FROM ABJECTION TO COALITION:
SEXUAL SUBJECTIVITIES AND IDENTITY POLITICS
IN TWENTIETH-CENTURY LESBIAN AND GAY NOVELS

By

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by

Leslie J. Henson
I dedicate this dissertation to my mother and father, both of whom have labored to allow me to get the education they never had. My mother’s concern with my education, and her willingness to do everything in her power to help me get it, like my father’s generosity in providing economic support, have been indispensable. Their lives and values speak in these pages.
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By

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This study reads the sexual subjectivities represented in novels by gay and lesbian writers Radclyffe Hall, David Leavitt, James Baldwin, and Leslie Feinberg within the context of current debates on identity politics. A lesbian and gay identity politics based on the notion that all lesbians and gays share a singular identity has justifiably come under fire for privileging the needs of white, middle-class lesbians and gays. However, when deconstructive, Foucauldian, and psychoanalytic critics reject identity politics completely, they efface both the material peril under which most lesbian and gay subjects live, and the dependence of lesbian and gay critics on institutional spaces created by identity politics.

Through a materialist application of Julia Kristeva’s...
psychoanalytic notion of abjection, this study examines both hegemonic and oppositional representations of identity that maintain their homogeneity by abjecting various others--femme lesbians, working-class people, gays, blacks, and transgendered subjects--who stand in for the unacceptable, unacknowledged, or heterogeneous aspects of the identity in question. These constructions obscure the material conditions necessary for their existence. They do so by reducing social relations to the axis of sexual orientation, as do the protagonists of Hall's *The Well of Loneliness* and Leavitt's *The Lost Language of Cranes*, and by denying their own dependence on threatening bodily products, parts, and traits, as do the racist white and homophobic black characters in Baldwin's *Just Above My Head*.

In place of such exclusionary representations of identity, this study locates the more inclusive, tactical forms of subjectivity depicted in Baldwin's novel and in Feinberg's *Stone Butch Blues*. These tactical forms of subjectivity, based on an acknowledgement of their own historical and material limitations, lay the groundwork for a politics of coalition which avoids the dangers of identity politics. By bringing a materialist reading practice that highlights such forms of subjectivity into the classroom, we can enable our students to acknowledge the material bases of their own subjectivities, hence creating the conditions that foster a transformative coalition politics.

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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

What or who is it that is "out," made manifest and fully disclosed, when and if I reveal myself as a lesbian? What is it that is now known, anything? What remains permanently concealed by the very linguistic act that offers up the promise of a transparent revelation of sexuality? Can sexuality even remain sexuality . . . without that opacity designated by the unconscious, which means simply that the conscious "I" who would reveal its sexuality is perhaps the last to know the meaning of what it says? (Butler, "Imitation" 15)

[G]ender is defined by its transitivity [i.e., its artificiality and contingency], . . . sexuality manifests as multiple sexualities, and . . . therefore we are all transsexuals. There are no transsexuals. (Halberstam 226)

The above quotations--the first from the 1991 volume Inside/Out: Lesbian Theories, Gay Theories, the second from the 1994 anthology The Lesbian Postmodern--exemplify a defining tendency of much of what has come to be known in the academy as "queer theory," that is, the tendency to occlude consideration of material differences of privilege and oppression in favor of discursive analyses which emphasize linguistic inadequacy and/or indeterminacy. Judith Butler's argument, while valid enough in its own psychoanalytic and deconstructive terms, is puzzling from a materialist perspective that emphasizes, not what might be "concealed by [a] linguistic act," or what the "conscious
'I'" will be "the last to know," but something that would, indeed, be "known" were a speaker to "reveal [her]self as a lesbian"--that is, that such a speaker occupies a position of oppression, one within which her sexuality towards other women subjects her to various economic, political, and cultural consequences. Similarly, Judith Halberstam's claim that, as a result of the discursive "transitivity" or artificiality and contingency of gender, we are "all transsexual" and, equally, "[t]here are no transsexuals," asserts a general principle of linguistic indeterminacy that effaces the material differences between transsexual and nontranssexual subjects. Halberstam grants priority to a linguistic indeterminacy that would seem to hold more sway in the realm of discursive theory than in that of actual fact. Whatever the political ground gained by pointing out the instability of all gender and sexual categorizations, we are not "all transsexuals," materially speaking; to claim otherwise is to erase the factors that separate transsexual subjects' experiences--in particular, their oppression--from the experiences of the gender normative.1 Against these factors, Halberstam's insistence seems more an example of what Jonathan Dollimore terms "wishful theory" ("Sexual Disgust") than an accurate or even responsible reflection on the current state of gender affairs.

1For a discussion of transgendered subjects' oppression, see Chapter Six of this study.
Through focusing on "the material," this chapter highlights differences of privilege and oppression among various social groups. After laying out my understanding of "the material," I examine current debates within feminist and queer theory over the meaning of the related group of terms matter, material, and materiality. I trace the split between Judith Butler's discursively-oriented and Teresa Ebert's class-oriented definitions of the material to the longer-running historical split between gender- and class-based forms of social and literary analysis, explaining how my understanding of the material avoids both gender and economic reductionism. Then, after considering how this conception of the material applies to the textual examination of subjectivity in lesbian and gay novels, I provide brief summaries of the rest of the chapters in this study.

My understanding of "the material" is inextricably linked to the social inequities that Butler and Halberstam occlude. In accordance with the work of Teresa Ebert, Rosemary Hennessy, and other self-described materialist feminists, I conceptualize the material as involving the social workings of power, with "power" denoting, not the Foucauldian meaning of "a diffused set of force relations," but "the hierarchical structures of domination and the dynamics of exploitation (whereby the surplus and privilege enjoyed by one group of people is gleans at the expense of
another)" (Hennessy, "Subjects" 143). Because terms such as "domination" and "exploitation" have been used to such an extent that they have lost some of their definitional force, Daniel O’Hara’s use of Jon Elster's modification of Marx's definition of "class" is helpful to explain exactly how we are to judge whether a particular social relation entails a "hierarchical structure." O’Hara argues that a "class . . . appears . . . as a collective actor on the historical scene’" because of its members' "'endowments,'" i.e., "'what people possess or own: some means of economic and/or cultural production and reproduction’" (416-417). A social relation is "hierarchical," then, if the members of one group--one "class," in O’Hara’s usage--have greater "means of economic and/or cultural production and reproduction" than do the members of another group or "class." I use "the material" to denote the social fact of differential access to "means of economic and/or cultural production and reproduction," as well as both the causes and effects of such differential access. "The material" thus refers to all of the myriad factors that result from and/or perpetuate the social empowerment or disempowerment of various social groupings in terms of their means of production and reproduction, including their means of reproducing particular values and subjectivities. These material factors include but are not limited to the psychological (e.g., internalized homophobia, to focus on an example of
social disempowerment), the physical (e.g., the high rates of lesbian and gay youth suicide), and the economic (e.g., the lack of job protection most lesbians and gays in this country face).

Hegemonic, anti-materialist queer theory, as exemplified in the quotations from Butler and Halberstam, displaces its attention away from the "material" in this sense. The term "hegemonic" might appear incongruous when applied to a form of theory that has existed in its current form for only five years (the term "queer theory" having first appeared in Teresa de Lauretis' introduction to the Summer 1991 issue of differences).² However, during that five years "queer theory" has become synonymous with the work of a number of "stars"—particularly, Judith Butler, Eve Sedgwick, Diana Fuss, Ed Cohen and others—whose work is antimaterialist in the sense defined above.³ The opening quotations, for example, indirectly cover over "the material" by disavowing the very identity-distinctions on which queer theory's economic viability—its access to

²For a discussion of the tenuous material position of queer theory and lesbian and gay studies within the academy, see David Román's "Speaking With the Dead" (168-171).

³See Donald Morton's "The Politics of Queer Theory in the (Post)Modern Moment" for a discussion of what I have been calling "hegemonic queer theory." Morton argues that "both lesbian and gay male queer studies have been largely captured by ludic theory," that is, theory that focuses on linguistic play and advocates cultural resignification as its political goal (136). I discuss Ebert's critique of "ludic" theory later in this chapter.
economic production--within the academy depends. Whatever their protestations against "identity" and "identity politics," the practitioners of anti-identity queer theory benefit from and depend materially, in particular, economically, on the identity-based political movements whose work opened a path for the dissemination of "lesbian and gay" texts and "lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgendered" studies. The volumes from which I took the quotations--The Lesbian Postmodern and Inside/Out: Lesbian Theories, Gay Theories--indicate this dependence when they trade on the benefits of identity by naming themselves "lesbian" and "lesbian and gay," respectively.

However, while much recent and current queer and feminist theory is anti-materialist in the sense defined above, the terms "material" and "materiality" are central to much debate in queer and feminist theory in the 1990's. Theorists who define their work as materialist, or who simply engage with the concept of "the material," include most notably Butler, Michèle Barrett, Teresa Ebert, Rosemary Hennessy, Donna Landry and Gerald MacLean, and Mas'ud Zavarzadeh, among others. The debates among these theorists over the nature of "the material"--in particular, their tendency to center around an opposition between "the discursive" and "the material"--can usefully be seen as a continuation of a longer-running historical debate over the primacy of economic class versus the primacy of gender in
structuring social relationships. As Rosemary Hennessy explains, contemporary materialist feminism has progressed from essentialist "feminist critiques within marxism" during the late 1970’s to an emphasis on the discursive construction of gender and subjectivity in the eighties; in the nineties, Hennessy claims, materialist feminists explore both the multiplicity and the global systematicity of the social differentials constructing women (Materialist xi-xiii). Covering the same historical ground, Donna Landry and Gerald MacLean provide a useful discussion of how debates between gender-centered (feminist) and class-centered (Marxist) analyses have often resulted in a "'dual-systems theory'" which attempts to explain "both women’s oppression in class-specific terms, and the profoundly gendered quality of class formations" (90). Against dual-systems theories, Landry and MacLean want materialist feminism to "shift the terrain of previous debates from a possible synthesis of Marxism and feminism to . . . [an] analysis informed by and responsive to the concerns of women, as well as people of color and other marginalized groups" (x). As I argue below, the historical split between Marxism and feminism manifests in contemporary conflicts over the meaning of "the material." In particular, the definition of "the material" advanced by Butler and other "ludic" feminists is useful primarily to counter certain forms of gender oppression, while Teresa Ebert and other
Marxist feminists define "the material" primarily in terms of class.

Discursively oriented theorists make little distinction between ideological, economic, and political forces, defining "the material" inclusively as, in essence, congealed discourse. These theorists argue that social change can best be accomplished through changing the terms of discourse broadly defined. This position is advocated most forcefully by Judith Butler in *Bodies That Matter: On The Discursive Limits of "Sex."* Butler argues heatedly with theorists who define "the material" as that which is outside or unaffected by discourse. Butler proposes a feminist redefinition of matter as "not a site or a surface, but . . . a process of materialization that stabilizes over time to produce the effect of boundary, fixity, and surface we call matter" (9); this "process of materialization" occurs, for Butler, through discourse. For Butler, then, "matter" is congealed discourse not substantially different from any other kind of discursive utterance. While conceding the existence of extra-discursive realities (e.g., hormonal and chromosomal differences between the sexes), Butler's primary aim is to problematize any positing of "the material" as that which is outside or unconstructed by discourse: "insofar as the extra-discursive is delimited," she writes, "it is formed by the very discourse from which it seeks to free itself" (11). This view leads Butler to argue that to
posit the material as that which is outside discourse is to engage in an act of "some violence" (11). Yet just as she does not distinguish between different kinds of discursive utterances, Butler does not say what kind of or how much "violence." This inability to distinguish between and among kinds of discourse points to a larger problem within Butler's work in general: that is, its tendency to flatten out the social field, collapsing differences among variously situated speakers (in particular, differences of access to means of economic/cultural production/reproduction) in order to make overarching epistemological and political claims.  

Further, this statement, like Butler's definition of "the material" and her work in general, privileges an implicitly middle-class experience of gender as the quintessential model for the workings of power. That is, from a middle-class feminist perspective, it makes sense to characterize as violent any attempt to delineate "the material" of gender outside or apart from discursivity, with

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4See Carole-Anne Tyler's "Boys Will Be Girls: The Politics of Gay Drag" for a critique of Butler and other theorists of camp and drag along these lines (53-58). For other materialist critiques of Butler's work, see Jennifer Cotter's review of Bodies That Matter and Ed Cohen's article, "Who Are 'We'? Gay 'Identity' as Political (E)motion" (83-84). In an interview with Liz Kotz after the publication of Gender Trouble, Butler herself remarked that she seems to have "some uncritical modernist notion of what can happen in esthetic space, where the play of identification can be interrogated with accountability suspended" (88). Against such an "uncritical modernist notion," materialist analyses highlight the construction of "esthetic space" itself within and through complex relations of power.
discursivity being understood as all the disciplinary apparati, including language, that enforce a hierarchical social differentiation between "men" and "women." To claim that, for example, hormonal influences constitute the extra-discursive materiality of gender is to overwrite the discursive forces that produce such concepts as "hormonal influences" in the first place; Butler believes that in overwriting these forces, one "preclude[s] the very possibility of a future rearticulation of that boundary" (207, original emphasis). From this perspective, what is outside discourse is not subject to change--a view which ignores the fact that within scientific discourse, material claims do not foreclose future change, but often enable it through providing research upon which other scientists can build or which they can challenge. However, it is understandable that Butler resists a theory which could be used to put "women" in their "natural" place, and thus to limit the access of women such as Butler to positions of traditionally male power.

Butler's theory of the matter which constitutes the material, then, is useful for countering one hierarchical abuse of power. However, to define matter as congealed discourse is still to flatten out the material differences I emphasize throughout this study; if matter is congealed discourse, then how are we to distinguish between various discursive utterances as they perpetuate and/or contest
these differences? Specifically, how are we to use this theory in the service of changing these differences? Butler’s theory implies that the more congealed a discourse is, the more material it is; hence, if our goal is to change "matter" or "the material," we should attempt to change those discursive practices that are the most congealed or "fixed." Yet this theory still does not distinguish between representations in the cultural sphere, and the economic realm of labor relations and degree of access to goods and services, as more class-based materialist feminists such as Rosemary Hennessy and Teresa Ebert do. Hence it does not allow us to ask how, and in what way, changes in cultural discourse might be related to changes in economic "discourse"/practices; further, as indicated by the very strangeness of using the phrase "economic discourse" to designate labor relations and access to goods and services, the definition of "matter" as congealed discourse allows Butler and other theorists to focus primarily on cultural discourses rather than also on economic practices and labor relations.5

5Tellingly, against over twenty entries for "Foucault" and almost fifty under "Lacan" in the index to Butler’s Bodies That Matter, the scant four entries for "Marx" in that same book refer the reader to what I call "the poststructural Marx." This is the Marx who called for "a materialism which can affirm the practical activity that structures and inheres in the object as part of that object’s objectivity and materiality" (250). Butler thus emphasizes the non-static status of the material for Marx, but omits Marx’s point that this "practical activity" which "inheres in the object" is that of labor. As Ebert points
This problem can be seen by the way in which Butler's theory perpetuates the erasure of certain constitutive violences from a large portion of current academic theory. For example, under the auspices of discursive theories such as Butler's, theorists can fool themselves into thinking that they are indeed doing all they can to change class and race relations when they deconstruct cultural representations of class discourses in academic texts, conferences, and classrooms. Pointing out the constructedness of class and race categories can have material effects, by empowering marginalized class and race subjectivities and by helping to challenge institutional structures based on naturalized categories of class and race. However, when we do not consider material questions of access to the means of cultural and/or economic production and reproduction, we can forget that academic texts, conferences, and classrooms often depend on or perpetuate in other ways the same hierarchies theorists attempt to deconstruct. Think, for example, of how few of our students (at least, UF students) come from marginalized class and race positions; a focus on changing the cultural representations of such subjects does not directly affect or necessarily even acknowledge this fact. Think also of the 

out, Butler's appropriation of Marx amounts to the erasure of Marx's interest in the material as "a particular articulation of a mode of production," and a replacement of this historical analysis with an ahistorical notion of "differance" (213).
labor of the secretaries at this university, without whom no one here would get a degree or continue their careers. The material hierarchy of class, manifested through classist university policies, determines that these women themselves will not be able to get degrees: despite the anti-classist policy of allowing university workers to take a certain number of classes per semester free of charge, exhausting workloads and other forms of classism mitigate against workers actually taking advantage of this policy. A well-respected "feminist" dean, for example, told one secretary that her attempt to take classes would "interfere" with her job and that she should therefore just quietly get back to her desk; this dean refused, point-blank, to help the secretary take classes.

Such occurrences are rendered invisible by a theory of the material that flattens out the social field through understanding "discourse" as both the cause of social differences and the way to change these differences, without distinguishing between and among types of discursive practices. The "feminist" dean was indeed working against

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6Butler is quite clear on the fact that she considers discursive means the proper route to social change. Butler's political goal is "to make the signifier into a site for a set of rearticulations that cannot be predicted or controlled" (Bodies 219). Resignification thus becomes both goal and method of social change, as indicated by her championship of citationality as a "radical rearticulation of the symbolic horizon through which bodies come to matter at all" (23), a re-citation of "the law" that "reiterate[s] and coopt[s] its power" (15; emphasis added).
class oppression in her own intellectual work, yet she used her power as a dean to enforce the material hierarchy of class in terms of access to higher education; of the two practices--cultural resignification in academic texts and the enactment of power as dean--I daresay the second has more of an effect, and definitely more of an immediate effect, on the material as I have defined it. Judith Halberstam's work quoted at the beginning of this chapter likewise flattens the social field by elevating discourse to an all-determining status. Only such a theory could unequivocally assert that, contrary to the huge social disparities between normatively- and trans-gendered people, "we are all transsexuals."

Teresa Ebert's discussion of "ludic" feminism/postmodernism is helpful here. Ebert names as "ludic" the currently dominant form of academic feminism "that is founded upon poststructuralist assumptions about linguistic play, difference, and the priority of discourse" (3). According to Ebert, ludic feminists such as Butler, Donna Haraway, and Elizabeth Grosz participate in the larger tendency of ludic postmodernist theorists to theorize difference as "always (only) within the very practice of culture and signification"--i.e., what happens in literary texts, media representations, and so forth--rather than within historical-material relations of "class, labor and exploitation" (132, 117)--i.e., how much one makes, who
benefits from one's labor, and so on. In my terms, such ludic theorists take one slice of the material—"the practice of culture and signification"—as the whole thing. Ebert, however, defines the material as based only in "class, labor, and exploitation." She argues that ludic theorists displace the latter with "epistemological arguments about foundationalism and textuality—substituting [for labor politics] . . . a politics of desire (lust) and multiple 'undone' or 'cyborg' identities . . . and a (Foucauldian) notion of power as nondeterminate, shifting, and reversible" (117). For Ebert, power relations are not "nondeterminate, shifting, and reversible," but determined in an obdurate manner along hierarchical lines via capital's exploitation of labor. Hence, contra Butler and other post-Marxist theorists, Ebert's notion of "the material" privileges class and class-based analysis. Against ludic postmodernism, Ebert champions a "resistance postmodernism" that "insists on the need for the model of base and superstructure and asserts the priority of the mode of production, especially since the economic has been so fundamentally eclipsed by ludic logic" (146). For Ebert as for traditional Marxists, the economic realm is the "base" and cultural representations the "superstructure" rising above and grounded in that base.

In using the metaphor of base and superstructure, Ebert, in contrast to discursive theorists such as Butler,
explicitly address the relationship between "the economic" and "the cultural." Ebert's understanding of the relationship between base and superstructure is a bit more complicated than the metaphor suggests. For Ebert, "the material conditions of our labor" are "dialectic[ally]" connected to "the cultural practices, meanings, and subjectivities we produce" (246, original emphasis). That is, "cultural practices, meanings, and subjectivities" are based in and in turn have an effect on labor conditions, which likewise are based in and have an effect on cultural practices. The problem with Ebert's theory is not, then, simple economic determinism, since she allows for the possibility that cultural practices have material effects. Instead, Ebert tends towards economic reductionism in that she assumes that capitalism is the motor force in producing current social hierarchies, and that all social differentials can be explained by recourse to class or labor relations. She views "[t]he present," for example, as "the temporality in which capitalism intensifies its efforts to increase the rate of profit by extracting the free labor of others" (265); class struggle involves "the social struggles over the exploitation of labor, including race, gender, and sexuality as well as class" (64, emphasis added).

Such an analysis, while inestimably valuable for bringing critical attention to the occluded issue of economic class relations, does not allow for an examination
of material effects from anything but an economic class-based perspective. For example, while grounded in and having their effects upon the economic, racism and homophobia are not always solely driven by economic or labor relations. Likewise, the fact that Jews as a "class" are relatively economically well-off in this country does not mean that they are not oppressed as a class, for not only are Jews in this country increasingly becoming victims of psychologically and physically violent anti-Semitic attacks, but dominant means of cultural and political production and reproduction also actively exclude or demean Jewish ethnic mannerisms, religious practices, and so forth. Hence, my understanding of the material as involving both cultural and economic means of production/reproduction counters both the discursive reductionism of the ludic notion of materialism, and the economic reductionism of a strict Marxist theory of historical materialism.\footnote{My argument here is based on Judith Plaskow's article, "Anti-Semitism: The Unacknowledged Racism."}

\footnote{Other texts that try to mediate between strictly discursive theories and "objective" labor theories include Rosemary Hennessy's \textit{Materialist Feminism and the Politics of Discourse} and Michèle Barrett's \textit{The Politics of Truth: From Marx to Foucault}. Barrett advocates a theoretical relativism that foregrounds, following Michel Foucault, the power relations at work in any construction of material relations and historical events (162-3). Similarly, Hennessy argues that "discourse," including our own theoretical descriptions of social relations, is "ideology" (91). Hennessy thus defines the materiality of discourse through the fact that "all theories . . . help shape the formation of social subjects as well as what comes to count as the 'real' or the 'truth'" (7).}
This understanding of the material has implications for my choice of a dissertation focused on cultural representations of sexual subjectivities. On the one hand, the dissertation itself is addressed primarily to those who do have access to academic resources. Similarly, its production has been made possible by a number of material privileges: the computer my father bought me, the fact that I could (barely) afford to take six weeks off from teaching to finish it, the books I had the money to buy, my health, the safety of my neighborhood, and, just as importantly, the (relatively safe) material space that has been carved out for lesbian and gay studies within the academy. However, it is my hope that through this dissertation I will be able to use these privileges in the service of changing some of the very material relations that produced them. Such change is possible within the terms of my understanding of the material because I include the struggle over cultural meanings as an inherent aspect of material relations. It is my hope that bringing material issues of access to resources to the forefront will provide a useful intervention in discourses that obscure and/or draw our attention away from

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...I should also say here that, were it not for witnessing the extreme difficulties experienced by a working-class friend in finishing her dissertation—the poor health, having to teach three classes rather than one the summer she finished, the unsafe neighborhood, her inability to buy books, not to mention the breakdown of her very old, substandard computer—I would not have been aware of what I have called "the determining role" of such material factors.
such issues, and in this way contribute to enabling more critical theorists and teachers to use their resources and energies to work against all of the academic policies and practices that perpetuate social inequities, not just the cultural and discursive ones. Further, as I argue in my conclusion, critics can teach students a materialist reading practice that can become the basis for a politics that spills over the bounds of the academy—a politics that seeks to unravel multiple relations of privilege and oppression in our social world.

Teresa Ebert's discussion of the materiality of the sign is useful for explaining how my understanding of the material plays into the reading of texts. Ebert argues that, far from constituting "the correspondence between a single signifier and signified" or, conversely, "a free-floating chain of signifiers," the sign is "situated in an ideological process" of social struggle through which "the prevailing ideology and social contradictions insist on a particular signified (or set of signifieds)" for any given signifier (174). And while the relation between signifier and signified is "insecure, continually contested and changeable," those who control "the social relations of production" have the ability to displace or erase oppositional meanings with ideologies that serve their own interests (174-5), both through cultural representations and through control over economic structures and social
conditions. Against these dominant ideologies, which often try to hide the various levels of social struggle and inequity--ludic theory being one such ideology--Ebert practices a "historical materialist critique" that relates "the contradictions within a [textual] system" to "larger social contradictions, specifically the struggle over gender, race, and class inequalities" (13). Following Ebert and other materialist feminists and queer theorists, I read the lesbian and gay novels I have chosen in relation to social contradictions, for their take on what Rosemary Hennessy terms "the exploitative social arrangements that [texts] so often manage" (Materialist 94), or, I would add, just as often, and sometimes simultaneously, contest. Because texts to some extent act as cultural agents themselves, through their structure and language advocating particular social interests, throughout this study I make statements that refer to what the text in question argues or claims. I do so not because I believe that texts are univocal, but because I believe that texts serve as palimpsests of particular cultural and ideological positions, positions which often attempt to oppose some "exploitative social arrangements" while advancing others. However, as my readings of The Well of Loneliness and The Lost Language of Cranes demonstrate, even texts that advocate social inequities document, through textual contradictions, marginalized characters, and revealing
linguistic tropes, the social conflicts at work in their pages.

These conflicts, moreover, often take place at the level of subjectivity, or in texts, at the level of representations of subjectivity. As demonstrated by the example of lesbian and gay studies, an institutional space created at least in part by the difficult work of subjects who conceptualized themselves as "lesbian" and "gay" in an affirmative sense, subjectivities are affected by and in turn have an affect on what economic and cultural resources are available, and to whom. Defining ideology as any "available knowledge," Hennessy argues that ideologies "operate in an indeterminate relationship with economic and political production," such that "available knowledges are both shaped by and in turn help define the contradictory development and displacement of economic and political forces" ("Subjects" 145). In this sense, subjectivity as

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10 Hennessy here differs from some of Marx's views on ideology. For an extended study of Marx's definitions of ideology, see Michèle Barrett's 1991 book The Politics of Truth: From Marx to Foucault. Barrett argues that, while Marx did leave a legacy of sometimes contradictory definitions of ideology in his texts, he primarily saw ideology critically, arguing in German Ideology that ideology is equivalent to "'the dominant material relations grasped as ideas'" (cited in Barrett 11). Barrett argues that this position does not allow for a more complex understanding of ideology "that goes beyond the notion of collusion in what is ultimately not in one's interests" (10). In contrast, Teresa Ebert defends Marx's argument that "'it is not the consciousness of men that determines their existence, but their social existence that determines their consciousness'" (29). For Ebert, subjects resist dominant social relations, not through "ideology," but
an "ideology" of the self constitutes "a main arena for the struggle against economic exploitation as well as cultural oppression" (Ebert 43). For lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered subjects, literature has been particularly important in helping to shape subjectivities, because many of those who later go on to adopt lesbian, gay, bisexual, and/or transsexual/transgendered subjectivities take their first self-understandings from literary representations, lacking as they do other forms of support. Thus, while not all queer subjects learn what it means to be "queer" from reading--class and cultural background could be a factor here--lesbian and gay novels do provide a strong forum for influencing subjectivities. They thus can have material force in a social world that rejects and oppresses some sexual subjectivities while rewarding and privileging others.

At this historical juncture, an identity politics bent on forcing the social recognition of lesbians and gays as an identifiable "class" in the sense defined above--i.e., a group which, while not homogeneous, has a certain set of "endowments" in common in terms of its access to economic

through "ideology critique": critique of the dominant discourses that mystify and naturalize social inequities "as inevitable" (8).

\[11\] In his book Gaiety Transfigured: Gay Self-Representation in American Literature, David Bergman argues that for many gay people, "[h]omosexuality ... is a literary construct" (Bergman 6).
and/or cultural production and/or reproduction—has largely been discounted as an effective means for countering the oppression of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgendered (l/g/b/t) people. Yet, as Cindy Patton notes, l/g/b/t theorists have not been able to devise or articulate a "postidentitarian politics" (164). This impasse lends a certain urgency to l/g/b/t novels' interventions in the construction of l/g/b/t subjectivities. Many contemporary theorists maintain that identity politics inevitably dissolves into discursive squabbles over in-crowd membership.¹² Such squabbles do little to change the "social structures of oppression and domination" discussed above. However, Chapter Two of this study argues that a materialist perspective on identity politics complicates the issue. In this chapter, I insist that while it is important to remember that social movements which are based on monolithic notions of collective group identity can and do reify problematic and exclusionary constructions of identity, it is also important to remember that forms of collective self-definition provide some necessary social benefits, and can bring about coalition among those who

¹²See, for example, Jennifer Wicke's "Postmodern Identities and the Politics of the (Legal) Subject." Relying heavily on Denise Riley's critique of identity politics in "Am I That Name?" Feminism and the Category of "Women" in History, Wicke contends that identity-based political movements will continue to dissolve into struggles over "policing the identity line" if they do not build in "a freewheeling recognition of the instability of that identity" (30, 31).
otherwise might not have thought about their situation in collective terms. I consider how a ludic deconstructive critique of identity politics ignores these benefits, its own dependence on identity categories, and the real-world difficulty of overturning hierarchical, binary categories of identity. I then turn to the work of Michel Foucault as a more likely base for a materialist theory of sexual subjectivity. I relate how Foucault's genealogy of sexual identity categories works against totalistic and ahistorical theories that reduce all of history to one binary power struggle; however, I claim, Foucault's work also justifies the dismissal of identity politics that I find so detrimental.

A materialist application of Julia Kristeva's concept of abjection can be used as a way out of the impasse to which this rejection of identity politics has led, I argue, allowing us to judge the political desirability of collective self-constructions without abandoning such constructions entirely. I explain how the individual subject's always incomplete separation from culturally proscribed abjects such as feces, blood, semen, and urine is played out through the process whereby individual and collective identities are constructed through an always incomplete rejection of otherness, a rejection that founds, albeit unstably, the identity in question. Such rejections of otherness are always incomplete because the identity
based on abjection must continually work to keep itself pure, causing it to act out its self-definition on the social plane through marginalizing those whom it rejects. The less individual and collective self-constructions follow this model, I claim, and the more they approximate what Kristeva calls the "subject-in-process," the less they will perpetuate the oppression of various social others and instead, enable coalition between and among varying groups. Finally, in place of granting our allegiance to either problematic notions of unitary identity or equally problematic totalizing rejections of identity, I advocate Chela Sandoval's model of U.S. third world feminists' "oppositional consciousness" as a blueprint for a complex, strategic politics of sexual subjectivity adequate to the complexity of the contemporary material relations in which contemporary lesbian and gay subjects are located.

Chapter Three argues that Radclyffe Hall's The Well of Loneliness advances a notion of lesbian identity that does not do justice to such material complexity. Hall's text, I claim, enacts the double abjection of both working-class and femme subjectivities in order to elevate the necessarily butch, upper-class lesbian to the status of representative "invert." Through Stephen Gordon's abjection of the femme lesbian and the class-inflected economy of desire she represents, the text asserts lesbian and gay identity as an essentially homogeneous phenomenon that crosses class
barriers, a construction which privileges the emotional and cultural oppression of the upper-class invert at the expense of the economic oppression of the working-class lesbian. This textual silencing and appropriation of an important element of "the material" is relevant, I maintain, to current debates over the politics of representing oppressed subjectivities, particularly debates in performance theory concerning butch-femme representations. Throughout, I claim that, like the individual psychic process of abjection Kristeva theorized, the text's abjection of the femme and of the material is incomplete: the text voices both femme and working-class lesbian subjectivities as "articulate silences," effectively if unintentionally documenting the larger material relations which both threaten the upper-class invert and allow her to take on her identity.

Chapter Four contends that by using an impoverished child's "lost language" as a metaphor for white middle-class gay oppression, David Leavitt's *The Lost Language of Cranes* perpetuates in terms of class the logic of abjection it opposes in terms of sexuality. The text links secrets of sexuality to secrets of race and class, demonstrating how the abjection of homosexuality from white middle-class subjectivity is tied to white middle-class isolationism--i.e., the isolation of the white middle-class from other racial and class groupings, as well as the isolation of (homo)sexual subjectivities within white middle-class
society. Within this context, I see the text arguing for the necessity of an essentialist politics of gay identity centered on the act of "coming out." However, the text's focus on the way in which white, middle-class gay male subjectivity is irrevocably marked by the larger conventions and exclusions of middle-class culture works against any essentialist articulation of gay identity. Coming out in and of itself, though it may unite white middle-class gay subjects in a struggle against homophobia and heterosexism, does not counter deep-set white middle-class habits of emotional isolation or provide a way for class-privileged gay subjects to form coalitions across class differences.

James Baldwin's last novel, *Just Above My Head*, also focuses on factors that hinder coalition. Baldwin's text traces both homophobic and racist identities to an abjection of what Bakhtin terms "the grotesque body," which the novel names as those "dark bits" of subjectivity that make the body vulnerable, mortal, and collectively constituted. As I explain in Chapter Five, I turn to Bakhtin's discussion of the grotesque body to validate the existence, contra Kristeva, of historical forms of subjectivity that are not based on separation from feces, blood, semen, urine, and so forth. Baldwin's text finds in Gospel music a black construction of subjectivity which affirms that which has been culturally designated as abject as part of oneself; this Gospel subjectivity even recognizes the discursive and
material interdependency of "white" and "black" subjectivities upon one another. Without an acknowledgement of both this interdependency and our shared history of racism, Baldwin's novel avers, white racists will continue to enact abjection-as-racist-oppression; further, without an examination of their own subjectivities and how these may be based on the abjection of homosexuality, black and other heterosexually-identified subjects will continue to enact abjection-as-homophobic oppression. Against such abjection, the text argues for the integral role of the black gay Gospel singer in reproducing black Gospel subjectivity and black culture in general.

Leslie Feinberg's 1993 novel Stone Butch Blues also offers specific methods through which to counter the problem of abjection; as I demonstrate in Chapter Six, Feinberg's text constitutes a kind of primer on coalition politics and the tactical forms of subjectivity such a politics requires. Against radical feminist and performance theories of gender, the novel portrays gender as materially inscribed according to a plurality of signifiers, with genitalia being the most important in determining positions of relative privilege and oppression. This understanding of gender as materially inscribed according to a number of different signifiers allows, I argue, for the recognition that allies against sexism hail from a number of different gender positions. Further, Feinberg's novel indicates that only those
marginalized subjectivities which recognize various subjects' differing material positions can form the basis for a politics of coalition that can correct the errors associated with identity politics. Such a politics can occur, the text maintains, when subjects make a conscious decision not to abject others, and instead decide to engage with other subjects in such a way as to learn the material limits of their own subjectivities.

The conclusion to this study connects my discussion of the above novels to pedagogy. I explain how novels such as the ones examined in this study can be used in conjunction with strategic revelations about our own subjectivities and carefully formulated writing assignments to teach a materialist reading practice that can help students to recognize the role played by material relations in forming their own subjectivities. Such a materialist reading practice, I claim, helps to create the conditions that foster a transformative coalition politics. Whatever their ideological perspective, literary texts' portraits of material relations trigger students' (and teachers') emotional responses--responses which often indicate, I argue, the dynamics of abjection-enacted-as-oppression described in the preceding chapters. I discuss the problems with the model brought out by classroom discussions I have experienced, as well as the strengths, explaining how equipping students with the model of abjection-as-oppression
can give students a theoretical framework through which to understand their emotional responses to representations of material relations. I then describe how we can work against both the problem of abjection and some of the problems associated with critical pedagogy by emphasizing the material relations within and against which our own subjectivities take shape. Finally, I detail two writing assignments, devised in conjunction with my former co-teacher Mary Ann Leiby, which can also supply students with an opportunity to begin to move from abjection to coalition.
CHAPTER 2
IDENTITY POLITICS IN CONTEXT

This focusing upon our own oppression is embodied in the concept of identity politics. We believe that the most profound and potentially the most radical politics come directly out of our own identity, as opposed to working to end somebody else's oppression. In the case of Black women this is a . . . revolutionary concept because it is obvious from looking at all the political movements that have preceded us that anyone is more worthy of liberation than ourselves. (Combahee River Collective 212)

To what extent do identitarian logical systems always require the construction of socially impossible identities to occupy an unnamed, excluded, but presuppositional relation subsequently concealed by the logic itself? (Butler, Gender 39)

Questions of identity politics have become increasingly central to American literary and cultural criticism, particularly though not exclusively for members of those groups that have been marginalized by traditional versions of "identity." However, as the above quotations indicate, we are far from a consensus as to what the terms "identity" and "identity politics" even mean. For the members of the Combahee River Collective, a politics based on "identity" is precisely the means through which to counter their exclusion from previous political movements that did not deem Black women "worthy of liberation." In contrast, for Butler, writing under the influence of Derrida and Foucault and in
the wake of a feminist movement increasingly being forced to face its own exclusionary practices, "identity" is the product of a "logical system" that simultaneously perpetuates and conceals its exclusion of other "socially impossible identities."

To what do we attribute these contradictory views of "identity"? How might we understand this difference? Some would argue, no doubt, that historical time period explains the difference, in that the Combahee Collective wrote in 1977, before a national consciousness of the inadequacy of identity-based political movements such as the Women's Liberationist and Black Power movements had come about, while Butler wrote in 1990. However, rather than seeming naive about the negative effects of identity-based movements, as the historical argument would suggest, the Collective, like Butler, is well aware of the exclusionary nature of "the political movements that have preceded us."

I would like to suggest that the gap between Butler and the Collective stems more fundamentally from a difference in material perspective, and that a materialist theory of sexual subjectivities can provide a way to make sense of what is valid in both of these views. From a materialist perspective, Butler's question concerning whether "identitarian logical systems always require the construction of socially impossible identities to occupy an unnamed, excluded, but presuppositional relation
subsequently concealed by the logic itself" has a decidedly idealist cast, particularly when juxtaposed with the Collective's pragmatic/practical use of "identity."

Butler's critique of identity hails from an "unnamed" and "presuppositional" material perspective of privilege, since assertions of identity can exclude and oppress only when made by those who have some degree of social privilege; those without privilege do not have the power to enforce any "construction of socially impossible identities."

In contrast to Butler, the Collective speaks up for the "socially impossible" identities of Black women using as a productive method of social struggle the very terms Butler's later critique partially disables. ¹ Contrary to Butler's claim concerning "identitarian logical systems," the Collective uses "identity" here in the sense defined by Shane Phelan, who explains that she "insist[s] on [her] lesbian identity not because [she] believes [herself] to be 'really' lesbian, but because [her] relationship to that category . . . importantly structures [her] life" (782). For Phelan and the Collective, assertions of "identity" serve as shorthand for the material position of the speaker.

¹Butler has been peculiarly unable to see the power of her work in setting the terms of debate within queer theory, as evidenced by her reading of the title of the infamous Judy magazine (a graduate-student-produced mock-serious fanzine parodying and contesting Butler's status as a queer theory "star"). Rather than reading "Judy" as humorous in the way it is humorous to call a parent or authority figure by a diminutive, Butler read the title as calling for her return to normative femininity (Bodies x).
--the conditions of oppression s/he faces as a result of being associated with a particular category of being, as well as the collective cultural resources and strengths s/he brings to his/her resistance to those conditions.\(^2\) Such strategic, materialist usages of "identity" are a far cry from the exclusionary, disciplinary forms of "identity" targeted by Butler and other contemporary queer theorists.

In this chapter, I argue that while it is important to remember Butler's warning that social movements which are based on monolithic notions of collective group identity can and do reify problematic and exclusionary constructions of identity, it is also important to remember that forms of collective self-definition such as the Combahee River Collective's provide some necessary social benefits, and can bring about coalition among those who otherwise might not have thought about their situation in collective terms. I discuss how a certain contemporary deconstructive critique of identity politics ignores these benefits, its own dependence on identity categories, and the real-world difficulty of overturning hierarchical, binary categories of identity. I then turn to the work of Michel Foucault as a more likely base for a materialist theory of sexual subjectivity. I explain how Foucault's genealogy of sexual

\(^2\)In her latest book, *Getting Specific: Postmodern Lesbian Politics*, Phelan argues for a return to identity politics in the Combahee River Collective's original sense (x).
identity categories works against totalistic and ahistorical theories that reduce all of history to one binary power struggle; however, I claim, Foucault's work also justifies the dismissal of identity politics I find so detrimental. Ultimately, I argue, a materialist application of Julia Kristeva's concept of abjection can be used as a way out of the impasse to which this rejection of identity politics has led, allowing us to judge the political desirability of collective self-constructions without abandoning such constructions entirely. The less such constructions are based in abjection, I claim, and the more they approximate what Kristeva calls the "subject-in-process," the less they will perpetuate the oppression of various social others and instead, enable coalition between and among various social groups. Finally, in place of granting our allegiance to either problematic notions of unitary identity or equally problematic totalizing rejections of identity, I advocate Chela Sandoval's model of U.S. third world feminists' "oppositional consciousness" as a blueprint for a complex, strategic politics of sexual subjectivity.  

3While the rest of this study and parts of this chapter refer to "identity" to denote narrow forms of selfhood that are based on the abjection of various social "others," and use "subjectivity" to mean more positive, neutral, and/or complex forms of self-construction that do not necessarily depend on exclusion for their functioning, in this chapter I sometimes use the terms "identity" and "subjectivity" interchangeably to mean any collective construction of self. Two related factors mitigated against my original intention to keep the two terms separate in this chapter: the awkwardness and strangeness of constructions such as
Using diverse postmodern methodologies, many queer theorists have tarred political movements based on the categories "lesbian" and "gay," or, in some cases, "lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgendered" (l/g/b/t) as anti-erotic, divisive and exclusionary, and susceptible to, if not dependent on, commodification and consumerist excess. Critics use the term "identity politics" to designate organized political movements which attempt to gain "civil rights" for lesbians, gays, and, in some cases, bisexuals as a legitimate minority group similar to Blacks, Jews, 

"subjectivity terms," and the need to follow some critics' usage of the term "identity politics" to mean any form of politics based on collective self-assertions.

4See Judith Butler's "Imitation and Gender Insubordination" for a discussion of identity politics as anti-erotic (14). For analyses of identity politics as divisive and exclusionary, see Butler's *Gender Trouble* (39); Diana Fuss' *Essentially Speaking: Feminism, Nature and Difference* (102-103, 115-116); Ekua Omosupe's "Black/Lesbian/Bulldagger" (108); Shane Phelan's first book, *Identity Politics: Lesbian Feminism and the Limits of Community* (51-58, 166); and Jennifer Wicke's "Postmodern Identities and the Politics of the (Legal) Subject" (30-31). Robyn Wiegman's "Introduction: Mapping the Lesbian Postmodern," makes a strong argument against identity politics as commodification (3).

5For discussion of the problems posed for lesbian and gay identity movements by bisexuals and bisexuality, see Clare Hemming's "Resituating the Bisexual Body: From Identity to Difference." Transsexual and transgender activists have had an equally if not more difficult struggle with lesbian and gay identity movements, as demonstrated by a June 1994 decision by the lesbian- and gay-run Human Rights Campaign not to include transsexuality as a category in the Employment Non-Discrimination Act (Minkowitz 146); HRC has since instituted a more transsexual-positive policy.
women, and so forth.

This type of "identity politics" is thus integrally linked to the Black Power and Women's Liberation movements of the sixties and seventies. Queer theorist critics of "identity politics" focus primarily on the most problematic definition of gay and lesbian selfhood these movements advance, that is, the definition of gay and lesbian sexuality as an inborn, unchanging, and unchosen aspect of the self. Through such reification (also extended to "women," "blacks," etc.), "identity politics" has become shorthand for many critics and theorists for "bad essentialist politics," or, as Douglas Crimp writes, borrowing from Diana Fuss's discussion of essentialism in feminist theory, "[i]dentify politics has most often been understood, and is now denigrated, as essentialist (denigrated in certain quarters, in fact, as essentially


7For a discussion of how early gay rights groups "formed through identification with [these] political movements," see Douglas Crimp's "Right On, Girlfriend!" (314). For histories of the evolution of contemporary gay and lesbian identity politics from the homophile organizations of the 1950's, see John D'Emilio's Making Trouble: Essays on Gay History, Politics, and the University and Martin Duberman's Stonewall. Rather than focusing on the predominantly male homophile organizations, Elizabeth Kennedy and Madeline Davis' Boots of Leather, Slippers of Gold--a history of a 1940's and '50's Buffalo lesbian community--"traces the roots of gay and lesbian liberation to the resistance culture of working-class lesbians" (372).
essentialist)" (314). In queer theory, such a view derives from two, sometimes overlapping sources: from certain applications of deconstructive, Foucauldian, and psychoanalytic theory, and from the voices of those who have been marginalized by traditional white, male, middle-class-dominated gay identity politics. Such work provides a valuable corrective to abuses enacted in the name of narrowly-defined, monolithic constructions of identity, for example, the abuse of working-class butch-femme women enacted by mostly white, middle-class feminists in the name of the "woman-identified" woman.

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8In her wonderfully titled essay "Tremble, Hetero Swine!", Cindy Patton refers to the "near hegemony in gay studies of deconstructive and psychoanalytic techniques" (164).

9Teresa de Lauretis, for example, chastises contemporary lesbian and gay studies for its "enduring silence on the specificity of lesbianism" ("Queer Theory" vii), while Ekua Omosupe points out that "[t]he term 'lesbian' without racial specificity, focuses on and refers to white lesbian culture" (108). More recently, bisexuals, transgendered, and transsexual people have denounced lesbian and gay political movements for leaving out their needs; see Jo Eadie's "Activating Bisexuality: Towards a Bi/Sexual Politics" for a bisexual critique of lesbian and gay identity politics. Also, see Rosemary Hennessy's Materialist Feminism and the Politics of Discourse for a discussion, citing Sandra Harding, of the "historical intersection" of "postmodern theories of the subject" with "critiques from within feminism of feminism's exclusive focus on gender" (69). Of course, these debates within feminism continue to have a strong influence on queer theory.

10See Leslie Feinberg's novel, Stone Butch Blues, for a fictional representation of such abuse; I analyze Feinberg's novel and its depiction of working-class butch/femme subjectivities in Chapter Six of this study.
However, the wholesale rejection of "identity politics" engendered by reductive, idealist, or ludic\(^{11}\) applications of contemporary theory does not always serve the interests of those who are in practice marginalized by identity politics, or even the interests of those who have been privileged by post-sixties liberation movements' identity politics (e.g. white middle-class gay men, in sexual identity politics, and white middle-class women in gender-based feminist politics). As we saw by juxtaposing the Combahee River Collective's use of identity as a basis for politics with Judith Butler's rejection of identity politics, a totalistic rejection of identity politics can mitigate against positive uses of "identity," or what I sometimes term, in order to avoid the more negatively charged implications of the word identity, "subjectivity." In Cindy Patton's words, "more than standing for the discovery of a self, identities suture those who take them up to specific moral duties. Identities carry with them a requirement to act" (147). In theorizing this "pragmatic, temporal aspect to identities," Patton finds that "[q]uotidian uses of identities must be understood in the context of a struggle to control the general rules of identity construction," and further, that "[t]he plainly essentializing logics within this field must be viewed as

\(^{11}\)See Chapter One of this study for a discussion of "ludic" theory, particularly as it has been critiqued by materialist theorists such as Teresa Ebert.
options deployed in a deadly game of queer survival, not as foundations for [the essentialist forms of] 'identity'" (167) critiqued by many contemporary queer theorists.

Cornel West sheds light on the way in which notions of "identity" foster survival when he explains that

Identity has to do with protection, association, and recognition. People identify themselves in certain ways in order to protect their bodies, their communities, their way of life; in order to be associated with people who ascribe value to them, who take them seriously, who respect them; and for purposes of recognition, to be acknowledged, to feel as if one actually belongs to a group, a clan, a tribe, a community. ("Colloquy" 57)

West ends by reminding critics of identity politics that "any time we talk about the identity of a particular group . . . , we have to be very specific about what the credible options are for them at any given moment" (57). In Virtual Equality: The Mainstreaming of Gay and Lesbian Liberation, Urvashi Vaid points out that the "credible options" for most lesbians and gays in this country are few indeed. In most American contexts, Vaid tells us, people "are still governed primarily by the fear of disclosure of their sexual orientation" (7); the United States continues to be, despite some symbolic advancements, a place "filled with people of every age, color, and background, who struggle in actual or virtual isolation to acknowledge their sexual orientation to themselves and to others" (7).12 For lesbians, gays, and

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12 When I visited a bisexual person from my area in her hometown, she reminded me not to use the "l" word or even the "g" word when we were out in public, as someone she knew
bisexuals—who are routinely consigned to isolation in cultural contexts which assume and enforce heterosexuality, whose means of economic survival are often in jeopardy, who comprise the single largest target of hate crimes in the nation, and who commit 30 percent of teen suicides in this country—the "protection, association, and recognition" provided by identity are important indeed.  

West's discussion of "protection, association, and recognition" points to the inherently coalitional nature of what we call "identity." In Douglas Crimp's words, identity is "always a relation, never simply a positivity" (313); hence, because "[i]dentification is . . . identification with an other," even the singular "identity" constructions between the slashes of "l/g/b/t" enable coalitions among individuals who otherwise might not have seen themselves in collective terms. In an important sense, "identity" is

13See Vaid for an intelligent discussion of employment discrimination (7) and hate crimes. Vaid cites a 1984 National Lesbian and Gay Task Force survey which found that "one in seven gay men and one in ten lesbians had been subjected to violence because of their sexual orientation" (11). Both the statistic concerning lesbians and gays as the largest target of hate crimes and the 30 percent teen suicide statistic are from a Reagan-Bush administration study (Vaid 16). Finally, it should be noted here that the collection of such statistics would not be possible without some form of "identity politics," and that such statistics can be disseminated as powerful arguments for social change.
"coalition." By articulating a subjectivity as, say, transgendered subjects, individuals form a coalition around a category that did not previously exist as a positive social entity.

Deconstruction is particularly prone to ludic applications that forget the subjective necessity of "identity," their own dependence on identity categories, and the real-world difficulty of overturning hierarchical, binary categories of identity. Deconstructive readings of identity emphasize the way in which, as a result of the workings of language, any notion of identity is haunted by non-identity, or what Butler would call "socially impossible identities," binary exclusions that return to disrupt the privileged terms of the identity in question. For deconstructionist critics, reliance on identity is ill-advised, given the shifting, unstable play of signifiers which constitute it. For example, "the lesbian-signifier" is always finally unclear for Judith Butler because "its specificity can only be demarcated by exclusions that return to disrupt its claim to coherence" ("Imitation" 15). Similarly, Laura Doan's reading of Jeanette Winterson's Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit emphasizes the contradictions inherent in the claiming of "identity." Doan writes that "[the text's] continued reliance on the terms of

14 Here I am flying in the face of those who oppose "identity politics" and "coalition politics," for example, Jan Sawicki (42).
heterosexuality—indeed the lesbian’s inability to exist without it—is troubling because the lesbian is still positioned within binary logic itself" (146). The haunting of lesbian identity by that which it is defined against—i.e., heterosexuality—is "troubling" for Doan because it "interferes with the complete overthrow of heterosexual hegemony" (147). Rather than relying on binary definitions of sexual identity, Doan argues, the lesbian writer’s "political agenda" should be "to displace and explode the binary" through her textual representation of sexuality (147). Critics such as Doan thus advocate a ludic agenda that touts the play—or, in Doan’s more violent language, the "explo[sion]"—of binaristic identity terms as the goal of lesbian and gay politics. As if they had forgotten the "protection, association, and recognition" identity terms can afford those who, to requote Urvashi Vaid, "struggle in actual or virtual isolation," deconstructionist critics such as Doan champion "a diversionary politics that continually deconstructs and/or refuses the categories on which contemporary oppressions are based" (Phelan, "Becoming" 782).\(^\text{15}\)

\(^{15}\)Other deconstructionist critics favor identity politics as a necessary political stage in which the less privileged binary term—e.g., gay, black, woman—becomes elevated over its previous master; Derrida himself warns against the negative political effects of ignoring the stage of "inversion" (Findlay 64). Derrida’s warning is not always heeded, however, as Doan’s article makes clear.
Further, this deconstructive critique of identity politics at times falls prey to the same essentialization of identity it so relentlessly targets. Cindy Patton contends that "[l]ike . . . opinion formation that operates through citing hegemonic opinions one is 'above' holding, deconstructionists may believe in the imputed essentialist identities much more than those in the political sphere" who claim to have them (166). Patton's point that some deconstructionists "believe in the imputed essentialist identities" is borne out by the fact that to criticize an "identity" term for producing "exclusions that return to disrupt its claim to coherence" is to assume that social categories in fact describe their members, and that these members belong to these categories in some unproblematic way. That is, identity-based political movements can be criticized for erecting identity constructions which do not include all "women," all "lesbians," or all "queers" only because we believe that the excluded others are, in fact, "women," "lesbians," or "queers" whose interests deserve to be represented under that rubric.\textsuperscript{16}

\textsuperscript{16}The term "queer" has been proposed as an alternative to exclusionary sexual identity terms such as "gay" and "lesbian," and has in some cases functioned successfully to produce coalition amongst self-identified lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, transsexual and other people whose sexual practices qualify them to stand under the queer umbrella. For an argument against the "universalizing" tendencies of the term "queer," see Terry Castle. Castle argues in particular that the term "queer theory" denotes "primarily the study of male homosexuality" (13).
Against a deconstructionist condescension towards everyday practitioners of a supposedly "essentialist" politics, my experience in organized lesbian and gay identity politics suggests that definitions of lesbian and gay subjectivity are very much up for grabs among political organizers; organized l/g/b/t politics does not univocally assert that "sexual orientation is fixed genetically or in early childhood," and that lesbians, gays, bisexuals, and transgendered people constitute "a homogeneous minority population" (Herman 250). At the height of the struggle for "gay rights" in Gainesville, activists fiercely debated, not only the place of transgendered and bisexual people in the struggle against sexual fascism, but also whether sexual orientation was inborn or chosen; whether such a question mattered at all; and, regardless of what was really the case, what strategies for presenting homosexual and bisexual subjectivities would be most effective. To be sure, one of the dominant/majority voices that arose was the voice of gay essentialism; however, other voices arose, voices which argued for categorical terms because signifiers of sexuality "presently embody and transmit relations of oppression" (Phelan, "Becoming" 782). Activists also discussed the differences made by race, class, gender, ethnicity, religion, and ability in determining lesbian and gay people's self-understandings. However, despite differences, these activists--including at least one self-identified
queer theorist--came together out of a common sense of resistance to heterosexist and homophobic norms--resistance embodied in their individual and collective self-identifications as lesbian, gay, bi, transgendered, and/or queer.

In addition, the deconstructive strategy of perpetual refusal of categories is flawed because subjects assert constructions of identity and subjectivity, not in "the realm of the imaginary, with its . . . promise of infinite possibilities for performance and reperformance" (Patton 147), but within specific historical, material, and political contexts that constrain the play of meaning. As Jonathan Dollimore writes, drawing from the work of Jacques Derrida, "[t]he political effect of . . . trying to jump beyond the hierarch[ies] [upon which oppressions are based] into a world quite free of [them], is simply to leave [them] intact in the only world we have" ("Dominant" 190). Shane Phelan gives the following example: "Telling [homophobes with baseball bats] that I am not 'really' a lesbian is different from saying it to readers of Signs; what the Signs audience can understand as deconstruction becomes simply a return to the closet" in the face of said homophobes ("Becoming" 782). Ideally, as Gayatri Spivak points out, deconstruction "'is neither a constitutive nor, of course, a regulative norm'" (cited in Phelan, Getting Specific 139). However, as Doan's essay would indicate, deconstruction has
ironically become exactly such a "regulative norm" when applied to identity politics, evidencing what Heather Findlay terms the "rigor mortis" attendant upon deconstruction's "strict codification into a theory or system" (65). Such ludic applications of deconstruction to identity politics need to be tempered by consideration of the specific material contexts in which identity-claims function--contexts in which identity-hierarchies cannot so easily be transcended. Lesbians, gays, bisexuals, and transgendered/transsexual people will benefit more from such a materialist focus than from prescriptive idealist claims for a singular "political agenda." 17

In contrast to such anti-materialist, idealist claims, the enormously influential work of Michel Foucault would seem at first glance to offer some strong resources for a materialist perspective on the question of identity politics. 18 Foucault’s genealogy of sexual identity

17While I find material reasons to defend what most critics call "identity politics," I should note here that materialist theorists, like ludic theorists, also sometimes indiet identity politics. In opposition to identity-based politics, Teresa Ebert argues that "class consciousness . . . and not the experience (identity) of the subject is the basis of revolutionary practice" (119). As my argument makes clear, however, assertions of identity or subjectivity can encode what Ebert calls "class consciousness," or the subject's history of and resistance to oppression.

18Foucault's influence has extended through multiple fields, including history, literary criticism/theory, psychology, and sociology. For example, most of the works in the interdisciplinary collection Forms of Desire: Sexual Orientation and the Social Constructionist Controversy, edited by Edward Stein, position themselves either for or
categories, I will argue, does have an advantage over ludic applications of deconstruction in that it emphasizes both the historicity of sexuality-based social categories and the multiple power relations such categories can be invoked to serve. However, as I go on to show, Foucault’s work, like deconstruction, has also become fodder for a totalistic rejection of a collective politics of sexual subjectivity, and thus must be supplemented by another theoretical perspective.

In The History of Sexuality Volume I, Foucault argues that our current, common-sense understanding of homosexuality, indeed, of sexuality in general, as an inherent property of individuals--i.e., as something having to do with who one is rather than merely what one does--stems from the late nineteenth century.¹⁹ For Foucault, "sexuality is the set of effects produced in bodies, behaviors, and social relations by a . . . complex [multi-centered] political technology" (127). Through various medical, legal, psychological, and psychiatric discourses, this "political technology" produced the modern homosexual 

against Foucault’s views on the history of sexuality.

¹⁹In The Apparitional Lesbian: Female Homosexuality and Modern Culture, Terry Castle contests Foucault’s dating of modern homosexual subjectivity, claiming that "one can find evidence of a certain incipient lesbian self-awareness well before the so-called invention of the lesbian around 1900" (10). Castle’s readings of the diary of Anne Lister and of the homoerotic cult that flourished around Marie Antoinette are quite convincing on this point.
as "a species," each member of which possessed "a personage, a past, a case history, and a childhood, in addition to being a type of life, a life form, and a morphology, with an indiscreet anatomy and possibly a mysterious physiology" (43). The discursive implantation of "species" of sexuality, particularly homosexuality, in bodies allowed "relations of power" to "[branch] out and multipl[y], [measure] the body, and [penetrate] modes of conduct" (48), providing power with "a surface of intervention" (48) over which to exercise control. In particular, according to Foucault, nineteenth-century technologies of sexuality advanced the interests of the (white, European) bourgeoisie. Such technologies served as instruments of both "state-directed racism" and the "self-affirmation" of the bourgeoisie: "a defense, a protection, a strengthening, and an exaltation that were eventually extended to others . . . as a means of social control and political subjugation" (127). Through sexuality, the bourgeoisie "provided itself with a body to be cared for, protected, cultivated, and preserved from the many dangers and contacts, to be isolated from others so that it would retain its differential value" (123).

This genealogy of the class and race effects of the discourse of sexuality is extremely useful for a materialist queer theory that wants to attend to the complexity of power relations and power effects. It provides a valuable
corrective to totalistic theories that "distort" and "obscure" difference (Sawicki 47) by reducing all of history to one binary struggle, for example, the conflict of rich and poor, straight and gay, or white and black. Similar to the deconstructionists who believe the binary structure itself--rather than one or the other side--to be the embodiment of power, the Foucauldian critique of identity politics disseminates an alternative understanding of "power," not as that which lies solely in the hands of the "oppressors," or, as in traditional Marxism, that which operates from the top down in the interests of the ruling class (Foucault 94). Rather than conceptualizing a "binary, all-encompassing opposition between rulers and ruled [e.g., straights and gays] at the root of power relations" (Foucault 94), Foucauldian critics see power as multiple and dispersed, as inherent in every aspect of our daily lives, from the way we groom and comport our bodies\(^{20}\) to the way we think about ourselves as having a "sexuality," whether that sexuality falls under the socially privileged side of the binary, the oppressed side, or neither. In line with Foucault's view of the dispersed nature of power,

\(^{20}\) Sandra Lee Bartky's "Foucault, Femininity, and the Modernization of Patriarchal Power" focuses on the disciplinary power that regulates the female body's "size and contours, its appetite, posture, gestures and general comportment in space, and the appearance of each of its visible parts" (64). Bartky argues that this disciplinary power "is everywhere and it is nowhere; the disciplinarian is everyone and yet no one in particular" (74).
Foucauldian critics tend to argue with "grand narratives" of oppression and domination—e.g., classical Marxism and certain forms of radical feminist theory—and to favor "local" interventions over systemic analysis.

Ironically, however, Foucault's attention to the local and the specific has become, when coupled with his critique of "the ways in which sexuality comes to constitute the ground of identity, and autobiographical gestures the exclusive ground of politics" (Martin, "Lesbian" 276), another rigid, condescending grand narrative advocating one origin of oppression—sexual identity categories—and one political solution—the refusal of the self. Critics who have been influenced by Foucault are fond of pointing out that sexual identity categories are ultimately constraining, and implicate us in the disciplinary practices which function by categorizing and, through this categorization, regulating individuals. Jan Sawicki, for example,

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21 Steven Epstein discusses the disjunction between social constructionist theories such as Foucault's and "the self-understandings of many gay people," claiming that "defenders of constructionism" see most lesbians and gay men as "victims of 'false consciousness,' unaware of the constructedness of their identities" (258).

22 See, for example, Robin Wiegman's argument that "lesbian identity functions to define and limit activities that exceed the normative heterosexual script" (3, emphasis added). Along similar lines, Shane Phelan claims that lesbian theorists are "implicated in heterosexuality and patriarchy at the point where we conflate lesbianism and 'gender trouble'" ("(Be)Coming" 775). Phelan reminds lesbian theorists who view acts of rebellion against patriarchal standards of womanhood as true signs of lesbianism that "[b]eing a tomboy is not an indicator of
discusses how "[d]iscourses such as psychoanalysis view sexuality as the key to self-understanding and lead us to believe that . . . we must uncover the truth of our sexuality" (22). In this way, she claims, "dimensions of personal life are psychologized, and thus become a target for the intervention of experts" (22). For Sawicki and others, ascribing to an ontology of lesbian or gay identity ultimately furthers patriarchal constructs that limit and regulate us by producing our own investment in these constructs. This is what Foucault calls "subjection," meaning that we are produced in and through, become subjects both of and to, the regimes of disciplinary power through which contemporary society is structured.

lesbianism except to those who believe that real women do not climb trees" (775). For opposing texts which claim "lesbian" or "gay" as liberatory rather than regulatory terms, see Steven Epstein's "Gay Politics, Ethnic Identity: The Limits of Social Constructionism"; Adrienne Rich's "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence"; Monique Wittig's The Straight Mind and Other Essays (34-35); and Susan Wolfe and Julia Penelope’s introduction to their collaboratively edited Sexual Practice, Textual Theory: Lesbian Cultural Criticism.

Sawicki does recognize, however, the "strategic value" of building identities, depending on "the contexts in which it is done" (107); her argument that Foucault’s work "does not entail a complete rejection of identity based politics, but rather, [a rejection of] the search for a true identity as a basis for universal emancipation" (7) is solid enough. However, Sawicki underestimated the extent to which Foucault’s refusal of sexual identity categories can be used, within American academic contexts dominated by individualism, to invalidate movements organized around such collective terms.
Foucault's analysis of disciplinary power faults the practitioners of lesbian and gay identity politics for not adequately understanding the way in which the discourse of sexuality they use has itself constructed them as who they "are." Just as some Derrideans claim that to resist or reverse the binary power relation is only to cement it, Foucault's reading, if correct, would mean that lesbian and gay activists and theorists actually advance the ability of power-interests to control their bodies and the bodies of other sexual "deviants" when they base their political movements and theories on notions of a shared, inherent sexual identity, or when they advocate only the political benefits of coming out as lesbian or gay. This aspect of Foucault's work has tended to work against collective political struggle, particularly on the part of lesbians and gays, by too thoroughly problematizing the categories around which groups could organize, and by fostering a split between "intellectual" activists allied with Foucault and "street" activists who perceived Foucault's attack on identity-categories as politically backward, dangerous, and reactionary (Vance 28). Given these problems, I use Foucault's historical genealogy of sexuality primarily to

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24Mark Blasius' *Gay and Lesbian Politics: Sexuality and the Emergence of a New Ethic*, does just that. Blasius is something of an anomaly here in that he uses Foucault's later work on the ethics of the self, rather than the earlier work on the genealogy of sexuality, to emphasize the ethical benefits of coming out.
demonstrate, not the local workings of power or the way in which the oppressed further their own oppression through speaking the discourse of sexuality, but how that discourse often advances class and race as well as sexual interests.

Yet given the problems with Foucault's perspective on identity politics, we need to turn elsewhere for a theory that can provide a framework through which to correct for the problems of identity politics without completely rejecting politics based in collective self-constructions. As I go on to argue, a materialist application of Julia Kristeva's psychoanalytic concepts of abjection and the "subject-in-process" can provide just such a framework. Psychoanalysis might seem a strange place from which to build a materially-inflected reading of identity politics, given the often-cited critique of psychoanalysis's conservatism and/or apoliticism. Indeed, both Freud and Lacan have been justly criticized for the phallocentrism of their theories, and both have made arguments with decidedly

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25I should say here that, contrary to the usage of Foucault I am critqueing here, some critics use Foucault to perform critical genealogies of "deviant" sexual subjectivities (Terry 56-57) or to affirm the radical potential of "reverse" discourses of sexual identity (Epstein 251). Also, Foucault himself did praise the gay liberation movement--not for demanding "gay rights," but, as Biddy Martin tells us, for creating "supports for relationships other than those allowed within or by the heterosexual nuclear family structure" (12).
classist and racist implications.\textsuperscript{26} Yet, as I demonstrate below, both Freud and Lacan laid the groundwork for a contemporary psychoanalytic critique of identity that can be used, via Kristeva, for a materialist criticism that works against class, race, and other forms of oppression.

The work of Freud and Lacan has been invaluable for the contemporary psychoanalytic critique of identity. Through his attention to unconscious drives and impulses, Freud showed us that no identity is ever fully present to itself. Too, Freud's ideas about homosexuality have distinct anti-identity-politics implications. Specifically, Freud believed, as Henry Abelove cites him, that "all people were 'capable of making a homosexual object choice' and that all had 'in fact made one in their unconscious'" (389). Thus Freud did not support a homosexual identity politics based on the idea that homosexuals constituted a "third sex."

\textsuperscript{26}Freud's sexist theory of "penis envy" is well-known. For critiques of both Freud and Lacan in terms of gender, see Luce Irigaray's \textit{Speculum of the Other Woman}. For a class- and gender-based critique of Freud's analysis of Dora see Jane Gallop's \textit{The Daughter's Seduction} (132-150); Gallop's book also provides an interesting, if sometimes problematic, engagement with Lacan and his feminist interpreters/detractors, including Irigaray. The classist and racist implications of Lacan's thought are indicated by Ellie Ragland-Sullivan's (accurate) claim, in her article "Seeking the Third Term: Desire, the Phallus, and the Materiality of Language," that "Lacan taught that . . . a dialectical battle between the sexes . . . is prior to any class [or, presumably, racial] dialectic" (41). This assertion of the priority of sexual difference makes race and class into secondary components of the subject, thereby making struggles against race and class oppression secondary to the struggle against the negative consequences of sexual difference, i.e., the struggle against gender oppression.
(This does not mean, however, that Freud’s theories were free of homophobia and heterosexism.27) Lacan complicated the question of identity and its relation to the unconscious by arguing that the unconscious is structured like a language, thus setting up an even stronger theoretical framework within which critics could trace the effects of social divisions as manifested in dreams, literary texts, political statements, and so forth.28 Lacan’s theory of the mirror stage, according to which the fiction of a unified ego is modelled on the infant’s view of him/herself in a (literal or metaphorical) mirror, is also useful for a critique of identity politics. The infant’s equation of him/herself with the hypostatized image in the mirror is, after all, only a fiction, a way to establish unity where previously there had been only a multiplicity of heterogeneous drives, motor impulses, and so forth. As Ellie Ragland-Sullivan explains, for Lacan "the ego and language are themselves defenses against knowing what or who

27Judith Butler’s reading of Freud’s notion of melancholy critiques the heterosexism and homophobia implicit in Freud’s theory; against these forces, Butler draws out the underlying function of homosexual desire in Freud’s concept of melancholic heterosexual identity formation (Gender 57-72).

28In Black Skin, White Masks, Frantz Fanon demonstrates such a use of Lacan’s theory of the mirror stage. On the basis of his own work as a psychoanalyst, Fanon argues that the black man is the "real Other for the white man," and vice versa. The relations are different, however, in that the black man’s perception of the white man is conditioned by the "historical and economic realities" of oppression (161).
we are" (64). Hence, "any struggle for personal or social freedom" will be faced with a "magnitude" of "difficulties" (64) -- particularly when that "struggle for ... social freedom" is wound up with linguistic assertions of collective ego-ideals (e.g., "Black is Beautiful," "Gay is Good," "Sisterhood is Powerful," etc.).

Building on the strengths of Freudian and Lacanian theory, Julia Kristeva's work revising Lacan offers the psychoanalytic critique of identity I find most useful for a materialist criticism that shares the goals of what Ragland-Sullivan calls "social freedom" movements. Kristeva's notions of abjection and of the "subject-in-process" can be used to determine the extent to which various constructions of identity/subjectivity perpetuate negative exclusions or, conversely, allow for multiplicity, self-revision, and historical change. Kristeva defines abjection as the initial process that lays the groundwork for the construction of the self, a process that precedes the Lacanian mirror stage. In the mirror stage, the infant learns to equate itself with a fictional unity, a mirror image of the self, and thus to differentiate him/herself from other human subjects and from objects. Yet earlier, according to Kristeva, the infant has already learned to differentiate itself, through abjection, from culturally proscribed objects of desire, or abjects, for example, feces, blood, semen, and urine. This primary
differentiation or repression is not that of an already constituted subject separating from an object or even a mirror view; rather, the infant who has heretofore experienced her/himself as "the receptacle of all being" (McAfee 117) begins to, in Kristeva's words, "expel," "spit . . . out," and "abject" herself "within the same motion through which [she] claim[s] to establish" herself (Powers 3). Abjection is thus the necessary moment preceding the subject's constitution qua subject.

For Kristeva, then, any concept of a unitary "identity" is a fiction, based as it is on the unstable ground of abjection. Yet the process of abjection is necessary, according to Kristeva, to the construction of a viable human subject who is not consumed with madness--psychosis for Kristeva being the state of the subject who does not differentiate from the primary chaos of being, the subject who does not accede to the Symbolic law of separation which enables us to communicate with others as others. Kristeva can be critiqued here for the way in which her theory of abjection essentializes, individualizes, and universalizes

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29 On this point, see Kelly Oliver's Ethics, Politics, and Difference in Julia Kristeva's Writing (14), as well as her Reading Kristeva: Unraveling the Double-Bind (12).

30 See Reading Kristeva for a critique of Kristeva's notion of abjection as a universalizing and ahistorical projection (161). Oliver argues that Kristeva mistakenly attributes women's oppression to a crisis in the myth of the Virgin Mary, a crisis which happened, Oliver reminds us, subsequent to women being oppressed (161).
one particular, culturally privileged form of subjectivity--a subjectivity based on the division of human beings into discrete individuals who are split off from what Bakhtin would call the "grotesque" aspects of the body\textsuperscript{31}--into the only acceptable, functional subjectivity possible.\textsuperscript{32} Her implicit equation of lesbianism with psychosis is also extremely disturbing.\textsuperscript{33}

\textsuperscript{31}Bakhtin argued that, in contrast to the individualized body that has prevailed in European literature for the past four hundred years, earlier representations of the body emphasized the "grotesque body," i.e., the body "[e]ating, drinking, defecat[ing] . . . sweating, blowing . . . the nose, sneezing," copulating, and so forth (Rabelais 318). Notably, many of the bodily activities on Bakhtin’s list produce the elements that are Kristeva’s "abjects." However, rather than arguing, as does Kristeva, for the necessity of one particular form of subjectivity, Bakhtin notes the cultural variability of representations of the body and the forms of subjectivity corresponding to such representations; hence, I use Bakhtin’s notion of the grotesque body in conjunction with Kristeva’s notion of the abject as a way of correcting for the problem of ahistorical universalization in her theory.

\textsuperscript{32}See Oliver’s Reading Kristeva for a critique of Kristeva’s notion of abjection as a universalizing and ahistorical projection (161). Oliver argues that Kristeva mistakenly attributes women’s oppression to a crisis in the myth of the Virgin Mary, a crisis which happened, Oliver reminds us, subsequent to women being oppressed (161).

\textsuperscript{33}Judith Butler argues that Kristeva’s "reification of the [Lacanian Symbolic] paternal law" as the foundation of culture inevitably leads to the conclusion that female homosexuality is "a culturally unintelligible practice, inherently psychotic" (Gender 87). Butler justly critiques Kristeva for "prefer[ring] to explain lesbian experience as a regressive libidinal state prior to acculturation itself, rather than [taking] up the challenge that lesbianism offers to her restricted view of the paternally sanctioned cultural law" (87).
Contrary to these tendencies of Kristeva's thought, I follow critics who use the term "abjection" to designate, not only an internal, individual psychic process, but also, a collective social dynamic that perpetuates the oppression of l/g/b/t's and other social groups. Like Judith Butler, Kelly Oliver, and others, I argue that Kristeva's notion of the individual process of abjection can be used to explain larger social dynamics--dynamics which mirror the individual subject's unstable foundation in the expulsion of the abject. The infant's (always incomplete, ongoing) separation from the abject continues to play itself out, I argue, as racism, classism, sexism, homophobia, and transphobia--to name some of the social dynamics I discuss in this study. These dynamics, I claim, are perpetuated not only through the impersonal discourses Foucault identified, but also through individual subjective choices. I thus follow the substantial number of critics who use Kristeva to explain, not universal conditions of subjectivity, but the subjectivity of those who oppress as it has been constructed by historically specific cultural practices and institutions.34

34Lee Edelman's "Tearooms and Sympathy, or, The Epistemology of the Water Closet" provides a particularly fine example of this kind of reading. Edelman argues that the abjection of male anal pleasure--as both evidenced and enforced by the structure of men's room, in which defecation is "closeted"--underwrote the construction of a virulently nationalist and homophobic Cold War American male subjectivity.
Judith Butler, following Iris Marion Young, helps to explain how the individual process of abjection plays itself out on the social level: "the repudiation of bodies for their sex, sexuality, and/or color is an 'expulsion' followed by a 'repulsion' [i.e., an abjection] that founds and consolidates culturally hegemonic identities" (Gender 133). For Butler, the stability of "the subject"--which I read as not any subject, but these "culturally hegemonic identities"--is determined by "cultural orders that sanction the subject and compel its differentiation from the abject" (134). Abjection, Butler explains succinctly, "is the mode by which Others become shit" (134). Rather than conceding the necessity of socially-enacted abjection to a viable subject, I argue that certain twentieth-century lesbian and gay novels represent forms of subjectivity based on a conscious choice not to "abject" others in Butler's sense. These subjects do not found themselves through the expulsion/repulsion of others as representatives of the abjected components of their own bodies. Further, as my reading of James Baldwin's Just Above My Head suggests, such subjects are able to avoid abjecting others because they choose to conceptualize the grotesque aspects of their own bodies as integral to their subjectivities.

We could term such subjectivities what Kristeva calls "subjects-in-process." For Kristeva, the solution to the problem of abjection-enacted-as-oppression is to bring the
human agents who enact oppression to an acceptance of alterity, or difference. Kelly Oliver puts it this way:

[Kristeva] argues that we must address difference within personal identity itself. She suggests that this is the central step toward a "demassification of difference," which can acknowledge difference without attempting to totalize it, annihilate it, or reconcile it. In this way, the violence directed toward the other can be disintegrated "in its very nucleus." The subject can understand the other, sympathize with the other, and, moreover, take the place of the other, because the subject is other. (Ethics 13)

Oliver explains how, by making "the social relation interior to the psyche" (13), emphasizing that what we exclude in order to form individual and group identities is internal to our/those very identities, Kristeva conceives of "breaking down identity as an ethical imperative" (15). Rather than defending our own unitary, stable identities and thus perpetuating the exclusions on which these identities are based, Kristeva proposes that we understand ourselves as "subjects in process/on-trial," that is, subjects who are engaged in the process of becoming aware and accepting of the otherness within—including the otherness of one's own bodily abjects. This understanding of internal otherness will allow subjects to be flexible enough to revise and change individual and collective self-constructions— including the ones critiqued by Foucault—as the need arises, rather than clinging to a unitary mirror image that could enact the abjection of undesirable bodily products by turning other subjects into "socially impossible identities."
However, the notion of "breaking down identity" through bringing the subject to see, in Noelle McAfee's gloss on Kristeva, "her own strangeness" and "internal difference" (130), can be critiqued as being too simplistic a solution to the multiple problems of racism, classism, sexism, homophobia, and other forms of oppression which are perpetuated through entrenched social institutions, and not merely through the interrelations of individual subjects. Further, no idealist, universal analysis of the subject can predict that representations of subjects as subjects-in-process will always have positive political consequences. Some closure, it would seem, is necessary for effective political action, as the example of Gainesville's organized l/g/b/t politics would indicate; without such closure, homophobic subjects as well as l/g/b/t subjects and our heterosexual allies would have to be admitted to the coalition. Still, as Leslie Feinberg's novel Stone Butch Blues suggests, subjects-in-process--subjects who consciously choose not to enact abjection-as-oppression, and who understand the ongoing nature of the struggle for social freedom and self-definition--stand a far greater chance of forming coalitions that do not collapse or fold in on themselves.\[35\] This is so because subjects in process will

\[35\] While any subjective identification with a social category is always/already coalition, throughout this chapter, I use "coalition" to refer to groups who organize across established social differences; in this sense, "identity" denotes older, more established social
hold in check the need to rigidly and oppositionally position themselves against contaminating others, thus ensuring that they do not exclude from their ranks many of those with whom they might have common cause. Such subjects will be able to accept and work with social others that would be threatening to a less fluid subject that acts out its own abjection of various aspects of itself by rejecting, for example, black men who are also gay, and therefore not "beautiful" from a heterosexist, homophobic perspective; or gay men who are also poor, and therefore not "good" from a classist viewpoint; or high-heeled, made-up working-class women who are not "powerful" from a middle-class feminist perspective.

In conclusion, we cannot do away with identity politics completely, for, as Shane Phelan puts it, "[t]he realities of institutions and U.S. politics require that we base common action on the provisional stability of categories of identity, even as we challenge them" ("(Be)Coming" 779). Thomas Yingling--an otherwise staunch critic of identity politics--writes, "Juridically we are subjects marked by our relation to a state that defines us through the criminalization of our sexual behavior"; thus, until these definitions no longer operate, "we cannot forgo the

categories--however much those categories might be based on the effacement of differences--while "coalition" refers to groups who are bucking those categories and in the process of trying to create new ones. "Coalition" is thus the collective correlate of the "subject-in-process."
difficult work of identity politics" (161). However, rather than reifying narrow identity constructs, we need to practice--and construct theories which can recognize--the complexity of subjectivity and the simultaneous need for strategic uses of "identity." Chela Sandoval's model of U.S. third world feminists' "oppositional consciousness" can provide a blueprint for the strategic politics I am envisioning here. Sandoval argues that, in place of hegemonic feminist typologies which set up a struggle between various forms or stages of feminist consciousness, U.S. third world feminism demands "a new subjectivity, a political revision that denies any one ideology as the final answer, while instead positing a tactical subjectivity with the capacity to recenter depending on the kinds of oppression to be confronted" (14). Thus, following Sandoval's model, when I attend a heterosexual wedding where the men and women are expected to pair up and dance together, I speak up for what such a ritual means for "lesbians and gays"; conversely, when I attend a Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Student Union meeting at which all the leaders are white and advocate "gay" interests which are really "white" interests, I deconstruct the term "gay."

A materialist criticism can apply the same flexibility to its readings of sexual subjectivities in lesbian and gay novels. These novels, perhaps more than our theoretical apparatus for reading them, flesh out the complex, often
contradictory uses to which collective self-understandings can be put. In thinking about the novels I have chosen, I will move from examining identity-claims that foster the abjection of certain marginalized subjectivities, to claims which enable the construction of productive political alliances among oppressed subjects; the less such claims foster abjection, the more they are able to acknowledge the complexity of what I have been calling "the material." These novels demonstrate that the goal of creating coalition among differently oppressed sexual subjectivities will be met, not by abjecting and scapegoating identity politics, but by materialist reading practices which recognize the construction of subjectivities along multiple lines of both privilege and oppression. In bringing our attention to these multiple axes of difference, these novels emphasize, not only the abuses enacted in the name of "identity," but also the resistance to oppression and the affirmation of difference encoded in some subjects' self-identifications as "black," "transgendered," "gay," and so forth. It is to these novels that I now turn.
CHAPTER 3
"ARTICULATE SILENCES": FEMME SUBJECTIVITY AND CLASS RELATIONS IN THE WELL OF LONELINESS

In her biography of her life partner Radclyffe Hall, Una Troubridge describes how Hall came to her and asked her permission to write *The Well of Loneliness*, thereby exposing both Troubridge and herself to possible "condemnation" (82). Troubridge claims to have replied

> without so much as an instant's hesitation: I told her to write what was in her heart, that so far as any effect upon myself was concerned, I was sick to death of ambiguities, and only wished to be known for what I was and to dwell with her in the palace of truth. (82)

Troubridge's words here manifest, in Joan Nestle's phrasing, "some of the enduring aspects of femme power" (*Persistent* 15), particularly, I would add, the power to self-define as a lesbian. Because lesbianism has been associated historically with masculinity,¹ the power to self-define as

¹See Esther Newton's "The Mythic Mannish Lesbian: Radclyffe Hall and the New Woman" for a discussion of how turn-of-the-century sexologists such as Havelock Ellis (who wrote an introductory note for *The Well*) and Richard von Krafft-Ebing both equated lesbianism and masculinity (287-289). In *Odd Girls and Twilight Lovers: A History of Lesbian Life in Twentieth-Century America*, Lillian Faderman notes that Hall's depiction of Stephen Gordon was "directly influenced" by these sexologists, and that Hall's text in turn, "as the only truly famous and widely available lesbian novel for decades," continued to help "form self-concepts" among young lesbians up through the 50s and 60s--including concepts of "butch" and "femme" subjectivities (173).
lesbian has been particularly important for "femme" lesbians--lesbians who accord with traditional standards of femininity in appearance, employment, sexual role, and/or other areas of self-determination and expression.² Throughout her relationship with Hall, Troubridge often expressed this power by dressing in clothing coded as feminine when she was to appear with the more masculinely-attired Hall, in this way making herself visible as Hall's sexual partner, i.e., as a lesbian (Rolley 63).

This chapter will explore how the abjection of femme subjectivity in *The Well of Loneliness*'s construction of the lesbian as the butch plays into the hands of regulatory regimes organized around trajectories of both gender and class. I begin by establishing the working premises of the chapter: first, that the text bases its plea for justice for the invert on a discourse of identity that abjects (femme) desire as the basis of (a) lesbian subjectivity and makes the butch body the necessary site of lesbian identity; second, that it does so in order to defuse the threat posed to aristocratic codes of gender and sexual morality by both

²Faderman argues that, in contrast to earlier definitions of "butch" and "femme" as stereotypically masculine/active and feminine/passive, among 1980s lesbians the meanings of "butch" and "femme" were "totally subjective" (Odd 267); in contrast to using the term to mean either completely, stereotypically feminine or some "totally subjective" definition, my definition of "femme" highlights a number of different areas according to which a lesbian could be said to be a culturally recognizable "feminine" or "femme" lesbian.
femme and butch lesbian desire; and third, that this
abjection of the femme lesbian and the (class-inflected)
economy of desire she represents is wound up with the
relegation of what I term "the material," particularly
class-based suffering, to the "constitutive outside" of the
novel's discourse of lesbian identity. After establishing
these premises, I move on to discuss the silencing and
appropriation of "the material" entailed by the text's
construction of issues concerning how individuals represent
themselves and others, in both social relationships and
artistic works. The first of these sections on
representation focuses on the silencing of "the material"
perpetuated by the discourse of morality through which the
text judges characters for lying or telling the truth. The
second section on representation analyzes the appropriation
of "the material" enabled by the text's sexist and classist
use of blood relations as a metaphor for what constitutes a
legitimate relationship between an artist and the "material"
s/she represents. Continuing on the issue of representation,
I tie this portrait of what constitutes a legitimate
artistic relationship between artist and material to current
debates over the politics of representing oppressed

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3For an interesting biographical parallel, see Katrina Rolley's article "Cutting a Dash: The Dress of Radclyffe Hall and Una Troubridge." Rolley argues that the (upper) class implications of Hall and Troubridge's butch-femme dress "may, on occasions, have overshadowed other implications" (56).
subjectivities, particularly debates in performance theory concerning butch-femme representations. Finally, I return to the text to explain in more detail how Hall's novel appropriates class-based suffering in order to make the upper-class butch Stephen Gordon the representative invert; I make this argument by detailing how, through rejecting her femme lover Mary Llewellyn, Stephen imitates the suffering of an impoverished butch-femme couple, Jamie and Barbara, and in this way becomes qualified, in the text's view, to speak for the entire class of suffering inverts.4 Throughout the chapter, I argue that class-based suffering and femme desire, though abjected, each remain an "articulate silence," in the words used in the final scene to describe Mary's lingering presence after Stephen forces her to leave their home (434).

Before beginning my discussion of the novel, it will be helpful to provide a plot summary for those readers unfamiliar with Hall's text. The novel takes us through Stephen's development as a lesbian and an author. Stephen is born to aristocratic parents on her father's ancestral estate, Morton. However, her birth is troubled because her parents had been expecting a male child. They name her Stephen, and she develops into a tomboy who experiences her first crush--on Collins, a maidservant--at a young age.

4I want to thank Mary Ann Leiby for pointing out to me the text's appropriation of class-based suffering.
However, even after a difficult and painful love affair with Angela Crossby, a married woman from a working-class background, Stephen does not understand her lesbian "nature." She only discovers that there are others like her when, after her father's sudden death, she reads a passage her father had underlined in a sexological book he left in his study. There Stephen discovers that she is an "invert," one whose sexual desire for members of one's own sex is a manifestation of one's biological "inversion" of the "normal" proportions of masculinity and femininity in one's sex. Stephen reveals her sexuality to her mother, who tells her that she cannot go on living with Stephen at Morton, and that Stephen must leave her home.

Stephen takes her likewise inverted servant Puddle with her to London, where she authors a book that meets with some critical success; however, this book does not incorporate Stephen's experience as an invert, and is thus somewhat limited. Then, while serving in a women's ambulance unit during the first world war, Stephen meets the femme Mary Llewellyn, with whom she falls in love. The two eventually settle down together in Paris, but begin to experience problems when they discover that upper-class heterosexual society has no place for them as lesbians and that their only opportunity for social life lies with other inverts, many of whom lead dissipated lives centered on drinking in the bohemian bars of Paris. Stephen becomes obsessed with
her writing, thinking that through writing about inverts she will be able to change the world's prejudice against them and provide Mary with a better life. At about this time, Stephen and Mary are reunited with Martin Hallam, a friend from Stephen's past, and Mary begins to enjoy his company and the social privileges of being accompanied by a man rather than a butch woman in public. She is still, however, strongly attached to Stephen. After a mighty internal struggle, Stephen tells Mary, untruthfully, that she is having an affair with another woman, thus sending Mary, as Stephen had intended, into Martin's waiting arms. Finally, in extreme emotional pain, Stephen hallucinates that her room is filled with the ghosts and spirits of other suffering inverts, and prays aloud to God for herself and her kind.

Privileging the Butch Body, Abjecting Femme Desire

The novel privileges Stephen's perspective and ultimately abjicts femmes from its discourse of lesbian identity--after all, the most important femme in the text, Mary Llewellyn, ends up with a man. Mary, the femme from a "none too prosperous background," (284) and Stephen, the upper-class butch, represent opposing discourses of lesbian identity/subjectivity, with Stephen's discourse ultimately gaining the upper hand through plot structure and
narratorial comment. Through her final plea to God (and, by extension, heterosexual society) to "'[g]ive us . . . the right to our existence!'" (437), Stephen constructs a collective homosexual subject which includes both male and female "inverts." However, far from including "all lesbians," as Shelly Skinner claims (31, emphasis added), this collective subject does not include Mary, the lesbian femme from a poverty background. (Nor does the category of the invert include the masculine gay man.) Stephen enacts the erasure of the femme lesbian by, in effect, giving Mary to a man in order to save Mary from spending her life associating with a community of inverts Stephen considers to be low-class. She thus circumvents Mary's desire to remain with her lover, and patronizingly takes the decision for how Mary will lead her life out of Mary's hands and into her own. In the end, Stephen's "us" is dependent on Mary's absence. Jean Radford writes, "[T]he invert renounces an individual love relationship in the name of the 'suffering

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5As M.M. Bakhtin tells us, "each character's speech possesses its own belief system" (315).

6Both Sonja Ruehl's "Inverts and Experts: Radclyffe Hall and the Lesbian Identity" and Jean Radford's "An Inverted Romance: The Well of Loneliness and Sexual Ideology" note that Stephen's behavior towards Mary, like her behavior towards her first lover Angela, demonstrates her class-determined "nobility" of character, her noblesse oblige (Radford 109; Ruehl 26). Ruehl also describes how "Stephen views [the bohemian bar world of the Parisian invert] from a definite class position," contrasting its sordidness with the "indelibly upper-class" social world of "teas and 'studio parties'" in which Stephen spent her childhood (25).
millions’ of women and men for whom the novel speaks" (110). But the more subtle point is that Stephen creates herself as part of a monolithically oppressed "us" by acting against her sexual desire for Mary, hence in effect excluding Mary from that "us"; the narrator reinforces this exclusion by designating Mary as both "perfect woman" and "normal" (314, 406).

In contrast to Stephen’s identity discourse, Mary’s constructions of a lesbian subject position for herself always include Stephen, as when she says, "they [Jamie and Barbara] were like you and me" (403). More significantly, Mary uses writing to inscribe herself within an economy of lesbian desire. When the homophobia of Lady Anna, Stephen’s mother, forces Stephen to visit her childhood home without taking Mary, Mary writes Stephen a letter in order to combat this delegitimation of their desire for each other—a significant choice, given that writing is one of the "weapons[s]" (340) Stephen chooses to use against a world bent on erasing lesbian desire, with the other weapon being sex (355). The text describes the letter approvingly as "full of many things which a less privileged pen had best left unwritten--loyalty, faith, consolation, devotion"

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7See Claudia Stillman Franks’ article, "Stephen Gordon, Novelist: A Re-evaluation of Radclyffe Hall’s The Well of Loneliness" for an analysis of Stephen’s relationship to writing. Similar to my point later on in this chapter, Franks asserts that Stephen associates writing with suffering; Franks does not, however, include an analysis of the class determinants of this suffering.
We know that the "less privileged pen" is that of the narrator rather than Mary because the text obviously approves of Mary's letter: Mary's linguistic celebration of lesbian desire has the positive consequence of enabling Mary to defeat "the world's first onslaught upon [her and Stephen]" (338). However, the description of the letter also reveals the narrator's alignment with a pen other than ("less privileged" than) Mary's, i.e., with Stephen's.

The novel's plot structure, too, upholds Stephen's construction of lesbian identity, effectively rewriting Mary's version of femme lesbian subjectivity. At the end of the novel, Stephen tells Mary, untruthfully, that she is having an affair with the upper-class femme Valérie Seymour, thereby sending Mary into the waiting arms of Martin Hallam, the man Mary earlier claims she "'could have loved'" had it not been for Stephen (431). In alignment with the text as a whole, Stephen thus reduces Mary's authorship of a shared lesbian subject position based on "loyalty, faith, consolation, [and] devotion" to "an articulate silence . . . a jibing, grimacing, vindictive silence" (435). Stephen "brushe[s] [this silence] aside with a sweep of her hand" (435) so that she might articulate the more politically acceptable notion of lesbianism as necessarily coexistent.
with the butch body, i.e., as visibly identifiable through signifiers of masculinity.\textsuperscript{8}

Both Stephen and the more general narrator articulate this version of both male and female homosexuality as physically inscribed through signifiers of gender-crossing. Stephen's body, for example, is marked by the masculinity thought by Havelock Ellis to constitute the "'chief characteristic of the sexually inverted woman'" (Newton 288). Stephen is described as a "narrow-hipped, wide-shouldered little tadpole of a baby" (13) who looks remarkably like her father--details which suggest that her homosexuality is the result of a masculinity biologically inscribed on a body that is otherwise "female," i.e., a body that has female genitals, breasts, and a menstrual cycle. Other discourses of homosexuality in the text present other causes for Stephen's homosexuality. For example, her parents desire a male child and consequently name her Stephen, thus providing her with the psychological impetus for crossing heterosexual gender roles. However, all of the discourses of homosexuality included in the text equate

\textsuperscript{8}Jane Gallop points out that Freud privileges an economy of sight in determining sexual difference, rather than an economy of smell, because of the greater "control" afforded by such an economy (Daughter's 28); later in this chapter I explain precisely what upper-class social interests gain in "controlling" lesbian sexuality by equating it with visible butchness/masculinity.
lesbianism with a physically inscribed masculinity. Stephen’s masculinity can be read as resulting from biology (the sexological reading), her family upbringing (the psychoanalytic reading), or an act of God (the religious reading), yet all of these discourses construct the physically marked butch body as the bearer of lesbian identity. In describing inverts other than Stephen, the narrator steers us towards gender-crossing bodily signifiers such as (the male) Jonathan Brockett’s hands, which are "white and soft as a woman’s," (226) and (the female) Pat’s ankles, which are "too strong and too heavy for those of a female" (350). Signifiers as minute as "the timbre of a voice, the build of an ankle, the texture of a hand, a movement, a gesture" reveal homosexuality as a condition which is inscribed on the body of the invert as gender inversion (352-3). The text’s construction of the queer subject thus accords with the late nineteenth-century medical/psychological categorization of homosexuality "less [as] a type of sexual relations than [as] . . . a certain way of inverting the masculine and the feminine" (Foucault 43).

This way of constructing homosexuality would have difficulty, of course, explaining the masculine gay man and

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9See Jean Radford for a discussion of the multiplicity of discourses at work in the novel.
the feminine lesbian. In The Well of Loneliness, the femme lesbian functions as what Julia Kristeva would call the abject. Kristeva describes the abject as "an ambiguity that, through the violence of a revolt against, demarcates a space out of which signs and objects arise" (10); it is "something rejected from which one does not part," that which "disturbs identity, system, order" (4). In The Well, the femme lesbian functions as just this sort of "ambiguity" (like the ones, perhaps, of which Troubridge declared herself "sick to death"), out of which, "through the violence of a revolt against," butchness as the "sign" of lesbian identity arises. The text is able to ensure that masculinity functions as the "sign" of lesbian identity only by "rejecting," without completely "parting from," the femme lesbian's embodied articulation of a lesbianism grounded in a desire not necessarily inscribed on/in one's physiology. By describing the rejected femme's silence at the end as "articulate," as well as in portraying Mary as the initiator of her romantic/sexual relationship with Stephen, Hall's novel allows us to see how the femme lesbian's desire

10Newton discusses the difficulty Havelock Ellis had as a result of his equation of lesbianism with masculinity. Newton cites Ellis' "awkward compromise" on the issue of the feminine invert: i.e., his belief that the feminine invert possessed "'a genuine, though not precisely sexual, preference for women'" (288). Despite the fact that it ultimately abjects the femme lesbian (and the economy of desire she represents), Hall's text at least counteracts such nonsense by portraying Mary as the aggressor in her sexual/romantic relationship with Stephen.
occupies the place of the abject, that which Stephen/the text "revolt[s] against" but does not succeed in completely "parting from."

Nevertheless, while its construction of the lesbian as the butch is haunted by the femme possibility—the possibility that lesbian desire could occupy a body that is not gender-crossed—the novel's plea for social justice for the invert is based on the notion of both male and female homosexuals as necessarily gender-crossed. Many critics have noted how the biologism of the sexological theory employed by the text has some definite political advantages, in that the biologically determined homosexual could be absolved from the blame that a heterosexist audience would bestow if the homosexual person were depicted as having a choice in the matter.\(^\text{11}\) The inclusion in the text of psychoanalytic and religious discourses of homosexuality does not change this hetero-apologetic political focus. Hall's text's plea for social justice was much more likely to be accepted if the visible butch body, rather than a form of desire which any woman could experience, was posited as the ground of lesbian identity. Stephen's self-wounding lie at the end of the text complies with this political necessity by effectively writing over Mary's version of a

\(^{11}\)See Lillian Faderman's *Surpassing the Love of Men* (320-321). For a discussion of the political expediency of essentialism in the contemporary gay movement, see Carole Vance (27-30).
lesbian selfhood based in desire rather than in a biologically, psychoanalytically, and/or religiously inscribed masculinity.

The Class- and Gender-Inflected Threat of Desire

The abjection of the femme lesbian is wound up with the text’s abjection of sexual desire in general, primarily associated in the text with working-class characters. The femme lesbian’s version of lesbianism as something grounded in a desire uncoupled with signifiers of gender-crossing needed to be downplayed if the avowed sexuality inherent in any construction of lesbianism were not to bleed into another discourse of sexuality: the discourse of "working-class [male and female] sexual amorality" (Keating 187). As Keating’s phrase "working-class sexual amorality" indicates, historically, both working-class men and women have been associated with sexual lasciviousness. However, this equation of the working-classes with excessive sexuality has been particularly strong with regard to working-class women. Nancy Armstrong, for example, notes that in Victorian England, "the figure of the prostitute could be freely invoked to describe any woman who dared to labor for money" (79), meaning that all working-class women were sexualized. Simultaneously, other groups of women were considered to be so asexual that sexual acts between, for example, middle-class British women, were literally "unthinkable" to many (Faderman, *Surpassing* 154). Lillian Faderman cites the 1811
case of Miss Marianne Woods and Miss Jane Pirie, who were accused by their pupil Miss Cumming of mounting each other and engaging in sexual relations. When the two women sued for defamation of character, the House of Lords decided in their favor. The judges' statements implied that "virtuous" and "respectable" middle-class British women were by nature incapable of such acts (152). As Faderman puts it, the judges, following dominant social belief at the time, refused to consider that "women above the lower class were sexual creatures . . . [who] would willingly indulge in sexual activity for the gratification of their own appetites" (149). Sexual "appetite"--desire--has historically been considered the property of men and the working-classes alone, not of "respectable" British women.

In *The Well of Loneliness*, we can hear traces of the discourse of working-class sexual amorality in the descriptions of the "florid, full-lipped and full-bosomed" (16) maidservant, Collins, upon whom Stephen experiences her first lesbian crush; its characterization of Stephen's first lover, former (working-class) dancer Angela Crossby, as a promiscuous woman who toys with Stephen in order to throw her wealthy husband off the scent of her other extra-marital affair with a man; and its treatment of the footman Henry, who exemplifies an animalistic, excessive desire from which the text, as we will see, distances the upper-class butch, thereby allowing her to take on an identity that minimizes
the low-class element of desire. The text attempts to abject the femme lesbian's discourse of desire, and the dangerously low-class elements of sexual desire this discourse invokes, from Stephen's textually privileged discourse of lesbian identity. Elaborating on Kristeva, Judith Butler describes abjection as the process whereby "[t]he boundary of the body . . . is established through the ejection and transvaluation of something originally part of identity into a defiling otherness" (Gender 133). In The Well, Stephen's sexual desire for Collins, Angela, and Mary—all women from poor or working-class backgrounds—constitutes an "original part of" the text's construction of Stephen's "identity," a "part" which is (incompletely) "eject[ed] and transvalu[ed] . . . into a defiling otherness" represented by Mary and other working-class characters. The qualities associated with these other working-class characters establish the category of the noble invert--i.e., the upper-class butch lesbian--"through the violence of a revolt against" the "discourse of working-class sexual amorality" they embody.

The text establishes Stephen as a "noble" invert "through the violence of a revolt against" "working-class sexual amorality" in the scene where she refuses to take sexual advantage of Angela Crossby after Angela confesses to having prostituted herself to survive (181). Stephen's moral nobility in this scene depends on Angela's
economically-caused moral degradation. (I say "economically-caused" because, while she is not otherwise portrayed sympathetically, the text is clear that Angela prostitutes herself only in order to escape the rigors of poverty [181]). Through this scene, the text in effect argues how fine an invert can be in not acting on her sexual desire with, if you will, a low-class whore. Hence, the sexual desire for women signalled by Stephen’s butch body is subordinated to the dictates of a morality coded as open only to the upper classes; if, as a victim of nature, nurture, or God, Stephen’s butch body can’t help feeling it, she can summon her upper-class conscience to keep her from doing it, or, as when she gives Mary away to Martin, from continuing to do it. Neither Angela nor Mary, by way of contrast, is able to transcend their class-determined sexual desires.

The abjection of the femme’s economy of desire thus enables the text to voice a lesbian identity that fulfills class-based political conditions. At one point, the novel produces a kind of cross-pollination between the (socially and textually imposed) sexual guilt of the working-class heterosexual man and that of the class privileged masculine female invert. This cross-pollination occurs through the image of the "'honourable'" scar Stephen gets while driving an ambulance during the war (293). The scar, in fact, figures psychoanalytically as the congealed mark of
Stephen's Oedipal crisis, i.e., as her gender wound; sexologically as a symbol of inversion; and religiously as "the mark of Cain" which a heterosexual Christian society is exhorted to forgive. Moreover, this scar both figures and contains the sexual desire abjected by a heterosexist construction of lesbian identity as based primarily in a crossed or "inverted" gender identity.

Early in the novel, Stephen sees Collins, the maidservant upon whom she has her first lesbian crush, being kissed by Henry, the footman: "Henry caught Collins by the wrists, and he dragged her towards him, still handling her roughly, and he kissed her full on the lips" (28). Here, Henry is portrayed as acting out his desire in a "rough" and domineering way, making him a figure of a stereotypically excessive, animalistic working-class (hetero)sexuality from which the text distances Stephen. In response to Collins' and Henry's sexual "display," Stephen hurls a broken flower-pot at Henry, "cutting open his cheek, down which the blood trickled slowly. He stood as though stunned, gently mopping the cut, while Collins stared dumbly at Stephen. Neither [Collins or Henry] spoke" (28). Henry's bloody wound can be read psychoanalytically as enacting the displacement of Stephen's own Oedipal wound--the gender-wound of the

12 For a discussion of Hall's Catholicism and its accommodation of her lesbianism, see Joanne Glasgow's "What's a Nice Lesbian Like You Doing in the Church of Torquemada? Radclyffe Hall and Other Catholic Converts."
castrated butch who, in a heterosexual symbolic, is denied access to the maid/mother.\textsuperscript{13} Stephen displaces her frustration at this symbolically-decreed lack of access onto Henry's body, punishing him for exercising with Collins the "rough" sexual desire age and, more importantly in this text, gender prevent her from exercising.

However, because the symbolic is not only heterosexual but also, in this text, upper-class, Henry's wound is also class-inflected: Stephen's sexual lesson is played out on the silenced (and in Henry's case, wounded) bodies of two working-class people, whose (hetero)sexual behavior the text figures as shameful in that Collins is both "betraying" the child Stephen and indulging herself while, according to the rules binding servants, she should be working.\textsuperscript{14} This point is borne out by the fact that in firing Collins after this event, Stephen's father is presented as doing the kind thing for his inverted daughter Stephen, rather than as enacting a

\textsuperscript{13}See Newton for a discussion of how Collins stands in for the mother in this Oedipal drama (290)--a common class-based association between maid and mother also often noted by Freud and other psychoanalysts in their work.

\textsuperscript{14}See Elizabeth Roberts' \textit{Women's Work 1840-1940} for a description of the lot of the domestic servant at this time, particularly her 12-hour workday (29-32). These long hours and the isolation often involved ensured that "women tended to choose [alternative employment]" over domestic servitude when possible. The way in which Collins is expected not to engage in romantic liaisons seems particularly cruel when we read Roberts' citation of Edward Cadbury's 1909 statement that "'few women expect to be life workers. Practically all look forward to marriage as an escape from work'" (15). In this instance, classism functions as an agent of what Adrienne Rich calls "compulsory heterosexuality" (159).
classist punishment of a woman who pays with her job for exercising, against Stephen’s childish desire, her own (hetero)sexuality. Given that these incidents mark the first "signs" of Stephen’s lesbian identity, we can see already how upper-class lesbian identity is bought in this text at the expense of class-based suffering.

Henry’s bloody wound—both class- and gender-inflected as the wound caused by desire—is later displaced into the scar which similarly "cut[s] open" (293) Stephen’s cheek during the war; the scar signals both Stephen’s inversion and her nobility of character in "protecting" Mary during the war, during which the two women worked in the same ambulance unit. For example, Stephen, who is the best driver in the unit, always takes Mary with her, thus angering the other recruits who are forced to ride with less competent drivers. The image of the scar also harkens back to Stephen’s equation of inversion with the "mark of Cain" (205), and to the text’s descriptions of the masculine bodily signifiers—the too-thick ankle or too-deep voice—which make inversion manifest and "readable." In this way, the text constructs Stephen’s scar as a symbol of both heroism and lesbianism cum masculinity, inscribing both Stephen’s class-related moral nobility and her gender "deviancy" (Weir and Wilson 109).

However, because lesbian desire threatens to exceed the gender codes governing aristocratic heterosexual behavior,
the text uses the image of the aristocratic butch's scar/gender wound to establish Stephen's moral nobility by abjecting her (class-inflected) sexual "deviancy"/desire. This strategy is revealed when Stephen is thinking about seducing Mary. As the narrator relates it, Stephen's eyes become "the slaves of her anxious and passionate body; the red scar on her cheek [stands] out like a wound" (300). The butch lesbian, like the working-class heterosexual (male or female), could embody a dangerously excessive sexuality which threatens to reverse the proper relationship between mind ("eyes") and body, upper class and lower class, male and female, with the heretofore dominant "eyes" (aristocrats and men) becoming the "slaves" of a (working-class and female) body uncontrolled by the bonds of marriage. However, in the scene quoted above, Stephen envisions her father asking her, "'What is honour, my daughter?'" (300), and is thus reminded to behave nobly and to first warn Mary of the (upper-class) societal disapproval she would incur through consummating a relationship with Stephen. Stephen's scar (as sign of heroism) thus marks her distance from a guilty working-class mode of male heterosexuality at the same time that it reveals her bodily desire, transforming working-class male heterosexual desire into a noble, aristocratic butch identity which earns Stephen the right to speak, indeed, impels her to speak, on behalf of the class.
of inverters who also bear "God’s mark on their foreheads" (352).\footnote{The "mark" which makes homosexuality qua inversion readable as such in The Well of Loneliness is transformed in the film Philadelphia into the lesion on Tom Hanks’ character’s forehead which signals homosexuality qua AIDS. In the film as in the text, the visible manifestation of homosexuality is what allows it to be regulated, as well as what allows it to speak. The scene in which Hanks’ character opens his shirt to reveal the numerous large, dark lesions on his chest--an action which definitively establishes his visibility as a disease-ridden queer, and hence his right to speak as a target of discrimination--both participates in and mourns this cultural production of the white gay body as a quasi-racialized visible spectacle.}

Stephen’s scar, then, represents Henry’s blood congealed into the mark of the deviant, yet noble, invert/butch--the raw, abjected animal desire which could bleed through to "disturb" Stephen’s moral nobility at any moment. Yet the scar also represents Stephen’s lesbianism cum masculinity as a visible gender "wound," hence indicating that for the biological woman, whom psychoanalysis deems "castrated," masculinity can function as a further mark of castration, pointing up the butch woman’s gender status as neither a "real" man nor an acceptable woman, but rather, a "wounded"/castrated woman who wants, but can’t have, the maid/mother. Teresa de Lauretis makes a similar point when she identifies this scar, along with Stephen’s other signifiers of masculinity, not as "a phallic pretension but rather a fetish" which "signifies Stephen’s desire [to have] the (lost) female body" (240). For Stephen, as de Lauretis explains, her
masculine body image, rather than consolidating a positive narcissistic self-image, "inflicts a narcissistic wound," in that her phallic body is not "what the mother desires" (241). 

De Lauretis fails to note, however, the way in which in The Well of Loneliness, "what the mother desires" in terms of her daughter's gender position is implicated with upper-class codes of morality. Lady Anna's perception of Stephen as "a caricature of Sir Phillip; a blemished, unworthy, maimed reproduction" (15), along with Stephen's inability to fit into upper-class heterosexual society, demonstrates how the butch body is cast as a "maimed reproduction" precisely because it threatens to "maim reproduction," i.e., the reproduction of upper-class bodies and values. Until the novel's ending, Stephen is silenced by these aristocratic gender norms. For example, when the child Stephen picks up on her mother's disapproval of her, she is "filled with a sudden contrition, with a sudden deep sense of her own short-comings; she would long to blurt all this out to her mother, yet would stand there tongue-tied, saying nothing at all" (15). Stephen's inability to fit the prescribed norms of gender again and again reduces her to the silence reserved for those who fall outside the reality of "normal"

16See Inez Martinez's article, 'The Lesbian Hero Bound: Radclyffe Hall's Portrait of Sapphic Daughters and Their Mothers,' for a more detailed analysis of how Stephen's life is determined by her relationship to her mother.
gender. Indeed, Stephen's mother cannot bring herself to see Stephen's body as a gendered, human body, and refers to Stephen's body again and again as an "it" which dares to "move about [the Gordons' aristocratic estate] Morton" (82).

Stephen has difficulty taking up a position in language because her status outside normative gender constructs places her outside the gendered pronouns reserved in English to designate persons. At one point, Stephen rails, "'I shall never be a great writer because of my maimed and insufferable body-' She fell silent, suddenly shy and ashamed, too much ashamed to go on speaking" (217). In this way, the text uses the visibility of Stephen's gender deviance as what Michel Foucault would term a "surface of intervention" (48) over which aristocratic society is able to exercise control, keeping lesbian desire shackled to the butch body, where it remains "silent" and "ashamed," speaking only through its inscription on the body it has "maimed." The Well of Loneliness thus supports Foucault's contention that, in positing an innate sexuality which visibly manifests on the surface of the body, Western culture has increased the domain of power. In making lesbian desire visible as (only) masculinity, the text effectively contains and polices lesbian desire.

Butler writes that "the very notion of 'the person' is called into question by . . . those 'incoherent' or 'discontinuous' gendered beings who appear to be persons but who fail to conform to the gendered norms of cultural intelligibility by which persons are defined" (Trouble 17).
The novel regulates lesbian desire even in the final scene, when Stephen does finally get a voice that can speak from/as her butch body. Stephen’s self-wounding lie to Mary buys her the ability to speak/write as an invert, in contrast to an earlier text in which "none of her own strange emotions" are revealed (214). As with her earlier writing, however, Stephen’s lesbian voice is made to fit into gender norms which equate women’s bodies with their reproductive capacities. The text figures Stephen’s authorship of a collective subject position for inverteds as a metaphorical birth, preceded by her hallucinatory vision of "millions" of inverteds struggling "to become articulate through her" (437). After much pain, Stephen’s "womb be[comes] fruitful" with "the fierce yet helpless children who would clamor in vain for their right to salvation," turning "first to God, and then to the world, and then to her" (437). The aristocratic butch who represents the last hope of inverteds speaks out for her kind--"gasp[ing]," in the last words of the text, the plea quoted earlier: "Give us . . . the right to our existence!" (437). With these words, Stephen’s silenced butch body finally gets to speak, but only through representing itself according to upper-class gender constructs which reassimilate it back into the image of aristocratic womanhood. Stephen’s noblesse oblige, combined with a sense of devoted motherhood, bring her to intercede with God and the world for the collectivity of
inverts. Stephen gets to reproduce children who bear her paternalistic construction of homosexual identity and experience, but only at the cost of silencing and, as we will see, appropriating the suffering of others.

Mary Llewellyn's femme lesbian desire threatens to explode this neat little class-based schema by exposing an order of women's desire for women which sees (its love object) but can't always be seen (by regimes of regulatory power). When Stephen and Mary return to their house in Paris, Mary watches Stephen in the mirror, "noticing the strong, thin line of her thighs; noticing too the curve of her breasts--slight and compact, but of a certain beauty" (321). Mary's lustfully appreciative view of Stephen emphasizes the "certain beauty" of Stephen's butch body, the way it combines "strong, thin" masculine lines with "curve[s]." However, this lustful appreciation of the butch body is written over by Stephen and the text's more prevalent descriptions of the butch body as monstrous and flawed, indeed, as literally scarred by its lesbianism cum masculinity. The text thus defuses the threats posed by Mary to upper-class codes of gendered morality: the threat of the femme body which could appear to reproduce those values while in the very act of lusting after other women, as well as that posed by the femme lesbian's validation of what Pat Califia terms "the butch phallus" (180), i.e., her validation of the butch's usurpation of masculinity. In
finally designating Mary as a "normal," as well as in sanctioning Stephen's abjection of her desire for Mary, the text defeats these threats, transforming, through the class imperative to raise the invert above animal desire while still retaining her gender "invertedness," the femme lesbian's perception of the butch body's "certain beauty" into a pathetic displacement of every "normal" woman's desire for a "'real man'" (406, 315).

Material Relations as "Constitutive Outside"

As we have seen, Stephen's sexual identity is purchased through the (always incomplete) abjection of desire as the basis of lesbian subjectivity. Desire threatens to disrupt the more politically expedient notion of the invert/lesbian as a physically marked, and hence easily identifiable being whose lesbianism is a matter of fiat--Nature/biology's, early upbringing's, or God's--rather than of a less determined desire which any woman could experience. This abjection of the femme lesbian and the (class-inflected) economy of desire she represents is wound up in the text with the silencing and appropriation of what I term "the material," particularly class-based suffering. We have already seen, for example, how working-class suffering--Henry's wound and Collins' job loss--is congealed in Stephen's scar, which appropriates the pain caused by the constraints placed on working-class (hetero)sexuality in order to mark the pain of Stephen's inversion; we have also
seen how this scar, in harking back to the signifiers of gender inversion which make homosexuality manifest and readable, excludes the femme lesbian from the category of the invert. Judith Butler’s work has been justly criticized for perpetuating a kind of discursive monism that obscures the material workings of economic privilege and oppression we have been discussing here. However, when Butler’s work focuses on the master texts of Western culture rather than attempting to theoretically legislate the terms of oppositional political practice in general, it can be usefully appropriated to theorize the specific cultural forces--namely, sexism and classism--at work in the abjection of (femme) desire and of the material.

In her recapitulation of Irigaray’s reading of Plato, Butler notes how Plato’s distinction between form (coded as masculine) and matter (coded as feminine) "takes place in an inscriptive space" which itself "cannot be explicitly thematized"; this "inarticulate 'matter' designates the constitutive outside of the Platonic economy . . . what must be excluded for that economy to posture as internally coherent" (Bodies 38). Butler highlights Plato’s association of the "material" with the "feminine," and the political interests at work in their mutual relegation to the "constitutive outside" of a classist and sexist Platonic

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18Sagri Dhairyam’s article, "Racing the Lesbian, Dodging White Critics," critiques Butler’s work along these lines as well as along racial lines (29-31).
discourse. The Well of Loneliness mirrors this simultaneous relegation of the "material" and the "feminine" to a "constitutive outside," i.e., one which is "produced," as Butler explains, through "a set of exclusions that are . . . internal to [the system in question] as its own nonthematizable necessity" (Bodies 39). This "constitutive outside" "emerges within the system as incoherence, disruption, a threat to . . . systematicity" (Bodies 39).

In The Well of Loneliness, working-class characters--the material "services" they provide the upper classes, the suffering they incur as a result, and the materially-based economy of truth they represent--both are and are not recognized as the "inscriptional space," the "nonthematizable necessity" whose "articulate silence" both enables and renders "incoherent" the text's discourses of lesbian identity and lesbian authorship.19 For instance, simply through depicting the relationship between Stephen and "Puddle," as Stephen nicknames her tutor-turned-personal-servant, the text implicitly recognizes that Puddle's devoted servitude is what enables Stephen the leisure in which to write. At the same time the text makes the "inscriptional space" provided by Puddle's labor/body a "nonthematizable necessity" by arguing that the variables of wealth and poverty are equally conducive to the true

19Jane Gallop's "Annie Leclerc Writing a Letter, With Vermeer" discusses the similar dependency of the bourgeois woman writer's écriture féminine on the working-class woman.
artist's writing (213). Material relations thus become, like femme desire, the "constitutive outside" of the text's discourse of the lesbian artist--an (in)articulation whose incoherence both enables and "threatens" the "systematicity" of that discourse.

Morality and "The Material"

In the terminology established in the preceding section, material relations function as the "constitutive outside" of the discourse of morality the text uses to judge different characters' choices about whether to lie or tell the truth in representing themselves and others. Through a set of "incoherences" around lying and truth-telling, the text simultaneously reveals and conceals the class interests which underwrite its distinction between noble and ignoble verbal choices, nobility of character and "poorness of spirit." Consider the text's view of a lie told by Puddle, for example. Puddle decides not to tell Stephen what she [Puddle] knows about Stephen's sexuality, because to do so would mean that she [Puddle] might be fired for her "fearless plain-speaking," thus leaving Stephen "alone" (154). While Puddle berates herself sarcastically for a "most kind and self-sacrificing liar," (155) the text endorses her silence on Stephen's sexual identity--a silence she never breaks--by presenting it as indeed "kind and self-sacrificing," just as it endorses Stephen's lie to Mary at the end of the novel as kind and self-sacrificing by
presenting it as is being in Mary's best interests, i.e., her best interests as construed by a heterosexist upper-class society.

However, both Puddle's lie and Stephen's lie in fact advance upper-class interests: the first, by ensuring that Stephen will have a devoted servant whose labor will enable Stephen to champion inverts through her writing, and the second, by evidencing Stephen's (upper-class-coded) moral nobility. This nobility is contrasted with the first lie in the text, which is told by Collins. Collins lies to the nurse about a comment she [Collins] had made to Stephen, putting the blame on the child Stephen rather than on herself so as not to lose her job. Stephen cries upon hearing this lie, "for far worse than Collins' poorness of spirit was the dreadful injustice of those lies--yet this very injustice seemed to draw her to Collins, since despising, she could still love her" (18). While the narrator who is focalized through Stephen chalks up Collins' lie to "poorness of spirit," and constructs it as an "injustice," the "articulate silence" of class suffering in this text points to the economic basis of Collins' choice, its anchoring in her vulnerable material position rather than her inherent spiritual "poorness." Stephen's ambivalent "love"--for Collins as well as, later, for Angela and Mary--is thus equally class-inflected, based as it is on the economically enabled moral superiority which allows her
to "despise" women from lower class positions (despised demonstrated, for example, by Stephen's paternalistic attitude towards Mary, whom she constructs as absolutely incapable of taking care of herself).

The novel's approving attitude towards Stephen's decision to "come out" to her mother, as we would now put it, also reveals another class-based "incoherence" concerning the issue of sexual "truth." In contrast to the servant Puddle's textually sanctioned silence and Stephen's textually sanctioned lie to Mary, the text argues that for Stephen to tell her mother the truth about her sexuality is honourable, noble, and morally upright, while to lie to her mother about her sexuality would be "despicable," low, and degrading. Stephen imagines that visiting Morton with Mary would entail "despicable subterfuges," a "guard set upon eyes and lips; [a] feeling of guilt at so much as a hand-touch" (334). She rails against such behavior for its dishonesty: "Intolerable quagmire of lies and deceit! The degrading of all that to them was sacred--a very gross degrading of love, and through love a gross degrading of Mary" (334). Taken alone, these passages might read like a justifiable condemnation of what we now call "the closet," as a critique of the heterosexism which enables "normals" but not "inverts" to show affection freely. However, if those who argue that gender and sexuality are always also "raced" and "classed" are correct, there is no such thing as
"heterosexism" per se. And indeed, when read together with the passages concerning Collins and Henry, these passages reveal that Stephen is railing against her loss of a particular, class-based form of heterosexual privilege—against the fact that her homosexuality subjects her to the same degree of surveillance the text presents as justified when focused on (heterosexual) servants. Stephen's "guilt" here parallels exactly the "guilt" of Henry and Collins, who likewise cannot betray their desire by "so much as a hand-touch," not lest they be shamed, but lest they be fired and lose their livelihoods, as Collins is finally fired after Stephen sees Henry kissing her. And just as Stephen's lie to Mary at the end of the text serves upper-class interests by enabling Stephen to demonstrate her class-based moral nobility, so here telling the truth about her sexuality would save Stephen the pain of having her class sensibilities offended by seeing her lover "degraded," through lying, to the level of a dishonest "criminal"—the level of one who, like Collins, must put their material need for survival above their need to represent their sexuality in a discourse of truth. When read in conjunction with Puddle's "articulate silence," these passages reveal that

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20 In her book *Women in England, 1870-1950*, Jane Lewis cites a 1906 "investigat[ion]" of "working girls" which demonstrated that "factory girls" preferred factory work to domestic servitude because of the greater "lack of personal liberty" entailed in domestic service.
only the upper-class invert can afford the moral nobility of being out.

The Well of Loneliness thus answers in the affirmative Judith Butler's question in Bodies That Matter: "Is there an unmarked class character to the demand for universal 'outness'?" (227), causing the thoughtful middle-class queer to rethink the popular bumper-sticker's demand for all who are interpellated by its call to "Come out, come out, wherever you are!" The text reminds the middle-class queer to reconsider the economic costs of truth concerning sexuality, highlighting the necessity for the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgendered movement to target classism and economic oppression as agents of heterosexism and homophobia. Those segments of the l/g/b/t movement which single-mindedly promote "outness" as the solution to heterosexist oppression would do well to consider the function of "outness" in The Well of Loneliness, particularly as it is tied up with what Eve Sedgwick terms wider mappings of secrecy and disclosure, and of the private and the public, that were and are critically problematical for the gender, sexual, and economic structures of the heterosexist culture at large. (Epistemology 71; emphasis added)

21I am thinking here of organizations such as the one which sponsors "National Coming Out Day" on Oct. 12 of each year. While I do not oppose coming out as a political strategy, I would prefer that we as a movement stop fetishizing coming out as the only tactic available, and begin to work on the economic, racial, and other conditions which prevent many people from "coming out."
For Sedgwick, these "mappings" have "become oppressively, durably condensed in certain figures of homosexuality" (71). In Hall's novel, class and gender relations are "durably condensed" in the figure of Stephen, both played out and masked through their figuration on the body of the queer.\textsuperscript{22}

\textbf{The Artist's Blood and "The Material"}

The text's theory of artistic representation proves just as problematic and riddled with telling contradictions as the discourse of morality through which it judges other social utterances. In the novel, blood is used as an image which crystallizes hierarchies of class and gender in their relation to representation-metaphorized-as-reproduction.\textsuperscript{23}

By this I mean that in the text, Stephen needs to metaphorically bleed--thus feminizing herself--to write the inversion and the nobility of character that the text figures as residing "in her blood." Here we should remember my reading of the novel's final scene, in which the description of representation as reproduction enables Stephen to voice her identity as an invert while simultaneously reassimilating her to the norms of aristocratic womanhood; the text's emphasis on Stephen's

\textsuperscript{22}Of course, racial issues are also played out on the body of the queer; see Kim Emery's forthcoming article for an analysis, similar to my analysis of class, of race in The Well.

\textsuperscript{23}Blood also figures, as we have seen, as a site of abjection--a symbol of the (femme) desire abjected by a heterosexist construction of the lesbian as the butch, as well as a symbol of the more general "castration" of women.
need to bleed to write her identity as an invert reinscribes her, despite the "masculinity" of her active desire for women, as a biological female. Blood thus images both Stephen's aristocratic heritage and her inversion (as gender "wound"). It is the inextricability of these two meanings, their complete interimplication, that determines Stephen's-- and through her the novel's--articulation of a class-specific lesbian voice which arrogates to itself the task of representing all "inverts."

Blood as central to the mechanics of reproduction is necessary to the mechanics of representation in the text, so that Stephen must "wound herself" in order to write. Stephen's relationship to writing is determined by the network of gender and class relationships inherent in the image of blood, in that Stephen's relationship to the people who serve as "material" for her texts is figured as a legitimate, reproductive blood relationship. In contrast, the effeminate gay playwright Jonathan Brockett is condemned for his illegitimate, vampiristic relationship to emotional "material" for his texts. The distinction, however, breaks downs through the class relations represented by "blood," revealing that Stephen articulates her identity in a way which is as vampiristic as the method used by Brockett. Stephen's relationship to the characters of her first novel --"simple . . . humble people sprung from the . . . same kind soil that had nurtured Morton"--is figured as a kind of
motherhood: "These people had drawn life and strength from their creator. Like infants they had sucked at her breasts of inspiration, and drawn from them blood, waxing wonderfully strong" (214). From this maternal relationship between aristocratic author and "humble," i.e., servant-class people, the text concludes that "fine books . . . must somehow partake of . . . the strange and terrible miracle of blood, the giver of life, the purifier, the great final expiation" (214). This relationship is presented by the text as a "legitimate" one in that these characters are "part of her own emotions" (214), (i.e., as part of Stephen's ancestral home they belong to her blood) while Jonathan Brockett is condemned precisely because his writing feeds on the blood of others whom he does not own:

His face gave him away, a hard, clever face that was glued to other people's keyholes. That was why Brockett wrote such fine plays, such cruel plays; he fed his genius on live flesh and blood. Carnivorous genius. Moloch, fed upon live flesh and blood! (234)

This textual condemnation of authorial vampirism is interesting, given Sue-Ellen Case's discussion of the vampire as a figure for the queer ("Tracking"). Brockett's relationship to his material is, then, too "queer," in that it is not based on the re-production, through writing, of emotions which he owns, but on his illegitimate vampirization of "other people's" "live flesh and blood."

Yet in articulating this distinction between legitimate artistic representation and literary cannibalism, the text
undermines the very basis of such a distinction, in that Stephen's writing too can be said to be a vampirization of "other people's" "live flesh and blood." For Stephen's relationship to her artistic "material" to be legitimate, she must write of/with her own blood, as she does during her "war" with Martin for romantic ownership of Mary, when, in the text's words, "her pen was dipped in blood, [so] that with every word she wrote, she was bleeding!" (428). Yet just as the working-class characters that spring from her pen are fed on her blood, Stephen's "blood" is fed upon the blood of the working class, not least of all in her relationship to "Puddle," her likewise inverted tutor/governess whose servitude to Stephen allows Stephen time to write. While the narrator asserts that "everything comes as grist to the mill of those who are destined from birth to be writers--poverty or riches, good or evil, gladness or sorrow" (213), Stephen's re-production of the aristocratic, inverted self, as well as her representation of working-class characters, is based on the labor of those whose "selves" are not enabled, in Hall's novel, to speak the truth of their sexuality in any kind of positive or empowering way. Indeed, one of Puddle's main functions in the text is to urge Stephen to speak for "'all the others who are like’" Stephen but are "less strong and less gifted," and to "'help'" Stephen do so (205)--a function which implies both a certain homogeneity among Stephen,
Puddle, and all other inverts, and a hierarchy between speaker and those presumed unable to speak for themselves—those Stephen's aristocratic privilege actually disables from speaking for themselves: a hierarchy, in other words, between the author and the presumably "inarticulate" material s/he represents. The text's theory of legitimate art is thus an oppressive one which justifies Stephen's representation of working-class characters through an appeal to feudal paternalism: Stephen's characters are based on people who are hers, people she owns.

**Representing Oppressed Subjectivities: Current Debates**

This analysis of the text's theory of artistic representation has implications for current theories of representing oppressed subjectivities, and in particular for debates in performance theory over the politics of butch-femme representations. I argue that much performance theory has, like *The Well of Loneliness*, relegated "the material"—the complex network of multiple social hierarchies determining the meaning of gender "performances"—to its "constitutive outside." Judith Butler's work is again relevant, in that it is she who, along with Sue-Ellen Case, articulated a powerful performance theory of butch-femme lesbian gender parody which brought the issue of lesbian representation into the feminist- and queer-impacted mainstream.
In 1990, Butler contended that butch-femme lesbian gender performances parodically reveal "the utterly constructed status of the so-called heterosexual original" they are said to imitate (Trouble 31); similarly, Sue-Ellen Case in 1988 held that the butch "proudly displays her [fictional] possession of the penis," while the femme "foregrounds her masquerade by playing to a butch, another woman in a role" (64). Since 1990, both theorists have been critiqued for their emphasis on the visible deconstruction of gender, an emphasis which ensured, in the words of Lisa Walker, that, as in The Well of Loneliness, "the femme is invisible as a lesbian unless she is playing to a butch" (881).  

The work of both Butler and Case at the turn of the decade should be placed in context, however, in that it constituted a strong response to the earlier abjection of butch-femme women by middle-class, non-butch-femme-identified lesbian-feminists who dismissed butch/femme practices, and the primarily working-class women who "performed" them; these middle-class lesbians had seen in

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24See Lisa Walker's article for a discussion of the function of visibility in the work of Butler and Case, particularly its racial determinants/effects.

25Lillian Faderman's study of lesbian life in twentieth-century America cites at length some of the reasons why butch-femme roles were not practiced by upper- or middle-class lesbians. Wealthy women's "social position" required the greater mobility enabled by heterosexual marriage--hence causing them to adopt more bisexual lifestyles (Odd 177)--while many middle-class women eschewed
butch-femme practices only an uncritical replication of oppressive heterosexual roles (Case, "Towards" 57; Butler, Trouble 31). However, in focusing on butch-femme practices as deconstructions of gender, both Case and Butler reinscribed the sexism and heterosexism behind the earlier abjection of butch-femme. That is, they translated lesbian desire(s) into terms acceptable to the predominantly straight poststructuralist feminist establishment, implicitly making lesbian femmes second-class dykes in order to place lesbian cultural practices in the forefront of the deconstruction of (gender) identity. Since the femme body does not visibly appear to deconstruct dominant gender constructs, the lesbian femme's claim to deconstructionist fame could logically occur, in the terms of Butler and Case's theories, only when she appeared with a butch—a situation too close to that of the traditionally ideal heterosexual woman in relation to her man to be a comfortable one for many feminists to advocate. Just as disturbingly from a queer-positive perspective, this focus on the visible deconstruction of gender difference turned

the visibility of a behavior that could cause them to lose their positions in government, education, and social work (178). (Butch-femme styles also offended, according to Faderman, middle-class women's sense of "'[p]ropriety'" [181].) And while Faderman does not explain why, in the face of their economic fears, working-class lesbians braved the streets as visible lesbians, she does suggest that working-class lesbians used butch-femme roles as a way to form a visible and structured subculture bonded together against oppression (174).
femme-femme and butch-butch couples, as well as androgynous lesbians who fit neither the butch not the femme image, into the unrepresented and unrepresentable "queers" of this particular strand of "queer theory."

Heather Findlay's reading of how deconstruction has been used by heterosexist feminists likewise exposes the heterosexism which accompanied the once, and to some extent still, critically hegemonic focus on the deconstruction of gender difference in much feminist theory in general. In her article, "Is There a Lesbian in this Text? Derrida, Wittig, and the Politics of the Three Women," Findlay critiques Elizabeth Berg for following Derrida in figuring the second "stage" of deconstruction as a lesbian "inversion" of hierarchical sexual difference; like other feminist critics whose goal is the deconstruction of gender difference, Berg thus made lesbianism—which to a certain extent depends on gender difference to define itself in terms of "women"—into a "stage" which must be overcome (63). According to Findlay, both Berg and Derrida eclipse homosexuality by figuring the goal of deconstruction—the production/exposure of a text's différence—as heterosexual intercourse (i.e., dissemination into the hymen and so forth) (63). In discussing butch/femme lesbian practices primarily in terms of how they deconstruct gender constructs, Butler and Case successfully lesbianized the feminist deconstruction of gender difference, but at the
cost of making some lesbians--butch/femme lesbians--more "subversive" than others, and one (kind of) lesbian--the butch--the most "subversive."

There are other problems with the reduction of butch/femme practices to the deconstruction of gender alone. In not also attending to the "raced" and "classed" material contexts in which butch-femme statements as representations of lesbian identity are made, Case and Butler replicated the classism their defenses of butch-femme set out to dismantle. As Carole-Anne Tyler pointed out in her 1991 response to dominant theorists of camp gender performance (including Case and Butler), certain white, bourgeois theories of gender-subversive performance entail oppressive racial and class effects, in that these theories depend on a degree of distance between the gender performer's "act" and the "white, Anglo, bourgeois style" that "counts as natural femininity [or masculinity]" (57). The gender performer thus ends up citing--and ridiculing--standards of masculinity and femininity belonging to "the class, ethnic, or racial other" (57). In other words, as Tyler explains, wearing a Dolly Parton wig in a middle-class context can mark you as standing in superior, ironic relationship to the femininity you are parodying and exposing as a construct; however, in doing so it also implicitly makes a superior, ironic comment on the working-class women for whom such femininity is the "real" thing (57). Paternalistic racist
and classist constructions to the contrary, the "material" cited by a dominant gender performer may not "belong," like the working-class "material" on which Stephen bases her writing of lesbian identity, to that performer. In focusing on butch-femme practices only in relation to gender, theorists such as Case and Butler forgot to consider other material relations, and other relationships to (the) material, which impact on the meaning of gender performances.

In a more recent article, Case traces the historical and conceptual trajectory between the '80s conclusion that lesbians "had little choice but to appropriate the phallus in order to appear" and the '90s belief, which she contests, that "commodity fetishism overcomes dominant gender traps" ("Student" 39). She explains how '90s gender parodists use "the costumes of phallicized commodities" to deconstruct "earlier naturalized systems of genderfication and (hetero)sexualization" (40), a practice which Case finds disabling, trapping the lesbian in "the marketplace of images" such that "[h]er politics are an ad campaign" (40). Case thus articulates how the empowerment of the butch lesbian as heading up a subversive deconstruction of visible gender codes led into a trap, in which the politics of lesbian representation are roped into an arena of the visible structured by class exploitation--the arena of commodity politics, in which you have to (be able to) buy
the commodities that allow you to appear as a lesbian. This trap can be traced to the problems in performance theory discussed earlier, that is, to the undertheorization of the relationships between performer and material, audience and material, and performer and audience.

Judith Butler’s more recent work responds to the criticism of her earlier work as being focused too exclusively on gender by attending to the way in which a multiplicity of "vectors of power require and deploy each other for the purpose of their own articulation" (Bodies 18). Butler’s reading of the film Paris is Burning, for example, looks at the racial and class forces at work in the ball participants’ gendered performances. However, Butler’s debate with bell hooks over the politics of representing black gay subjects demonstrates that the issues raised in The Well of Loneliness concerning what constitutes "legitimate" representation are still pertinent. As recorded by Butler, the debate centers on the question of who has the "right" to represent the black men whose lives are interpreted by the film. hooks critiques the film for not revealing that it "'is shaped and formed from a perspective and standpoint specific to Livingston,’" the white woman who made the film (qtd. in Bodies 134); the film thus "'does not oppose the way hegemonic whiteness "represents" blackness, but rather assumes an imperial overseeing position’" (134). Here, hooks reveals her
fundamental theoretical assumption that representations should foreground the material relations which enable them, rather than masking these relations through "an imperial overseeing position" that results in fact from white control over "the material" in both senses (i.e., the immediate textual material under consideration and the larger material social context). This assumption leads her to say that the white filmmaker should have theorized her relationship to the black material which helped to sell her film. Not surprisingly, Butler counters that the film's "reelaboration of kinship . . . makes none of us who are outside of heterosexual 'family' into absolute outsiders to this film" (137). Butler thus elides hooks' call for a theorization of the white subject's material interests in representing blackness: while she considers the racial interests at work in Livingston's film, the closest she comes to an acknowledgement of her own racial position is when she admits, parenthetically, that the phrase often used to describe Livingston, "'a white Jewish lesbian from Yale'" also "implicates this author in its sweep" (133).

By claiming that all of those "who are outside of heterosexual 'family'" have a stake in the film, Butler in effect agrees with hooks that material relations are important in determining a viewer's stake in the film. However, her lack of attention to her own racial position contradicts this emphasis. Butler's definition of "the
material" is interesting to consider here. For Butler, "the material" is an effect of discourse—not a preexistent given, but an effect of power, or, as she says, "power in its formative or constituting effects" (Bodies 34).

However, Butler elides consideration of the "constituting effects" of her racial position on her reading of the film by arguing that all queers have a "legitimate" relationship to the lives of impoverished black and Latino gay men through their common outsiderhood to heterosexual family. The proprietary implications of this debate between hooks and Butler become even more disturbing when we note that it takes place between a straight black woman from a working-class background and a white upper-middle-class lesbian who battle it out, in Butler’s representation, for ownership of the rights to represent silent black gay male bodies, none of whom Butler quotes on their reactions to the film.

Butler thus produces a theory which allows her voice to continue to speak, like Stephen’s, for lesbians and gays.

Stephen’s Appropriation of Class-Based Suffering

Like Butler’s text, The Well of Loneliness endorses the right of the privileged queer to speak for all queers. In a move that parallels the way in which Butler appropriates the material of impoverished gay Black and gay Latino men’s lives in order to make claims concerning all lesbians and gays, Stephen Gordon buys the right to speak for inverts from working-class and poor backgrounds by appropriating,
through imitation, the material, class-based determinants of working-class and poor characters’ lives. Stephen’s early fantasies concerning the maidservant Collins map out, as it were, the way in which the text uses the class-inflected deaths of Jamie and Barbara—the impoverished couple whose deaths the text chalks up solely to inversion—to support, not a critique of class relations, but a notion of the invert as an unjustly oppressed category of being, as though inversion alone caused the suffering of the impoverished invert. When Collins tells the child Stephen about her housemaid’s knee, Stephen wants to "wash Collins in [her] blood" (23), and dreams of "cutting off her [Collins’] knee with a bone paper-knife and grafting it onto her own" (22)—a fantasy motivated, the text implies, by Stephen’s desire to be Collins’ "'Saviour'" and thus to procure Collins’ comforting kisses and her gratitude (22). As we will see, this fantasy is metaphorically fulfilled through Stephen’s relationship to Jamie and Barbara at the end of the text. Stephen also tries to get housemaid’s knee herself by kneeling on the nursery floor and pretending to clean the carpet, "always careful to copy Collins’ movements, rubbing backwards and forwards while groaning a little" (23). Stephen enjoys this self-induced suffering because "it certainly seemed to bring Collins much nearer; it seemed to make Stephen feel that she owned her by right of this diligent pain" (23, my emphasis). As my reading of the
novel goes on to show, it is through "right of . . .
diligent [self-induced] pain" that Stephen comes to "own"
the right to represent all inverters in a sexually-based
discourse which is "careful to copy" the sounds of class-
based suffering.  

Stephen's sexually motivated imitation of class-based
suffering--an imitation which displaces the meaning of
Collins' sounds and gestures from the realm of class to the
realm of the sexual--prefigures the strategy later taken by
the text to construct the category of the invert as one
which Stephen can represent. The text argues, for example,
that Barbara's death from double pneumonia and her lover
Jamie's subsequent suicide stemmed from factors related
solely to inversion: for example, through Jamie's
descriptions, before she kills herself, of

the life of hardship and exile that had sapped
Barbara's strength and weakened her spirit . . .
the cruel dispensation of fate [i.e., their
homosexuality and the townspeople's disapproval of
it] that had forced them to leave their home in
the Highlands. . . . (401)

Barbara's death is posited as a direct result of their
sexuality, which forces Jamie and Barbara to leave the
Highlands. Class is also a factor, however, in that, coming
from impoverished backgrounds, Barbara and Jamie must live

26Audre Lorde discusses how a "profit economy" programs
us to "respond to . . . difference in one of three ways":
ignore it, copy it, or destroy it (115). In this text,
copying class difference functions as a way for a discourse
of lesbian identity to both ignore and, through the deaths
of Jamie and Barbara, literally destroy class difference.
in a cheap apartment which lets in the dust and rain, and are unable to afford the "smart English doctor" (359). Barbara and Jamie's poverty is hence as necessary to their deaths as is inversion. Yet both Stephen and Mary edit out this class factor in their readings of the deaths as something which, on the basis of the sexual identity they shared with Jamie and Barbara, could happen to them. Indeed, these deaths are the deciding factor in Stephen's compulsion to give Mary away to a man who can protect her from such a fate.

Even more strikingly, the text quickly turns its focus from the fact of Barbara's death--a fact which could "belong" not only to the world of the invert, but also to that of the poor--to inversion-related pain to which Stephen/the class-privileged invert can relate. The narrator claims that Jamie's pain at Barbara's death "seemed as nothing to an anguish that was far more subtle," i.e., her inability to mourn Barbara "without bringing shame on her name . . ." (401). The text emphasizes the emotional and moral aspects of the oppression of inverts, claiming that even death is "as nothing" to the "shame" that stigmatizes homosexual unions, a shame which for Stephen is the most fundamentally oppressive aspect of her inversion. In this way, the text cuts off that part of Jamie and Barbara's lives which can be read as being determined by class in conjunction with inversion, and grafts it onto an
identity discourse which privileges the oppression of the aristocratic invert. Indeed, this identity discourse needs the deaths of Barbara and Jamie in order to demonstrate the collective suffering of "inverts," and maintains the class-related aspect of their deaths only as a "nonthematizable necessity."

Moreover, Stephen’s self-wounding lie mimics Jamie’s suicide in that same way that the child Stephen mimics the class-based suffering of Collins in order to "own her." Through lying to Mary about the nature of her relationship to Valérie Seymour and thus forcing Mary to leave her--i.e., through the abjection of desire discussed earlier--Stephen is able "to copy" Jamie’s suicide after Barbara’s death. The text describes how Stephen, in pushing Mary away, wounds herself. "Stephen struck at her again and again, desperately wounding herself in the process, though scarcely feeling the pain of her wounds for the misery of what she was doing to Mary" (430-31). This self-wounding culminates in the lie to Mary which cuts Mary (and the economy of desire which she represents) out of the novel’s discourse of lesbian identity, entailing, prior to her rebirth as the inverts’ spokeswoman, Stephen’s metaphorical suicide: "Stephen Gordon was dead; she had died last night" (435). Speaking as a lesbian requires the deconstruction, through pain, of Stephen’s old identity so that she might speak for a collective "we." Stephen’s metaphorical suicide enables
her to give birth to the voice of the invert, a voice which has credibility only if we edit out the contribution of material factors to Jamie's suicide and Barbara's death, as well as the material position from which Stephen's voice emerges and the economic interests that voice serves.

Unlike Mary, Jamie and Barbara appear among the "millions" of suffering, apparitional inverts clamoring, in Stephen's final vision, to "become articulate through her" (437). Stephen's textually endorsed assumption that her self-induced pain is equivalent to "their pain, her pain, all welded together into one consuming agony" (437) constructs the lesbian as a monolithically oppressed category of being, in this way denying that the pain of the class-privileged invert is different from the pain of the class-oppressed invert. By abjecting Stephen's desire for Mary, the text is able to provide Stephen with the pain necessary to suture over the material differences between the impoverished invert and the aristocratic invert: for example, the fact that, unlike Jamie and Barbara, Stephen always has access to the "comforting feel of her cheque

27Terry Castle claims that "[b]y embracing the apparitional, by realizing its potential within her own body ... , Stephen Gordon also acts out a ... liberating movement from denial to acceptance," a movement which brings about "the creative ferment of a desire encompassed and acknowledged" (52). Such a reading, while it affirms the acceptance of lesbian desire, does so in a way which ignores how Stephen's "creative ferment" is dependent on the material differences which make Jamie and Barbara into dead bodies, then ghosts.
book" (166), even when she is being laughed at for her masculinity. Stephen copies Jamie and Barbara's class-based pain through the abjection of desire, displacing the material determinants of Jamie and Barbara's pain into a discourse of inversion which Stephen can "own." Indeed, Stephen's abjection of Mary can be seen to fulfill another class-based function in that it relieves Stephen of being "ashamed to be rich" (358), providing her with the suffering she needs to "copy" the pain of the "starvation poor" inverts (358). This "copying" involves, however, a simultaneous effacement of such class-determined pain, ensuring that the pain of the impoverished invert will wait upon that of the aristocratic invert in this textual "palace of truth."

In conclusion, The Well of Loneliness demonstrates that the abjection of the femme lesbian in the construction of the lesbian as the butch is tied up with a silencing and appropriation of "the material," particularly class-based suffering. This double exclusion is replicated in the work of theorists of butch-femme such as Judith Butler and Sue-Ellen Case when they ignore the "raced" and "classed" material contexts in which butch-femme statements are made in order to celebrate a deconstruction of gender in which the femme can participate only when authorized by a butch. In such theory, as well as in The Well of Loneliness, a notion of lesbianism which privileges the butch plays into
the hands of regulatory regimes organized around trajectories of both gender and class. Both theory and text thus suggest that, rather than assigning the butch lesbian the position of the privileged and the femme lesbian that of the oppressed amongst lesbians, the regulation of lesbian desire effected by the symbolic containment of lesbianism within the butch body contributes to the oppression of various lesbians, though in different ways. Yet in documenting both lesbian femme desire and class-based suffering as "articulate silence[s]," The Well of Loneliness opens a space in which these "silence[s]" can begin to speak, and thus to escape "the palace of truth" for a more open construction.

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28See Lesléa Newman’s recent anthology entitled The Femme Mystique for a number of pieces, including my essay "My Sister, My Blood, My Femme Lesbian Body," which document that many lesbian communities continue to perpetuate the equation of true lesbianism with butchness. For example, a femme friend of mine was recently told by another lesbian that in wearing feminine clothing my friend was "dressing heterosexual"; the implication was that my friend was thus somehow betraying the lesbian community.
CHAPTER 4
"MORE THAN A MATTER OF WHO YOU SLEEP WITH"?
COMING OUT IN THE LOST LANGUAGE OF CRANES

Homosexual relations operating in a matrix of consent and filiation, cleaving between the purely libertarian and the purely communal, create and sustain just the right balance between self and other to provide the mutual respect needed to model democracy. (Mohr 203)

Lesbian and gay sexuality is an insurrection, not only on the part of gender, as feminism is, but on the part of subjectivity—individuality—itself, asserted with reference to sexuality as a technology through which our selves are governed. It is, as such, a politics of . . . calling into question the power relations constitutive of us through our sexuality. (Blasius 83)

"Just the right balance between self and other . . . to model democracy"; "an insurrection . . . on the part of subjectivity": with these words, Richard Mohr and Mark Blasius stake out same-sex relationships as the ground of new, differing forms of political agency. For Blasius, it is the act of coming out as lesbian or gay that initiates this "insurrection," propelling the lesbian or gay subject into a collective ethos that emphasizes "erotic reciprocity" and sexual "agency" rather than the subordination of the woman's needs and desires to the man's or the subjection of both individuals to regulatory norms of (hetero)sexuality,
as in traditional heterosexual relationships (90, 92). Blasius claims that this ethos entails "the development of what Plato called 'the political excellences,'" in that one's ability to "come out and live a lesbian and gay ethos" is necessarily affected by the relationship between "the local lesbian and gay community" and "wider socio-historical existence in all its aspects" (208). Hence "we," Blasius continues, "should be concerned about racism, sexism, and ageism within the lesbian and gay community" because they "affect the morale of the community and hence one's ability to live within it, as well as [reducing] the possibility that those so disempowered will come out into the lesbian and gay community" (208). Blasius's rhetoric sets up an opposition between the "we" who "should be concerned about racism, sexism, and ageism," and "those so disempowered" by these oppressions. "We" (i.e., young white males) should care about other-than-sexual forms of oppression, not because these oppressions limit and constrain the lives of those both within and without the lesbian and gay community, but because they lessen our "ability to live" pleasant lives within the community, in part by preventing "those . . . disempowered" lesbians and gays from becoming social, sexual, emotional, and political resources in (presumably

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1Blasius draws heavily on the work of Michel Foucault, including both Foucault's earlier work on the role of sexuality in creating and regulating the subject (33), and his later work on the ethics of the self (205).
"our") community. Blasius thereby reveals that the lesbian and gay ethos he celebrates is indeed marked by the "power relations" he claims it opposes. Such claims on the part of white, presumably middle- or upper-class gay male theorists demonstrate a somewhat naive privileging of sexuality (understood simplistically in terms of homosexuality versus heterosexuality) as the primary ground of subjectivity, subjection, and resistance. This privileging of the sexual is surprising when we consider that Mohr and Blasius made their claims in 1992 and 1994 respectively, that is, at least a decade or more after analogous notions of "sisterhood" had lost almost all critical currency in feminist circles.

Blasius and Mohr are not alone in their insistence that gay male sexual relations provide a model of radical equality in relationships. While acknowledging the potential for sexual colonialism involved in relationships between white, class-privileged men and working-class men, David Bergman's Gaiety Transfigured: Gay Self-Representation in American Literature, lists Oscar Wilde, Walt Whitman, Edward Carpenter, Goldsworthy Lowes Dickinson and C.R. Ashbee (English disciples of Whitman), John Addington Symonds, and Herman Melville among those gay men whose lives and works advocated gay male sexuality as a means of breaking race, class, and other barriers. Bergman also claims, based on Joseph Harry and William B. DeVall's sociological research into gay male domestic partnerships, that "the discourse of equality seems to have been translated widely into the lives of gay men" (41). However, the extreme class-bias underlying this claim is made apparent by Harry and DeVall's findings, as summarized by Bergman, that "lower-class gays tended to prefer less egalitarian relationships" (42, emphasis added).

See This Bridge Called My Back: Writings By Radical Women of Color for one of the first articulations of women of color feminism to get white, middle-class feminists' collective attention. After the publication of Bridge in
David Leavitt’s 1986 novel *The Lost Language of Cranes* likewise gestures towards the idea that an affirmed, "out" gay subjectivity constitutes the basis for a new, utopian political order. The protagonist, Philip Benjamin, claims that homosexuality is "'more than a matter of who you sleep with'" (155), and is instead "'a question of secrets'" (170). In line with Philip’s argument, the text links secrets of sexuality to secrets of race and class, thus implying the utopian argument that the liberation of homosexual desire could have positive ramifications for struggles against race and class oppression. Philip declares his homosexuality to his parents, Rose and Owen Benjamin, who, significantly enough, are concurrently facing the loss of the rent-controlled New York apartment where they have spent most of their married life. Philip’s declaration forces both Owen and Rose to come to terms with Owen’s own heretofore secret homosexuality and the larger terms of their conventional middle-class lives. The text thereby demonstrates how white middle-class heteroscedual subjectivity is based on the abjection of homosexuality--its "ejection and transvaluation . . . into a defiling otherness" (Butler *Gender* 133). This abjection of homosexuality is linked, Leavitt’s novel claims, to white middle-class isolationism--i.e., the isolation of the white

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1981, it became less tenable for white middle-class feminists to homogenize all women as "sisters" who faced the same monolithic oppression.
middle-class from other racial and class groupings, as well as the isolation of individuals within white middle-class society. Within this context, the text argues for the necessity of an essentialist politics of gay identity centered on the act of "coming out."

However, the text's focus on the way in which white, middle-class gay male subjectivity is irrevocably marked by the larger conventions and exclusions of middle-class culture works against Philip's utopian articulation of gay identity. The novel's anatomy of white middle-class (straight and gay) subjectivity also works against what I will show to be the classist implications of the text's metaphor of homosexuality as a "lost language." The text demonstrates that, despite his claims, Philip's form of identity politics does not lead to the development of "the political excellences," but instead perpetuates along lines of class and gender the logic of abjection it opposes in terms of sexuality. The politics of coming out drives a momentary wedge into the white middle-class subject's emotionally insular subjectivity based on the abjection of emotional, sexual, racial, class, and bodily "secrets," but fails as a means of producing the more positive social order imagined by Mohr and Blasius--not only because it does not account for the other vectors of power that construct gay subjectivity, but because coming out in and of itself, though it may unite white middle-class gay subjects in a
struggle against homophobia and heterosexism, does not counter deep-set white middle-class habits of emotional isolation or provide a way for class-privileged gay subjects to form coalitions or alliances across class differences. 4

Before I proceed with an analysis of the text, it will be helpful to provide a more detailed plot summary for those readers unfamiliar with Leavitt’s novel. The Lost Language of Cranes weaves together the stories of Philip, Owen, and Rose Benjamin as the three come to terms with both Philip’s and Owen’s homosexuality. The novel opens with Owen’s trip to a gay porno theater, a trip he has made every Sunday for years while his wife Rose, a copy editor, stays home doing crossword puzzles. However, the two are now being faced with the possible loss of the apartment they have shared for twenty-one years, causing them each to begin examining the routines into which their lives have fallen. Rose feels she

'Most reviewers of The Lost Language of Cranes have missed what I am emphasizing here, that is, the text’s engagement with and relevance to larger political debates concerning identity and politics in American culture. Robert Jones, for example, is mystified as to "what point [Leavitt] intended to make in contrasting Owen’s" sexuality with Philip’s (559); somehow, Jones seems to have missed the novel’s argument that gay identity politics has improved the quality of gay men’s lives (with Owen representing men who lived without the benefit of a widespread gay movement). Similarly, Adam Mars-Jones’ "Gays of Our Lives" characterizes the text’s father-and-son gay plot as Leavitt’s way of "pushing through a complex Oedipal agenda on behalf of his character" Philip (45), thus reducing the text’s argument concerning politics to a psychological wish-fulfillment. Mars-Jones also critiques the novel for not including strong characters with "a viewpoint broader than the personal," thus indicating his failure to understand the "broader" social arguments I discuss in this chapter (44).
no longer knows Owen, while Owen is unhappy with his life of subterfuge but too frightened to change it. Meanwhile Philip is experiencing the first real love affair of his life with the handsome yet self-centered Eliot, through whom he meets Jerene, a black lesbian feminist who has been rejected by her adoptive parents for her lesbianism, and from whose research on "lost languages" the text takes its title. Bolstered by his affair with Eliot, Philip decides it is time to tell his parents about his sexuality. Rose is upset and lets Philip know that she wishes he had kept his sexuality to himself, while Owen goes into shock, managing to tell his son only that he thinks it's "o-kay" that Philip is gay (175). In the ensuing weeks, Philip and Eliot break up, and Rose and Owen each begin to acknowledge to themselves Owen's true homosexuality, without, however, discussing the situation with each other. Finally, Philip finds a new boyfriend, Brad, and Rose kicks Owen out after the two discuss Owen's sexual feelings for men and his lack of sexual feelings for women. The final scene takes us to Philip's apartment, where Owen goes to spend the night before starting his new life, and where he comes out to Philip as a homosexual. The novel ends with Philip watching Owen sleeping on the floor of the apartment, shaken by his father's admission yet glad to have precipitated it through his own openness.
The novel's portrait of Owen Benjamin argues poignantly against the relegation of homosexual desire to the realm of the abject, demonstrating the usefulness of gay identity politics as a counter to the forced abjection of gay desire from middle-class American society. Until he comes out to Philip as a homosexual towards the end of the text, Owen conceptualizes his homosexuality as a disease which is extrinsic to his identity, a problem with which he is afflicted and which manifests itself through compulsive, anonymous sexual encounters at the Bijou, a gay porn theater. When a man at the Bijou theater asks Owen to go back to his apartment with him, Owen is unable to say yes, despite his desire to do so. Owen imagines how he and the man, were they to go home together,

would have to admit to each other in the broad light of day that they had come, each alone, to that dark room . . . , that heart of shame and lonely self-indulgence, and thereby acknowledge one another as human beings and not just shadows that float in a theatre and mimic, moment by moment, the flickering gestures of giants on a screen. (24)

Owen and the other patrons of the theater embody the disease model of homosexuality, acting as "shadows" who "mimic" porn images rather than "human beings" who feel "shame" and "lonel[iness]." *The Lost Language of Cranes* argues that the disease model in fact effects the abjection of certain components of the gay man's subjectivity--here, the emotions of shame and loneliness, elsewhere Owen's interest in
Renaissance poetry--and that the gay man caught in this model of homosexuality suffers a kind of emotional death by heterosexual convention.

The text's argument that the disease model of homosexuality abjects central components of the abject-gay subject's subjectivity is made clear when Owen reflects on how he returns from his weekly encounters at the Bijou "purged (for the moment) of a week's tension, a week's need, and imagine[s] that in a single afternoon the hell had been flushed from his life" (48). Judith Butler's succinct definition of Julia Kristeva's notion of abjection is applicable here. To cite more fully the definition quoted above, Butler characterizes abjection as the psychological process through which an identity "is established through the ejection and transvaluation of something originally part of [that] identity into a defiling otherness" (Gender 133). In Cranes, Owen conceptualizes his homosexual encounters in terms of defilement and abjection; through these encounters, he is "purged" of his homosexual impurity, the "hell" of homosexual desire "flushed," like feces (which Kristeva defines as one of the infant's first "abjects") from his life. Paralleling Kristeva's discussion of the nausea that can accompany abjection (Powers 3), Leavitt's text describes how Owen's "repulsion at his own actions was [sometimes] so great that he would find himself spitting onto the sidewalk, over and over, desperate to get that taste out of his mouth"
Owen wants to "get that taste out of his mouth," to separate himself from the shameful homosexual acts in which he has just engaged. However, according to Kristeva, the boundary separating the subject from the abject can never be completely established. The abject keeps coming back; for Owen, homosexual desire keeps coming back: "each week, it seemed, the hell would begin creeping back a little earlier, after just a day, an evening, an hour" (48).

Under the disease model, the proto-gay or abject-gay subject lives his homosexuality as abjection, as the nauseating process of attempting to purge himself of the "hell" of gay desire, only to have that repudiated desire "creep back" again and again and again. In fact, Leavitt's novel argues, abjecting homosexual desire guarantees that the abject-gay subject will compulsively pursue gay sex when the psychic dam he has built against homosexual desire bursts under the weight of "a week's tension, a week's need." 5 Weighted as it is with the force of prohibition,

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5The issue of gay male sexual drive is, of course, an extremely vexed one, given right-wing characterizations of gay male animal promiscuity. See Earl Jackson, Jr.'s article, "Scandalous Subjects: Robert Glück's Embodied Narratives," for a positive view of casual gay sex as an end in itself. Unlike novelists Leavitt, James Baldwin, Edmund White, and at times even John Rechy, all of whom portray gay male sexual excess as in part the result of heterosexist and homophobic oppression, Jackson celebrates Glück's use of casual gay sex as an alternative to heterosexist, patriarchal codes of sexuality (125). And while this celebration could be read as another utopian/essentialist reading of gay sexuality, Jackson does not claim that gay sex undermines race and class divisions.
the abject-gay subject experiences homosexual desire as an insatiable appetite which is only whetted the more by the brief and anonymous sexual encounters in which he engages; day by day, the psychic dam becomes weaker and weaker, homosexual desire stronger and stronger. Through detailing this process and contrasting it with Philip's joyous sexual encounters with his boyfriends Eliot and Brad, the text argues that the disease model of homosexuality, rather than same-sex desire itself, is responsible for Owen's subjective "hell."

In Leavitt's text, the abjection of homosexual desire is wound up with the rejection of desire in general: when Owen's "hell" comes creeping back, "with it [comes] desire of a sort he had never imagined possible" (48). After finding a note from another patron of the Bijou--a note Owen mistakenly believes was meant for him--Owen is "amazed . . . to discover, after all this time, that he still had the capacity to feel joy, and his pleasure at feeling pleasure was itself such a remarkable sensation that in the end the actual note really didn't mean that much" (49). Along with his desire for men, Owen has rejected desire and pleasure in general, including his earlier interest in poetry. Owen's father, who, not coincidentally, also believes that poor people cause their own poverty, dismisses Owen's dissertation on Renaissance poetry as useless and impractical (85); Owen himself, after living according to
norms of heterosexual convention that force him to abject his strongest desires, takes on his father's view, wondering "what kind of fool he must have been to have wasted two-and-a-half years and three hundred pages on a bunch of poets no one was ever going to read anyway" (100). Middle-class heterosexual convention entails the suppression of forms of desire, pleasure, and production which do not lead to economic success. The abjection of homosexuality is thus connected, the text argues, with the rejection of other aspects of the self deemed "wasteful" by middle-class heterosexual society--including some forms of heterosexual passion. Philip's mother Rose, for example, lives in what Philip perceives as an emotional "middle ground . . . where contentment and despair coexist as dual sensations so similar, so faint, that they become impossible to distinguish" (45-46); however, even Rose experiences moments when "as she had long ago read in Proust (and she always, always remembered) the heartstrings yearn to be plucked" (47). It is during one of these "rare episodes of wanting" that Rose has an affair with another man. Yet, despite the emotional centrality of this affair, middle-class heterosexual convention dictates that this heterosexual passion, like all homosexual passion, must be kept "secret."

That such convention has incredible emotional costs is demonstrated by the story of Jerene Parks, Eliot's black lesbian-feminist roommate. When Jerene comes out to them as
a lesbian, her adoptive parents disown her. "'You're not my daughter,'" says Jerene's father--the only one she has ever known--thus cutting Jerene out of the family by reminding her of her adopted status (65). Jerene's status as a disavowed "secret" after her parents disown her literalizes or transfers Owen's disavowal of passion from something that happens within the subject to something that happens between subjects--she is the abject lesbian subject who represents the abjection of passion as a basis for living and its replacement by deadening conventions of race, class, sexuality, and gender. Philip's argument that homosexuality is not just a "matter of who you sleep with" is borne out by the way the now well-off Parkses treat their own (racially-inflected), impoverished origins. Just as they consider Jerene's lesbianism "'filth'" and "'abomination'" (64), Jerene's upper-middle-class black parents treat her grandparents like dirt because they represent Jerene's parents' own impoverished origins. The Parkses refuse to embrace Jerene's grandparents lest they get their clothing soiled by Jerene's grandfather's "tobacco juice and sweat" and her grandmother's dirt from cleaning laundry at work all day (59). The Parkses' abjection of Jerene is of a piece

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6I say "racially-inflected" because, as Stanley Aronowitz notes in his contribution to the Social Text discussion, "Race and Racism: A Symposium," part of the way racism has operated in this country is through the equation of blacks with poverty and poverty with blacks (35). Of course, this equation also allows for the classist erasure of poor whites from the nation's consciousness.
with their adherence to white upper-middle-class values and conventions, as exemplified by Jerene's mother's obsessive cleanliness and her dislike of basketball as "'unladylike'" for Jerene (62), and by the fact that Mr. Parks is the first black Nixon delegate, and opposes "'the black movement'" (63).

Jerene's story argues that the abjection of racial and class-based "secrets" operates similarly to the abjection of homosexual desire. Just as Owen's attempt to abject his homosexual desires is doomed to failure, so, despite or perhaps because of her attempt to reject her own class origins, Jerene's mother's cleanliness enacts her mother's life as a laundry worker, transported to a posh Westport home (62). Likewise, just as Owen's attempt to purge himself of homosexual desire reflects the larger homophobic culture's attempt to purge itself of homosexuals, so Jerene's mother's obsessive cleanliness and attempt to distance herself from the dirt and disorder of her impoverished past reflect the larger racist culture's attempt to cleanse itself of blacks, an attempt manifested by the threatening notes the Parkses receive under the door of their home in their otherwise all-white neighborhood. Further, both Owen's and the Parkses' behavior are linked to material realities: Owen fears the discovery of his sexuality will entail the loss of his job (133), while the Parkses adhere to white, upper-middle-class standards of
behavior because, as the narrator notes, "in certain ways their lives . . . depend[ed] on it" (57). The *Lost Language of Cranes* thus argues that the designation of homosexual desire as an abject desire is symptomatic of an economy of representation--an economy which exists in dialectical relation with material economic practices\(^7\)--whereby middle-class American culture maintains the race and class boundaries of white middle-class subjects' identities.\(^8\) The text images such bounded selfhood through describing Owen's longing for "the absolute safety of his chair, . . . his book, his cake," i.e., of his middle-class heterosexual abode (48).

Michel Foucault's description of how the deployment of sexuality facilitated both racism and classism helps to explain the racial and class implications of sexual "safety" in Leavitt's text.\(^9\) According to Foucault, through technologies of sexuality the (white) bourgeoisie "provided

\(^7\)See Chapter One of this study for a discussion of how discursive representations are shaped by and in turn help shape material relations.

\(^8\)The text thus accords with two of Thomas Yingling's comments regarding homosexuality and lesbian and gay studies. Yingling remarks that "same-sex desire has functioned almost as synecdoche for the repressed in our culture" (156), and that practitioners of lesbian and gay studies "seem currently in agreement that the fate of heterosexuality has been and remains indissolubly linked to the fate of patriarchy, capital, and the master race" (155).

\(^9\)See Chapter Two of this study for a more complete discussion of Foucault's theories as they relate to issues of race, class, and sexuality.
itself with a body to be cared for, protected, cultivated, and preserved from the many dangers and contacts, to be isolated from others so that it would retain its differential value" (123). Given this historical analysis, we can read "safety" as the text’s way to underscore a primary effect of social privilege: its ability to "protect[]," "cultivate[]," and "preserve[]" certain subjects precisely through their "isolat[ion] from others." Owen’s particular agony over his sexuality, the conflict he experiences between his heterosexual "safety" and his most intense sexual desires, can be seen as a product of both privilege and oppression: the bourgeois need to "retain" the "differential value" of the isolated bourgeois body produces the anguish of the middle-class gay subject. In short, the bourgeois need for isolation between classes is paralleled by enforced isolation within the bourgeoisie, particularly, the isolation of the middle-class gay subject. Moreover, as we will discuss more fully later in this chapter, Leavitt’s text demonstrates that both heterosexual and homosexual subjectivities can replicate this class-based need to preserve the bourgeois body from "dangers and contacts."

Foucault’s discussion of the white, bourgeois interests served by the deployment of sexuality has some interesting implications for analyzing the text’s take on the usefulness of gay identity politics. The text inscribes both "essentialist" and "constructionist" views within a larger
strategy aimed at consolidating the ontological rights of gays—that is, the right to be gay. Leavitt's text takes the tactic of "sexual liberation movements" described by Jonathan Dollimore, movements that "sometimes and necessarily [embrace] a radical essentialism with regard to their own identity" while at the same time laying out "an equally radical antiessentialist critique of the essentializing sexual ideologies responsible for their oppression" ("Different" 637). Against the disease model, as we saw, the text at times argues in favor of an essentialist gay identity politics model of same-sex desire which would make homosexual desire an integral part of "who one is" and "coming out" the central goal of gay politics.\(^\text{10}\) However, I will argue, this strategy makes sense only within a bourgeois context, and perpetuates white, middle-class interests when not integrated with a larger understanding of the construction of social difference along lines of race, class and gender in addition to lines of sexuality.

\(^{10}\)Robert McRuer's "Boys' Own Stories and New Spellings of My Name: Coming Out and Other Myths of Queer Positionality" points out that the gay liberationist "rallying cry 'Out of the Closets, into the Streets' quickly became simply 'Out of the Closets'" (263). McRuer, however, revives "coming out as a myth of . . . queer (op)positionality," (261), a radical, nonessentialist standpoint from which to assert a powerful myth of collective subjectivity. As my reading of Cranes indicates, my perspective is that coming out can have positive effects against sexuality-based oppression and inscribe other oppressions at the same time.
Wilfred Koponen defines "coming out" as the process whereby "gay people accept their sexuality as an intrinsic, and ultimately valuable, part of their self-identity" (1); in everyday parlance, "coming out" can also refer to an individual's chosen revelation of sexuality.¹¹ (The particular meaning I intend as I use the term throughout this chapter should be clear from context.) For Koponen and other gay critics and writers, including Leavitt, the acquisition of a gay "identity" is a positive alternative to the fear, shame, and denial the abject-gay subject experiences under what I have been calling the disease model of homosexuality. Of course, many other critics and theorists criticize "the focus on coming out and its product, the coming-out narrative" for privileging sexuality as the central component of gay people's lives, thereby ignoring other factors that shape gay people's subjectivities (McRuehr 265). Indeed, Rob McRuer claims that "reservations about the coming-out novel are at this point standard fare in reviews of contemporary gay and lesbian literature" (265). As my argument here indicates, I share these "reservations," but also argue for the continued

¹¹Koponen offers a useful summary of various psychological models of the stages involved in coming out (14-22), endorsing Elisabeth Kübler-Ross' model of the five stages of dealing with death as most appropriate. Rather than following Koponen in focusing on the individual psychology of coming out, I have chosen to focus on the various culturally available discourses of homosexuality taken up by gay and proto-gay subjects, and the relationship between these discourses and material forces and practices.
usefulness of coming-out narratives for countering the abjection of homosexuality within middle-class society.

The text's portraits of Owen's and Philip's lifelong, unchanging sexual desire for men, along with Philip's spoken rhetoric, constitute the text's most essentialist moments, if by "essentialist" we mean they support a view of sex as a biological force and . . . sexual identities [as] cognitive realizations of genuine, underlying differences" (Epstein 241). This perspective on gay identity is manifested in Philip's impassioned statement to his parents that "'my attraction to men, is the most crucial, most elemental force in my life, and to deny it . . . would be a tragedy'" (174); thus the necessity of coming out. For Philip, homosexuality is not a "choice" in the accepted sense of the word. Philip tells his father, "'It was nothing psychological; it wasn't a decision I reached. The fact was that I got sexually excited by the thought of men. I got erections. With girls--I felt nothing'" (232). All of Philip's rhetoric here should be understood within the context of the abjection of desire discussed above. That is, to speak of homosexuality as the "'most elemental force in [one's] life,'" a force which, far from being something "'psychological,'" constitutes an inherent, determinate part of oneself, dictating who one "is"--to speak of homosexuality in this way is to emphasize, within and against a context of the abjection of homosexual
desire, that one's sexual desires are not amenable to change under the disease model, which advocated--and still advocates--"cure" through therapy. As Eve Sedgwick notes, "Conceptualizing an unalterably homosexual body seems to offer resistance to the social-engineering momentum apparently built into . . . the human sciences of the West" ("How" 78).

Philip's claim that his sexuality is not "psychological" can be read as a direct response to the therapeutic model of homosexuality first deployed, if Foucault is correct, within the upper and middle classes (120). This reference to psychology reveals a class basis to Philip's argumentative strategy: historically bourgeois,\(^{12}\) therapy directed at changing sexual orientation poses the most threat to underage or economically dependent boys and girls whose parents can afford to send them to the psychiatrist or psychologist, and whose class status provides them with the motivation to enforce the "differential value" of their children's' bodies.\(^{13}\) And

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\(^{12}\)Most of Freud's patients, we should note, were bourgeois, as Jane Gallop indicates when she discusses "the maid/governess/nurse" as "the most insistent . . . intrusion into the [Freudian] family circle" (Daughter's 144). Of course, only families that were bourgeois or of a higher class had maids, governesses, and nurses.

\(^{13}\)This is not to say that the poor and working-classes are not vulnerable to psychiatric intervention in their sexuality; as I discuss in Chapter Six of this study, the parents of working-class character Jess Goldberg in Leslie Feinberg's *Stone Butch Blues* send her to a hospital to cure her of her masculine gender "disorder." However, parents
while Philip is no longer economically dependent on his parents when he comes out to them, he does wait until he has graduated from college and is supporting himself to tell them about his sexuality--a postponement that might not have been necessary had his parents not had the economic power of supporting him through college.

Contemporary debates over the usefulness of gay identity politics sometimes center on the issue of whether sexuality can be changed or not. Like Philip, proponents of gay identity politics often argue that "being gay is an essential, inborn trait about which there is no choice" (Vance 28), a contention they prove by pointing to the unchanging nature of their desire. Critics of gay identity politics argue that this model is applicable only to a percentage of self-identified gay and lesbian people, and excludes bisexuals altogether.\(^\text{14}\) This argument between

with more economic resources could have kept Jess in an institution for far longer than the few weeks Jess spent in the hospital. Too, the resources available to a working-class family in the fifties, when Jess is institutionalized, were far greater than the resources available to working-class families in the 1980s, the time period of Leavitt’s novel; the cost of psychiatric and psychological intervention was also far greater in Leavitt’s novel’s time period, making such intervention likelier in middle-class families.

\(^{14}\)Steven Epstein, citing Kenneth Plummer, notes that many lesbians and gay men "experience several shifts in sexual identity and the structure of desire" in the course of their lives (271). See Marjorie Garber for a discussion of how Leavitt’s later novel, While England Sleeps (based on the autobiography of poet Stephen Spender) irons out the complexities of bisexual existence (355-357); Garber’s contention could also be applied to The Lost Language of
"essentialism" and "constructionism" tends to obscure inquiry into the class and race components of sexual identity categories. In The Lost Language of Cranes, both "essentialist" and "constructionist" moments are based in a particular, bourgeois experience of sexual oppression. We have already seen, for example, how Philip's essentialist argument that his sexuality is not "psychological" is motivated by a particularly middle-class fear of psychological intervention. As I go on to discuss, the text's constructionist metaphorizations of homosexuality as a "lost language" are also based in a class-specific experience of sexual oppression--specifically, the middle-class experience of sexual oppression as threatening to one's class privilege.

The title of the text refers to a child whose case-history Eliot's roommate Jerene encounters in her research on lost languages. This child, Michel, is severely neglected by his mentally retarded, poverty-stricken teenage mother, and as a result never learns how to speak English or to mirror other humans. Instead, he learns to imitate the movement and sounds of the cranes he sees wrecking buildings outside his window. This "language," Jerene reflects, is Cranes. Spender, at any rate, seems to be in agreement with Garber's reading. After reading Leavitt's rendition of his life as that of a gay man who could not give up the privileges of heterosexuality, Spender sued Leavitt, who settled out of court, for "breach of copyright and the violation of his own 'moral right' to his own work" (Vice Versa 355).
"forever lost to her [i.e., Jerene]," belonging "to Michel alone" (183). Through this image of the crane-child, the text argues that homosexuality is likewise a "lost language"—a language the text attempts to excavate. This metaphoric usage is made apparent through Jerene’s insight that, like the crane-child, "each, in his own way . . . finds what it is he must love, and loves it; the window becomes a mirror; whatever it is that we love, that is who we are" (183). The text thus uses the language of essentialist identity politics to counter right-wing rhetoric condemning homosexual "behavior"; contrary to such rhetoric, homosexuality is a matter of "what . . . [we] must love," love which, moreover, is "who we are."

However, embedded in Jerene’s essentialist rhetoric is a term from the lexicon of constructionism: the word "find" here works against the deterministic connotations of "must," implying a certain degree of agency, of choice. Indeed, the text subverts its own essentialism by naming homosexuality a lost "language," thereby implying both agency and social construction. Further, the image of industrial cranes also undercuts the notion of homosexuality as a natural and inherent part of who you are, evoking instead Donna Haraway’s image of the human cyborg, utterly constructed, dependent on the desiderata of the urban, post-industrial landscape for its most elemental bodily processes and self-understandings. The notion of homosexuality as a language
also works against the text's more essentialist moments in that "language" implies the possibility of failed communication, misinterpretation, lost letters, and all the other aspects of textuality celebrated by postmodern theorists. Owen's initial attempts to learn the gay "code," for example, illustrate, not unproblematic access to an essential gay language, but tragicomic misreadings of others' sexuality and of their intentions. An example occurs when Owen misreads the heterosexual teacher Winston Penn as gay and invites him over to dinner in order to fix him up with Philip. Owen's initial inability to speak a gay language is comparable to another one of Jerene's research tidbits--the story of twins who invented their own language and were forcibly separated and taught English, thereby losing their own invented language. While she agrees with the decision to separate the children, Jerene is obsessed with "'what it means that a private, invented language must be sacrificed "for the good of the child"'" (53). The text argues that Owen, like the twins, sacrifices "a private, invented [gay] language" in order to survive in a virulently heterosexual middle-class culture.

However, this metaphorization of homosexuality as "the lost language of cranes" privileges middle-class gay white men's oppression at the expense of those who are less economically privileged: that is, to equate Owen's and Philip's experiences with those of the crane-child is to
forget that the crane-child can only become a metaphor for middle-class gay experience if we edit out the material factors responsible for the child's abandonment. The text's equation of the middle-class gay subject's experience with that of the crane-child enacts, in a much subtler way, the kind of self-pity Owen expresses before coming out, when he equates being gay--a kind of emotional homelessness within middle-class society--with being physically, literally homeless. To Owen's mind, being gay puts one "out in the street," as revealed by the question Owen asks himself while travelling to the gay porno theater the Sunday of the novel's opening scene: "What, [Owen] wondered, was he, a decent and respectable man, with a well-heated apartment . . . doing out among these people, out in the street on a cold Sunday morning?" (3). Homosexuality separates a person, in Owen's mind, from the "decent and respectable" world of middle-class heterosexuals; to be homosexual is to lose that class-privileged world, to be "out in the street" with the bums and the cops. Before "coming out" as a gay man, Owen vacillates between being terrified of losing his job, home, and family and considering his middle-class status "a pity" because "[h]e want[s] to be thrown out into the gutter" (22). Indeed, Owen's shame at his inability to control his homosexual desires is so great that, tiring of the constant struggle involved in attempting to suppress his desires, he concludes that to be homeless would be to be
"triumphant! That would be a spit in the face of this life" (21). The abjection of homosexuality effected by the disease model is thus portrayed as leading to an appropriation of class-based suffering similar to that upon which Stephen Gordon's identity in The Well of Loneliness is based.

The metaphorization of the abject-gay subject as the crane-child operates according to a similar logic, one based on an appropriation of economic suffering and a denial of middle-class privilege underwritten by a fear of losing that privilege. If the parallel is exact, the lost gay language would have to have been produced as a result of neglect, since the crane-child imprints with cranes because no one else is there to provide for him--an image that plays into right-wing, homophobic arguments that male homosexuality is produced by absent fathers. The image of the crane-child's economic and bodily neglect is thus quickly glossed over in the text's parallel with a "lost" gay language: the loss of the crane-child's language, rather than its production as a result of poverty in the first place, becomes the focus of the metaphor. That which is the result of oppression--the crane-child's language--is made to stand in for something positive--a private, invented language--the loss of which constitutes middle-class gay white men's oppression.15 The

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15The classist erasure of the poverty which breeds the crane-child is even more apparent in the BBC television version of The Lost Language of Cranes, which, to my mind,
crane-child's economic and bodily neglect, however, retain a residual resonance as an image of both middle-class white gay men's emotional neglect and their fear that they too will experience economic and bodily neglect if they are open about their sexuality.

However, this somewhat obsessive, semi-maudlin focus on homosexual "language" as inaccessible, as forever "lost" in a society where we are all marked by heterosexist and homophobic constructions of subjectivity, can--whatever its origins--be seen as a response to the isolating force of white bourgeois socialization, particularly for homosexual children. This isolation is manifest in the story of how Philip comes to see himself as "other" than the heterosexual norm. During his boyhood, other boys "routinely call [Philip] 'faggot' or 'fairy,,'" but "neither he nor they ever connected the word[s] with any reality, or with his by then highly-evolved masturbatory life" (74). This nameless limbo--what Philip thinks of as his "secret life"--comes to an end when Philip is in the sixth grade and his best friend, Gerard, breaks his promise to Philip by asking a girl named Laura to go steady with him. Gerard's heterosexuality places him at the center of a middle-class sixth-grade social order organized around the ritualized deflates some of the force of the text by transposing the story from New York to London; the Benjamins' fear of losing their apartment and joining the ranks of the homeless has more resonance for me in a New York City setting.
enactment of heterosexual desire, as represented by the image of Gerard and Laura sitting enthroned, "hand-in-hand on a bench in the playground," while "the girls c[o]me up to them . . . to ask their solemn advice" (75). Terrified of losing Gerard's friendship, Philip tries desperately to get a girlfriend himself, in the hopes that at least he and Gerard would then be able to double-date. After humiliating himself by asking seventeen girls to go out with him—all of whom say no--Philip repeatedly throws himself against a wall in Central Park, near which, not uncoincidentally, several men "[stand] among the trees, staring past each other, stroking erections that bulged from their pants" (76). For the first time, Philip begins to associate sexual desire and identity: "[h]e watched the sad ritual of his kind and was not surprised" (77, emphasis added). Abjected from heterosexual sixth-grade society, Philip begins to identify with other men whose desire for men makes them outcasts to heterosexual society and indeed, to any kind of positive, nurturing form of social organization. This "kind," it seems, is fated never to experience the closeness, connection, and social approbation accorded to heterosexuals. Instead, this group of solitary outcasts is destined to enact desire for men only through using the presence of other men as incitement for essentially masturbatory sexual experiences.
Within and against such an isolating bourgeois context, an essentialist politics of coming out makes a great deal of sense. In Philip’s sixth-grade society, no real individual occupies or is perceived to occupy the subject position “faggot,” because the only subject position—the only “identity”—available is assumed to be heterosexual. By asking seventeen girls to go steady with him, Philip unintentionally transgresses heterosexual codes which construct the beloved as unique and irreplaceable rather than interchangeable with sixteen other beloveds. Philip’s actions reveal that his feelings are a world away from those of the narrator of Rose’s favorite Billie Holiday song when she sings, “I’d lie for you, I’d cry for you,/ I’d lay my body down and die for you” (88). Instead, Philip exposes heterosexual codes as rigid, rule-bound conventions rather than expressions of every (middle-class sixth-grade) subject’s inherent heterosexuality. However, Philip’s classmates do not read Philip’s actions as a critique of heterosexual hegemony, nor even as indications of his exclusively homosexual desires, but as a reflection of Philip’s own “'stupid[ity],’” as classmate Donna Gruber puts it (76). In fact, contrary to the deconstructive argument that “expos[ing] heterosexuality as an incessant and

16 Carole-Anne Tyler has criticized Judith Butler’s theory of butch-femme as subversive gender performance for not taking into account the very factors I am emphasizing here, that is, the importance of audience and context in determining meaning (54-58).
panicked imitation of its own naturalized idealization" would serve gay interests by working against heterosexual hegemony (Butler, "Imitation" 23), Philip puts himself at risk precisely to the extent that he succeeds in exposing the artificiality of heterosexual convention.

Philip's experiences thus raise serious questions about the efficacy of deconstructionist politics as an alternative to identity politics. Laura Doan's deconstructionist political goal of "displac[ing] and explod[ing] the [heterosexual/homosexual] binary" (147) seems difficult to realize in a context in which the homosexual pole of the binary is not even recognized as a subjective possibility. Without an understanding of (an exclusively) homosexual desire as an inherent aspect of his subjectivity, Philip's inability to ante up in the middle-class heterosexual economy of desire puts him at social and physical risk, as represented by his social isolation and by the fact that the area of Central Park to which Philip runs to hurt himself is "an obscure wooded corner where he could have gotten mugged or beaten up" (76). Philip's experiences with his classmates and in the park demonstrate that white middle-class gay male oppression has definite material effects.17

17While to date I have been unable to find the class breakdown of lesbian, gay, and bisexual youth suicides, we can certainly assume that they include white middle-class boys. Richard Hall, who claims approvingly in "Gay Fiction Comes Home" that "[n]owadays, a gay novel rarely explains, complains, or apologizes" (25), would do well to remember the high rate of queer teens who die at their own hands.
In a bourgeois context so thoroughly dominated by heterosexual "identity politics"—otherwise known as homophobia and heterosexism—some form of gay identity politics is helpful for ensuring that children such as Philip do not continue to die by their own hands or by putting themselves in physically dangerous situations. A gay identity politics based on essentialist notions of identity allows Philip to publicly proclaim (often to strangers) "'I'm gay!'" after he enters college (34); in doing so Philip (naively, according to the text's presentation) hopes to counter the "oppression of untold numbers of gay men and women" (34). By coming out, Philip is able to join a collectivity of queer subjects through the Gay and Lesbian Campus Coalition, where he meets Brad Robinson, the man who ultimately becomes his partner. He thereby counters the bourgeois isolation in which he first experienced his sexuality. Similarly, Owen ends the pain and despair of living his homosexuality as abjection when he tells Phillip that he's a homosexual, too (314). He does so, the text implies, as a result of hearing Philip describe the hypothetical scenario about what his life would be like.

Certainly, this is something to "complain" about. The classism of Hall's claim is revealed by his admission, in his last paragraph, that "[t]here is a large body of work that is still separatist, angry, polemical and highly critical of the middle-class values embedded in the books mentioned here" (27). Apparently, however, these works don't count as the contemporary "gay novels" that "rarely . . . complain."
if he denied his homosexuality and married a woman he could not "'love sexually'"; this scenario mirrors precisely Owen's own life, his marriage to a woman with whom he can only have sex if he "think[s] about men while [they’re] doing it" (173).

However, to focus exclusively on rectifying the "losses" experienced by the middle-class gay subject is to deny that subject's class privilege; for example, many subjects who are less economically privileged than Philip face every day of their lives dangers such as Philip faces that one day in Central Park. A bourgeois politics of coming out that does not recognize the complexity of the material relations in which sexual subjects are ensconced runs the risk of merely perpetuating the bourgeois body's isolation from "dangers and contacts" identified by Foucault; in doing so, gay identity politics replicates the mechanism by which homosexuals themselves are abjected from/isolated within bourgeois society. Ending the abjection of middle-class queers from/within middle-class society is definitely a necessary and worthy political goal. However, as my reading of Cranes would indicate, those who pursue it would do well to be aware of the other oppressive social relations that are wound up with the middle-class's suppression of homosexuality, and to recognize as well the privileges held by middle-class queers.
An example from the text helps to illustrate how oppressive class relations are wound up with the middle-class suppression of homosexuality. Rose’s reaction when Philip comes out to her and Owen demonstrates the way in which the "absolute safety" of white middle-class heterosexual subjectivity is based on the mutual rejection not only of gays but also of the less economically privileged from bourgeois society.

[U]p until this moment she had thought about [gay] lives as occasionally and casually as she thought about the lives of the doormen in the building, whom she passed sometimes and wondered, Where do they live? Do they have families? . . . . Now, suddenly, it was as if she had been thrown into a distant, distasteful world . . . . Does this mean, she wondered, that from now on, every time I read the word ‘homosexual’ in a book, or hear it on the news, I will be hit in the stomach? I will have to cover my ears? She thought, suddenly, of AIDS and wanted to cover her ears. (170)

Rose’s thoughts trace a trajectory from an association of gays with doormen, from whom she has heretofore been able to maintain a comfortable social distance, to her experience of Philip’s revelation as an assault on her own bodily integrity, to AIDS. The text thus demonstrates the contemporary salience of Foucault’s discussion of the bourgeois origins of sexuality: Rose’s need to preserve her body from "the many dangers and contacts, to be isolated from others so that it [can] retain its differential value" (Foucault 123) works along lines of both class and sexuality. Philip’s revelation threatens Rose’s bourgeois
emotional insularity, her ability to define both gays and doormen as others---"Do they have families?" (emphasis added)--from whom she is comfortably distanced. The "insistent linking of AIDS and homosexuality" (Patton 160) in right-wing/mainstream public discourse\(^\text{18}\) is likewise shown here to be a product of the bourgeois deployment of sexuality.\(^\text{19}\) That is, the conceptualization of AIDS as "the homosexual disease" that invades intact, innocent heterosexual bodies is possible only because homosexuals

\[\text{\textsuperscript{18}}\text{I wish I could say this has changed, but two recent cultural texts prove otherwise: first, a local news report last month quoted, without further comment, a Gainesville sperm bank official's claim that the bank requires its donors to be monogamous, healthy, and heterosexual--as though the three were necessarily correlated; second, Richard Horton's May 1996 article "Truth and Heresy About AIDS," which appeared in The New York Review of Books, cites a prominent scientist's thesis that homosexuals get AIDS because they "take nitrites to enhance sexual experience or take other drugs such as amphetamines or cocaine" (16), thus increasing their susceptibility to auto-immune dysfunction. That such a claim can pretend to scientific validity is nothing short of absurd, given that it is based, as Horton notes, on "surveys" rather than any objectively verifiable method of study (16). No researcher not invested in proving his/her own homophobic prejudices could possibly overlook the difficulty in finding a representative sample of the gay population through a survey, or the possibility of leg-pulling on the part of gays (or others masquerading as gays) filling out such "surveys."

\[\text{\textsuperscript{19}}\text{Tellingly, AIDS education has worked most dramatically among the middle- and upper-classes, so much so that contemporary news reports claim that new HIV cases are no longer highest in the (predominantly race- and class-privileged) gay male community, but among poor women. See Cindy Patton's "Tremble, Hetero Swine!" for a discussion of how new-right discourse not only links AIDS with homosexuality, but connects both with uncivilized Africans, thereby consolidating "new-right identity as (white) Western and heterosexual" (157).} \]
themselves are experienced as intruders whose very presence assault a bourgeois heterosexual bodily and emotional integrity premised on the exclusion of homosexuality. It is this phenomenon that makes the identity politics slogan "We’re here, we’re queer, get used to it!" so appropriate, so fabulous, so necessary within a bourgeois context. Without gay identity politics such as Philip’s, "homosexuality" would remain, for Rose and those like her, something out there, as distant and insignificant as doormen are to a classist consciousness.

However, middle-class gay identity politics is liable to founder, as it does in Leavitt’s text, on precisely the same bourgeois mechanism of exclusion or, to bring in Kristeva’s psychoanalytic term, abjection. Compare Philip’s reaction to a young female street hustler to Rose’s reaction to Philip’s declaration of homosexuality. Almost immediately after he claims that the gay men of his generation "'know [being gay is] a lot more than a matter of

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20 Along these lines, in "How to Bring Your Kids Up Gay," Eve Sedgwick discusses how, despite its liberal espousal of tolerance towards homosexuals, contemporary "revisionist psychoanalysis" such as that set forth in the DSM-III is still complicitous, through its treatment of male effeminacy, with the culturally "endemic" wish that "gay people not exist" (76). Sedgwick cites Richard C. Friedman as representative of such "revisionist psychoanalysis." Friedman reveals his homophobia by arguing first, that effeminate boys turn out gay because other men, in Sedgwick’s words, "don’t validate them as masculine" (74), and second, that parents, peers, and psychoanalysts have the right to try to enforce a "'heterosexual outcome'" by punishing boys for effeminacy (78).
who you sleep with" (155), Philip and his gay companions encounter "a teenage girl in serious punk garb" who asks the group for some money. Philip "look[s] blithely over her head and walk[s] on," while John, an older gay man, tells her to "'[s]hut up, bitch!'" when, angry that no-one in the group acknowledges her or gives her money, she calls them faggots. The description of Philip looking "blithely over her head" echoes both the earlier description of the male cruising ground where men "star[e] past each other, stroking erections" (77), and Rose's desire to "cover her ears" when confronted by her son's homosexuality. Philip's response to the impoverished is essentially no different than Rose's response to his coming out. Rose wants to "cover her ears" while Philip "look[s] blithely over [their] head[s]."

Hence, the text demonstrates that the white middle-class gay identity politician's need for emotional insularity replicates the very mechanism whereby his own subjectivity is abjected from the middle-class social order; thus, the text ends up arguing that emotional safety, however preferable it is to the abject-gay subjectivity lived by Philip's father, and however much more conducive it is to stable gay relationships, is not of itself enough to produce wide-scale social change, and of itself does not counter even the roots of homophobia. The parallel between Philip looking "blithely over [the young girl's] head" and the men in the park "staring past each other" demonstrates that,
even after coming out, the contemporary middle-class gay identity politician is shadowed by the effects of middle-class abject-gay subjectivity as it has been shaped by the bourgeois regulation of sexuality. Owen's experiences with homosexual desire are paradigmatic here. Just as the proto-gay or abject-gay subject denies his own implication in his desire, and the middle-class heterosexual subject denies his/her implication in homophobia, the middle-class white gay man buys his emotional "safety" by denying that poverty is real and that he is implicated in the poverty of others.

Philip's privileged ability to separate himself from the teenage hustler is also due in part to race, as indicated by the fact that Jerene's parents, when they make essentially the same choice as Philip to deny their own implication in poverty, must abject their own parents to do so: while not always correlated, race and class oppression are strongly linked. Remember, for example, that the Parkses' abjection of their parents is dictated in part by the racial oppression they face and their need to separate themselves from the wrong kind of blacks, i.e., poor ones. Perhaps an understanding of the greater complexity of her position as a black lesbian feminist explains why Jerene

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21 Thus, while the majority of the poor are whites, within racial minority groups, higher percentages are poor.

22 A character in Toni Morrison's first novel, The Bluest Eye, expresses this class-based distinction as that between the "neat and quiet" "colored people" and the "dirty and loud" "niggers" (87).
belongs to several political organizations and volunteers at the gay hotline, while Philip's major community involvement is limited to his membership in his college's student organization for lesbians and gays. Hence, the text leads us to consider the difficulty of coalition politics for middle-class white gay men who have been socialized in a heterocentric culture in which their sexuality is an extremely isolating force, and who have no conscious experience of collective identification other than that involving their sexuality. We can thus reasonably expect that such men might have difficulty taking part in collective political action, particularly when that collectivity includes others with whom they do not necessarily feel safe, and who would challenge their ability to maintain hegemonic control over the proceedings. As Bernice Johnson Reagon says, "It's very important not to confuse . . . coalition and home"; unlike "home," Reagon explains, coalition "ain't safe for nobody" (360).

"Home," however, in the form of a stable, monogamous, bourgeois gay relationship is precisely what Philip most urgently desires. Consonant with his socialization within white middle-class heterosexual society, Philip enacts his desire for men in gendered terms. Like the middle-class characters in Leavitt's textual world in general, Philip vacillates between a feminized emotional "hunger" produced by too much bourgeois safety/isolation and a masculine
emotional safety desired by the emotionally hungry and based on the denial of such desperate "hunger." (I take the term "hunger" from Philip's wry observation that "in New York, to get what you wanted, you had above all never to look hungry" [34].) In exploring the transposition of gendered terms into gay relationships, the text further demonstrates the necessity of an understanding of the psychic as a force having material effects in the social realm. Far from being an independent entity, the psychic is formed by a multiplicity of material forces within the social realm—including, in The Lost Language of Cranes, the ideology of all-encompassing heterosexual romance as disseminated through pop culture. This ideology is instrumental in producing middle-class emotional "hunger" along lines of gender. Not insignificantly, Philip works as an editor of romance novels. Through these and other heterosexual texts, argues Cranes, the love that eats you up is rendered normative for women, who, like Philip before Rob, take up the role of the emotionally hungry one. For example, Rose compares her love for Owen to her friend Rhea's for her husband: "Rhea was possessed by a passion for her husband so complete and absorbing it overshadowed even her instinct for self-preservation, her need for dignity. By comparison, Rose's love for Owen seemed like nothing at all" (91). Such all-consuming masochistic heterosexual female passion is
rendered normative by mass media texts such as the Billie Holiday song quoted earlier.

Philip takes up this ideology of absolute immersion in the beloved, comparing his relationship with Eliot to one of the romance novels he has edited. He reflects that "each night they seemed to consume each other, like Sylvia and Steve [the protagonists of the novel], 'licked by white-hot flame, the fire of their urgent need'" (107). Having been socialized through exposure to such texts, Philip believes that "that is how love affairs [are] supposed to begin," and doesn't understand why "in his case the fire was burning out a cavern inside of him," leaving him with "less than he'd started with," unlike Eliot, who would have "things to return to" when the affair with Philip ended (108). Philip, the editor/reader of romance novels, is thus "feminized" from the start in his relationship with Eliot, relegated to a role resembling that of the 1950s housewife: someone whose existence revolves around her man, someone who doesn't have important (i.e., paid) work to do--"things to return to"--in the public sphere. The text thus supports Teresa Ebert's contention that "patriarchal ideology . . . operates through romance narratives . . . to mystify the social contradictions and material conditions of women's exploitation in patriarchal capitalism" (9). Further, when Philip first meets Eliot, he almost consciously works to construct Eliot in the idealistic terms of such romances,
editing out his own envy of Eliot's wealth. "He's rich, he thought enviously, but then because he was trying to fall in love with Eliot, he changed his mind. Freedom, he thought. Integrity" (38). Philip's (bourgeois) desire for perfect romantic love does not allow for an examination of the ugly realities of class privilege and oppression. He wants to be in love, to live the image of love created by heterosexual society but which could be occupied by gay subjects as well. Thus, despite its longing for a forever inaccessible, lost gay language, the text reveals that there is no pure, revolutionary gay desire--the middle-class gay white man, too, has been marked by the same heterosexual conventions against which Philip attempts to rebel.

Leavitt's novel demonstrates how material forces which encourage individuals to accede to an emotionally insular subjectivity coopt the potentially oppositional politics of those who, like Philip and the Parkses', are oppressed in one respect but who also have enough privilege to keep themselves safe from other "dangers and contacts," in Foucault's words. Philip eventually abandons his role as the hungry, abject-gay subject, takes up a monogamous relationship with Brad, a friend from college, and returns to a life of political inaction. 23 Philip is able to

23Adam Mars-Jones criticizes the text's celebration of such gay monogamy. Mars-Jones argues that, as a result of AIDS, writers such as Leavitt are able to portray monogamy as "an achievement against odds rather than a laying down of the splendid burden of improvisation" (44). See Richard
achieve his relationship with Brad after having a one-night stand with Rob, a very vulnerable, frightened younger man who shakes and is extremely passive during his sexual encounter with Philip. In this scenario, Philip is now the older, more experienced one, and when Rob begins leaving messages on his machine, Philip does the same thing to Rob that his former boyfriend Eliot did to him, i.e., he doesn’t return his phone calls. In this way, Philip is able to end the most abject period of his life when, after Eliot breaks up with him, he wanders around New York at night, crying in public places and once having a sexual encounter with another man in a booth at a porn shop. Through this example, the text argues that gay couples can replicate the conventions of sexist heterosexual relationships, with differences in age and experience substituting for gender. Reflecting on his behavior towards Rob and its cruelty, Philip recalls his friend Sally’s comment that "[m]en were assholes . . . and now, for the first time, regretfully, Philip felt himself sinking into the ranks of men" (205). Philip assumes, then, the role of the "man" in the relationship, forgoing his earlier feminine role of being

Hall for a discussion of the increasing importance of long-term familial relationships in contemporary gay fiction; as Hall expresses it, the "sexual outlaw, long a staple of gay fiction . . . ., is giving way to the sexual in-law" (26).
the "hungry" one. This "masculine" component of his subjectivity is also operative in allowing Philip to separate himself from his social world and that which it defines as abject, in particular, the young female hustler from whom he turns away, the too-apparently hungry subject who craves not just attention, but money.

In conclusion, contrary to the claims by Mark Blasius and Richard Mohr with which we began this chapter, The Lost Language of Cranes reveals more than a nodding acquaintance with other-than-sexual forms of oppression, and a willingness to acknowledge that those whose primary oppression is based in sexuality will not necessarily make the leap towards acting against their own implication in other oppressions. The politics of coming out is useful for mitigating some of the pain and suffering caused by the abjection of homosexuality, but inadequate to the extent that it privileges the middle-class white gay man's loss of a gay language over other forms of oppression. Because homosexuality is indeed more than a matter of who you sleep

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24 Philip's accession to such a "masculine" subjectivity indicates a parallel between middle-class Euro-American gay relationships and Mexican/Latin-American ones, in that, as Tomás Almaguer argues in "Chicano Men: A Cartography of Homosexual Identity and Behavior," Latin men likewise take on distinctly gendered, culture-specific masculine/feminine roles in their sexual relations with each other. In light of the definite stigma accorded to effeminate men even within gay communities, Almaguer might want to revise his argument that, in difference to his understanding of U.S. conceptions of homosexuality, in Latin cultures the "feminine"--passive--partner alone is stigmatized for his role in anal intercourse (79).
with, gay identity politics can function as a way to begin chipping at the ice in which moribund white middle-class heterosexual subjectivities such as Rose’s are ensconced, revealing the precariousness of the emotional safety which prevents such subjects from acting against oppression. However, *The Lost Language of Cranes* teaches us that without a conscious effort to pry its white, middle-class male practitioners away from their race, class, and gender insularity, a politics centered on the act of coming out will produce nothing but better lives for those who, though oppressed in terms of their sexuality, also already have significant social privileges.
"'He was--singing about us. He is us': racial identity and the black gay gospel singer in James Baldwin's Just Above My Head

"We shall overcome,  
We shall overcome some day.  
Oh, deep in my heart  
I do believe oh  
We shall overcome some day." (Qtd. in Seeger and Reiser 9)

There was a time when "We Shall Overcome" would consistently move me to tears, not because I associated it with African-American people's courageous resistance to the myriad atrocities of racism, but because I associated it with my own resistance—as a white person, though I would not have consciously said so—to homophobia. I was able to make this equation because I knew little about the history of black resistance to racism and how it differed from and connected to the multi-racial history of resistance to homophobia. We sang this song over and over again the night I and fourteen others--mostly white-skinned European-Americans, with the exception of one African-American woman and one Latina woman--were arrested in what the newspapers proclaimed a "gay civil rights sit-in." And while I do not know how other whites heard that song that night, I do know that I sang it as though being queer made me black, that is,
subjected me to the same kind and depth of oppression as that faced by blacks in the United States.¹

This use of black civil rights rhetoric by the predominantly white gay rights movement is dangerous if it does not include an acknowledgement of its source and of the differing histories of resistance staged by blacks of multiple sexualities against racism and queers of multiple races against homophobia. In Gainesville, two groups who consistently head support for homophobic legislation—the Ku Klux Klan and the American "Family" Association—have used this mistake to reinforce some blacks' homophobia by triggering their anger at such appropriation. The radical right has also used this tactic nationally, "gain[ing] support among people of color by saying that rich white men [are] trying to hijack their movement" (Mandy Carter, qtd. in Human Rights Campaign 11). However, rather than working against racism, such homophobic hate groups further race hatred through their alliance with organizations such as the Klan. Critics and writers play into the hands of these groups when they erase the presence of black gay characters in James Baldwin's last novel, Just Above My Head, and when

¹White gay activists Bob and Rod Jackson-Paris made this same error at a talk they gave at the University of Florida, in which they claimed that white gays' experiences of oppression gave them the ability to—and I quote—"own" black people's oppression.
they deny the significance of gay sexuality in Baldwin's life and work in general.  

Baldwin himself, unfortunately, was nauseatingly familiar with the double whammy of homophobic and racist oppression which conspire to keep black gays almost completely out of cultural sight.  

Just Above My Head directly confronts both the notion that black identity is necessarily heterosexual and the denial of black history which allows the simplistic equation of "black" and "white queer" oppression. Baldwin's text tells the story of Arthur Montana, a black gay gospel singer who dies of heart 

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2Trudier Harris perpetuates such a denial when she claims that after his first novel, Baldwin "dealt with homosexuality (among white characters)" (2614). Though she immediately thereafter includes "racial and sexual identities" in her list of Baldwin's topics, the parenthetical phrase "among white characters" effectively erases Baldwin's courageous choice to represent homosexuality among black characters in his last novel. For a discussion of other writers who efface the importance of sexuality in Baldwin's life and work, see Emmanuel S. Nelson's article "Critical Deviance: Homophobia and the Reception of James Baldwin's Fiction."

3I say "almost completely" because, in addition to Baldwin, a few other black gay writers have begun to win some cultural recognition, even if only within the realm of lesbian and gay studies, and have used their work to contest the invisibility of black gay men. For example, see Joseph Beam's In the Life: A Black Gay Anthology and Essex Hemphill's Brother to Brother: New Writings By Black Gay Men.

4Throughout, I use the nomenclature of "black gay men" rather than the longer "black homosexual men." In putting "black" before "gay," I am following Max Smith's usage of "Black gays" to refer to black homosexuals who view, as did Baldwin, their "racial heritage as primary" (226). Perhaps because he could not find a place for his racial subjectivity in gay culture, Baldwin did not himself
failure at the age of thirty-nine, through the eyes of Arthur's older brother and manager, Hall Montana. The book opens with a description of Arthur's death and proceeds as a series of flashbacks through which Hall deliberates on his own life, his brother's life, and the lives of their loved ones. Throughout, Arthur's voice is presented as a vehicle for a collective form of black subjectivity, as the text makes explicit when a black civil rights activist introduces Arthur by proclaiming, "'It seemed to us, to us who heard him, that he was--singing about us. He is us'" (392).

Sadly, however, Baldwin's novel suggests that not all the members of his community want to accept the black gay Gospel singer as representative or even part of "us."

Yet if Baldwin's argument is correct--and I believe it is--homophobia and racism share a common root. This chapter explores Baldwin's last novel's argument that both racism and homophobia can be linked to a rejection of the bodily parts, products and traits that make the subject vulnerable, mortal, and collectively constituted. I explain how, against the anti-bodily tenets of white racist subjectivity, the text strategically upholds the "black" subjectivity embodied in Gospel music. I then discuss the opposition identify as "gay." At various times, he saw "Gay Liberation," like "Women's Liberation," as "essentially a white middle-class phenomenon" (Baldwin, "James" 197), or more positively later in his life, as part of a larger movement towards accepting the essential androgyny of all human beings (Price 688-690).
between the two forms of subjectivity in terms of their differing relations to and constructions of history. The text opens up the possibility of using racial terms metaphorically, with "white" and "black" denoting differing values and ways of constructing the body. However, I claim, the text ultimately argues that we keep racial terms grounded in the differing material conditions faced by white and black subjects. Finally, I turn to a discussion of the place of sexuality in the text, analyzing how, far from comprising separate registers of difference, racism and homophobia are inextricably linked in this novel. Baldwin's text highlights the role played by homophobia in violence against black men, and upholds the position of the black gay man as an essential contributor to black culture.

Before proceeding with an analysis of the text, it will be helpful to introduce M.M. Bakhtin's notion of the "grotesque body" as a way to theorize Baldwin's text's arguments concerning the role played by differing constructions of the body in white racist and black Gospel subjectivities. While Julia Kristeva views abjection as a condition of subjectivity necessary to allow the subject to distinguish him/herself from the maternal body (Oliver, Reading 161), M.M. Bakhtin's definition of the "grotesque body" emphasizes that the rejection or denial of certain aspects of the body has a history, rather than resulting from some supposedly universal, unavoidable process of
subjectivity. Bakhtin defines the "grotesque body" in contrast to the new "bodily canon" which has prevailed in the "official literature of European peoples . . . [for] the last four hundred years" (Rabelais 319). This canon "presents an entirely finished, completed, strictly limited body, which is shown from the outside as something individual," as the "impenetrable facade" of "a closed individuality that does not merge with other bodies and with the world" (320). In such constructions of the body, "[a]ll orifices . . . are closed," and "[t]hat which protrudes, bulges, sprouts, or branches off . . . is eliminated, hidden, or moderated" (320). This closed, finished, individual body stands in contrast to the grotesque body, which prevailed in European literature until the new canon, and which still exists, according to Bakhtin, in common speech and in literature, "especially," he notes, "if the literature is gay or abusive" (319)--an interesting choice of words even when we remember that Bakhtin's translator is using "gay" in the old sense of "full of fun." The grotesque body is "a body in the act of becoming," one which merges with the world (317). Constructions of the grotesque body emphasize "[e]ating, drinking, defecation and other elimination (sweating, blowing of the nose, sneezing), as well as copulation, pregnancy, dismemberment, [and being] swallowed up by another body"; this emphasis creates "a double body" which "[i]n the endless chain of bodily life
... retains the parts in which one link joins the other, in which the life of one body is born from the death of the preceding, older one" (318).

*Just Above My Head* associates the grotesque body with African-American culture, naming as "white" the "new bodily canon" which, it argues, is based on the abjection of the undesirable aspects of the grotesque body: the bodily products, parts, and traits which make the body vulnerable, limited, mortal, and collective in the sense referred to above, in which "the life of one body is born from the death of the preceding, older one." In its descriptions of the white-created and dominated institution of advertising, the text exposes the new bodily canon as an abjection of the grotesque body. According to Hall, advertising forbids the American people "to stink . . . ; to grow gray, to wrinkle, to be sexless; to have unsmiling children; to be lusterless of eye, hair, or teeth; to be flabby of breast, belly, or bottom" (438). The body shown in advertising does not age or protrude too much; it is "shown from the outside" as the "entirely finished, completed, strictly limited body"--"the impenetrable facade" of "a closed individuality that does not merge with other bodies and with the world" (320). In the "technicolor bazaar" promulgated by advertising, "[f]aggots . . . never appear" and "death shall have no dominion" (438).
In contrast to this strangely un-bodily body, created primarily by white people, the text emphasizes the blood, sweat, shit, come, tears, breasts, pussies, balls, asses and pricks of both white and black subjects. The abjection of these aspects of the body, the text argues, has racial, gender, sexual, and class implications. The racial implications of the grotesque body are encoded in metaphor from the very beginning of the book, and are wound up with the text’s title, which refers to Hall’s hallucinatory vision of his bedroom ceiling dropping to "not more than two inches, just above my head," threatening to crush him—a vision brought on by his brother’s death (24). This awareness of his own mortality translates into Hall’s description of his shit as "dark messengers" of mortality, "little bit[s] of oneself [which] drop into [the earth’s] darkness, accumulating patiently there the terms of an ultimate rendezvous: one day one’s shit will hit the earth an hour or so before one joins it, maybe less" (25). Judith Butler’s description of the abject implicitly argues that abjection is modelled on the separation of the subject from his/her shit: for Butler, the abject is "that which has been expelled from the body, discharged as excrement, literally rendered ‘Other’" (Gender 133). Hall’s description of his shit, in contrast, does not render it "Other," but claims it as "a little bit of oneself," moreover, a "dark" bit which signifies mortality.
Ironically enough, given white Christianity’s notion of the body as the depository of sin which the Christian spirit transcends, the text presents Gospel music as an expression of body-positive black subjectivity, an art form which encodes African-American subjects’ collectively empowering response to their oppression. Unlike the black church in Go Tell It on the Mountain, the black churches in Just Above My Head, while also being sites of human folly and hypocrisy, allow some affirmation of the grotesque body. Hall details the hard-on he would get as a teenager watching Sister Miller as she "stroke[d] her breasts . . . [and] started to shout" when inspired by the Holy Spirit during the church service (70). Too, Arthur’s lover and eventual life partner Jimmy laughingly remarks that he knows of no other people besides his own--i.e., American blacks--who "learned how to play honky-tonk, whorehouse piano in church," and "all the time grinning in Mister Charlie’s face!" (363). In contrast to dominant white forms of Christianity, the African-American Christianity described in this text, while not perfect--after all, it is the members of the black church whose homophobic judgement of Arthur  

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5In other works, most notably the long short story "Sonny’s Blues," Baldwin used blues rather than Gospel as the touchstone of African-American culture and subjectivity. For an analysis of Baldwin’s use of the blues, see Marlene Mosher’s "James Baldwin’s Blues." Mosher argues that Baldwin "came to consider ‘freedom’ to be characteristic of only ‘some gospel songs [while] . . . in all jazz, and especially in the blues, there is something tart and ironic’" (114).
helps speed him to his death—is not based on a wholesale rejection of the grotesque body, as is white racist subjectivity. The black Gospel subjectivity celebrated by the text should not, then, be assumed to repudiate the body in the same way as the dominant white form of Christianity imaged for Hall by the medieval penitents who would go through the streets "beating" themselves. 6 "[H]ow deeply, how relentlessly, they despised themselves!", he comments (417); how relentlessly, that is, they despised what I have been calling the grotesque body in which they inevitably shared.

The text connects racist oppression to the abjection of the grotesque body in the scene in which Hall recounts how, "in those years" (i.e., pre-Civil Rights movement), a white salesperson dealing with a black customer would "nearly strangle on his or her tongue" when about to make the "unwise" move of warning the black customer of the price (103). Hall explains how "you pretend not to notice" the salesperson's mistake: "it is as though you understand how panic can make a person fart, and you indicate that you know the smell won't linger" (103). Black presence serves to

6In Gaiety Transfigured: Gay Self-Representation in American Literature, David Bergman cites Amitai Avi-Ram’s warning to white readers not to impose "the European Christian opposition of ‘soul and body or between the sacred and sexual’ on African-American religious beliefs" (173). Conversely, we should also not "‘oversexualiz[е] the Afro-American [concept of] "soul" in order to distinguish it . . . from the dualisms of Euro-American theology’" (173).
bring out the grotesque aspects of the white subject’s body, the "fart" produced by racist "panic." However, the salesperson’s "panic" is complicated by class, in that it is contributed to by the presence of the "house dick . . . buffing his fingernails next to the panic button"; as Hall says, the salesperson "merely works here" (103). Black presence threatens to activate the upper-class white "panic button" by reminding wealthy whites that their goods, gained historically through theft, violence, and exploitation, could be stolen back from them; post-slavery, the white racist subject reads the very existence of the black subject as a reminder of his/her tenuous control over his/her property.

Gospel music encodes African-American subjects’ collective response to the conditions of such racist oppression. And while Arthur and his friends sing in Gospel choirs in the north, the text argues that Gospel music needs to be understood in terms of racism in the South.7 Traveling south, Hall reflects, is "traveling through history" (384). Hall begins to understand the significance of Gospel music as an expression of black subjectivity when he accompanies Arthur and Arthur’s pianist Peanut on their singing tour of civil rights rallies in black Southern

7Here I should emphasize that the text does not portray racism as the sole property of the South; rather, it argues for the historical importance of Southern race relations to contemporary black subjectivity.
churches. When Arthur begins to sing a Gospel song at one of these rallies, Hall feels as though "all their [i.e., blacks']] passion were coming through that voice" (394). This "joy and power," Hall tells us, are the same he had felt upon arriving in the South. He continues,

I was glad, I was relieved, to be where I belonged. This sounds insane, of course, for I did not know the South, had never been here, did not know Mrs. Reed [their hostess], or anything about her, had been frightened all the way here, for my brother, for myself, for Peanut--and yet, once I arrived, I was glad. It was as though something had been waiting here for me, something that I needed. (396)

This "something" that Hall finds in the South is, of course, the black Gospel subjectivity that "had brought us through many hard trials" and "would be forced to bring us through many more" (396).

However, the text does not romanticize the black Gospel subject's acceptance of the grotesque body, but rather, demonstrates at what cost this acceptance comes and under what historical conditions black people have produced it; as Hall reflects during one civil rights rally--the one after which his and Arthur's friend Peanut is abducted by the Klan, never to be heard from or seen again--"it is one thing to know that you are going to die and something else to know that you may be murdered" (396). Peanut's horrifying death at the hands of white racists--made all the more horrifying by the fact that the text leaves the details of this death up to the reader's imagination, telling us only that Hall, Arthur, and Crunch never find him again after he is
abducted--affects all of these black men and their families deeply, hastening both Arthur's and his first lover Crunch's journeys into the drug and alcohol addiction that eventually kill them. Baldwin's text makes such racial atrocities resonate in the black Gospel singer's words: "And that mighty silence fell again, as Arthur paused, threw back his head, throwing his voice out, out, beyond the [white] motorists and the [racist] governor, and the blood-stained trees, trees blood-stained forever: Have you been through/ great sorrow?" (395). Little wonder, given their experiences of racism, that the black church-goers respond "Yes, Lord!" (395) to the Gospel singer's song. The collective subject of black Gospel music--"[W]e are the song we sing," according to Jimmy (552)--is thus grounded in the current material conditions which leave "no room" for black subjects (113). As Arthur's first lover Crunch sings

"Oh, there wasn't no room . . . no room at the inn! He was not singing about a road in Egypt two thousand years ago, but about his mama and his daddy and himself, and . . . those streets which you and I . . . are going to walk until we meet." (113)

Here as throughout the text, Hall as narrator uses "you" to refer to the collective white racist subject, while "I" stands in for Hall as representative of the black subject in general.

However, while the text is careful to demonstrate the way in which the specific historical conditions which affect African-American subjects ground Gospel subjectivity, it
also takes pains to avoid what Trinh T. Minh-ha terms the "identity enclosure" (95), in which difference becomes reified into an absolute. White racist subjectivity could "meet" the black subjectivity encoded in Gospel music; in Hall's words, Gospel music is "black" only because

the people who have betrayed themselves into being white dare not believe that a sound so rude and horrible, so majestic and universal, can possibly issue from them--though it has, and it does; that is how they recognize it, and why they flee from it. (290)

Thus, the text claims that despite the material disparity between white and black subjects and the differing forms of subjectivity associated with those conditions, black subjects share with the white racist subject the "universal" experience of "rude," "horrible," and "majestic" human embodiment.

This emphasis on the "universal" experience of human embodiment has some interesting implications for discussions of abjection as it relates to historical conditions of oppression. Kelly Oliver argues that Kristeva attributes the oppression of women to our lack of cultural discourses which affirm that the child was once part of the mother, what we might call, following Bakhtin, the child's grotesque bodily connection with the mother. Without such a discourse, "the child feels its connection to the maternal body as a threat" (1993, 162); this threat is then collectively projected onto all women. Oliver's argument can be transposed into racial terms: without a discourse
that affirms the white subject’s connection to the black body, this connection is perceived as a threat, leading to the oppression of black-skinned subjects. Yet in contrast to Kristeva’s claim with regard to maternal discourse, Baldwin’s text documents an already existing racial discourse which affirms a grotesque bodily connection between black and white-skinned subjects; however, this discourse is historically present only in black communities, spoken primarily by black-skinned subjects. Baldwin’s text thereby demonstrates the necessity for using Kristeva’s theories cautiously when it comes to race, particularly as there is a difference between the dominant group’s discourse and that of the oppressed group.

Unfortunately, the difference between white and black discursive practices made it difficult for Baldwin to successfully communicate his vision to whites. In particular, Baldwin’s attempt to foster whites’ understanding of the grotesque bodily connection between white and black subjects has often been met with disparagement and misunderstanding. Margaret Mead, for example, misread Baldwin’s argument for the collective and historical basis of subjectivity, demonstrating in the dialogue I go on to quote what Baldwin would term a peculiarly "white," American notion of subjectivity as individual and separated from history--an odd notion for an anthropologist of such renown to have held. Before the
excerpt from which I quote, Baldwin argues that "sin demands atonement." Mead characterizes his position as implying that "the sins of the fathers are visited on the children," and Baldwin replies, "They are." The rest of the dialogue is worth quoting in full.

MEAD: The consequences are visited on the children.
BALDWIN: It’s the same thing, isn’t it?
MEAD: No, it’s not the same thing at all. Because it’s one thing to say, All right, I’m suffering for what my fathers did--
BALDWIN: I don’t mean that, I don’t mean that! I don’t mean that at all! I mean something else! I mean something which I may not be able to get to . . . .
MEAD: . . . but when you talk about atonement you’re talking about people who weren’t born when this was committed.
BALDWIN: No. I mean the recognition of where one finds oneself in time or history or now. . . . After all, I’m not guiltless, either. I sold my brothers or my sisters--
MEAD: When did you?
BALDWIN: Oh, a thousand years ago, it doesn’t make any difference.
MEAD: It does make a difference. I think if one takes that position it’s absolutely hopeless. I will not accept guilt for what anybody else did. I will accept guilt for what I did myself. (Qtd. in Bigsby 109)

This dialogue enacts a conflict between the two different modes of subjectivity in their relationship to history and collective identity. Mead finds the collective, historical subjectivity which Baldwin insists upon--"the recognition of where one finds oneself in time or history or now"--to be "hopeless" for the white subject who must confront racial guilt. Baldwin, however, maintains that such "atonement" is necessary if we are to move beyond the history of racism. Baldwin’s novel articulates more clearly what Baldwin was not "able to get to." Specifically, it
connects the rejection of the grotesque body with that of history when Hall claims that "history is . . . to be found . . . in our repudiations" (481). Through the novel, Baldwin in effect tells Mead that it is not a matter of what you did or of you suffering for what your ancestors did; rather, what "you" are, including your insistence on the distinction between your "self" and those who came before you, your "repudiation" of the history that has enabled you to become a renowned anthropologist studying other, darker cultures, is a product of racial history.

Baldwin's text argues that the white subject's rejection of racial memory and history is responsible for the ongoing trauma of racism. "[C]ollectively speaking, white people have no shame," Hall reflects; they also "have the shortest memories of any people in the world--which explains, no doubt, why they have no shame" (481). Without a historical memory of how "the life of one body is born from the death of the preceding, older one" (Bakhtin 318)--i.e., without a conscious remembrance of the bodily and material relations that have produced them--white subjects have none of the "shame" that could propel them to cease enacting racist oppression. This rejection of racial history occurs at both the individual and collective levels. Individually, Hall claims, the white (male) subject "can't forget the black breasts that gave [him] milk: but [he doesn't] dare remember, either" (398). The term "dare" here
implies that to remember this primary bodily connection with a black woman would be an act of courage. This association of memory with courage is picked up by the narrator’s definition of the difference between a "white" relationship to personal and social history and a "black" relationship as that "between flight and confrontation" (514). The white racist subject "flies" from his individual bodily and collective social origins, while the black subject--the black-skinned subject who chooses black subjectivity--"confronts" these bodily and social/historical origins, the Southern "trees blood-stained forever" (395). Here, it is pertinent to note that Peanut, the lightest skinned, is the one taken and lynched by the white supremacists; the visual evidence of miscegenation threatens the racist’s tightly-bound white identity by showing where, in Minh-ha’s words, "categories . . . leak" (94). The lynching of Peanut enacts on the social level the abjection of the "dark bits" of the grotesque body by racist white subjectivity, allowing the white racist subject to "fly" from his/her grotesque bodily connection to the black subject by placing the mixed-race subject firmly outside the limits of white identity.

In line with its general opposition to tightly-bounded racial identities, the text at times pushes the terms "black" and "white" beyond their material association with African-American and European subjects respectively. For example, Hall calls the "whiteness" of Reverend Williams, a
speaker at a civil rights rally, into question when Williams condemns the hypocrisy behind the exhortation that the poor pull themselves up by their bootstraps: "'You can’t talk about bootstraps unless you got boots, and, Lord knows, we didn’t have no boots,'" he says (390), recounting his own experience of childhood poverty. Upon hearing this, Hall "remembers, suddenly, that thousands of black people cross the color line every year"; these people become "white Christians" simply by "chang[ing] neighborhoods" (389, 390). Here, the text uses racial terms to express class-related values: "the price the country extracts from [blacks who move into ritzy white neighborhoods] is exactly the price the country pays--for being white--and the price is incoherence" (390). This "incoherence" is a matter of one’s values--including the value one places on bodily functions--rather than solely of one’s literal economic or racial condition. Because they retain their racial memory and the values that go along with remembering their history, Hall’s family does not lose its "blackness" by living in the deadened and deadening middle-class white suburbs, while those blacks who prefer advertising’s "gaudy image" to "the truth of life" enter "the voting booth as blindly and cheerfully incoherent as they were at the supermarket, reaching out for the ‘brand’ name, the name . . . which had been most ruthlessly and successfully sold to them" (437).

Racial identity, then, has something to do with whether
one lives one's life "incoherently" buying products sold under the premises of heterosexism, classism, and racism which are contradicted by the material conditions of one's life and one's history. One's response to these conditions partially determines where one stands in relation to "black" and "white" subjectivity and the historical relations these forms embody. The blacks who live according to the "white" way of understanding the body do not recognize the disjunction between capitalist ideologies and the material conditions of their lives, unlike Revered Williams, who exposes the "incoherence" of the work ethic, the way in which one of its central metaphors depends on the supposedly universal material condition of owning shoes.

However, Reverend Williams' grounding in the material fact of having no shoes, and the way in which he uses language in accordance with this fact rather than "incoherently" constructing metaphors which deny it, suggests the necessity for keeping metaphorical usages of the terms "white" and "black" grounded in the material conditions of subjects' lives. Hence it is important to remember that Hall only wonders if Williams' is white, and does not call Williams "black" even though his subjectivity is closer to that which the text claims is an historical product of African-American culture. Reverend Williams' skin remains "white," with all the material privileges attendant upon that skin color within the boundaries of
William's class position. As the narrator says of Arthur and his white French lover Guy, "the terms [of their relationships to history] are so unutterably different" (480). Whites "use, and are protected by [their racial privilege] every hour of every day" (332). Too, despite the class-based values Reverend Williams espouses, Hall cannot help but wonder whether Williams is truly with the black cause rather than being an FBI informant (396); unlike the "incoherent" middle-class blacks Hall criticizes for their values, Williams' skin color, though not his class background, places him with the dominant social group.

The text's portrait of two opposing forms of subjectivity is complicated by its depiction of Guy, a white Frenchman with whom Arthur shares a brief but meaningful affair in Paris. In some ways Guy occupies a subject position midway between the (metaphorically and, in this text, usually literally) "black" subject who consciously inhabits history and the grotesque body, and the "white" subject-of-abjection. Yet Guy fails to acknowledge what the text's portrait of Reverend Williams ultimately emphasizes: the full extent of whites' material privileges and the differing relations of whites and blacks to history. The text describes Guy's awareness of the material history of racism, detailing how something "at the bottom of [Guy's] eyes . . . knows . . . what happened" and "refuses reconciliation"; this look is also, the narrator tells us,
"at the very bottom of Arthur's eyes" (479). After relating to Arthur his pain over residing in a racist, spiritually "bankrupt" culture that "has told too many lies about too much, has blasphemed what is sacred," Guy snorts, "It is a miracle that any one of us can fart, much less shit" (476-7). Guy's words indicate his implicit awareness that racism is connected to what I have termed an abjection of the grotesque body. Yet, in spite of his alignment with the grotesque body and the pain of knowing "what happened," Guy also attempts to avoid what the narrator terms "wrestling with [this] history" (480) by looking to Arthur for "what Arthur would not dream of looking for in Guy": "[t]he stubborn anguish Guy sees in Arthur corroborates Guy's reality, . . . begins to divest him of his irksome privilege, his blinding color, and welcomes him, so to speak, into the human race" (480). Arthur and Guy cannot remain longtime lovers, not only because "Arthur does not need Guy's suffering to corroborate his own reality," but because Guy "does not know his own [ground]" (480), i.e., has not done what the narrator claims racist whites who envy black spirituality have not done: "embrac[ed] one's only life" (486). In looking to Arthur to corroborate his reality, Guy avoids this task; looking to the black man to validate his anti-racist subjectivity is asking, as Arthur points out to him, too much, particularly given that this gesture repeats the history which Hall as narrator rails
against—that of blacks being forced to nurture whites in order to survive.

Hence, while Guy’s subjectivity does not completely abject history or the grotesque body, he has not sufficiently engaged with the racist history of his country, and with that history’s material presence in the conditions that have produced his own subjectivity—has not "embraced his . . . life" in order to "redeem," in the narrator’s word, this ongoing history. His subjectivity thus borders on that of racist whites who envy blacks for their spirituality, such as the whites who listen to the black performer Sonny Carr and "inarticulate[ly] lament" that they cannot sing as he does (486). This "paralyzing envy[,] from which what we call 'racism' derives so much of its energy," stems from the refusal, like’s Guy’s, to "embrac[e] one’s only life," a refusal which leaves the white subject "trapped outside all nourishment," perpetuating racism out of his/her "estrangement from our beginnings, from the universal source" (486, 487 emphasis added). The example of these envious whites thus warns against what Audre Lorde has analyzed as one of Western culture’s three methods of dealing with difference: that of "copy[ing]" it (115). In this text, such copying fetishizes black difference in a way which perpetuates the white subject’s appropriation of the spiritual, emotional, and/or economic labor of the oppressed black subject. In the case of the black singer, such
fetishization puts the black singer, and, I think we can extrapolate, the black writer, on a spiritual pedestal, over against the white subject, without changing the material conditions of the black artist's life. It allows him or her to continue being, like Sonny Carr, "highly esteemed as a performer and treated . . . viciously" as a person (486); indeed, such fetishizing envy would tend to reinforce this "vicious" treatment in affirming that only the oppressed black artist can sing so movingly, thus necessitating the perpetuation of the suffering sung by the black artist. "Our suffering is our bridge to one another. Everyone must cross this bridge, or die while he still lives--but this is not a political, still less, a popular apprehension" (113). Confronting his/her own "suffering," then, allows the white-skinned subject to "cross [the] bridge" to other embodied subjects; in this way the text avoids the mistake of claiming that only black subjects have this ability. Nor are whites the only ones who fear suffering: after all, Hall himself initially resists "cross[ing] [the] bridge" by being unwilling to love another human being.

The text further complicates any rigid opposition between the two forms of subjectivity by recognizing the discursive nature of memory/history, and consequently, of any construction of subjectivity. The black subject's achieved acceptance of the grotesque body's origins and of history can never be completely coherent in that memory can
never be entirely separated from "imagination" (531). Baldwin's text acknowledges the irony of using "white" language—language that has been produced and furthered by the same social and cultural institutions that have enacted genocide on Native Americans and mass murder and brutal enslavement on African-Americans, to name only two groups whose cultural survival has depended upon a simultaneous resistance to and appropriation of "white" English. Hall theorizes this irony when he explains that "the attempt to excavate a history . . . is motivated by the need to have the power to force others to recognize your presence, your right to be here" (480). Without this power, "the disputed passage will remain disputed . . . the document promising safe passage can always be revoked," because only "[p]ower clears the passage" (480-1). As Hall goes on to explain, "the paradox, here, is that power, rooted in history, is also, the mockery and the repudiation of history. The power to define the other seals one's definition of oneself" (481). In other words, the text acknowledges that the motivation for "excavat[ing]" personal and collective "history" is the need for power, specifically, the power to have one's interpretation of history accepted so that one will have "safe passage." Yet the need for power can trap the black subject in the white racist "repudiation" of the perpetual, ongoing, and often complex and contradictory motion of history; the text thus warns against the black
subject "sealing" his/her definition of self through defining the white racist as absolutely other. "[M]emory cannot be a pillar of salt, standing watch over a dead sea," Hall muses: "we need a new vocabulary" (530). This vocabulary would express how "[o]ur history is each other," and "[t]he other is ourselves" (481).

The black subject of which I speak in this chapter, then, is not "pure," does not stand completely outside the white racist subject of abjection, in that simply by opposing him/herself to white racist subjectivity the black subject gets tied up in the "sealing" of history which is enacted on the individual, bodily level as the abjection of the grotesque body. Rather, the black subject, as represented by the gospel singer, is aware of the process of abjecting the other in order to define the self. "One thing is absolutely certain," Hall reflects. "[O]ne can repudiate, or despise, no one’s history without repudiating or despising one’s own. Perhaps that is what the gospel singer is singing" (481). Here the text acknowledges the potential for perpetuating the logic of abjection inherent in any attempt to posit an opposition between modes of subjectivity.

Given this acknowledgement of the potential for playing into a logic of abjection, the text is careful to use the racialized terms "black" and "white" in a complex, strategically essentialist way, manifesting what W.E.B.
DuBois would term a "double consciousness" rooted in the African-American subject's life-affirming response to his/her contradictory historical situation in American culture. Through recognizing the black Gospel subject's ability to become "just like them" (375), the text avoids the trap of constructing a form of subjectivity that abjects the white racist's fear of embodiment. Within a context of oppression, wherein the black subject has been made to bear the weight of the white racist subject's repudiation of the body, black people are not automatically able, simply by virtue of being black, to super-humanly "transcend" the conditions of their oppression and become spiritually superior beings who have no fear of their own vulnerability and mortality. Indeed, both Hall and Peanut try to murder racist whites; Brother Miller is portrayed as a spineless, fear-ridden man whose cowardice and inability to take responsibility for himself leads him to sexually abuse his daughter; and Jimmy reveals that he most fears the hatred of white racists aroused in him during civil rights lunch counter sit-ins, because such hatred makes him "just like them" (375). Hall, too, has to struggle with his sexism, and like Arthur, his fear of love. "[T]hem is always us, they are always we," Hall muses at one point (105), thereby mitigating against any tendency to base black subjectivity on a mirror-image repudiation of the white racist fear of embodiment.
The text as a whole dons what Henry Louis Gates, Jr. has termed "the empowering mask of black difference" in order to "talk that talk, the language of black difference" ("Canon" 29); that is, the text argues in favor of a "black" affirmation of the grotesque body--an affirmation African-American subjects are historically situated to make--without making that affirmation into dogma or a necessary, quasi-biological component of African-American subjectivity. Another way to say this might be to explain how, in emphasizing both the literal and metaphorical meanings of racial terms, Baldwin's text walks a middle-ground in what Kimberly W. Bentson has identified as a debate within African-American literature on the meaning of race. One side, represented by Ralph Ellison, emphasizes the "dialectical" nature and "subversive ambiguity" of Afro-American language and constructions of blackness, while the other side, represented by Amiri Baraka, "longs for [the] incarnation [of blackness] as literal presence" (171, 172). Baldwin's text inscribes both the "literal presence" of blackness as a property/product of black subjects--a form of subjectivity encoded in black Gospel--and the metaphorical and dialectically-motivated nature of any construction of blackness, including that advanced by the text itself.

At this juncture, I would like to turn to a discussion of the function of homosexuality in the text. Baldwin's portrait of Arthur Montana as a vehicle of black
subjectivity is complicated by the fact that Arthur Montana is homosexual. Yet Arthur is not "gay" in the sense of perceiving himself primarily in relationship to codes of gender and sexuality. Rather, he experiences his sexuality as an issue almost exclusively in relation to his racial subjectivity. Moreover, as I go on to show, Arthur's homosexual experiences are precisely those experiences which enable him to become the singer of black subjectivity by providing him with the love and suffering at the core of gospel music.

In *Just Above My Head* as in much of Baldwin's work in general, the experience of shared vulnerability that occurs in long-term sexual love relationships provides the primary avenue through which human subjects confront their own mortality. That is, both heterosexual and homosexual love furnish the black subject with the opportunity to embrace the grotesque body: in Hall's terms, "if we can, simultaneously, confront and surrender, extraordinary fingers can string from us the response to our mortality"

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8Bergman critiques Baldwin for his decision to represent racial subjectivity as more primary than sexual subjectivity. Specifically, he finds fault with Baldwin's discomfort with the term "gay." Yet Bergman fails to even consider that such discomfort might stem, not simply from "homophobia in both the black and white communities" (166), but also or perhaps even primarily, as Baldwin himself sometimes claimed it did, from racism within the white "gay" community. Significantly, Bergman titles the chapter in which he considers Baldwin's work "The Agony of Gay Black Literature," thus overwriting Baldwin's own choice to identify primarily with the black community.
When he comes back from the war, and is reflecting on his own inability to love his girlfriend Martha and the way in which he "had used somebody merely as a receptacle and allowed [him]self to be used merely as a thing," Hall wonders "if [he] would find in [him]self the strength to give love, and to take it: to accept [his] nakedness as sacred, and to hold sacred the nakedness of another" (310). These musings cause him, for the first time, to "[suspect] why death [is] so terrible, and love so feared"; he "glimpse[s] an abyss" (310). After falling in love with Jimmy's sister Julia and being left by her, Hall, like Arthur through his relationship with Jimmy, learns to face this "abyss," to confront the "terror" (190) triggered by love, the fear of the beloved's death and of one's own vulnerability in the face of that possibility. Through their music and their love, Arthur and his first lover Crunch also "confront and surrender" to their mortality, and learn to "trust[] every second of [their] . . . darkness" (198). When Arthur makes love to Crunch after the two share a meal, "Pepsi-Cola, mustard, hamburgers, ice cream, surrender[] to funkier, unknown odors," and "Crunch moan[s] . . ., surrendering, surrendering" (208). Through their sexual relationship Arthur and Crunch "confront" and "surrender" to the "darkness" and "funkier, unknown odors" of the grotesque body. Both Hall and Arthur thereby model the achieved black subjectivity which the text offers as an
antidote to the history of racial and sexual terror produced by white racist subjectivity.

Arthur's homosexuality, then, does not detract from his ability to function as a singer of black subjectivity, but rather contributes to that ability. Emmanuel S. Nelson puts it best when he says that Baldwin's homosexual characters "play a redemptive role...not because those characters are homosexual, but because their homosexuality intensifies their suffering, suffering that has redemptive possibilities" ("James" 122). When Crunch is away fighting the Korean war, Arthur hides his grief from his family--the grief of a lover for the beloved, rather than the grief of friend for friend--and "pour[s] [this secret] into his [Gospel] song" (263); "[h]is love was his confession, his testimony was his song" (261). When recounting how the "double weight" of the homophobic "judgement within and the judgement without" caused Arthur to begin to "sink" into the drug and alcohol abuse which eventually kill him, the narrator muses, "And, yet, it is true, and Arthur was right when he insisted, I've got to live the life I sing about in my song: he meant that he could not afford to live a lie" (244). Homosexuality is thus portrayed as an essential component of "the life I sing about in my song," that is, of Gospel music, and hence, of blackness per se.

When Arthur and Crunch sing Gospel music together, the songs take on gay meanings, without undoing or taking away
from the "sacred" meanings of those songs, as when the two men sing--and in context the reference to Arthur's and Crunch's sexual relationship is unmistakable--"somebody touched me and . . . it must have been the hand of the Lord!" (199). The texts presents Jimmy's decision to come on to Arthur by banging out "Just a Closer Walk with Thee" on the piano (539) as positive and justifiable, or, rather, as not needing to be justified, in that the text's notion of the sacred is not based on a separation between body and spirit, sexuality and spirituality. Jimmy says, "Every inch of Arthur was sacred to me," and continues, "And I mean: sacred" (552). Somewhat more shockingly, Baldwin's text also "queers" Gospel by juxtaposing sexual descriptions of Arthur giving Crunch a blowjob with lines from a Gospel song: "So low--and Crunch gasped as Arthur's mouth left his prick standing in the cold, cold air, as Arthur's tongue licked his sacred balls--you can't get under him" (208). Because Baldwin's text theorizes God as being made in our image, such that notions of God constitute externalized representations of forms of human subjectivity, the implication that Arthur's and Crunch's hands are for each other "the hand of the Lord," and that getting under Crunch is getting under God, is both humorous and quite literal. Here as elsewhere the text places sexuality, including homosexuality, at the core of black subjectivity.
The real "sin," in the text's terms, is not the queering of Gospel, but the homophobic repudiation of the queer Gospel singer. Jimmy tells Hall that it was only when Arthur "got scared about what they might think about what he'd done to their song--our song--that he really started to be uptight about our love" (553). Ironically, Arthur fears the black community's judgement of his queering of Gospel. I say "ironically" because, in Hall's terms, such anti-queer, anti-love, anti-sexual judgement derives from a "white" form of subjectivity, one based on a repudiation of the grotesque body. And while the sexual body in general falls under the category of the grotesque body, in this text it is the homosexual body which is most closely linked to the grotesque body. This connection is made clear, for example, when Hall shouts at a white producer who is "giving [him] some mealy-mouthed crap about [his] brother's private life being a problem" (22). Hall answers him, "If he likes boys, then buy him a bathtubful, you hear? Buy him a boatload! What the fuck do you like?" (22). The narrator Hall, looking back on this event, tells the reader, "I'll never forget that cat's face: some people look at you like you've farted when you try to tell them the truth, or they know you mean what you say" (22). Whereas the racist reveals his racism through a "fart" of racist panic, the homophobic subject equates homosexuality itself with a fart, or rather, with how a subject who repudiates the grotesque
body would perceive a fart—namely, as something which should be kept quiet, ignored until it goes away, and certainly not commented upon in public. In contrast, despite his defensive reference to his brother’s "private life," Hall metaphorically equates the "truth" of his brother’s sexuality with the "truth" of the grotesque body, the body which does not live a "private life" by staying closed off from its environment, but rather, mingle its smells with the world.

Thus, far from comprising separate registers of difference, racism and homophobia are inextricably linked in Baldwin’s text. The intersection of racial, class, and gender ideologies that motivated and continues to motivate the lynching of black men has been analyzed by black feminists such as Hazel Carby and Angela Davis. Yet the possibility that the rejection of homosexuality is a motivation for racist violence against black men has received far less critical attention. Hall touches on this motivation when, in an imaginary monologue addressed to

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9 Last month, the Southern Poverty Law Center sent me a flier which included a photograph of Harold Mansfield, who was shot by a racist hate-group in 1991 simply because he was black.

10 Frantz Fanon, in Black Skin, White Masks, did claim that "the Negrophobic man is a repressed homosexual" (156); however, for the neo-Freudian Fanon, homosexuality is a "neurotic" manifestation of the Oedipus complex, except when it is undertaken for economic reasons (180). See Diana Fuss’ Identification Papers for an analysis of the race relations Fanon is attempting to counter through these formulations.
the white man, he claims, "Maybe the difference between us is that I’ve never been afraid of the prick you, like all men, carry between their legs" (398). While this passage could be read in terms of the heterosexual white man’s desire to wield the black male phallos—"By the way, what did you do with my prick once you’d cut the black thing off and held it in your hands?" Hall asks the white man, continuing, "You couldn’t have cut yours off and sewn mine on?" (398)—Arthur’s homosexual presence in the text, as well as the particular wording of this and other passages, suggests the possibility of a violently repudiated or, in Kristeva’s term, abjected sexual desire at work in such racial violence. Hall emphasizes the white man "holding the black thing in [his] hands," and also asks, "[D]id you eat it? How did it taste?" (398), thus focusing on the bodily, quasi-sexual sensations lynching provided for the white man. This emphasis on the white male body’s sexual sensations symbolically castrates the white man who masks these motivations with the rhetoric of racial "purity": after asking about the taste of the lynched man’s prick, Hall remarks, "Ah. The cat seems to have your tongue, sir" (398). A similar example through which the text connects racial violence to repudiated homosexuality occurs when, after a civil rights rally at a black church in the South, Hall describes the danger faced by blacks at the hands of the angry and humiliated whites waiting outside: "Anything
could be used as an excuse for violence, if not murder, or one of them might, simply, go mad, and release his pent-up orgasm--for their balls were aching. You could damn near smell it" (397). In signifying on the white man's "aching" "balls" and "pent-up orgasm," the text suggests the possibility of an abjected homosexual urge at work in the white man's violence against the black man, while also, simultaneously, demoting the white male phallus to the achingly embodied penis.

This achingly embodied is precisely what homophobic and racist subjectivities attempt to deny. In the text's terms, homophobia and racism are both based on an attempt to gain "safety"--i.e., on the racist and/or homophobic subject's attempt to distance him/herself from those "dark" or queer bits of him/herself which disrupt his/her illusion of mastery. Jimmy, Arthur's lover for fourteen years, reflects on being deprived of safety for his homosexuality. "What the world calls morality," Jimmy says, after speaking to Hall of his love for Arthur after Arthur's death, "is nothing but the dream of safety. . . . [And] the only way to know that you are safe is to see somebody else in danger" (551), in this case, Jimmy, the black gay man. Homophobia is thus linked to the illusion of safety upon which upper-class white identity is so unstably founded. The rejection of black lesbians and gays into a "defiling otherness" (Butler 133) seen as separate from black identity thus
indirectly serves "white" interests; it also directly serves white racist interests by dividing black subjects from one another, forcing black lesbians and gays to expend precious energy fighting against homophobia within their racial communities.\(^{11}\) In this light, the homophobia which in part causes Arthur’s death becomes particularly senseless—and poignant, when we read the text as, like all of Baldwin’s fiction, partially autobiographical.\(^{12}\) Surely, Eldridge Cleaver’s desire for a revitalized black population could have been served more productively than by his denouncements of Baldwin’s homosexuality as a "'sickness'" and a "'racial death-wish'" (qtd. in Gates 38). In contrast to Baldwin’s public response to Cleaver—in which Baldwin, in Henry Louis

\(^{11}\)For an analysis of homophobia in Black culture, see Cheryl Clarke’s "The Failure to Transform: Homophobia in the Black Community." Clarke, while holding blacks responsible for transforming their attitudes, traces homophobia in the black community to the larger homophobic culture of whites. Further, against (presumably white, or at least, non-black) lesbians and gays who speak as if the homophobia of the black community were worse than that of the larger culture, Clarke claims that "it is not accurate to attribute homophobia to the mass of black people" (205). Historically, she claims, the poor and working-class black community has "accepted [gay men and lesbians] as part of the community," even while treating them as "subjects of curiosity" (206). Clarke’s contention is borne out by Samuel Delany’s memory, as told to Joseph Beam in an interview titled "The Possibility of Possibilities," of a black gay man named Herman, a flamboyant queen who, though not able to be explicitly "out," was indeed accepted as part of Delany’s childhood community (190-191).

\(^{12}\)The autobiographical subtext to the novel is apparent in the names Baldwin chose for his black gay characters: "Jimmy" was Baldwin’s nickname, and "Arthur" was his middle name.
Gates' rather ill-chosen words, "turn[ed] the other cheek" (38)--Baldwin's last novel depicts homophobia as having murderous consequences for the black gay artist and the black community as a whole.13

Against Cleaver's homophobia, the text argues that the reproduction of the black subject and the black family is emphatically not the sole province of black heterosexuals' physical coupling; rather, *Just Above My Head* emphasizes the role of love between men in reproducing black culture and values.14 Indeed, it is love between brothers which motivates Hall's re-memory of his family's history. The very structure of the text makes Arthur and Hall "point[s] of transition in a life eternally renewed" (Bakhtin, *Rabelais* 318). The text begins with Arthur's death and Hall's son Tony's questions about his uncle's homosexuality

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13In "The Fire Last Time: What James Baldwin Can and Can't Teach America," Gates attributes this bland public response to Baldwin's desire to be "loved by his own" (38)--a desire which, in Gates' view, also caused Baldwin to abandon for a time his initially complex, relational notions of racial identity for a reactionary and essentialist black nationalism.

14This emphasis on love between men does not efface the role of women in reproducing the black community. Baldwin's text does not subordinate or efface the heterosexual woman's power in male-female relationships; indeed, powerful women precipitate Hall's evolution from someone who fears his own mortality to someone who embraces it. Thus, *Just Above My Head* can be seen as Baldwin's attempt to represent a non-sexist form of black male heterosexual subjectivity, in contrast to earlier works such as *Another Country*. This move corresponded with Baldwin's increasing ability, as represented by biographer David Leeming, to express himself in a "feminine" manner (377).
(37), and ends with Hall’s dream about Arthur, in which Hall tells Arthur, "ain’t nothing up the road but us, man" (559). Hall’s narration of his brother’s life shows Tony that the black gay man is part of the communal body, the common life that is "up the road" for Hall’s children and the younger black generation in general. The text’s description of Hall’s pillow being "wet with tears" after the dream demonstrates that metaphorically, Hall and Arthur also reproduce the black community (559), in that Hall’s regenerative tears stem from his response to his brother’s song, his brother’s death; it is his understanding of this song that he passes on to the younger black generation. Just as the relationship between brothers enables the reproduction of black subjectivity, the relationship between men who are lovers also produces fluids that regenerate the black community: the tears on Hall’s pillow are paralleled by Jimmy’s assertion that the song he learned from Arthur "will bring water back to the desert" of homophobic, racist, capitalist America (553).

Baldwin’s text thus constructs a positive, strategic myth of an achieved black subjectivity based on the grotesque body as morally and politically preferable to the dominant racist and homophobic constructions of subjectivity which motivate U.S. history. Contrary to Margaret Mead’s despair at the collective history shared by white and black subjects in the U.S., Baldwin’s text sounds a note of hope
for those white racist subjects who wish to transcend themselves, as well as for black subjects for whom the black gay Gospel singer's confrontation with and surrender to personal and collective history brings "water . . . back to the desert." "We shall," possibly, "overcome," but not, Baldwin's text reminds us, before "we" come to a fuller acceptance of just who it is that "we" are.
[Male-to-female] Transsexuals are not women. They are deviant males. (Raymond, Transsexual 183)

In fact, as she wanders off into the Village in her drag, Alisa Solomon, inasmuch as she passes successfully, is a man, is male, is a man for a day. (Halberstam 214)

The above quotations represent opposite poles in the contemporary theoretical debate concerning gender definition, with Janice Raymond taking a particular radical feminist position--one that sees an absolute, unbridgeable gap between "men" and "women"--and Judith Halberstam asserting the performance theory notion that "man" and "woman" are social roles that can be taken up interchangeably regardless of anatomy.¹ At first glance, Halberstam’s more sophisticated perspective would seem to be preferable to Raymond’s rigidly essentialist one. However, as I go on to argue, Raymond and Halberstam have more in common than initially appears, in that both efface what I

¹Here I am following the definition of radical feminism put forth in Verta Taylor and Nancy Whittier’s article, "The New Feminist Movement." Taylor and Whittier define "radical feminism" as the ideology that views "gender as the primary contradiction and foundation for the unequal distribution of a society’s rewards and privileges" (535).
term the "material inscription" of gender, that is, the inscription of gender within and through complex social relations of privilege and oppression. This inscription is determined by a multiplicity of gendered signifiers including but not limited to anatomical criteria. Leslie Feinberg’s 1993 novel Stone Butch Blues challenges both Raymond’s radical feminist perspective and performance theories of gender, demonstrating that, despite their dissimilarities, both views erase these material determinants of gender. Such erasure, I will argue, works against the goal of political coalition called for by Jess Goldberg, the protagonist of Feinberg’s novel, when she asks participants at a lesbian and gay rights rally, "'Couldn’t the we be bigger?" (296)

This chapter will examine how Stone Butch Blues critiques both binary essentialist and performance models of gender identity, offering in their place the notion of gender as what I term a "material inscription." Rather than seeing gender as strictly biological or as (only) a cultural role performance, the text argues that, while a subject’s dress, gesture, stance, occupation and ideology also convey gendered meanings, oppressive material (including economic) forces inscribe gender on the body itself such that genitalia are made to function as the ultimate, grounding signifiers of maleness or femaleness. This notion of gender as material inscription works against essentialist
definitions of gender as inherent, monolithic and 

homogeneously aligned with anatomy, and against bourgeois 

postmodernist notions of gender as the cultural performance 
of autonomous individuals. Further, the text argues that 
marginalized subjectivities which recognize the differing 
relations of various subjects to material forces form the 
basis for a politics of coalition that can correct the 
errors associated with identity politics. Ultimately, the 
text uses Jess's experiences to demonstrate how the "we" can 
"be bigger."

Through its portrait of Jess and the male, female, and 

transgendered subjects that people her world, Feinberg's 

novel provides a complex portrait of gender construction in 
some recent U.S. contexts. Judith Shapiro, in her article 
"Transsexualism: Reflections on the Persistence of Sex and 
the Mutability of Gender," articulates a definition of 
"transgenderist" similar to that used by many contemporary 
theorists. Shapiro distinguishes "transgenderist" from 
"transsexual," in that "transgenderist" designates a person 
with "a career of gender-crossing, which may or may not be 
directed toward an ultimate [i.e., genital] physical sex 
change" (251). This discussion of a "career of gender-
crossing" is somewhat problematic, given the number of areas 
(discussed below) in which "gender-crossing" can occur; 
further, it presumes the existence of two immutable gender 
categories individuals can "cross." In distinction from
this usage, I follow Stone Butch Blues in defining as "transgendered" those who identify as neither "men" nor "women"; this disidentification with gender categories, the text argues, is not the result of a "core gender identity" so much as it is the result of what I call the "material inscription" of contradictory and incompatible gender definitions on the bodies of those whose lives are significantly determined by the difficulty others have in placing them in a fixed gender category.²

While it follows a larger trajectory from "butch" to "transgendered," Jess's gendered subjectivity can be seen as evolving more specifically through roughly four different phases. The first phase runs from her birth in a working-class area of Buffalo, New York, to age fifteen, during which period she suffers verbal abuse, physical violence, gang rape, and incarceration in a mental institution for her

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²This definition would seem to leave out those "transsexuals" who are able to successfully "pass." However, as I argue later in this chapter, the fear of discovery can significantly determine one's life, no matter how successfully one "passes" as the gender of choice. I am also flying in the face here of those who define transsexual or transgender subjectivity in terms of a "core gender identity," reducing gender-crossing individuals to normatively gendered though wrongly placed "men in women's bodies" or vice versa. For an analysis of how the medical/psychiatric establishment enforces such normative binary definitions of gender through controlling access to gender reassignment clinics, see Sandy Stone's "The Empire Strikes Back: A Posttranssexual Manifesto" (291-295) and Dwight B. Billings' and Thomas Urban's "The Socio-Medical Construction of Transsexualism: An Interpretation and Critique."
gender ambiguity. Next, Jess enters her existence as a (stone) butch lesbian in the working-class lesbian bar culture and the factories of Buffalo in the mid-1950s. This period ends when the factories are hit by massive layoffs as a result of the recession of the 1970s, at which point Jess begins taking male hormones, has her breasts removed, and starts to pass as a man in order to get work and escape the escalating violence against butch women; thus, in contrast to the male-to-female transsexuals upon whom the debate over transsexualism has for the most part centered, Jess is motivated by economics to change certain aspects of her anatomy. Jess enters the fourth phase of her life when she moves to New York City in the mid-1980s. Here she decides to stop taking the hormones that allow her to pass as a man and instead to live openly as an ambiguously gendered "he-she." At this point Jess’s body violates more

3For discussions of how the mental health profession has enforced patriarchal definitions of femininity, see Phyllis Chesler’s Women and Madness and Celia Kitzinger and Rachel Perkin’s Changing Our Minds: Lesbian Feminism and Psychology.

4A "stone butch" is a butch who does not allow her partner to fondle or penetrate her genitals during lovemaking, a trait which has led some feminists to classify stone butches as women who are ashamed of their femaleness and who want to be men. For an alternative argument that the stone butch's emphasis on pleasing and giving to her partner is the ultimate expression of patriarchal womanhood, see Lee Lynch’s poem, "Stone Butch." In Feinberg’s novel, being "stone" is attributed to the dynamics of sexual abuse more than to any internal gender identification. For a discussion of sexual abuse dynamics, see Ellen Bass and Laura Davis’ The Courage to Heal: A Guide for Women Survivors of Child Sexual Abuse.
gender codes than ever: her hips revert to their earlier rounded shape and she begins to menstruate again, but her chest is now flat and her voice permanently deepened by the hormones. This final phase is represented as the culmination of a lifetime of gender ambiguity, and Jess's decision to stop trying to answer the question of whether she is "woman or man" is shown to be the most empowering decision of her life (222); she even begins to make progress towards overcoming her "stone" fear of being touched sexually.

In taking us through these stages of Jess's life, Stone Butch Blues contests a primary "rule" of gender identified by transgender activist Kate Bornstein, that is, the "rule" that "[o]ne's gender is invariant" (46). Janice Raymond assumes both this "rule" and the related one that "[t]here are two, and only two, genders" (46) when she refuses to consider male-to-female transsexuals as anything other than "males." Before I delve further into the text, it will be helpful to consider Raymond's argument in more detail, particularly given the authority granted The Transsexual Empire by cultural studies and anthropological researchers, and by some individual transsexuals. Rather than being simply a biological essentialist, Raymond is a socio-

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5See, for example, Terri Webb's "Autobiographical Fragments from a Transsexual Activist." Following Raymond, Webb argues that male-to-female transsexuals "do violence to women in their need to adopt a woman's skin" (193).
biological essentialist who believes that the gap between the genders is caused by the binary inscription of oppressive patriarchal meanings onto binary anatomy, an inscription which ensures that those with penises will never know what it is like to have lived "their whole lives as women" (Transsexual 117). Raymond views gender socialization as monolithic and homogeneous, as though, in Carol Ridell’s characterization of Raymond’s theory, "biology plus socialisation equals destiny" (177). For Raymond, gender socialization occurs in two, and only two, directions: towards "'privilege'" (103) for men and oppression for women. She repeatedly terms male-to-female transsexuals "male-to-constructed-female transsexual[s]" (119, emphasis added), and argues that the transsexual "violates women’s bodies by taking on the artifactual female organs for himself" (118). Male-to-female transsexuals, then, are "really" men who imitate, but never succeed in truly becoming, real, "unconstructed" women.

*Stone Butch Blues* complicates this portrait of a strict and impassable gender divide based on a monolithic, homogeneous gender socialization meted out along strict anatomical lines. Rather, Feinberg’s novel demonstrates a multiplicity of factors according to which gender is defined, with genitals accorded the most importance by dominant institutions of power (e.g., law enforcement agencies). In *Gender Outlaw: On Men, Women, and the Rest of*
Us, Kate Bornstein lists many of these factors, some of which fall under and some of which exceed the notion of gender performance. Bornstein defines "gender roles" as "jobs, economic roles, chores, hobbies" (26). She adds to this definition a list of other factors according to which we "attribut[e]" gender to someone (26), including "physical cues" such as "body, hair, clothes, voice, skin, and movement" (26); "behavioral cues" such as "manners, decorum, protocol, and deportment" (27); "textual cues" such as "histories, documents, names, associates, relationships" (28); "mythic cues" such as archetypes of "the dumb blonde" and "the strong and silent type" (29); "power dynamics as cues" (29); "sexual orientation as cue" (29); and, the ultimate determinant of gender in our culture, "biological gender"--"body type, chromosomes, hormones, genitals, reproductive organs" (30).

Given the number of biological criteria for gender attribution, and the fact that many of them require medical technology to be divined, I add the term "anatomical gender" to Bornstein's list to denote the attribution of gender according to visible (or potentially visible) biological features, e.g., facial hair, breasts, and genitals.6

6The difficulty of attributing gender according to "biological" means is complicated by the fact that many of these criteria--including genitals--do not always line up neatly according to the terms of a binary divide; see, for example, Judith Butler's discussion of a DNA specialist's speculation that "a good ten percent of the population has chromosomal variations that do not fit neatly into the XX-
Feinberg's novel adds several other indices of gender, most notably political belief (support for war being coded as masculine and opposition to war coded as feminine); style of love-making and position in intercourse (penetrator/penetrated, toucher/touched, etc.); and degree of emotional expressivity. Of course, not all of these factors are operative all at once at any particular time. Rather, different factors or combinations of factors are accorded more or less significance according to social context, i.e., who is reading the gender signifiers. Thus, degree of emotional expressiveness comes into play as a significant distinguishing factor between "butch" and "femme" in Jess's relationship, during her butch period, with her femme lover Theresa. In contrast, the cops who arrest the young Jess and Butch Al (her older butch mentor) for not wearing women's clothing are not concerned with

female and XY-male categories" upon which much contemporary science founds its notions of binary sex difference (Gender 107). Likewise, Bonnie Spanier notes that all "men" and "women" have "male" and "female" sex hormones, and that, indeed, "women after menopause have lower levels of the major estrogen and progestin [female sex hormones] than do men of the same age" (342). Finally, as many researchers have noted with respect to genitalia, medical technology has enabled doctors to "correct" exceptions to the binary genital gender rule immediately upon birth or at the time when the anomaly makes itself known.

See Deborah Tannen's You Just Don't Understand: Women and Men in Conversation for an analysis of the gendered nature of degrees of emotional expressivity. While she does not consider the role of factors other than gender, and limits her study to ostensibly heterosexual couples, Tannen does see degree of emotional expressiveness as the gendered product of a particular socio-cultural formation.
degree of emotional expressivity, and instead attach primary importance to anatomical gender, since they can identify Jess and Al as "women" who break the law against "women’s" dress codes only by recourse to an anatomical definition of gender.

*Stone Butch Blues* amply demonstrates the tension between this multiplicity of arenas in which gender functions and the binary definitions of "men" and "women" used to interpret this plethora of gender signifiers. Jess’s life is determined from the very beginning by her inability to fit all of her gender signifiers into one half of this binary frame. As a child, even when "bundled up in the dead of winter, with only a couple of inches of [her] face peeking out" (15), Jess’s physical appearance and way of moving is such that adults question her gender. "[T]here was something about me," the narrator Jess reflects, looking back, "that made [grownups] knit their eyebrows and frown. No one ever offered a name for what was wrong with me. . . . I only came to recognize its melody through this constant refrain: 'Is that a boy or a girl?’" (13). Apparently, what’s "wrong" with Jess is that her gender signifiers do not line up neatly on one or the other side of the gender divide. I discuss later how, for Jess, this discrepancy is more than a matter of clothing, but of the way in which gendered meanings are attributed to various aspects of the body itself. Here I want to draw out the text’s argument
that this multiplicity of gendered signifiers working within a binary frame produces a corresponding multiplicity of gendered subject positions.8

As both Bornstein’s list and Feinberg’s text might indicate, the sheer multiplicity of arenas in which gendered meanings operate entails that very few of us are ever completely in line with normative definitions of gender.9 Gender normativity, like gender transgression, is a matter of degree. Hence Feinberg’s text documents a continuum of gendered subjectivities rather than a set of rigidly bounded or oppositionally-defined ones. In Feinberg’s novel, the monolithic category of (anatomically-defined) women is inhabited by heterosexual women, femme lesbians, Saturday night butches, heterosexual he-she’s, stone butches, and "passing" women (i.e., genital women passing as men), while (again, anatomically-defined) men are comprised of

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8While the text amply demonstrates that these positions do not exist apart from factors of race, class, and ethnicity, I initially discuss gender positions in isolation for purposes of clarity.

9For example, according to the Bem Sex Role Inventory, the psychological test devised by Sandra Bem to measure degree of masculinity, femininity, or androgyny, I can be categorized as having far more masculine traits than feminine ones; however, most aspects of my physical appearance are quite conventionally feminine, with the exception of "excessive" bodily and facial hair characterized by my supposedly feminist gynecologist as indicative of "male hormone excess." The racial and ethnic bias of the gynecologist’s medically sanctioned "diagnosis" should be noted here, since the supposedly "biological" constant of hairless womanhood is specific primarily to white Anglo-Europeans.
transgendered and transsexual male-to-female "women," drag queens, straight men with long hair and "feminine" politics, physically masculine men with progressive politics, and macho/misogynist heterosexual men.\textsuperscript{10} It is worth noting here that, while a few of these subjectivities are almost completely in line with normative gendering, the rest vary as to which and how many areas of traditional gender construction they defy, as well as in the consequences of these gender transgressions. (For example, transgressing gender standards for sexual orientation but not for gendered presentation of self--the lesbian femme's position--has different consequences than transgressing gender standards for self-presentation but not for sexual orientation--the heterosexual he-she's position.) Further, in conjunction with racial status, these gender positions determine an individual's placement along an economic continuum. White masculine men, and, until the recession, white masculine women work the higher-paying blue collar jobs, while feminine women and Black and Indian men work lower-paying jobs; one step below this are the feminine men and feminine women who work as prostitutes.

Performance theories of gender such as Judith Butler's and Judith Halberstam's would seem to provide a theoretical

\textsuperscript{10}Similarly, JoAnn Loulan's The Lesbian Erotic Dance: Butch, Femme, Androgyny and Other Rhythms theorizes a multiplicity of gendered positions among lesbians. Loulan does not trace these positions to material issues, however, but to interior psychological states.
purchase on the somewhat bewildering array of gendered positions documented by the novel, for, as the citation with which I began this chapter indicates, performance theory does not wed biological sex to cultural gender role, hence allowing for a greater number of gendered positions than simply "man" or "woman." Judith Butler argues, for example, that "gender ought not to be construed as a stable identity or locus from which various acts follow"; instead, gender is "tenuously constituted in time, instituted in an exterior space through a stylized repetition of acts" (Gender 140). In line with this notion of gender as "stylized repetition," Jess at one point indicates her butchness through "widen[ing] [her] stance" (29), while Jess’s first femme lover Milli sends an erotic femme signal through lifting her eyebrow (106).

*Stone Butch Blues* thus agrees that gender is in part like a performance, constituted through actions. However, *Stone Butch Blues* also suggests that there are bodily and material limits on the performativity of gender. Gender performers who revel in their "freedom" to perform various genders elide the more intractable physical and behavioral cues of gender, cues which, as Kath Weston notes, most people find difficult to consciously control (13). Feinberg’s novel demonstrates that not all gendered subjects can perform all gender positions. There are gendered positions--feminine ones--which Jess simply cannot perform
or inhabit, things about her gender position which she cannot change. Unlike what Jess refers to as "the Saturday-night butches [who] giggled and tried to fluff their hair and switch clothing" (8) when cops busted the bars, Jess and her drag queen and stone butch sisters "never switched clothing" (8)--not because they "chose" to perform outlawed gender identities, but because, as a result of gender signifiers over which they could not maintain conscious control, they "didn't have a choice" (7) as to how they would be perceived. Regardless of what they wear, these transgendered subjects send out gender-transgressive physical and behavioral cues that cannot be removed as easily as the "Saturday night butches" discard their men's clothing. Immediately before she is taken into custody by cops who eventually rape her, vaginally and anally, and shove her head into a shit-filled toilet, Jess debates with herself as to whether taking off her tie would make things "go easier" for her (61). The narrator who is Jess looking back on these events concludes that "of course, it wouldn't have" (61). By this point in the text, the reader accepts this conclusion, knowing that, just as the child Jess looked ambiguously gendered even when bundled up in a snowsuit, even in a dress the adolescent Jess looks like, in the words of one of the white high school boys who rapes her, a "'fucking bulldagger'" (41)--a woman whose masculine physical appearance is interpreted to indicate her sexual
desire for women. Jess's lament that she "'look[s] more like a he-she with a [feminine] wig on'" (143) likewise demonstrates the inadequacy of a performance theory of gender centered on gendered products to account for the multiplicity of physical indices through which gender is inscribed.

The novel thus contests the bourgeois individualist notion of gender performance identified by Kath Weston. Like the worker under capitalism who is formally 'free' to sell her labor . . . the practitioners of this kind of [gender performance] are apparently 'free' to present gendered representations of self that they assemble, according to taste, from repertoires of artifacts. (12).

Unlike the "Saturday night butches," Jess is not "free" to present a normatively gendered "representation of self"; from the very beginning of her life Jess has no "free" choice as to her position as a gender outlaw and the violence she suffers as a result. The beatings, rapes, thefts, verbal abuse, incarceration in a mental institution, humiliation, unemployment and continual skirmishes and anxiety over which bathroom she should use demonstrate that the question of gender is, in the words of E.J. Graff's review of Stone, "anything but playful" (25) for Jess and

11 These boys also call Jess a "'kike,'" indicating that anti-Semitism as well as gender ideology motivates their attack.
those like her who are, in Jess's word, "different" (13). This "difference," the text suggests, is inscribed within specific material contexts according to a multiplicity of criteria, but most brutally, for Jess, according to anatomical/genital criteria. Contrary to Judith Halberstam's argument that a genital woman who successfully passes as a man for a day "is a man, is male" for that day (214), the novel emphasizes that no matter how "masculine" Jess looks, acts, talks, walks, etc., without a penis Jess can never fully signify as a "man." In Jess's context, those signifiers of gender which are the most difficult and expensive to exchange/procure are accorded the ultimate significance in determining/enforcing gender--i.e., anatomical signifiers, with genitalia being the most important of these. After taking hormones and having her

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12Butler's latest book, *Bodies That Matter*, attempts to overcome these limitations of performance theory by reworking performativity as citationality, the enforced citation of the norms of sex (15). Sue-Ellen Case has also distanced herself from her former position on the subversiveness of butch-femme performances, in part because this emphasis contributed to the distorted politics of the "new dyke" who has taken over for her lesbian-feminist foremothers of the 1970s; this "new dyke," Case argues, is "an ad man" for whom "fashion wear [is] a form of activism" ("Student" 40).

13Judith Halberstam's argument that sexual reassignment surgery be reclassified as cosmetic surgery effaces this issue of differential access, due to class, to gender surgeries (216). Halberstam would do well to think about what group of people, in terms of class, is able to make use of cosmetic surgery; her reclassification, if enacted, would only make it all the more difficult for any but the upper-middle-class and wealthy to procure such surgeries.
breasts removed, Jess takes on the name "Jesse" in order to pass as a man, but this discursive move and the masculine performances that accompany it— including, most memorably, the time when Jess passes off her dildo as a penis in order to make love to a heterosexual waitress named Annie— do not erase the anatomical genital discrepancy between Jess and a "real" man and the material consequences of this discrepancy. For real-life transgendered person Brandon Teena, who, like Jess, also hailed from a working-class background, these consequences included being raped and brutally murdered by two male friends when they discovered that she was biologically female (Atcheson 100).  

Having experienced violence for transgressing gender boundaries, Jess is aware of such potential consequences. Her time with Annie, like her entire "passing" period, is thus underwritten with fear, suggesting an important material difference between Jess performing a male identity and a "real" man doing so.

The material inscription of gender according to genital criteria is graphically demonstrated to the young butch Jess when a policeman takes her and her mentor, Butch Al, down to the station for wearing men's clothes. After raping Butch

\[14\] In emphasizing that both Jess and Brandon hail from working-class backgrounds, I do not want to imply that working-class people are more anti-transgender than others. I can imagine many middle-class contexts (e.g., fraternity parties) where those such as Brandon Teena would be in grave physical danger.
Al, the cop taunts Jess about her "'pussy friend Allison'" (36), thereby reminding both "women" that, despite their "masculine" clothing, muscles, hairstyles, gestures, jobs, hobbies, and choices of love-objects, their bodies are physically "female." Through rape the cop inscribes "female" genitals as the physical signifier of women's inferiority and weakness, their status as "pussies"--sexual objects to be taken or had by men.\(^{15}\)

Gender thus emerges, not as a cultural "resource utilizable by all" (Weston 12), but as the product of a material inscription through which subjects are assigned positions of relative privilege and oppression. The cop's use of the term "pussy" supports the materialist feminist contention that, Foucault and other ludic theorists notwithstanding, social difference is hierarchically structured, and the social realm made up of economic, political, ideological, and other institutionalized forces that all work materially to contest or reinforce those hierarchies. To understand gender as either a monolithic

\(^{15}\)The rape of Jess's (anatomically male) drag queens friends also serves the purpose of reinscribing male dominance by punishing these "men" for their downward gender mobility. For a discussion of asymmetry as a primary motivating factor behind intolerance for gender ambiguity, see Judith Shapiro's "Transsexualism: Reflections on the Persistence of Gender and the Mutability of Sex." Feinberg's portrait of the extreme violence encountered by working-class masculine women, however, contests Shapiro's conclusion, based on primarily upper-class, white, male-to-female transsexuals, that "those who intentionally move down in the system are more threatening to its values than those seeking to move up" (270).
social/biological construct or an infinitely resignifiable cultural role is to efface these hierarchical relations and the differences they make.

Against such reinscriptions of gender oppression, Stone Butch Blues performs what materialist feminist Rosemary Hennessy would call a "symptomatic reading" that "puts on display the exploitative social arrangements" (Materialist 94) enabled by rigid binary categories of gender. Or, to use Marjorie Garber's terminology, the novel reveals the "vested interests" that work to maintain a gender divide. These "vested interests" include, but are not limited to, economic ones, in that, as Jess and her friends know all too well, certain (usually lower-paying) jobs are limited to those who can "perform" femininity, while others are open only to masculine subjects; significantly, after the demise of industries requiring more "masculine" workers, butch women are unable to fit into the only work slots left available to working-class women: work slots the text depicts as requiring either the display of (as by secretaries and flight attendants) or the selling of feminine consumer products. Jess's choice to pass as a man is thus materially motivated; in Jess's words, "I don't feel like a man trapped in a woman's body. I just feel

\footnote{See Adrienne Rich's important article "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence" for an analysis of how the "true qualification" for "economically disadvantaged women[ 's]" jobs is "dressing and playing the feminine, deferential role required of 'real' women" (164).}
trapped" (158-159). Her decision is thus not an essentialist move that reifies a psychological gender divide—an inner core "gender identity" that is either completely male-identified or completely female-identified. Rather, it is a response to the material conditions that threaten, and in some cases take, the lives of those such as Jess.

This understanding of gender as material inscription, that is, an index which inscribes privilege and oppression according to a multiplicity of gendered signifiers and practices, enables the recognition of allies hailing from a diversity of gendered positions. We can see allies against

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17In line with the definition of the material offered in Chapter One of this study, I would claim that other factors besides economic ones (e.g., psychological factors) can be considered material to the extent that they place individuals in positions of relative privilege and oppression in terms of access to resources. In this view, even the sense of being "trapped" in the wrong body is a material factor in a transsexual's decision to change anatomical genders, in that in our culture access to certain cultural and economic resources is still based on gender; changing sexes can sometimes be the only way to procure such access. Furthermore, far from constituting an essentialist solution to the problem of rigid, binaristic gender ideology, transsexualism can be said to be a material solution insofar as transsexuals come out publicly as transsexuals; in doing so, transsexuals such as Sandy Stone expose the gender "rule" that gender is immutable and given anatomically, unambiguously, at birth, as precisely that—a culturally constructed "rule" for regulating the distribution of cultural and economic resources. And while this coming out strategy alone will not ensure a redistribution of gender resources on the basis of proclivity and desire rather than rigid social rules, it will at least encourage other proto-transsexual and transgendered people in their struggle against gender fascism.
oppressions based on gender, for example, among the masculine men whom Jess encounters when passing as a man named "Jesse." Jesse’s glimpses of masculine men’s interactions with each other illustrate how some masculine men use a homophobic discourse of binary gender to produce other men’s fear of being rendered "women." These men use a homophobic discourse of binary gender to police other anatomical men by calling certain forms of self-presentation and particular political positions "feminine": for example, Jesse’s coworker Ernie refers to another man, who has long hair and is a conscientious objector, as "Patty" rather than "Pat" (199). Significantly, the homophobic gender discourse that designates objection to war a "feminine" political position also defines certain forms of male emotional expression and male-male touch as feminine/queer, and hence as triggers for violence against the men who enact these behaviors; aware of this discourse as she is, Jess is quite reticent about touching other men when she is passing as Jesse (201).

Not surprisingly, the few men who do allow a comforting touch from what they believe to be another man are also those men who are the least sexist (or most respectful) towards women, in particular, Walter, who, though heterosexual, doesn’t "'stick around when the other guys start talking about pussy'" (200). Unlike men who linguistically reduce women to their genitals, Walter cries
while telling Jess about his wife's impending death, thus simultaneously breaking the gender rule that "real men don’t cry" and demonstrating his belief that his wife is not merely a set of genitals replaceable by any other female set of genitals. On the other end of the spectrum, Ernie--the same man who considers belief in war a positive determinant of heteromasculinity--aims his sexism against (biologically defined) women, urging the ostensibly male Jesse to buy girlie calendars (199). Hence, while Ernie and Pat are both "men," biologically speaking, they exist at different points on a continuum of gender as measured by politics. And while the material effects of Pat's feminized politics and Walter's emotional expressions do not mean that they experience the oppression accorded to biological women, Jess recognizes in both men potential allies against oppressive uses of gender. Another man, Ben, reveals himself as a gender ally when Jesse asks Ben how he got from the pain of prison to being the gentle man he is now. In response, Ben tells the story of Frank, who taught Ben that he didn't need to prove his manhood by fighting a guy who was always harassing Ben. Frank told Ben, "You’re already a man, you don’t have to prove that. You just have to prove what kind of man you want to be" (185). This lesson frees Ben, giving him room to move out of the violent terms of a hierarchically defined, heterogendered masculinity which would force him to beat another man to prove his own
manhood, his own distance from the abjected, feminized role of the loser/"'pussy'" (30).

Through Walter, Pat, and Ben, the novel depicts even masculine men's gender politics as diverse and heterogeneous. As Rosario Morales writes, "[c]olor and class don't define people or politics" (91). Stone Butch Blues adds gender to this list of factors that do not determine one's politics; while men such as Ben and Pat don't form a coalition working towards an immediately tangible goal with Jess, s/he recognizes them as allies who share an affinity—a common opposition to the sexism that fuels the motor of the binary systems of gender responsible for much of Jess's oppression. The novel's depiction of gender as a material inscription which produces a continuum of gendered subjectivities thus provides a model of gender beyond abjection, one which allows for the recognition of allies across the gender divide. These alliances are not so much based on an "identification" between Jess and the men as on Jess's/the text's recognition of the material force of binary systems of gender in determining and limiting, albeit in different ways, all of their lives. To appropriate Teresa Ebert, "the other is not other. Rather, the other is connected to all others . . . by the relations of [gender] production" (119).

However, we should note here that the recognition of alliance has, at times, led to an appropriating or
colonizing logic whereby one subject/group imposes its own totalizing views onto another, usually less privileged group in the name of an "identification" with that group.¹⁸

Similar to materialist feminist academic theory, *Stone Butch Blues* works against such "totalizing social logics" (Hennessy, *Materialist* 16). It does so by building in a documentation of the workings of abjection and privilege in the formation of subjectivities and their corresponding political movements. The novel demonstrates the exclusionary results of several different "totalizing social logics" held by characters in the text, and offers in their place materially-based constructions of subjectivity that allow for coalition across social differences. Such definitions avoid totalization, and thus enable coalition rather than appropriation or colonization, because they enable individuals to come together against shared oppressions without demanding that individuals abject other aspects of their subjectivity, and without elevating one arena of oppression into the factor by which one's social position is determined.

¹⁸In her new, suggestively titled book *Identification Papers*, Diana Fuss argues that "[i]dentification . . . is itself an imperial process, a form of violent appropriation in which the Other is deposed and assimilated into the lordly domain of Self" (145). It is thus important to underscore here that in Feinberg's text alliance and coalition do not depend on a psychic "identification," but on a conscious recognition of the role played by common material factors in determining different lives.
Contemporary theorists have justly critiqued identity-based political movements for the way in which, in Jennifer Wicke's words, "all of the group political energy becomes devoted to policing the identity line" through the administration of "rigorous tests . . . administered to determine if a member truly belongs with the special identity of a group" (30). Wicke, following Denise Riley, argues that the "initial impulse" of identity politics whereby a "group accepts its singularity as a social category . . . as the basis for identifying a common struggle" needs to be countered by "a freewheeling recognition of the instability of that identity" if political movements are to avoid this danger of reducing their politics to squabbles over in-group membership (30).

The novel provides several examples of how definitions of marginalized groups which stray from their material basis in "common struggle" against oppression have harmful and exclusionary results. The first example concerns the 1970s lesbian-feminist separatists who exclude butch-femme women from their circle, claiming that femmes are "brainwashed" while butches are "'male chauvinist pigs.'"19 Jess's second femme partner, Theresa, explains to Jess why these lesbian-

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19 For a contemporary article which likewise reduces butch/femme practices to heterosexual "role-playing," see Toni McNaron's "Mirrors and Likeness: A Lesbian Aesthetic in the Making." For a defense of 1950s butch/femme identities, see Joan Nestle's A Restricted Country and Lyndall MacCowan's "Re-collecting History, Renaming Lives: Femme Stigma and the Feminist Seventies and Eighties."
feminists exclude butch-femme lesbians from the lesbian events she and Jess so desperately need to attend, isolated as they are by the decimation their community has suffered at the hands of the recession. "'I think it's because they draw a line--women on one side and men on the other. So women they think look like men are the enemy. And women who look like me are sleeping with the enemy'" (136).

This reliance on physical cues of gender (rather than material conditions of privilege and oppression) to place "'women on one side and men on the other'" perpetuates a number of negative results. Tellingly, the gender "line" drawn by these middle-class feminists--"professors and doctors and lawyers" (11)--parallels the racial division in Jess's high school cafeteria, a division Jess has to have pointed out to her by her black friend Karla: "I looked around the lunchroom like I'd never really seen it before. The cafeteria was absolutely, right down the middle segregated" (42). Jess crosses this racial line because she

20This feminist "line" between men and women mirrors, of course, Janice Raymond's position. Her article, "The Politics of Transgenderism," which first appeared as part of the introduction to the 1994 edition of The Transsexual Empire, makes explicit the class-bias inherent in drawing this line. Raymond praises Stone Butch Blues for its "powerful testimony to class politics," but denigrates the novel's gender politics, particularly, Jess's "disavowal of her own womanhood" (218, 220). Raymond thus separates class and gender in a way the novel explicitly critiques; for Jess, identifying across gender boundaries is part of her class politics. Unlike Raymond, I see Jess's "ultimate identification with otherness" not as a problematic rejection of "womanhood," but as the positive basis for a transformative coalition politics.
wants to tell Karla about the boys who raped her on the football field, but is prevented from doing so by Coach Moriarty (whom Jess and Karla’s friend Darnell calls "'Jim Crow’" [43]). Like the gender line drawn by cops, the racial line is maintained through violence: Jess is suspended from school for one week for challenging this line; Karla, for two. The middle-class, white feminist "line" between men and women discounts such racial division, forcing black women to choose between "women’s issues" and "racial issues." The fact that Jess’s butch friend Ed marks a page in a book by a black male author, W. E. B. DuBois, as "summ[ing] up what she [is] struggling with," suggests the impossibility of such a "choice" for this multiply oppressed woman of color.

Secondly, this "line" effaces material differences of class and gender amongst women. Working-class femmes such as Milli, who works as a nude dancer, literally can’t afford to replicate the middle-class housewife’s passive dependence on her husband. The text’s portrait of Theresa as a tough-minded woman who slaps men who sexually harass her, threatens abusive cops with her high heels like weapons, and refuses to pass for straight, demonstrates the middle-class

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21The Combahee River Collective points out how "no other ostensibly progressive movement has ever considered our specific oppression [as Black women] as a priority" (212), explaining that Black women face a "racial-sexual oppression which is neither solely racial nor solely sexual" (213).
bias involved in the perception of femmes, based on their high heels and lipstick, as spineless victims of male power. Further, as we have seen, the abuse Jess suffers at the hands of cops and other "gender terrorists" (Bornstein 71) stems precisely from Jess’s status as an anatomically-defined "woman" who doesn’t look like, dress like, or hold the job a traditional "woman" should. Had the feminists who draw a line between men and women examined or listened to Jess’s material position, they might have found an ally for a "common struggle" against sexism, rather than excluding butch/femme women on the basis of physical cues of gender associated with gender oppression between middle-class men and women.

The novel provides two other examples of characters who project a "totalizing social logic" from their own oppression, and contrasts the exclusionary results of such logics with definitions of subjectivity which acknowledge the material workings of both privilege and oppression; the latter, the text argues, stand a far greater chance of enabling coalition across social differences. Duffy, the white male union organizer, learns a hard political lesson when the butches at the plant quit en masse for jobs at another plant, in part because Duffy decides to delay addressing their specific needs in order not to "divide" the union before contract negotiations with management. Like those of the white, middle-class women whose "line" between
men and women enforced a feminist homogeneity which actually divided women from women, Duffy's actions here ensure the very division of worker from worker he had hoped to prevent. Jess likewise perpetuates an exclusionary definition of butch identity when she assumes that what she and Ed, the black butch, face every day is "'pretty much the same'" (129), and when she accuses her former butch friend Frankie of not being a real butch because Frankie is dating another butch rather than a femme (207). Here, Jess's definition of butch subjectivity as based on desire for femmes, rather than on the material position of butches within networks of social power, excludes her old friend and ally from the circle of butch identity, just as her assumption of a homogeneous butch experience effaces Ed's life as a Black butch.

Against such exclusionary notions of identity, the text argues for tactical definitions of subjectivity based in the recognition of both of the salient characteristics of contemporary social divisions as defined by materialist feminists: that is, oppression and privilege. When they reunite and discuss the reasons behind Jess's earlier rejection of Frankie, Jess and Frankie devise a definition of butch subjectivity based on their 'common struggle' against oppression. "'I thought I had it figured out: I'm a butch because I love femmes. That was something beautiful. Nobody ever honored our love. You scared me. I felt like
you were taking that away from me" (273). As a result, Jess says, "when I came up against my own fears, I tried to separate myself from you" (273). Frankie defends her butchness: "'Jesus, Jess, when I walk down the street guys fuck with me. I don't have to prove I'm butch to them. How come I got to prove it to you?" (273).

Hence, the text argues against the exclusiveness of a definition of butch as based on desire for femmes, grounding its revised notion in the material oppression shared by both Jess and Frankie. Butch does not equal, in Frankie's words, "'sexual aggression or courage,'" particularly given what this construction would mean "'in reverse for femmes'" (274). Rather than laying claim to the essential properties of butch subjectivity, Jess and Frankie hammer out what Chela Sandoval would term a "tactical" definition of butch subjectivity based on the simple fact that "guys fuck with [them]" specifically for transgressing codes of gender. In contrast to Jess's earlier, fear-

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22Tracy Morgan's article "Butch-Femme and the Politics of Identity" explains that "butch" and "femme" have been used as "shorthand for talking about what goes on inside . . . the bedroom," with "butch" being equivalent to "active" and "femme" to "passive" (41). Against this usage, Morgan, like Feinberg's novel, argues for the separation of sexuality and gender in our understanding of "butch" and "femme" subjectivity.

23In her article, "The Theory and Method of Oppositional Consciousness in the Postmodern World," Sandoval argues that U.S. third world feminism demands a new, "tactical subjectivity with the capacity to recenter depending upon the kinds of oppression to be confronted" (14).
motivated definition, a definition which abjects the butch-loving-butch, both Jess and Frankie are strengthened by this definition, which enables them to come together in coalition against their mutual oppression. Likewise, when Theresa tells Jess that middle-class lesbian feminists perceive butches as male chauvinists, Jess "[can't] figure out what [the term] had to do with [butches]," and asks Theresa, "'Don't they know we don't deal the shit, we get shit on?" (135). Jess, in line with the text as a whole, defines the issue of butches' gender position in terms of their material oppression as abjected subjects who, like "women" in general, "get shit on" rather than "deal the shit." However, unlike more feminine women, butches "get shit on" specifically for not following disciplinary codes of femininity and for instead enacting traditionally masculine ways of talking, dressing, and moving, as well as for taking on traditionally "male" jobs and hobbies. For example, while both masculine and feminine women get raped and beaten by men, Jess's rapists and the men who physically

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24See Sandra Lee Bartky's "Foucault, Femininity, and the Modernization of Patriarchal Power" for a discussion of the way in which disciplinary power produces a self-regulating female subject who conforms to rigid codes of feminine dress, movement, and appearance. Bartky does not mention the butch and transgendered women who transgress these standards of femininity daily, but her analysis of these norms and their imposition by a vast array of cultural forces helps to support the extent to which "virtually every woman is required to participate" in these codes (72) and the social cost paid by those (biological) women who do not "participate."
assault her on the street always mention her masculinity or gender ambiguity, as when the leader of one gang of thugs says before the gang assaults Jess, "'What the fuck are you? ... I can't tell what you are. Maybe we should just find out, huh, guys?" (258).

The text identifies two factors that get in the way of oppressed subjects' forging coalitional definitions against common points of oppression: the need to separate oneself from the abject, and the structural nature of privilege. Jess's reaction to Frankie's dating another butch demonstrates the extent to which her own identity is founded on an abjection of the butch-loving-butch possibility: "The more I thought about [Frankie and Johnny] being lovers, the more it upset me. I couldn't stop thinking about them kissing each other. ... I found myself obsessing about Frankie and Johnny" (202). Jess's own sense of self is threatened by the butch-loving-butch precisely to the extent that it is based on the rejection of that possibility; hence Jess's perception that Frankie is "taking [something] away" from her, and her need to "separate [herself]" from Frankie. Significantly, the text suggests that this process mirrors the homophobic heterosexually-identified man's abjection of gay men when Jess reflects, "It was like two guys" (202); further, Jess's need to "separate" herself also replicates the line-drawing process through which white middle-class
lesbian feminists rejected Jess and her friends from their form of identity.

However, unlike these women, Jess is able to move from abjection to coalition by acknowledging what Cherríe Moraga, following Audre Lorde, terms "the nightmare within" ("La Gùera" 33)—for Jess, the fact that "[n]obody ever honored [butch/femme] love." She is motivated to face this pain by her stronger need for a reconnection with her butch past and her awareness of her own mortality (an awareness produced in part by her oppression as a transgendered subject). She goes back to find Frankie after realizing that the "'unfinished'" things in her life "'make[] [her] more afraid to die'" and "'hold [her] back in [the] fight[s]'" gender fascists pick with her (271). Jess's decision not to continue abjecting Frankie stems from her need not to lose that part of herself she shares with Frankie, a "'whole part of [her] life [she] really need[s]'" (272). Jess makes a similar decision not to abject another butch from the "'old days'" (283) when she meets with Grant after having passed as a man. Grant abjects Jess by gloating about how glad she is that she didn't decide to take male hormones like Jess did, since Jess is "'stuck'" being neither "'a butch [n]or a guy'" (283). Angrily, Jess says, "'How far are you willing to go, Grant? How much of yourself are you willing to give up in order to distance yourself from me?'" (283) Then, rather than continue to push her advantage when Grant begins
to flush, Jess remembers her own words. She thinks, "How much of myself [am] I willing to give up to distance myself from her?" (283) She thus makes the conscious decision not to abject Grant, but to emphasize their shared past: "'how [they] tried to make a home for each other. And [how they] could do that right here'" (283).

The second factor impeding coalition is the structural nature of privilege. Jess’s early ignorance of the racial seating arrangement in her cafeteria exemplifies a peculiar, much-noted characteristic of social privilege, that is, its ability to pass itself off as the invisible norm.25 The text argues that the effective coalition politician will maintain an open subjectivity that allows for the acknowledgement of his/her own position of privilege and how that position might distort his/her understanding of a different subject’s oppression. For example, Jess’s encounters with Duffy, a white male union organizer, provide a partial model of how to make coalition work, given the distorting nature of privilege. Duffy is effective as a coalition politician because he acknowledges his own ignorance concerning the conditions Jess faces, as shown by his ability to admit that he made a mistake and his ability

25See for example Rob McRuer’s analysis, drawing from Richard Dyer’s discussion of the social construction of whiteness, of the attempt of Edmund White’s A Boy’s Own Story to pass off its white, upper-middle-class perspective as an objective or invisible frame.
to ask questions about Jess's life (at one point, he asks her if "girlfriends" is the right term [86]).

Duffy's attitude models that of the effective coalition/alliance politician: seeking out sameness and taking account of difference in such a way as to acknowledge the incomplete nature of his/her own understanding of the social--what Hennessy and other materialist feminists would call its "historicity," or in other words, its historically limited position in an ongoing struggle for social change. Jess also follows this practice during her butch period when she eventually admits, at Theresa's urging, her lack of knowledge of what her black butch friend Ed "faces every day that [she doesn't]'" (129). Jess is able to admit this ignorance after her lover Theresa, who is active in the social movements of the time, encourages her to go talk to Ed after a physical blowout between Ed and the white butch Grant over some of Grant's racist comments. With this support behind her, Jess is able to admit her ignorance of Ed's life, and, in her words to Theresa describing the conversation, to "listen as hard as she could" to Ed's experiences and knowledge as a black butch woman (129). Jess is then able to act in alliance with Ed against the bar-owner who decided to ban blacks from the bar after the fight between Grant and Ed. Jess tells the owner that barring Blacks wouldn't keep the peace, because "'I would've jumped in Grant's face over the shit she said, too'" (128),
thus emphasizing that racism and racial issues are not just the racially-oppressed person’s issues. Jess also acts in alliance with Ed by asserting that she "'wouldn’t go to an all-white bar’" (128). Here, Jess departs from her previously customary role, that of a mediator who remained neutral in order to bring fighting butches back together; instead, Jess chooses the needs of the racially-oppressed butch over her previous desire for a peaceful unity of butches which would, in fact, be bought at the expense of covering up the needs of the racially-oppressed butch.

Thus, the text endorses the strategy of coalition politics taught to Jess by the Native American women who work with her at one of her factory jobs: in Jess’ words, "my differences were taken into account, my sameness sought out" by these women with whom she was "held . . . together" by the factory’s assembly line conveyor belt (78). The text affirms the desire for partial sameness, and the need for what the Combahee River Collective termed "focusing on [one’s] own oppression" rather than "working to end somebody else’s oppression" (212). That is, the novel does not do away with the need for terms to define oppressed subjectivities, while it recognizes that these terms can each only partially represent—as "butch" only partially represents—the subjects whose oppression such terms both represent and, in certain usages, contest. Hence the importance of Jess’s dream, based on the history of
transgendered people she and her (male-to-female) friend Ruth have been studying, about the hut filled with "people who were different like me," people Jess feels "proud to be one of" (300). Jess and Ruth's historical knowledge of transgendered people functions to allow Jess and her friends to focus on their own oppression and its historical contingency—in Ruth's words, "'just finding out that it was ever different . . . made me feel things could change again'" (271). This mythic history of a time when "it was . . . different" for the social category of transgendered people serves to animate a politics based on a mutual sense of difference from contemporary American gendered norms.  

However, this transgendered subjectivity does not become a "home" for Jess, one unfractured by difference, in that Jess's Jewishness serves as a difference between her and her transgendered friends Ruth, Tanya, and Esperanza, just as race serves as a difference between her and Ed. In their analysis of Minnie Bruce Pratt's essay "Identity: Skin Blood Heart," Biddy Martin and Chandra Talpade Mohanty champion Pratt's exposure of "home" as "an illusion of

26See Evelyn Blackwood's "Sexuality and Gender in Certain Native American Tribes: The Case of Cross-Gender Females" for an analysis of why the gender ideology of certain Native tribes allowed for the institutionalized existence of a cross-gender role for women. Blackwood links this flexible gender ideology with the egalitarian mode of production practiced by these tribes (142-143). For an analysis of two other cultural forms of institutionalized gender-crossing in addition to the Native American berdache (the xanith in Oman and woman-woman marriage in Africa), see Judith Shapiro (262-268).
coherence and safety based on the exclusion of specific histories of oppression and resistance" (196); Martin and Mohanty also cite Bernice Johnson Reagon's "warning to all feminists that 'we are going to have to break out of [the] little barred rooms'" of our safe "home" subjectivities if we are to become effective coalition politicians--a warning which could have been aimed at the line-drawing feminists in Stone Butch Blues (192). Martin and Mohanty's essay suggests that perhaps Jess is such an effective coalition politician because she's never had the illusion of a safe "home": the people who share her first "home" with her, her parents, send her to a mental institution to teach her how to be feminine, and are thus anything but "safe" for the transgendered child whose "specific histor[y] of oppression and resistance" is violently excluded from their "home."

The novel argues that sameness, or absolute unity--total identity--is bought at the expense of the exclusion of those who are the most vulnerable to oppression, for example, the butches who are among the most vulnerable of the workers. Hence, the text replaces identity politics' desire for absolute sameness with coalition politics, evidencing that constructions of collective, shared identity are, in fact, always/already coalitions. All "transgendered" people are not the same, just as, the text is careful to show, all "lesbians," all "Jews," all "women," all "men," all "blacks," all "workers" are not the same.
The novel reveals that subjects can define themselves according to just one social category only by abjecting other aspects of themselves, aspects that correspond to the other arenas of social difference in which the subjects in question are constructed. The text's portrait of those with differing subjectivities incorporates the familiar postmodern gesture of taking "difference into account," while at the same time "seeking out sameness" in a way that avoids the danger Susan Bordo identifies with the wholesale rejection of identity: that of fetishizing difference to the point of reifying an atomistic individualism which denies commonalities of social experience.  

The text's simultaneous acknowledgement of sameness and difference implies that going to either extreme--identity politics' desire for absolute sameness, or deconstructionist politics' desire for absolute difference--ignores the complexity of material relations, thus dividing subjects whose energies would be better placed working together against all of their oppressions.  

In conclusion, Stone Butch Blues, through its emphasis on the necessity for materially-based definitions of

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27 See Bordo's "Feminism, Postmodernism, and Gender-Scepticism" for an analysis of how the deconstruction of identity can lead to such atomistic individualism.

28 See Chapter Two for my analysis of the problems associated with a politics that, in Shane Phelan's words, "continually deconstruct[s] or refuse[s] the categories on which contemporary oppressions are based" (Getting 150).
subjectivity built on the recognition of both common struggle against oppression and the limiting nature of privilege, provides a theoretical model for the accomplishment of coalition: a concrete practical method through which oppressed subjects can come together to effect a "bigger" "we." Grounded in their knowledge of both the systemic nature of the oppression they face and the historical and material limitations of their own viewpoints, coalition politicians provide a way out of the impasses of identity politics and towards a more possible future for us all.
CHAPTER 7
CONCLUSION

Black people alone cannot make . . . revolution in this country. . . . Women alone cannot make revolution in this country. Gay people alone cannot make revolution in this country. And anyone who tries it will not be successful. (Parker 241).

Without an emotional, heartfelt grappling with the source of our own oppression, without naming the enemy within ourselves and outside of us, no authentic, non-hierarchical connection among oppressed groups can take place. . . . But to fail to move out from there . . . will only insulate, rather than radicalize us. (Moraga, "La Gêera" 34)

Nowhere are the related issues of . . . identity[] and experience so highly charged and so deeply politicized as they are in the classroom. Personal consciousness, individual oppressions, lived experience--in short, identity politics--operate in the classroom both to authorize and to de-authorize speech. (Fuss, Essentially 113)

[P]edagogy is both exhilarating and dangerous. It is one of the few forms of cultural politics that cannot simply be consigned to academia. (Giroux, Border 160)

If Pat Parker is right that revolutionary social change requires a broad-based coalition of oppressed peoples, and Cherríe Moraga is right that we can only form such "connections" through first "grappling with the source of our own oppression"; further, if the classroom, as Diana Fuss argues, is a "deeply politicized" arena in which "consciousness," "oppressions," and "experience" are both voiced and silenced--then how might we as teachers use our
"exhilarating" and "dangerous" position as educators to encourage a politics of coalition that will not remain "consigned to academia"? This question becomes even more pressing when we realize that most of our students, though not all, are privileged in one or more aspects of their subjectivities, whether by virtue of class, race, sexuality, gender, physical ability, religion, or other factors. Thus, it becomes even more important to offer our students both the critical means through which they can begin to counter their own oppression(s), and the means through which they can begin to become, in radical pedagogy theorist Henry Giroux's term, "border-crossers" (Border 170) who, like Jess Goldberg in Stone Butch Blues, are able to cross over the boundaries of their own socially-constructed subjectivities in order to work for the needs of others who do not share their privilege(s).

In this chapter, I will argue that we can use classroom discussions of literary texts, strategic revelations about our own material positions, and carefully designed writing assignments to teach our students a materialist reading practice that can help them to recognize the role played by material relations in forming their own subjectivities. Literary texts provide an exemplary way of teaching such a reading practice, I claim, because even texts that attempt to obscure or justify oppressive social relations also document these relations in some way, e.g., The Well of
Loneliness; thus we can use literary texts to teach our students how to read for dynamics of privilege and oppression. Whatever their ideological perspective, literary texts' portraits of material relations trigger students' (and teachers') emotional responses—responses which often indicate, I argue, the dynamics of abjection-enacted-as-oppression described in the preceding chapters. I discuss the problems with the model brought out by classroom discussions I have experienced, as well as the strengths, explaining how equipping students with the model of abjection-as-oppression can give students a theoretical framework through which to understand their emotional responses to representations of material relations. I then discuss how we can work against both the problem of abjection and some of the problems associated with critical pedagogy by emphasizing the material relations within and against which our own subjectivities take shape. Finally, I detail how a writing assignment I devised in conjunction with my former co-teacher Mary Ann Leiby supplies students with an opportunity to begin to move from abjection to coalition.

A reading practice that highlights the multiple and complex materiality of subjectivity can be taught through closely examining literary texts and pointing out to students (or helping them to ascertain) the workings of privilege and oppression in the way texts and characters are
constructed/the way texts construct the world. The four texts I discuss in this study, for example, depict multiple social relations from varying ideological perspectives, and can thus be used as templates for discussions of the social world and the inequities that structure it. More importantly, such texts can be used to teach students how to read the social world for such inequities, for, as Harriet Malinowtiz argues, citing Paulo Freire, "'[R]ead[ing] the word and [reading] the world' [are] allied activities" (Textual xvi). *The Well of Loneliness* provides a strong case in point here. By training students to read this text for the function of working-class characters (and/or, as Kim Emery does, for the function of "Negro" characters), we can give students who lack such skills the critical skills for reading the function of working-class (and black) people in the social world in which they live. Students may, perhaps, be led to the conclusion that just as Hall's text marginalizes and appropriates the labor and suffering of working-class (and black) characters, so too does our social world. Further, if we impart these reading skills in such a way as to emphasize that we as teachers are ethically and politically opposed to the social inequities that texts represent, we can act as allies for students who also oppose this state of affairs. Students from oppressed subject-positions who are resigned to oppression or who believe that somehow they caused or deserve it may also be heartened by
our opposition to oppression, while unaware students from more privileged subject-positions may begin to see the inequities to which their privilege had previously blinded them.

Such reading skills, however, will serve as nothing but instruments of what the right terms "political correctness" if they do not enable students to begin the "heartfelt grappling with the source" of their own oppressions that Moraga sees as being so necessary. We need to make our classrooms into safe environments for students to acknowledge and explore their affective responses to literary texts' depictions of material relations, whatever these responses might be. (This does not mean, however, that we should tolerate blatantly hateful or discriminatory remarks. Students who make such remarks are acting out, rather than acknowledging and exploring, emotional reactions. Further, such acting out discourages other students from being able to explore their responses, for fear of being attacked.) If my experience is representative, in an open classroom environment students will usually reveal a variety of emotional responses to texts.

These emotional responses stem from what Giroux calls "the lived reality of difference" (201), i.e., the fact that the complex material relations discussed throughout this study form the matrix of teachers' and students' lives. As
a result, far from being a simple enterprise through which teachers deposit in students' minds knowledge of the complex and interconnecting social inequities that structure our world, teaching a materialist reading practice can be enormously difficult. Teachers themselves, because they are located historically and materially, will not have access to all important knowledge of all social groups, particularly as material relations change in time and history. (As I discuss later, openly acknowledging one's material position can turn this limitation into a pedagogical benefit.)

Further, as Kathleen Weiler comments, "this kind of pedagogy . . . in a society in which privilege and oppression are lived is risky and filled with pain" (470). This "pain" and "risk" are those of students and teachers who occupy socially-abject, oppressed subject positions, as well as the pain and risk of (sometimes the very same) students and teachers who occupy socially privileged positions and who experience learning about the oppression of others as a threat to their own emotional safety or the security and stability of their own identity. The former may feel, if one is not careful to create an affirming enough space, silenced by classroom dynamics. The latter often feel especially threatened by those in the classroom or in literary texts, who, like Hall in Just Above My Head, are angry at those in the privileged subject-position. It is these students on which I wish to focus for a bit. If the
model of abjection-enacted-as-oppression is correct, responses which demonstrate resistance to understanding certain social relations as oppressive can be traced back to students’ own experiences. That is, if both internalized and externalized oppression involve the psychic process of abjection, as the model of abjection-enacted-as-oppression developed in the preceding chapters implies, students who resist knowledge of the social inequities that structure our world do so because they have abjected a component of their own subjectivity, for example, their own sense of powerlessness at class oppression or at rape. Such students would then enact that abjection in class discussions through their treatment of and attitudes towards others who come to stand in for these abjected components of their own subjectivities.

To provide an example, a recent classroom discussion--triggered by a text which, like The Well of Loneliness, documented the oppression of working-class characters--centered on how students from working-class backgrounds who make it into college are disadvantaged relative to middle-class students, for instance, when they are left without money for books at the beginning of the term when their financial aid checks are delayed for weeks and sometimes even months at a time. Working-class students, who often do not have, as middle-class students do, relatives and friends with money from whom they can borrow, are then left to
struggle to keep up in classes for which they cannot do the reading. One student—herself a working student who had to struggle to get through school—argued vehemently that the solution to this problem lay in such students asking their professors for book money or getting the books from the library. Leaving aside consideration of how realistic it is to think that the library will have enough copies of all the books required for courses at this university, this student’s solution overlooked the materiality of class-based shame—i.e., the way in which such shame is both caused by and further perpetuates class oppression—in a culture in which people are blamed for being poor, are told again and again that it is their fault they do not have money.\(^1\) This student did not want to face her own oppression, for, however bold and outgoing she may have been, it certainly could not have been pleasant for her to be in a position where she had to ask others for money. Hence this student spoke out to "discount the oppression of others" ("La Güera" 30), which was also her own.

\(^1\)In Dreams of an Insomniac, Irena Klepfisz cites the example of Mr. and Mrs. Peters, a working-class couple who, after losing their home, froze to death in their own car rather than ask someone they knew for help (42). Such people, Klepfisz argues, are "not playing victim. Rather [they] are paralyzed by a socially learned lesson so deeply absorbed it has become almost an instinct life itself cannot counter" (44). She explains how classism, internalized and externalized, makes asking those who have money—and thus, power and control over you and over their own lives—a "humiliating" act through which you admit "that you have failed" (45).
Discussing literary texts such as *Stone Butch Blues* through the model of abjection developed in this study can help students to get an intellectual purchase on what may be happening internally when they act out in this way. JoAnna Kadi's model of the "conquered self" and the "conquest of the self" is relevant here. Kadi argues that internalized oppression (the "conquered self") can be overcome through a three-part method that allows one to begin the "conquest of the self"; this "conquered self" that must be overcome, it should be noted, is the product of the material forces that cause, for example, working-class students to feel they don't belong at university, and lesbians to think that their feelings are not normal or natural. The first component Kadi identifies is a change in "knowledge" (94), e.g., from believing that one's class oppression is a result of one's own inadequacies, or that one's sexual feelings are sick and perverted, to the knowledge that class oppression is systemic and political, or that oppression based on sexuality is politically motivated and serves certain vested interests. Literary texts can help us to communicate such "knowledge" to our students. For example, David Leavitt's novel can help to provide abject-gay or abject-lesbian students with an alternative model for understanding lesbian and gay sexuality. Literary texts can also provide the occasion for bringing historical facts of oppression to the attention of students who are unaware of them. Students
with little or no awareness of the officially sanctioned abuses enacted against oppressed groups can benefit from reading about the police treatment of Jess and her friends in *Stone Butch Blues* and police indifference to Hall and his friends and family in *Just Above My Head*; when students question the veracity of these representations, we can hasten to assure them that, while these are textual creations, they are based in historical facts of differential access to resources.

However, Kadi argues that "[i]t is not enough that the mind understand . . . [such facts]. The body and spirit must take action in order for deep change to occur" (94). For Kadi, "actions" against oppression must be accompanied by a willingness to engage the "feelings" associated with the oppression that one has denied or attempted to repress (95). She discusses how she herself had to allow the "layer[s] of numbness" and "wall[s] of amnesia surround[ing] certain [class-related] events" to melt so that she could re-experience the "shame and degradation of growing up working-class" (94), for only after she had re-experienced these feelings in the context of her new "knowledge" about class oppression could she begin to undo their devastating effects. In my appropriation of Kristeva's terms, individuals need to be able to face the abjected components of their subjectivities associated with their oppression, for only then can they form coalitions with others who have
faced similar and/or different oppressions. Classroom
discussions of literary texts can satisfy these requirements
for feelings and actions, in that literary texts
representing various material relations can act as triggers
for abjected memories of oppression. Discussing literary
texts can also provide the opportunity for students from
oppressed subject positions to take the action of speaking
out against their oppression, as a Latina student in my
Women's Studies class did yesterday when she told her
predominantly Anglo-American classmates that the
Americanization of popular culture in Latin countries is not
the product of Latin people's free "choice."

This last example, however, raises some of the problems
with the abjection-as-oppression model, for the colonization
of Latin countries by U.S. corporate interests and U.S.-
backed military regimes is perpetuated, not merely by
psychic mechanisms within and without the U.S., but by other
material forces, for example, by the lack of information and
the misinformation actively disseminated by U.S. media and
educational institutions. However, my teaching experience
suggests that the dynamics of abjection-as-oppression come
into play almost immediately when students are given
information about Third World economic issues, racial
oppression within the United States, homophobic hate crimes,
and so forth. That is, some students immediately resist
such knowledge, not merely because it conflicts with
ideological perspectives they already have, but because they have an emotional investment in these perspectives. Again, classroom experience bears out the previous chapters’ implications that certain constructions of subjectivity function to preserve the "differential value" (Foucault 123) of certain bodies at the expense of others, or in Kristevan terms to separate individuals from their abject others. For example, again in my Women’s Studies class, a student recently claimed that she did not want to oppress lesbians and gays, but she opposed lesbian and gay marriage because "we," i.e., heterosexuals, whom she presumed to be the solid backbone of society, need to maintain some kind of "identity" for ourselves and our children when they are growing up; without the legally enforced presumption of heterosexuality, "we" would lose our "identity." I was astounded, not only that a polite, otherwise thoughtful and considerate student would make such an argument (to an openly bisexual teacher, no less), but at the clear way in which this student revealed that her own "identity" depends on the legally enforced abjection of homosexuals from our dominant social structures. As my reading of James Baldwin’s novel suggests, such abjection of homosexuality from "identity" is indicative of a subject who is afraid to face her own bodily abjects as part of her own subjectivity --a subject, in other words, who does not want to face her
own embodiment and mortality, the necessary instability and flux of all human "identity."

Another question raised by the abjection-as-oppression model involves the extent to which it limits us in the struggle against oppression. Within the classroom, not all students will be open to examining their emotional investments in material relations, while others will be more concerned with ensuring that the landlord does not throw them out on their ear for having a lover of the same sex than with working through internalized homophobia; certainly, it would be ridiculous to suggest that such students attempt to psychoanalyze their landlord out of his/her homophobia. Collective action in the traditional political sphere--dare I say, traditional identity politics that fights for the rights of l/g/b/t subjects--would seem to be a better answer. However, the model of abjection-as-oppression can most certainly help those who both want to work towards an end to racism, classism, homophobia and heterosexism, and so forth, and who also have some degree of privilege--however small--that they can use and/or have used to enact abjection-as-oppression on others. (I think here of Jess Goldberg’s abjection of the butch-loving-butch, and of the homophobic black characters in Just Above My Head; socially disempowered as these characters were, they each had a certain degree of social privilege out of which they could oppress others.) For those who do want to undertake
such work, this model, and the model of the multiple, complex, and interconnected inequities that comprise our material world, can prove useful for helping subjects to establish coalitions of the sort Jess Goldberg forms in *Stone Butch Blues*. As we will see more clearly when I discuss a writing assignment designed to help students move away from abjection, the abjection-as-oppression model remains a valuable one for helping us to encourage our students to work through the problematics of privilege and oppression in order to come to fuller acceptance of themselves and active coalition with others.

It could be objected that, in following such a model, teachers are/would be imposing their own view of what constitutes oppression, and what constitutes liberation, on students. Some would even say that the model of abjection-as-oppression furthers a victim mentality that is ultimately counterproductive to the struggle against oppression. For example, what if the student discussed early in this chapter--the one whom I claimed condescendingly told other working students to just ask other students or their professors for books because she was unwilling to look at her own oppression as a working student--what if this student did not particularly feel oppressed as a working student? Wouldn’t telling her that she was, in fact, oppressed as a working student construct a strong and assertive student as a victim? This is a definite
possibility of the abjection-as-oppression model, suggesting that it needs to be applied with caution. However, regarding the "strong" and "assertive" working student, the fact that she refused to grant any empathy to working students who were fearful of asking for money indicated that she had constructed her own apparent strength and assertiveness on an abjection of such fear; otherwise, she would not have been so angry at more "timid" working students, and would not have constructed such students, rather than class inequity itself, as the problem. Had her strength and assertiveness not been based on abjection, she would not have had such a difficult time acknowledging that the working students to whom she felt superior collectively lack the resources of their middle-class counterparts, and that individuals asking for money from those with more privilege would not change this collective situation, which in fact was her situation.

Moreover, these problems with the model can be countered by another useful pedagogical technique--that of deconstructing one's own authority in the classroom. Teachers can enact what Giroux, following Teresa de Lauretis, terms a (non-coercive) "pedagogy of and for difference" ("Schooling" 142) by emphasizing the material relations within and against which their own subjectivities take shape, thereby modelling for students how Kadi's schema of knowledge, feelings, and actions works. For example, on
the first day of the term and throughout the semester I discuss certain aspects of my subjectivity with my students; how much I discuss depends on whether I am teaching freshmen composition, a sophomore level survey course, or an upper-division Women's Studies course. However, in all of my classes I discuss my work in lesbian and gay activism. I explain to students that in telling them about this work, I am resisting my own shame and other factors which put pressure on me to be silent about lesbian, gay, and bisexual lives; these factors, I tell my students, all stem from the material forces of homophobia and heterosexism, forces I would like to see brought to a permanent end. I continue to tell students these things despite the fact that each term, several of my freshmen English students give me lower evaluation scores because, in the written words of one student, "her openness about her homosexuality [gets] in the way of learning."² Despite this comment, this student revealed that s/he had, in fact, been "learning": learning the fact of lesbian, gay, and bisexual existence, a fact which challenges the heterosexist "knowledge" that, except for a few visibly identifiable "queers," most of "us"--and certainly those of us who are upwardly mobile, successful,

²Ironically, I never said to this class, as I have to others, that I was lesbian or bisexual, and provided lesbian and gay examples, at the most, four or five times throughout the semester. I think homophobic students were most irritated by an example I gave to illustrate a psychological point made by one of the essays we read for the class; the example involved two women in a dating relationship.
and gender-normative in appearance—are straight. As Harriet Malinowitz argues, citing Simon Watney, "In the absence of any speaking homosexual subjects, gays and lesbians have easily been 'depicted as a uniform type, an abstract, generalized, and thus dehumanized menace'" (74). From there, Malinowitz explains, "the next steps to marginalization and persecution are easy to make" (74). My "openness" thus threatened an assumption that upholds the material hegemony of heterosexually-identified subjects by making many of the rest of us invisible as anything but straight.

I also discuss with my students my racial and class privileges, and the process I have gone through—including some of the many, many mistakes I have made—as I have attempted to understand more completely how my privileges were related to the oppression of working-class, poor, and racially "marked" subjects. This technique can be even more powerful when, through team-teaching, two or more teachers are able to recount to students the process they

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3To cite only one example of the mistakes I have made—mistakes which I and my students subsequently learn from—a few years ago I apologized to a black student for racist comments made by one of the guest speakers for my course. Had I truly been concerned with that student's pain, and not with representing myself as the white teacher who had it together on issues of race, I would either have called the speaker on her racism or waited to discuss the issue with the entire class. As it was, I singled out my student in a way which isolated and repressed her, making racism her problem rather than one with which we all needed to be concerned.
have undergone in moving from abjection to coalition with each other. In this way, the preceding chapters lead to the valorization of an institutionally-marginalized form of teaching--team-teaching--as a model of coalition politics in action, particularly when it is done, as Dr. Leiby and I did it, across socially-constructed differences of class, sexuality, and so forth. But whether individually or with a co-teacher, locating myself materially allows me, as bell hooks advocates, "not to assume the posture of all-knowing professor[]" (52), and in this way to demonstrate the material limits of my own authoritative voice in the classroom. This deconstruction of one's own classroom authority, while it can never be complete as long as we are in charge of providing students with grades, offsets the problems with critical and radical pedagogy discussed by Elizabeth Ellsworth in "Why Doesn't This Feel Empowering? Working Through the Repressive Myths of Critical Pedagogy." In particular, locating one's voice materially ensures that a teacher will be unable to impose on her students a single master-narrative of oppression and/or liberation, for they will be aware of the material motivations influencing her perspective.4

4For a more complete discussion of the problem of privilege, oppression, and authority in the classroom, see the article Mary Ann Leiby and I co-authored: "Common Ground, Difficult Terrain: Confronting Difference Through Feminist Collaboration," forthcoming in Common Ground: Feminist Collaboration in the Academy (SUNY Press).
At this juncture I would like to return to Kadi's model of individual change in order to illustrate how writing assignments can be used to create the conditions for such change. All three of the components of individual change mentioned by Kadi—"knowledge," "feelings," and "action"—can be met through the act of writing. Like discussions of literary texts and strategic personal revelations, carefully designed writing assignments can facilitate students' coming to "knowledge" of their own oppression and that of others, engaging the "feelings" associated with such oppression, and taking "action." Mary Ann Leiby and I have devised several writing assignments directed towards these goals. In line with Moraga's argument about how individuals can move from abjection to coalition, our freshmen composition assignment sequence was designed to provide students with the opportunity to move from an examination of their own subjectivities to an engagement with those of others, an engagement that often produced an acknowledgement of the limitations of students' own knowledges. Through the first part of the sequence, students explore an aspect or aspects of their own subjectivity; for the second, students read and write about other students' responses to the first assignment.

[5]Here I should note that we devised this assignment for a cultural diversity composition course that was cross-listed with the Women's Studies department; it would need to be adapted for composition courses that do not have the institutional sanction of multiculturalism behind them.
The first part of the assignment sequence is adapted from David Hoehner's composition assignment based on N. Scott Momaday's *The Way to Rainy Mountain*. For this essay, students choose an aspect or aspects of their own subjectivity to explore through writing. These aspects may come from those we would associate with identity politics—such as race, sexuality, gender, class, ethnicity, or ability—or they may involve any other factor in a student's life, e.g., coming from an alcoholic home, playing baseball, suffering from an eating disorder, being the youngest in the family, and so forth. Students make an argument about the role played by one or more of these factors by writing in three "voices"—mythical/fictional, historical, and personal—voices which they then juxtapose in order to make an argument about their subjectivity.

For the first voice, students choose the discursive "myths" or fictions which circulate in the culture concerning their chosen subjectivity-factor, for example, the representation of Latinos as criminals, lesbians as man-haters, fat men as slobs, rape victims as "asking for it," and so forth. They may gather these discursive representations from television, newspapers, literature, or

6These "myths" or fictions may not always be so negative as the examples I've cited, nor will they always be something we would consider "false." For example, black students might choose to represent a myth concerning Harriet Tubman or Rosa Parks, thereby arguing for the positive function of Afro-American cultural discourses centered on these figures.
any other cultural source; they then render these representations in imitation of the "mythical" first voice in *Rainy Mountain*. The second, "historical" voice they take from written and, whenever possible, oral histories pertinent to the subjectivity factor or factors with which they are dealing. The third voice is composed of students' descriptions of personal experiences they have had, experiences that they either may or may not have considered important in the past, but which have to do with the component of subjectivity they are exploring. Through juxtaposing these various "voices," students can begin to see "mythic," "historical," and "personal" discourses "not as timeless or as monolithic discourses, but as social and historical inventions" (Giroux, Border 76). That is, because "personal experience" is never ideologically unmediated, juxtaposing their own narratives about their experiences with mythical and historical voices enables students to begin to perceive that their "personal" experiences and how they interpret them are influenced by larger cultural and historical ways of making sense. Further, this juxtaposition also allows students to begin to grasp that these larger ways of making sense may themselves be partial and limited, since mythical and historical accounts of a particular social group may or may not be in line with what students themselves have experienced in their lives. Students are empowered to intervene in these larger
"inventions" by constructing their own complex representations of their subjectivities as they exist in relation to the material forces of culture, history, and personal experience.

For the first essay, most students choose to focus on only one subjectivity factor. Significantly, while I emphasize that they may choose a positive or a negative aspect of their lives, students almost invariably choose an area of their lives in which they feel conflicted or are oppressed. And while this trend may be due to the fact that I often focus class discussion on issues of oppression, students are able to use the assignment to name what Moraga calls "the enemy" within and without, i.e., those internal and/or external forces which attempt or have attempted to keep students of oppressed races, classes, sexualities, genders, and so forth in a state of oppression. Indeed, I have been moved to tears by a Black woman's powerful account of the harm done to her by "the mighty man"--her father--who sexually abused her as a child, her research into the cultural and historical factors that fostered that abuse, and her argument throughout the paper that she as a child did not by any means deserve such treatment. Too, young lesbians have written different accounts of their personal, cultural, and historical heritages as lesbians--the joy of loving women and being part of an ongoing community and the pain of oppression faced by that community. In addition,
the only African-American male in a class of eighty responded to the assignment by discussing how he had been belittled throughout his education for wanting to explore the history of African-Americans, and how, due to a racist teacher’s discouragement, he had given up his artwork. With the first essay of our sequence, however, he was encouraged to explore his history. He read over forty books for the assignment and included his own artwork in the essay, thus representing himself as moving from a (socially enforced) abjection of his racial history to coalition with others of his racial position.7

While helpful for overcoming internalized oppression, such a focus on a single subjectivity-factor can lead, if we are not careful, to some of the problems discussed throughout this study, in particular, the reduction of the hierarchical differentiations that comprise the social realm to only one axis of difference, and the subsequent untheorization of the more privileged components of one’s subjectivity as they are implicated in the oppression of others. Philip Benjamin in The Lost Language of Cranes, for example, examines his own oppression as a gay man, but

7This may seem like an extraordinary example of an extremely motivated student; however, I have seen many students get this motivated when they are permitted to write about things which are pertinent to their lives. Later in this chapter I discuss a project undertaken by a Women’s Studies’ student concerning the problem of unnecessary hysterectomies. The student researched the problem so thoroughly that the gynecologist she interviewed knew less than my student did about the problem.
chooses at the same time to insulate himself in a bourgeois emotional safety that precludes his connection with those who suffer at the hands of class oppression. Thus, in order to counteract this kind of "insulation," in Moraga's term, the second part of the sequence requires students to engage with another student's response to the first part of the assignment (all of which is done in such a way that the papers' authors remain anonymous if they so choose).

Students choose whether or not to include their anonymous first paper in a file from which they all choose an essay to consider; they are also encouraged to glance through the papers in this file before choosing, so that they can choose a subjectivity different from their own in which they are interested in learning. Further, to balance the file, I include several copies of those papers from underrepresented subject positions--at the University of Florida, these underrepresented subjectivities include but certainly are not limited to lesbians, African-Americans, feminists, and working-class and disabled students. After reading their chosen paper, students are required to interview several people who embody the subjectivity factor or factors it describes, as well as to examine through library research, interviews with experts, community groups, and oral histories the sociological and historical conditions faced by those sharing that subjectivity. The assignment thus builds in the kind of acknowledgement of historical and
material limitations and perspective called for, as we have seen, by James Baldwin's *Just Above My Head* and Leslie Feinberg's *Stone Butch Blues*.

This two-part sequence and other assignments that encourage students to examine the construction of their own subjectivities within multiple relations of privilege and oppression have proven extremely effective for helping students to move from abjection to coalition. Through engaging with the paper of the African-American male student described above--the racism it recounted, as well as the strength and creativity which that racism could not kill--some white students began to acknowledge their own privilege, the way in which they unconsciously inhabited an unmarked "white" subject position that depended for its invisibility on the racist abjection of black "others."

These white students were more open to this process because, after all, within the confines of the assignment, they had chosen to engage with a black student's paper. This black student, moreover, chose to forgo his anonymity by allowing white students to interview him--a choice he made in order to contribute to his own goal of ending racist oppression. Through interviewing this student and other black students, including black activists on campus, some white students were able to see that their privileged whiteness was connected to the effects of racism on real human beings, and thus to broaden their understanding of the material
relations in which their subjectivities take shape; it is only after such a broadened understanding that students can cease acting out in the ways discussed above, and can begin to focus instead on working towards coalition. And while it is difficult for one or two college classes to undo what Andrea Canaan calls the "miles of mistrust" (237) between those facing differing material circumstances, I have seen students at least begin to cross those miles. I think of the bisexual woman and the gay man who, in response to a more advanced version of the assignment discussed above, formed a coalition against sexism in the gay male community. Unlike the gay man Moraga describes as being unable to coalesce with her because he feared coming to terms with what it felt like to be raped by men ("La Güera" 30), the gay student was able to overcome his fears enough to name sexism, and not the women who point out sexism, as the real problem in the gay community.

In the more advanced form of this collaboratively-produced writing assignment I utilize when I teach "Interdisciplinary Perspectives on Women"--the core course for the Women's Studies major here at UF--I do not explicitly split the coalition process into the two steps (writing about the self/writing about the other) described above. Because we are able to discuss in detail the

8 Along these same lines, Cherríe Moraga argues that the "radical feminist must extend her own 'identity' politics to include her 'identity' as oppressor as well" (Loving 128).
material conditions faced by a multiplicity of women, men, and transgendered subjects, and to apply Moraga's discussion of the barriers to coalition politics to our own impassioned classroom debates, students are already aware of how the process of abjection works, and are thus prepared to recognize and work against it in themselves. For this assignment, students choose to write on a particular problem affecting women; this may be a problem that affects men and transgendered subjects as well. In addition to doing traditional library research, students are required to interview both women affected by the problem and people who are working to solve it, including state officials, academics, activists, social workers, school board members, and so forth. The problem may be one with which they have had personal experience, or it may be one which, due to their privilege, they themselves have not experienced. For their paper, they analyze the causes of the problem and discuss in detail a concrete, practical solution and the particular steps that would be required to implement that solution at a local, state, or national level.

As with the composition assignment discussed earlier, students often elect to focus on an issue involving their own oppression. This semester, one such student has decided to examine biphobia within the lesbian and gay community. She sees this problem as being caused in part by lesbian and gay individuals' reactions to homophobia, and thus believes
that any solution will have to target homophobia from without and from within the lesbian and gay community. She thus chose to form a discussion group, open to anyone interested in the issue, dedicated to examining the effects of homophobia and biphobia in students' lives. Another student, a black woman, wrote about the problem of gang rape at UF fraternities and athletic dorms—a problem she herself had experienced first-hand. For her solution she resolved to give a talk at her high school warning other young women, many of whom are, as she was, naive about what happens to women on college campuses. While this solution does not ensure that those who rape women will not continue to do so, she acknowledged, it would be a worthwhile effort if it saved only one other young woman from undergoing the trauma of self-blame she had experienced. Through this action, this woman took another step towards overcoming her belief that the rapes were her own fault for being a young black woman who went to a party in an athletic dorm.

After discussing for an entire semester differences within feminism and the barriers to social change posed by all of the oppressions with which women are faced, other students in the "Interdisciplinary Perspectives" course choose to use the privileges they do have in the service of others. For example, this semester one of my white, middle-class female students chose to define the economic hardship being faced by Kitchen Table: Women of Color Press as a
significant problem affecting women. By spending her own money and many hours of her time making flyers and phone calls directed towards getting other students and faculty members to buy from or contribute to Kitchen Table, this student acted in coalition with women of color—and this despite the fact that her roommate has taken to calling her a "femi-Nazi" for her involvement with the project. Another, Greco-American female student began a project on the problem of unnecessary hysterectomies, a project she was motivated to undertake because her mother had suffered significant emotional consequences from an unnecessary hysterectomy. After being made aware through class discussion and reading assignments of the different material positions of women, this student tried to find out how different groups of women were affected by the problem. She discovered that black women are at least twice as likely to undergo unnecessary hysterectomies, and has decided to pamphlet health clinics used by economically underprivileged women in order to provide information that, apparently, doctors are not providing. By beginning with an issue that affected her personally through her mother, while simultaneously being aware of the complexity of the material relations inhabited by women and the dangers of abjection, this student too has been able to act in coalition with other women. Her efforts, like those of many other students I have had the privilege of teaching, thus work towards
wider social change, change that cannot be, in Giroux's words, "consigned to academia."

In conclusion, through reading with students literary texts such as This Bridge Called My Back, Just Above My Head, and Stone Butch Blues; strategically revealing our own material positions and our attempts to engage with others; and providing our students with the opportunity to attempt such encounters themselves, we can begin to work towards the "dangerous" and "exhilarating" goals of radical pedagogy and the desire of coalition politics at its most radical--that is, the desire to improve the lives of all subjects by healing the "split[ting] that originates in the very foundations of our lives, our cultures, our languages, [and] our thoughts" (Anzaldúa, Borderlands 80). Lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgendered people alone cannot "make [such a] revolution," nor can Blacks, whites, Asians, Chicanos, Latinos, Indians, women, disabled, middle-class, working-class, poor or any other people. If we move together, however, "the rock will wear away" (Christian and Near 536, emphasis added) and the material "earth" of our lives in this society begin, however slowly, to "turn over" (Parker 242).
REFERENCES


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BIографical Sketch

From the time I was in second grade till I was in tenth, my mother drove me and my three sisters to private Catholic schools miles from our semi-rural neighborhood in the South Hills of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. She did so because she wanted a better education for her daughters than what was available in the public schools she had attended, and because she staunchly believed in Catholic morality. However, because St. Louise de Marillac, my grade school, was in an upper middle-class neighborhood and my parents both hailed from working-class/blue-collar backgrounds--my mother grew up in an alcoholic working-class home and my father worked as a plumber--I never felt at ease there. The children at this school were cruel, and I was ridiculed more than once for my clothing and "low class" behaviors, for example, loudly defending a friend who was being ridiculed for not being part of the "in" crowd. While I too wanted to be part of that crowd, I never could seem to achieve that belonging.

Things got better when I got to St. Francis Academy, an all-girls' high school attended by both middle-class and upper working-class girls. I had a slew of loyal friends, scored high on the SAT, graduated second in my class, and
received a scholarship to St. Vincent College in Latrobe, Pennsylvania. There, I experienced something of an intellectual awakening; through a philosophy class with Dr. Meny, I began to see what books could offer, how they could allow me to see further than I could without them, and in so seeing, change my life. (It was through books that I first learned, for example, that there were real adult women who were proud to call themselves lesbians and to love other women sexually as well as emotionally.) I decided to major in English and minor in philosophy, and again graduated with highest honors, third in my class.

I chose to attend the University of Florida for graduate school because the English Department offered me a Grinter Fellowship in addition to a teaching assistantship, for a total larger than any of the other institutions to which I had been accepted. Dr. Ellen Nore, one of the few women professors at St. Vincent, helped me to make this decision by giving me the money to take a plane to Gainesville to visit the University. Throughout my eight years here, I have supported myself--and in some important ways found myself--through teaching a total of nine courses, including the core course for the Women's Studies major and several composition courses focused around identity factors such as race, class, gender, and sexuality. During this time I have also been (intermittently) active in the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgendered movement.
I received my master's degree in 1991, and was awarded two scholarships/fellowships that have facilitated my work towards the doctorate: an O. Ruth McQuown award in 1994, and a College of Liberal Arts and Sciences dissertation fellowship in 1995. When I receive my degree in December, I will be the first in my family with a Ph.D. My education has, in some ways, alienated me from those, like my parents, without college degrees. However, in this dissertation I have tried as best I could to write something the spirit of which, if not the language, honors my parents' and my grandparents' lives.
I certify that I have read this study and that in my opinion it conforms to acceptable standards of scholarly presentation and is fully adequate, in scope and quality, as a dissertation for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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This dissertation was submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the Department of English in the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences and to the Graduate School and was accepted as partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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Dean, Graduate School