priors and the angel invokes a spiritual communion with America, its past, and a hope for the future for gay men. *Angels in America* is in large part a meditation on law and history, and Prior, because of his WASP ancestry, comes to stand in for these nationalized systems of power. Contrasted with Roy Cohn, Prior represents a new kind of democracy in which political participation is not contingent on closetedness and heterosexuality. Prior represents a new, more liberal model of American citizenship, one of inclusion and tolerance that does not associate homosexuality with powerlessness and fear. Roy Cohn, perhaps the poster boy for Cold War witch-hunts and the persecution of homosexuals, is represented in this play as a man who has sex with men and contracts HIV/AIDS, but does not understand himself as a homosexual because of his relationship to power.<sup>63</sup> *Angels in America* uses this historical figure to invoke anxieties about containment and disease that are similar to those of the Cold War, anxieties that Roy seeks to escape through his relationship to right-wing power and his disavowal of homosexuality. When diagnosed with AIDS, Roy tells his doctor to write down that he has liver cancer, telling him:

Your problem, Henry, is that you are hung up on words, on labels, that you believe they mean what they seem to mean. AIDS. Homosexual. Gay. Lesbian. You think these names tell you who someone sleeps with, but they don't tell you that. (...) No. Like all labels they tell you one thing and one thing only: where

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<sup>63</sup> The actual, historical Roy Cohn who participated in the expulsion of supposed communists and homosexuals in the US government during the McCarthy era is often discussed because of the “open secret” of his own homosexuality. The documentary *Outraged* discusses his relationship to homophobia and the persecution of homosexuals during the Cold War.

does an individual so identified fit in the food chain, in the pecking order? Not ideology, or sexual taste, but something much simpler: clout. Not who I fuck or who fucks me, but who will pick up the phone when I call, who owes me favors. This is what a label refers to. Now to someone who does not understand this, homosexual is what I am because I have sex with men. But really this is wrong. Homosexuals are men who in fifteen years of trying cannot get a pissant antidiscrimination bill through City Council. Homosexuals are men who know nobody and who nobody knows. Who have zero clout. (51)<sup>64</sup>

This extended explanation of homosexuality by Roy is exemplary of the historical expulsion of alleged homosexuals from the US government during the McCarthy hearings—homosexuals were associated with other marginalized groups such as communists, socialists, and leftists, and surveillance of them was closely related to maintaining the power of right-wing ideologues. As Daryl Ogden argues, homosexuality for Roy “is tantamount to being saddled with the leftist identity of Alger Hiss and Julius and Ethel Rosenberg in the United States of the 1940s and 1950s, three Americans who betrayed a decided lack of clout as far as the federal legal system was concerned” (242). Roy represents what Kushner wants the audience to understand as an outmoded understanding of power, one that is not commensurate with new liberal values in America, but an understanding of power that regained dangerous traction during the Reagan years and is potentially carried on by other closeted, right-wing homosexual men like the Mormon clerk, Joe. Whereas Roy’s construction of sexuality might be

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<sup>64</sup> This scene is perfectly rendered by a pale, affected Al Pacino in the HBO miniseries.

productively read as an anti-identity or anti-identitarian model, because of the shame associated with powerlessness in his tirade, his construction of identity as problematic further reinforces the abstract ideal masculine citizen whose identity is erased through the mechanisms of power. Identity might be irrelevant for those in power, but it is not for those without access to its privileges. In contrast to Roy and Joe, we have Prior and his boyfriend Louis, as well as his friend Belize, a former drag queen and nurse who is also the only character in the story who is not white. This group of men represents instead a new, multicultural, liberal public emerging in contrast to the panicked Reaganite nationalism of the 1980s. Though David Roman argues that we should not read Roy and Prior as foils of one another (207), I think it is possible to read their ideological positioning in the play as a representation of dichotomous understandings of American history—one that is hopelessly rooted in past understandings of containment and exclusion, and the other which is both forward-looking yet at the same time in line with America's idealistic founding. The idealism of the original American dream of inclusion and community is what underscores the epiphanies of the play, the redemption of Roy through Belize and the ghost of Ethel Rosenberg, and Prior's claim to citizenship.

In the primary epiphanic moment of the play, when Joe Pitt's mother Hannah witnesses Prior's ascension to Heaven in the hospital, Roy Cohn receives forgiveness from Louis and Belize and Louis recites the Kaddish over Roy's body. Belize, a representation of what David Roman claims are the new affective and kinship structures of the play, argues that he and Louis and by extension the queer community, should

forgive Roy because “A queen can forgive her vanquished foe. It isn’t easy, it doesn’t count if it’s easy, it’s the hardest thing. Forgiveness. Which is maybe where love and justice finally meet. Peace, at least” (256). Belize’s feminization as nurse and “queen” marks this forgiveness as redemptive. Like Andy’s relationship with his lawyer Joe in *Philadelphia*, this statement from the non-white Belize to Louis, a Jewish man whose grandmother was displaced by the Holocaust, marginalizes historical anger and rage as ineffective strategies for political participation and advocates for something like tolerance or pluralistic inclusion. This scene is intertwined with Prior’s ascension to heaven in which he has his own epiphany in defiance of the angels: “We can’t just stop. We’re not rocks—progress, migration, motion is...modernity. It’s *animate*, it’s what living things do. We desire. Even if all we desire is stillness, it’s still desire *for*. Even if we go faster than we should. We can’t *wait*. And wait for what? God...” (265, emphasis and ellipses in original). Prior’s teleological view of progress is one commensurate with American ideals and fits nicely with Belize’s pluralistic and tolerant view of varying opinions, despite the fact that the reality of the enactment of Roy Cohn’s will has resulted in the deaths of those who are dissident either politically or sexually, a fact that is covered over by Prior’s epiphany and call to enfranchisement. Furthermore, the desire that Prior speaks of is emptied of its erotic potential as is his own body after his diagnosis with AIDS; he becomes instead an abstract vessel for a new hope of citizenship for gay men.

Nowhere is this desire for an idealized version of abstract citizenship more evident than the final scene of the play, where Prior, Hannah Pitt, Louis, and Belize are



sitting at the Bethesda fountain. Belize and Louis, as they do throughout the play, are debating various political issues and discussing them with Hannah. In particular, they have debated throughout proper strategies of political action, the intersection of race with homosexuality, the purpose of drag, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and socialism—yet in this scene Prior’s voice emerges to talk over them, to push their discussion of these concrete and material issues into the background. Roman argues that this scene is exemplary of “the basis for a network of alliances” and a “new kinship structure—one not based on heteronormative reproductive family structures” (213), and perhaps he is correct in this assessment. Yet, Prior’s relationship to his lover Louis is entirely without sexual desire or activity after his diagnosis with AIDS, underscoring the distancing of homosexuality and queerness from their history of sexual practices and community. Furthermore, Prior’s prominence in the play as a figure of gay citizenship that is coextensive with his WASP identity is naturalized in some ways in contrast to the discussions of necessary political maneuverings by Louis and Belize. Prior, in other words, has no need for these political maneuverings; his right to citizenship exists prior (*a priori*) to the question of his AIDS diagnosis, it must only be rediscovered through remembering the past of an idealized American public.

Prior’s final lines of the play are at once extremely moving and a displacement of the potential queer agendas of the play: “This disease will be the end of many of us, but not nearly all, and the dead will be commemorated and will struggle on with the living, and we are not going away. We won’t die secret deaths anymore. The world only spins forward. We will be citizens. The time has come. Bye now. You are fabulous

creatures, each and every one. And I bless you: *More Life. The Great Work Begins*” (280). The sentimental effect of these lines is clear: in the face of this disease and the marginalization and demonization of the LGBT community during the Reagan-Bush era, the rhetoric of inclusion and hope is powerful. But Prior’s association of forwardness with citizenship unites a teleological understanding of progress with a right to citizenship that has been used historically for practices of exclusion and is in many ways antithetical to queer understandings of time, place, and progress. Like Andy’s desire for “what is right” in *Philadelphia*, Prior’s claim that gay men will be citizens does not ask directly for any kind of political action, but seemingly rests only on compassion and recognition, and at the same time desexualizes queerness and its relationship to historical practices of exclusion. As Corber argues in his essay about *Philadelphia*,

invocations of the nation’s utopian promise exploit gay men’s desire to inhabit an unmarked body, a desire implanted in them by their lack of unencumbered access to the political sphere. The invocations affirm one of the nation’s most powerful myths, that the phrase ‘all men are created equal’ can be expanded indefinitely to incorporate a continuous succession of minoritized groups. Yet for US citizenship to operate as a system of privilege, there must always be a group or groups excluded from it. (125)

For those of us invested in a liberal and progressive politics, the invocations made by Andy and Prior in these two texts are very compelling. At the same time, they operate through whiteness, maleness, and desexualization to maintain the sanitized version of masculine citizenship that appeared in tact prior to the HIV/AIDS crisis. They maintain

a narrative of universal goodness and respectability that reaffirms traditional structures of affect and political belonging against the shame of overt sexuality, structures that I argue the texts discussed in the next section resist in their emphasis on the intimacies of caregiving and promiscuity, as well as their foregrounding of other identity categories in questions of HIV/AIDS discourse. While the texts discussed in the next section are epiphanic and sentimental, they resist sanitizing citizenship by making the AIDS virus constantly present in American life; the virus, through discussions of gender and sexuality, becomes a site where the ideology of abstract citizenship becomes particularly vulnerable.

### **Caregiving and Barebacking as Sentimental Ethics**

Rebecca Brown's novel *The Gifts of the Body* is written in the style of a memoir of a caregiver for patients with HIV/AIDS from a group called Urban Community Services. The novel is a series of intertwined and interconnected vignettes that attempt to chronicle a small period in the history of the HIV/AIDS crisis as well as document the community organizations and kinship networks largely responsible for caregiving in the absence of federal, state, and insurance funding. Presented as a series of "gifts" exchanged with various PWAs—gay men, women, a person who spent time in Africa—Brown's book is a meditation on the affective and personal toll of AIDS, and yet at the same time the ways in which communities respond to crises by forming new networks of affiliation, political participation, and care across lines of gender, race, and class. Like

*Philadelphia* and *Angels in America*, *The Gifts of the Body* has sentimental and epiphanic moments, and yet in its emphasis on touch, eroticism, and specificity, it resists the universalizing claims to citizenship and abstraction on which the other two texts stake their political claim.

Rebecca Brown's nameless narrator is a home care worker who cares regularly for several people with HIV/AIDS, some of whom are gay men and others, like one of the novel's central characters, Connie, who contract HIV from sources other than gay male sex. The narrator exchanges a series of bodily "gifts" with each of her patients, such as "sweat," "hunger," or "mobility." These gifts are not presented as unilateral from the caregiver to her patients, but rather as reciprocal. The reciprocity of these gifts is important to the text in that Brown's narrator does not seek to distance herself from the bodies of her patients, but rather emphasizes her close contact with them, even when that contact can be read as "dangerous" as it is for her boss, Margaret, who the reader is given to understand contracts HIV/AIDS during the period of her work as a caregiver. The voice of the narrator shifts in the text from focusing almost solely on her patients to including her own emotional responses to them in the later sections of the novel. This shift accompanies her own affective response and burn out in relationship to her caregiving, which has become increasingly difficult in the face of so many deaths. What remains constant throughout, however, is her emphasis on the importance of touch and physical contact with her clients. In the first chapter of the text, "The Gift of Sweat," the narrator is seeing Rick, a client who is more like a friend to her, and one whom she visits throughout the novel. In this chapter, Rick's health has deteriorated significantly and he

must be taken to the hospital by her friend and the head of Urban Community Services, Margaret. Rick is running a high fever and the narrator uses her own body to warm him:

He was still shaking. I pulled my body close to him so his butt was in my lap and my breasts and stomach were against his back. I pressed against him to warm him. He pulled my hand onto his stomach. I opened my hand so my palm was flat across him, my fingers spread. He held his hand on top of mine, squeezing it like the quilt. I could feel the sweat of his hand on the back of mine, and of his stomach, through his shirt, against my palm. I could feel his pulse all through him; it was fast. I tightened my arms around him as if I could press the sickness out. (7)

This moment is a very intimate act of caregiving, but it is also one of love. Contrasted with Andy's relationship to Joe in *Philadelphia* where Joe is afraid to touch his client, this moment in *The Gifts of the Body* presents a gendered dimension of caregiving in which a woman's body as a culturally constructed vehicle of touch comes to stand in for the affective and erotic necessity of physical contact. While this text is in many ways a documentation of the lack of state response to the HIV/AIDS epidemic, unlike *Philadelphia* it does not erase the bodily manifestations of the virus or shy away from contact with them. As Ann Cvetkovich argues, the "novel is grounded in the body by virtue of its attention to the materiality of caretaking...Intimacy and affective relationships are based on physical transactions" (223). This text adds "to queer representations of sexuality by finding eroticism and affect in physical acts that occupy a far wider range than genital sexuality, and in relationships that are just as intimate as

those between families, lovers, or friends” (Cvetkovich 223). The touch between Rick and the narrator in “The Gift of Sweat” is queer not simply because it is between a gay man and a narrator implicitly coded as lesbian, but also because of the presence of the virus as a bodily marker of one’s social status. Furthermore, this queer touch is explicitly feminized through an ethic of caregiving that emphasizes the erotics of care as a queer feminine practice. This is further underscored by Margaret’s touch of the narrator’s face when she arrives to take Rick to the hospital.

In recognizing the narrator’s distress over Rick’s illness, Margaret, who is straight, gives her touch to the narrator, offering her a moment of solace and hope. Margaret’s touch is echoed later in the text when she and the narrator exchange the gift of “hope” after Margaret has been diagnosed with the virus. The chapter “The Gift of Hope” in which Margaret’s touch seeks to rehabilitate the narrator’s desire to care for others is also a documentation of community responses to crises and new kinds of kinship networks in the face of a broader cultural lack of care. That the gift of hope is exchanged at a meeting of UCS, where hopelessness might permeate the air, is I think indicative of the sentimental and epiphanic nature of hope as an affective response. At the meeting, which also serves as a going away party for Margaret, the narrator reflects on why people are members of UCS: “I knew from things they’d said that Todd was gay, Li-Li wanted to go to med school, Beth’s granddaughter had it, Donald’s brother was sick, Denise’s husband had died of it. Everyone had someone” (142). The emphasis on interconnection in this chapter is also underwritten by the political desire of the members of UCS to expand their caregiving efforts to other underserved communities; Donald

discusses “a new development that will expand some of our current programs to help people disabled not only by AIDS but by other things as well. One of the things the epidemic has done for a lot of us is to expose us to how many people need the kind of help we can provide them” (140). By linking the affective interconnection of the people serving at UCS with an overt community political project of caregiving, this chapter resists the impulse to “make respectable” or disembodiment PWAs. By refusing to “mainstream” their clients, the members of UCS are able to connect the struggle of healthcare for PWAs to other questions of poverty, disability, and disease.<sup>65</sup>

This connection is underscored by the connection of HIV/AIDS in the United States to its pathways in Africa. As I have argued previously in this chapter, knowledge and information about AIDS in the west and in Africa seem completely distinct from one another. By including “The Gift of Sight” in which the narrator cares for a man who “was the scariest to look at,” and who “really looked like the plague,” but had contracted the disease from his work in Africa, the text explicitly connects the struggle against HIV/AIDS to its larger global context (117). Brown links localized community responses to lack of resources to larger global inequalities. Keith, the patient who dies in the narrator’s arms in “The Gift of Sight,” was a teacher in Africa, but had to return to the US for medical care after he contracted HIV/AIDS. His privilege to return to the States, and yet the lack of medical resources that await him there, highlights the ways in

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<sup>65</sup> This connection is true to the outgrowths of AIDS organizations such as ACTUP. As Cvetkovich illuminates in her chapter on the oral histories of lesbians active in the AIDS response, many of those who still remain dedicated to various organizations are those who saw AIDS as part of a cultural problem of care for the Other.

which the movement of power influences disease pathways and treatment. The touch between the narrator and Keith as he dies and she hands him over to his mother serves as a moment when these two discourses of disease might touch one another, as the narrator touches her patient. The gift of sight in this chapter carries several valences. First, it is a gift to the narrator to know that she can care for patients who appear to have “plague,” that she can carry on “like a normal conversation you’d have with someone you met at a party or with a new neighbor” (121). The gift of sight here also refers to insight, seeing the virus as more than just a problem of national “invasion.” When Keith dies in the narrator’s arms, he tries to focus his eyes on her at the last second of his death, and the gift he receives in this exchange is the sight of another person at the moment of his death, forming a new kinship bond that is created with the narrator, his mother, and his niece. This moment links a series of diseased bodies across lines of race, but also serves as a reminder of the ways that class, ethnicity, and sexuality work alongside privilege. Unlike in *Philadelphia* or *Angels in America*, those working in response to the AIDS crisis in *The Gifts of the Body* do not make arguments for citizenship based on an abstraction, de-eroticization, or desexualization of the body, but rather connect this particular struggle to a longstanding ideological problem of othering disease and poverty. It is within this context that the gift of “hope” exchanged between Margaret and the narrator can be understood as productively sentimental.

In one of two major epiphanic moments of the text, Margaret sees the narrator “wonder how long she has to live” and touches her face, recalling the earlier touch at Rick’s house: “She put her hand up to my cheek and I remembered the way she’d



touched my face that time she and I were with Rick. I felt her hand against my skin. She said, ‘You can hope again’” (148). For the reader and the narrator, this moment is extremely sentimental because of the lack of hope and the sadness that has accompanied the deaths of other characters in the text. The realization of something like “hope” might seem futile or naive in this circumstance, and having the ostensibly dying Margaret as its ambassador might also seem somewhat heavy-handed. And yet by tying this gift of hope to the interconnectedness of the members of UCS and their political project, the gift of hope is presented in a queer relationship to state institutions and to normalization. The sentimental epiphany here is not the hope of normalization for queer persons, as I argue it is in *Philadelphia* and *Angels in America*, nor is it a hope for the erasure of the virus or the process of being othered by bodily queerness, nor is it a hope tied to redemption for past “wrongs” of sexual immaturity. Rather, this moment is linked to reproducing and reinforcing the ethics of care employed by UCS and giving hope to the narrator for her ongoing participation in these projects. The lack of “redemption” in this moment is, I think, an integral characteristic of a productive sentimentality that does not seek to replace action with sympathy, and this is evidenced by the connection of the gift of hope with the following, and final, chapter, “The Gift of Mourning,” in which the narrator’s client Connie dies.

Like the other chapters of this text, “The Gift of Mourning” also places an emphasis on touch and the interconnection to be found in it. When Connie is dying, her son Joe creates a familial circle with his lover and the narrator: “Joe was looking at Connie. He kept looking at her as he lifted her right hand in his left and handed it over

to me. I took her hand. Then Joe took Tony's right in his left, then Tony reached his free hand across the bed and took mine and we were a circle" (161). The circle formed by Connie, her family, and the narrator is one that is constituted by touch, but touch that is required by, not in spite of, her disease and one that involves family as well as "strangers" like the narrator. When the narrator, Joe, Tony, and Connie's daughter mourn her death, the emphasis on hands and touching is particularly poignant given what is a cultural fear not only of being touched by death, but being touched by an incurable, communicable disease. Hope and mourning are presented as interconnected emotions at the end of *The Gifts of the Body*, and both are tied to sentimental epiphanies of belonging. These two affective responses to the diseased body exist in tension with one another, and in the emphasis on the necessity of touching the diseased body and opening oneself up to its "dangers," the tension created by these two emotions resists the disembodiment and abstraction that hope or sentiment might offer when it is not accompanied by a critical understanding of political action. The sentimentality of these two emotions is effective because of the continued presence of the dangers of the virus and the necessity for responses to it, responses that do not erase the body or its queerness in relationship to the state. I want to insist on a gendered understanding of this kind of queer sentiment, one that resists not only an impulse to abstract the body for redemptive citizenship, but one that also resists the denigration of "feminization" within mainstream and queer politics.

In her otherwise astute analysis of *The Gifts of the Body*, for example, Ann Cvetkovich argues that the text exhibits "a resolute and uncompromising

antisentimentality” (222). She further argues that an “activity [caregiving] that has traditionally been gendered as feminine is practiced in butch ways that avoid sentimentality” (226). The implicit antagonism here between the terms “butch” and “sentiment,” as well as “feminine” and “queer,” belies the continued association of femininity with the negative and the normative in many queer theoretical models. The antagonism between these terms also empties the queer relations of texts like *The Gifts of the Body* of some of their radical potential to undermine normative institutions by denigrating femininity and woman as “the normal” against which queerness must define itself. As I have argued in my first and second chapters, the fear of feminization and being feminized continues to operate paradigmatically at the level of the state and within queer politics. By embracing the feminization associated with a gendered understanding of sentimentality and caretaking, I would argue that the radical potential of *The Gifts of the Body* is heightened. While the narrator’s ways of being in the world may be “butch,” the constant presence of epiphanic and emotional moments, particularly in regard to “hope,” also signify sentimentality. In other words, “butch” and “sentimental” need not be considered oppositional; to consider them as such is to close down the range of “butchness,” as well as to limit the category of “sentimental” to feminine or womanly, where those terms implicitly stand in for the normative and the undesirable. Furthermore, by understanding the process of gift-giving as feminized as well as sentimental, I want to argue that we can understand what might seem an overtly masculine behavior, barebacking, as participating within the framework of a feminized—and queer—ethics of sentiment and caregiving.

Tim Dean's book, *Unlimited Intimacy: Reflections on the Subculture of Barebacking*, is an extended analysis of pornography and websites dedicated to the practice of barebacking, as well as a sort of anthropological exploration of a subcultural practice that is difficult to pin down in mainstream cultural sites. As I have demonstrated in my discussion of *Philadelphia* and *Angels in America*, the presence of either an HIV/AIDS diagnosis or the threat of spreading it has resulted in the desexualization of gay men in favor of the traditional "respectability" of mainstream masculinities in order to reestablish the right to citizenship. To put it frankly, there is most often no mention of sexual intercourse—in particular unprotected—for people who have been diagnosed with HIV/AIDS in mainstream narratives.<sup>66</sup> It would seem, then, that representations of gay men have indeed "grown up" in the way that Douglas Crimp describes in his discussion of the effects of HIV/AIDS. Both Dean and Crimp acknowledge the importance that "safe sex" education played in limiting the effects of HIV/AIDS. Their criticism is about how this rhetoric has been used to close down the networks of kinship and affiliation traditionally associated with gay male life and refocus that center into mainstream, heteronormative versions of "grown up" sexuality.<sup>67</sup> Crimp, however, argues that "seroconversion rates among gay men, including those gay men best informed about AIDS, have begun to rise again after a period of fairly steady decline. This means that many men who had been consistently practicing safe sex no

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<sup>66</sup> This is most definitely true for *Philadelphia* and *Angels in America*, but also applies to a wider range of texts about PWA's (men and women) including *Push: A Novel*, *The Hours*, *Rent*, *Boys on the Side*, and *Forrest Gump*, to name a few.

<sup>67</sup> In his essay, "De-Moralizing Representations of AIDS," for example, he discusses groups of gay men attempting to shut down New York City's sex club scene.

longer are” (265-6). The questions raised by Tim Dean about sexuality and networks of affiliation is in his book begin at this site—why do so many gay men continue to practice “unsafe” sex? What is the significance of barebacking? I will take Tim Dean’s explorations of these questions as a place to bring my own analysis of barebacking and its significance as a gendered, sentimental ethical practice.

Barebacking is almost entirely absent in mainstream texts about HIV/AIDS, drawing notice only because of its lack or its denigration. Thus, barebacking, like most of the cultural practices discussed in the alternative archives of this dissertation, is difficult to locate in any stable way and is almost always noticeable only for its absence. Without fetishizing Dean himself as a participant in the subculture of barebacking, I want to argue that his book does have things in common with the other alternative archives discussed in this dissertation. A combination personal narrative, analysis of other primary “texts” such as pornography and online solicitation sites, the architecture of sex clubs, analysis of official state discourse, and engagement with queer theoretical models, Dean’s book actively archives a subculture and participates in it, making meaning of practices that exist outside the mainstream by collecting and documenting in unconventional and revised ways. Given the personal and communal nature of Dean’s accounts and theorization, I will take his text as a place to begin to try to understand the significance of barebacking in relationship to caregiving.

In *Unlimited Intimacy*, Dean discusses an ongoing tradition of understanding the exchange of semen as giftgiving, and then concomitantly understands bugchasing (the active seeking of the HIV virus) and virus transmission as gifts that “keep on giving”

(79). Dean follows Derrida in his understanding of the ethics of gift-giving, where an “exchange” imposes a kind of obligation to reciprocate, which emphasizes the differentiation between individuals and groups. Seroconversion, or the gift of the HIV virus, on the other hand, circulates in a system of exchanges that are not easily traceable and extend beyond the individual. According to Dean, therefore, “the subculture’s gift economy always exceeds the couple: bareback sexuality is not paradigmatically that of the intimate pair but that of the group. Barebacking may thus be considered a strategy for taking sexuality beyond dyadic relations into the social. It enlarges the horizon of potential intimacy” (80). The exchange of viral infection, therefore, moves beyond a relationship of dyadic reciprocity and extends intimacy, and therefore the call to reciprocity, with an unending number of people and groups, producing new avenues of kinship formation that are doubly based on desire for and anxiety about infection.<sup>68</sup> Like the narrator in Brown’s *The Gifts of the Body*, this system of exchange is based on reciprocity at the same time that the exchange of gifts remains asymmetrical. In the case of Brown’s narrator, her clients cannot reciprocate her gifts because of their physical condition, but neither can she reciprocate theirs because of their debilitation or absence in death. The reciprocity of these gifts, therefore, must circulate more broadly through communities and organizations of care instead of from individual to individual.

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<sup>68</sup> Dean acknowledges the complexity, and the social stigma, attached to HIV infection, as well as its dangers. “On the surface, the idea of HIV as a gift seems utterly perverse. To become infected with the virus can feel catastrophic rather than a boon. However, the subculture’s loosening of medicine’s stranglehold on HIV/AIDS, like Deaf culture’s demedicalizing of deafness, endeavors to make it seem less catastrophic. Giving rise to community, it becomes something one can live with, rather than being construed as irremediably tragic” (73).

Likewise, the “gift” of seroconversion makes an asymmetrical and sometimes untraceable relation, creating an excess of reciprocity that must extend beyond the individual. Barebacking is sentimental in precisely the fact that its practice actively attempts to form and preserve relationships that are transformative of traditional kinship systems and the recognition of these systems in the political sphere. Furthermore, the practice of barebacking and seroconversion attempts to denaturalize “healthy,” as it is tied to ideological terms such as “respectable,” as the category for bodies that matter politically.

Barebacking, therefore, is not reducible to its physical action—having sex without a condom or other barrier device is most certainly common—but is specifically a term that refers to an ethical and communal practice. As Dean articulates: “As far from casual sex as one can get, bug chasing and gift giving entail life-long commitments—commitments that may be more permanent than those of marriage—in the sense that what is exchanged at a conversion party comes with a lifetime guarantee. It has not escaped barebackers’ notice that a better analogy than marriage for viral exchange is that of conceiving and bearing children” (85). Like the traditional or heteronormative ritual of marriage, barebacking begins in a sentimental place, where “at first sight” takes on new meanings. In his description of the architecture and rituals of sex clubs, for example, Dean states that much “of what goes on in a sex club is silent, because, unlike elsewhere, verbal language is not required for seduction. Communication in such spaces is primarily visual and tactile” (35). The ritualized behavior of glances, signals, casual conversation, etc., recreate and reformulate the

heteronormative understanding of courtship and “love at first sight,” but in forms where love is not dyadic or reciprocal in traditional ways. A sentimental understanding of connection—bodily and emotional—is established outside the boundaries of normative kinship structures. As Dean argues, “barebackers’ abandonment of condoms is motivated not only by a lust for enhanced physical sensation but also by a desire for certain emotional sensations, particularly the symbolic significance attached to experiences of vulnerability or risk. Rather than mindless fucking, bareback sex is an activity deeply invested with meaning” (45). While the act of barebacking might seem to engage in the hypermasculine codes of sexual aggressiveness and promiscuity, the desire for “raw, unmediated contact” (45) with others plays into feminized and sentimental notions of the affective dimension of sexuality, without making meaning of it through codes of heteronormative marriage or purity. Furthermore, the ritualized practices of barebacking, bugchasing, and gift giving preserve the affective dimension of sexuality by the constant presence of the gift of the virus, which as Dean suggested, is akin to conception and childbirth.

Though barebacking, as Dean describes in his study of pornography and cruising websites, is primarily associated with hypermasculinity, lack of fear, and a kind of “outlaw” status, I want to argue that the relationship of barebacking to conception and childbirth through viral transmission-as-weakness places the practice of it in a feminized relationship to dominant culture and institutions. Dean states that “self-identified barebackers represent themselves as *über*-men—as sexual professionals, experts in eros, and as outlaws, pioneers of the erotic avant-garde” (39). While I do not want to



undermine the right or ability to self-fashion as hypermasculine of individual practitioners of barebacking, I do want to take Dean's suggestion of the affiliation of pregnancy and the gift giving of seroconversion seriously in its feminized relationship to dominant political structures and modes of belonging. In other words, though the self-stylization and aesthetic practices of many barebackers might seem hypermasculine, the desire for "raw, unmediated contact" and the preservation of affective connection within the sex act connects that hypermasculinity to what has traditionally been coded as a feminized sentimentality about sex. Dean argues that HIV has led gay men to the discovery that they can "breed without women" (6). Thus, HIV becomes "a resource for queer reinventions of kinship because it offers a vital means of showing relatedness" (89). Through the preservation of affective connection in sexual relationships and the eventual "conception" of the HIV virus, barebacking practices mimic the feminine position in the heteronormative family structure, yet also embrace the association of this position with disease and abjection.

Like childbirth, seroconversion is a "gift that keeps on giving," and there is no way to return or be truly reciprocal in regard to that gift. Like the common cultural understanding of the mother-child relationship, the practice of gift-giving places an obligation on the recipient of the gift, but it is a gift and an obligation that is abjected by dominant culture. Barebacking and viral transmission are made abject by dominant understandings of sexual responsibility and bodily integrity, which shore up the normalization of certain kinship structures and privileges of the body. The diseased body is much like the potential reproductive body of women in that it is marked by its

penetrability, and thus its weakness. In this sense, despite the hypermasculine rhetoric of barebacking subcultures, the ritual and practice of barebacking is closely associated with a feminized position in relationship to social and institutional power. Instead of reading the hypermasculine self-stylization of barebackers as an effort to resist this feminized position, I want to suggest that this feminized position is an ethical and productive space from which to speak. By resisting not only the structures that normalize sexual behavior and desexualize people with HIV/AIDS, but also those which confer respectability explicitly through codes of masculinity, whiteness, and affluence, I want to suggest that a queerly feminized and sentimental ethics of barebacking-as-caregiving and caregiving itself can lead to new understandings of political and personal affiliation, as well as new modes of affective relations. If we fail to enact political change from the queer theoretical positions of barebacking, viral transmission, and caregiving, it will not be because practicing a queer feminized ethics is a failure to be political, but rather because we have not been persuasive enough in arguing for the ethical position and valuation of that queerly feminized and sentimental space.

### **Conclusion: Toward a Feminist Ethics of Care**

To be sick and to be feminized are not positions of respectability from which to argue for claims of abstract citizenship. The sentimental argument for caregiving, therefore, enacted from these positions is not one that is interested in normalization or enfranchisement in traditional ways that rely on the historical domination of masculinity,

whiteness, and wealth. In the queerly feminized sentimental ethics of care that I have elaborated in relationship to Rebecca Brown's *The Gifts of the Body* and Tim Dean's work on barebacking, terms such as "feminine" and "sentimental" do not carry the burden of apolitical normalcy. Furthermore, sentimentality and intimacy are disarticulated from their traditional associations with the strictly interpersonal, familial, and private and these realms are instead enlarged by the potentiality of new kinds of intimacy and affective relations. However, sentimentality and a feminized ethics remain a necessary part of these new modes of relationality. It is from this position that we can clearly articulate the difference between sentiment and catharsis, and between hope and redemption, through the continued affective presence of "virus" as a constitutive factor in the making of relationships—both personal and political.

To return to the characters of Olympia Precious, Bone, and Cal as the subjects of the previous chapters of this project, I want to finally argue that the "abnormality" of disease—"freakdom," womanhood, gender non-conformity, HIV—should not be understood as something to cure or eliminate, but as the defining factor of just political narratives. The presence of a war with a "virus" or illness is necessary for the ideological construction of the abstract and healthy citizen body, but it is also what destabilizes it. If we understand, on the theoretical level, that the "infection" is not something to be cured simply by reinforcing dominant paradigms and shutting out difference, then new modes of relationality are possible. Douglas Crimp elucidates a new kind of genuine responsibility designated as queer by quoting Thomas Keenan, a responsibility that

‘comes with the removal of grounds, the withdrawal of the rules or the knowledge on which we might rely to make our decisions for us. No grounds means no alibis, no elsewhere to which we might refer the instance of our decision...It is when we do not know exactly what we should do, when the effects and conditions of our actions can no longer be calculated, and when we have nowhere else to turn, not even back onto our “self,” that we encounter something like responsibility. (qtd in Crimp 13-14)

Along with Crimp and Dean, I want to argue that this kind of genuine responsibility is a promiscuous ethic of care that removes boundaries between not just individuals, but individuals and groups. However, I want to understand this ethical promiscuity as a specifically feminized and sentimental practice that gestures at a reformation of public life from a differently articulated imperative to speech. Promiscuity, historically connected to women, gay men, people of color, and other “freaks,” is when thought of both physically and psychically, what generates viral infection, but it is also what preserves it as a destabilizing force in the narratives of abstract citizenship and political belonging. For example, if we return to the discussion of *Push* from the first chapter, the “redemption” that comes at the end of the text is even more clear. By resisting shame and writing her own story, Precious’s fat, diseased, black female body is not made invisible, but rather insists upon itself as a pre-condition for the definition of citizenship. The emotional resonance of the text, therefore, is not about providing catharsis, but about understanding a feminized and queer politics of hope as a potentiality in the struggle against domination, oppression, and shame.

Unlike the masculine imperative to citizenship established by texts like *Philadelphia* and *Angels in America*, the ethics of caregiving and the constant presence of the virus in *The Gifts of the Body* and *Unlimited Intimacy*, connects the hypermasculinity of gay male barebackers to the elderly Connie in *The Gifts of the Body*, and to girls like Precious. Instead of casting the disease as “over there,” keeping the virus in the present makes it impossible to disassociate and disidentify with others who are figured as diseased. The potential for intimacy and care is exploded beyond normative understandings of gender, sexuality, race, and class through a political and sentimental identification not with difference, but with sameness through “infection.”

## CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION: DOING POLITICAL AFFECT: QUEER FEELINGS AND  
MOTIVATIONS

In the time of the Obama presidency, every issue seems to be emotionally charged with a sense of loss, of nostalgia for an imagined past of happy capitalism, Judeo-Christian values, and the complacency of white security and superiority.<sup>69</sup> The charged atmosphere of healthcare rallies where protesters bring unloaded automatic weapons, the threats of “patriotic” revolutionary coups, protest signs about the president’s “African” (read Un-American and exotic) roots, and the infamous “You lie!” moment, which usurped Obama’s message/voice and attempted to re-establish the imperative of a white congressman to speak, would seem to indicate a moment of great social change in which conservative elements are making a “last grasp” at maintaining their power. In 2009, the Southern Poverty Law Center released a report entitled “The Second Wave: Return of the Militias,” which chronicled the exponential rise in the number of patriotic, far-right paramilitary groups in the wake of the Obama election, when they had seemingly disappeared from American political life before the turn of the millennium. What the SPLC documents, therefore, is an increase in paramilitary activity

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<sup>69</sup> This is certainly not the first time this sense of nostalgia has invaded the public and political sphere. Suffrage, Civil Rights, and other moments of deep social change tend to promote similar reactions. What I think is unique about the Obama moment, however, is how little the social is actually being changed, how the status quo has been maintained, and yet that sense of nostalgia seems provoked almost entirely by the figure of Obama as black/African/socialist/terrorist, etc. For a discussion of the cyclical nature of threats and responses to masculinity, see Sally Robinson’s *Marked Men: White Masculinity in Crisis* and Tania Modleski’s *Feminism Without Women: Culture and Criticism in a “Post-feminist” Age*.

and “patriotism” directly related to racial hatred and masculine violence. Furthermore, what is striking about this increase in militia activity is its mainstream visibility and support from the Right. Whereas during the 1990s, this kind of activity was mainly underground, these new militia groups are made up in many cases of current and ex-law enforcement officials and military servicemen who openly participate in mainstream Right-wing activity and are often encouraged by the Right’s race-inflected rhetoric about immigration, Obama’s citizenship status, Civil Rights, and the displacement of white men as America’s “common law” citizens.<sup>70</sup> What I want to argue, however, is that beyond the racist and masculinist rhetoric of this growing militia movement is an affective dimension of lifestyle and “home” that permeates this particular incarnation of nostalgic male discourse.

The photograph on the following page illustrates the stakes and pervasiveness of the politics I will call “militant nostalgia.” The couple, members of Hutaree, a paramilitary Christian group from Michigan, captured in this photograph illustrate an integration of white militancy into a ceremony traditionally associated with private, family life: a wedding. The groom’s fatigues are a kind of mimicry of the uniforms worn by servicemen and women in “traditional” military weddings, and the automatic weapons brandished by the bride and groom, as well as the gesture at American Revolutionary patriotism represented by the cross and the “Don’t Tread on Me” flags

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<sup>70</sup> “Sovereign citizens,” for example, who have their roots in the 1980s Posse Comitatus, believe whites to have a superior citizenship rooted in common and natural law, whereas blacks are merely “14th amendment citizens,” subject to the dictates of the federal government. Sovereign citizens believe themselves, therefore, to have the right to resist any form of government activity that infringes upon their natural rights as white (male) citizens (“The Second Wave” 6).

underscore the critique this couple is making of where America “went wrong,” and the attempt to re-establish perceived traditional white values as central to the narrative of American democracy. The stance of the bride in relationship to the groom—slightly in front, where he is possessively angled toward her and holding her—is a mimicry of traditional wedding photos, and yet her disconnected look and what appears to be unwillingness are apparently menaced by the presence of automatic weapons. There exists, therefore, an element of gendered coercion in this photograph that elucidates the male sexual imperative to women’s bodies.



The photograph and the militant nostalgia it symbolizes illustrate an extremist example of what Sally Robinson calls “wounded white men,” whose crisis is



“characterized by competing interests: to heal a wounded white masculinity, and thus to remasculinize America, but also to dwell in a space of crisis and thus to reimagine the dominant meanings of white masculinity” (11). What is going on in this photograph and in the militia movements it represents is a struggle over a perceived loss of “inalienable rights,” as well as a struggle to recapture a masculinity rooted in force, in military and physical prowess (Photograph courtesy of Justin Elliott). The integration and display of this paramilitary activity, however, into the very “heart” of American family life, the marriage, indicates a structure of feeling and emotional public<sup>71</sup> associated with these groups and the rhetoric to which they subscribe. The emotional valences of “militant nostalgia” work to motivate those who might not otherwise be convinced or might even resist the overt militarization of this Right-Wing movement. Casting the threats of Obama, racial minorities, gay rights, secularism, etc., primarily as affective motivates a politics of militant lifestyle that circulates as necessary for the preservation of a way of life that is both visibly and invisibly rooted in white masculine imperative.

The heightened affective registers of this militant nostalgia for white male supremacy mark an obvious instability in the concepts of “inalienable rights” and access to disembodied citizenship. As Robinson articulates, “Displaying wounded bodies materializes the crisis of white masculinity, makes it more real, like other bloody battles over race and gender in American history; but such a materialization, in turn, threatens to expose the lie of disembodied normativity so often attached to white masculinity” (9).

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<sup>71</sup> By “emotional public,” I mean a group of people organized around a group of emotions that are relatively coherent. For example, the paramilitary group might be overtly organized around disaffection or rage, but these might coalesce implicitly around more complicated relationships to race, gender, and class.

But in this instance, where the reaction seems so disproportionate to the reality of very little political change, the exposure of the fiction of disembodied white masculinity seems counterintuitive. The seemingly disingenuous affective registers of militant nostalgia on the part of these white men perhaps open up a space for an already emotional public to be engaged in queer ways.

At the present political moment of heightened emotional rhetoric, a turn to a politics of queer feeling seems particularly appropriate. But what are queer feelings? Who has them? What motivates them? To what end might they be effectively deployed politically? Throughout this dissertation, the feeling of shame has emerged as an organizational category for understanding how citizenship politics work on the body and on communities. Shame is in a sense an exemplary queer feeling, not simply because being queer has historically been associated with shame, but because of its multiple registers and manifestations. Shame appears on the skin—through the blush, for example—but it is also *read* bodily through markers such as fatness, disease, race, gender non-normativity, etc. The manifestations of shame, according to Eve Sedgwick, are therefore “not distinct toxic ‘parts’ of individual or group identity that can be excised; they are instead integral to and residual in the processes by which identity is formed” (63). It is shame’s ability to “make identities” through its circulation between the individual and the group that centers it as a compelling place to understand how a politics of queer affect might circulate more broadly in American culture. Shame marks identity as “to-be-constituted, which is also to say, as already there for the (necessary, productive) misconstrual and misrecognition” (Sedgwick 64). The process of making

identity through shame is tied to the relationships it registers between individuals, communities, groups, and institutions. Shame is a particularly productive queer feeling because it charts the “orientations,” to use Sara Ahmed’s word, of political projects that work to produce or eradicate shame.

Shame is most often registered as an uncomfortable emotion, but it is this constitutive discomfort that marks it as queer. Discomfort, according to Ahmed, is “not about assimilation or resistance, *but about inhabiting norms differently*” (155). The figures I have discussed throughout this project—Miranda, Olympia, Precious, Bone, Cal, the HIV/AIDS patient, the barebacker—inhabit norms differently through the shame and discomfort produced by and on their bodies from a myriad of locations. Their archives and their narratives do not neatly conform to any kind of political or social script, but they also do not necessarily actively resist at every moment those normalizing impulses. They form an incomplete, transient, and partial collection of mishaps, struggles, disorientation, and resistance. The feelings of discomfort they elicit interrogate how shame works through normalizing discourses in both mainstream and queer theoretical paradigms. According to Ahmed, “queer feelings may embrace a sense of discomfort, a lack of ease with the available scripts for living and loving, along with an excitement in the face of the uncertainty of where the discomfort may take us” (155). Most importantly, queer feelings disavow not the power of norms to work on us, but the naturalized political and social imperative they assume over the bodies of Others.

The politics of queer feelings that I am sketching will therefore work within a set of parameters that are constituted by and take as the starting point the instability of the

categories and feelings that make up social and political life. First, queer feelings are feminized and feminist in their commitments. I use the word “feminized” not to necessarily connect the term to the female body—though I think it is a possible and likely site for queer feeling—but as a resistance to the denigration of women as a stand-in for the “normative.” Susan Fraiman’s critique of queer theory in *Cool Men* is helpful in illustrating why queer feeling must be inflected by feminism and feminization. Queer theory “may slip from seemingly neutral uses of the terms ‘queer’ or ‘homosexual’ to what is then revealed to be male sexuality in particular, only to move back out to ostensibly universal claims, which remain underwritten by masculinity” and furthermore “tends unconsciously to position women, gender, femininity, and feminism as normative ‘other’ to its antinormative project— and this may occur even when its project centers on female subjectivity— with the result that its own gender codings may be quite conventional” (129). Like mainstream political discourse, queer theory may slip into the habit of positioning “feminine” as its other and the norm that it must resist. But if queer feelings are about inhabiting norms differently, then embracing feminization as a queer method of critique opens up emotional and bodily identifications that do not rest on dichotomies of sex, gender, sexual orientation, etc. If to feel feminized is to feel queer(ly), then the shame associated with feminization is inhabited differently and works on the heteronormative in productive ways.

At the macro level, queer feelings are always relational. Though the individual might feel isolated—as shame is wont to make one feel—the dimensions of queer feelings are oriented towards social and political institutions that circulate and naturalize

the norm. Because they are relational, and the points/objects/person in each relation are mobile, queer feelings reflect the instability of social norms. Queer feelings are transient, malleable, and in a constant process of contextualization. Queer feelings are wide and promiscuous in the social and intellectual sense. As such, they look forwards and backwards simultaneously, not fixing their location temporally, but invest themselves simultaneously in the past and in the future as ways of producing the present.

Shame is fruitful place to understand this temporal fluidity. Heather Love argues in *Feeling Backward* that

Contemporary gay identity is produced out of the twentieth-century history of queer abjection: gay pride is a reverse or mirror image of gay shame, produced precisely against the realities it means to remedy. In the darkroom of liberation, the “negative” of the closet case or the isolated protogay child is developed into a photograph of an out, proud gay man. But the trace of those forgotten is visible right on the surface of this image, a ghostly sign of the reversibility of reverse discourse. (20)

Thus, simply converting gay shame into pride is not enough because it does not undermine the forces that mark the queer for shame in the first place, nor does it erase the queerly felt experience of disjointure from pride as a category in and of itself. Leo Bersani bemoans a similar conversion of shame into pride in his response to the “Gay Shame” conference, where he argues that more disturbing questions such as “In what sense is shame an isolating factor that blocks the thinking and the formation of politically viable communities?” are elided by the “emphasis on gay shame as something

imposed on gays by a homophobic society,” and thus “the problem raised by shame is how it can be transformed into a new kind of pride” (176). Evidence and recent history would illustrate the ways in which shame converted into pride can be turned back upon itself. For example, the pride associated with so-called “deviant” sexual practices in the pre-Stonewall era are converted into shame about non-normative relationships in the more conservative era of the HIV/AIDS crisis, even by perceived “spokesmen” for the gay community such as Andrew Sullivan, as I discuss in my third chapter. The specter of this reversal is what makes the imperative to temporal fluidity necessary in a politics of queer feeling. Shame is particularly instructive in this way precisely because it is both social and identitarian; the location of shame moves as norms move, and thus shame is never fully converted into pride if one is to continue the political project of feeling queer. The past cannot be disavowed as antiquated or retrograde, but neither I think can the future be eschewed as “kid stuff.” Queer feelings traverse the boundaries of childhood and adulthood, and thus are always at odds with shifting norms that appear to be natural and universal.

A place to perhaps test the case for queer feelings and explore some of its cautions and limitations is the “It Gets Better Project” created by Dan Savage in the wake of teen suicides brought on by the bullying of LGBT youth. The project begins with a pledge by its members: “Everyone deserves to be respected for who they are. I pledge to spread this message to my friends, family and neighbors. I’ll speak up against hate and intolerance whenever I see it, at school and at work. I’ll provide hope for lesbian, gay, bi, trans and other bullied teens by letting them know that ‘It Gets Better.’”

The project compiles videos from LGBT persons and straight allies that help youth to “imagine a future” where there might otherwise appear to be no hope by showing what the lives of “grown-up” LGBT people and allies are like. The project has also prompted action in the form of legislation, letter-writing campaigns, and protests against individuals, groups, and school boards that have sought to bully or discriminate against LGBT teens. The merchandise sold on the website for the project benefits other LGBT organizing in the form of teen suicide hotlines, ACLU projects, and the Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Education network. In many ways, the impulse for this project is rooted in a politics of queer feeling. The maternal comfort of the many voices collected by the video project is feminized in its impulse towards care. It coalesces personal experience and emotion with political action, as well as exposes how feelings of discomfort, disjointedness, shame, and despair are socially produced through normalizing ideological narratives. The videos offer a compelling testimony and message of hope to teens who might feel otherwise isolated and afraid, and the site offers resources for teens across the country who need help. The political organizing of this project is large and far-reaching in both the LGBT community and the mainstream of the American Left. But the message of “It Gets Better,” while compelling and perhaps necessary for motivating teens to see themselves as having a place in the world, also illustrates a number of elisions with which this project is perhaps ill equipped to deal.

For example, a great number of people in the videos testify to finding a space for themselves once they left home or reached college—a possibility that is not available to many queer teens who are not part of the middle and upper classes. Furthermore, the

opportunities for trans advocacy in many parts of the country are close to non-existent because gender expression and identity are not protected categories in all but a few states. Quite frankly, for a number of those experiencing queer feelings, “It Gets Better” might be at best a fantasy, and at worst a lie.<sup>72</sup> By focusing solely on a hope for the future in which there is no *agent* of social change, “IT gets better” as a catchphrase in some ways masks the institutional and social pressures that make queer feelings a lived reality. But this is not to say that the “It Gets Better Project” does not have a politics of queer feeling, only that it is an incomplete site of struggle that calls out for a more complex understanding of how queer feeling operates, how discomfort itself can be radical. Queer feelings must look forwards and backwards in order to illuminate the relations of the present, they must inscribe hope and loss simultaneously without offering escape or easy redemption. As Love articulates, “It is crucial to find ways of creating and sustaining political hope. But hope that is achieved at the expense of the past cannot serve the future” (29). Queered political hope is therefore not without a sense of ambivalence and a lack of teleological direction.

In Adrienne Rich’s poem, “Cartographies of Silence,” the speaker meditates on the possibilities of rehabilitation and rescue through language:

The scream  
of an illegitimate voice

It has ceased to hear itself  
therefore it asks itself

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<sup>72</sup> The “Make It Better” project founded by the Gay-Straight Alliance is, I think, an attempt to resolve the problem of agency found in the title of the “It Gets Better” project by focusing on teens and adults who strive to have a hand in overt political and social action.



How do I exist?

This is the silence I wanted to break in you  
I had questions but you would not answer

I had answers but you would not use them  
This is useless to you and perhaps to others.

The ambivalence in this stanza is illustrative of how queer feelings are experienced as out of joint, as frustrating, and as existing only in empty space. The desire of the speaker to rescue the addressee is frustrated by the silence that constitutively surrounds the existence of the “illegitimate.” But in the word “cartography” found in the title exists a complex kind of hope—a hope that mapping the silences of the illegitimate might result in productive processes that reformulate the mainstream “concrete and everlasting world”: “what in fact I keep choosing/are these words, these whispers, conversations,/from which time after time the truth breaks moist and green.” The frustration, hope, and ambivalence of the speaker are markers of queer feeling that only cyclically resolve as partial truths, and even the hopefulness of “cartography” betrays an ambivalence towards the mapping of other voices that is related to colonization and histories of oppression. Shame works in this space of ambivalence because of its transient, malleable, contextual, relational, social, and political nature. Shame is a feeling that is related to living differently under norms, but it is not a totalizing feeling—if one is shamed by institutional and ideological prejudices, does one *always* and at all times feel only shame? The instability of this affect and its locations is what makes it particularly fruitful as a place to start. Shame and the alternative archives it has produced and I have collected in this dissertation are necessary to the exploration of

what it means to have a politics of queer feelings. These archives, which look to the past for evidence of a lived queer history but also highlight the silences concomitant with queerly felt lives illustrate how shame can work simultaneously as a site of resistance and acquiescence to a norm lived differently.

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