Distracting the border guards: novel approaches to negotiating gender and sexuality in The Color Purple, Nearly Roadkill, and Stone Butch Blues

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Distracting the border guards: Novel approaches to negotiating gender and sexuality in *The Color Purple, Nearly Roadkill*, and *Stone Butch Blues*

by

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This is to certify that the Master's thesis of

A.D. Selha

has met the thesis requirements of Iowa State University
DEDICATION

For those who have come before me, I request your permission to write in your presence, to illuminate your lives, and draw connections between the communities which you may have painfully felt both a part of and apart from. I dedicate my work in remembrance of all of the gender warriors who lost their lives in the battle between self constructed gender expression and cultural terror including: Brandon Teena, Marsha P. Johnson, Carla D., Richard Goldman, Harold Draper, Cameron Tanner, Mary S., Jessy Santiago, Peggy Santiago. Also I write in dedication to those who continue to fight and survive to see an end to the oppression of gender and sexual queers, especially Myke.
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To my sister, Heidi Selin, "It was many and many a year ago,/In a kingdom by the sea,/That a maiden there lived whom you may know/By the name of Annabel Lee." And finally, Myke Selha, take a well-deserved curtsey. Two roads diverged in a yellow wood and we took 'em all! Our relationship itself spans so many communities, I lost track. Thanks not only for your help in my writing process, but also for helping me survive to get here at all.

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Crushing walls is draining. Sometimes, instead, I stay in bed, inside these walls, unwilling, with my gender enforceable student I.D., to board the bus routed toward campus. I know the guards become stronger from the sweat of my fear. I also know I can not break that plane. Not today.

Other times I stay out there, passing, unable to imagine having to return to another day of distracting the guards. I know they think I am one of them and they get puffed up at the sight of their numbers. I also know I can not return to a place guarded by women/men, homo/hetero, black/white, inside/outside. Not today.

In side these walls.
These walls talk plenty. They sweat my panic thoughts of breaking their plane. I close the lids of their glassy eyes which tempt/frighten me with the outside. I would rather paper over them with mirrors than feel the wind seeping through the cracks.

Out side these walls.
From here the walls touch everything not inside. They harbor the unpredictable around every corner. Mirrors become windows through which the guards watch. I've tried cut glass, knives, broken bottles, razor blades, even once a rope--threats on my life, threats on their lives--but they are not distracted by futile attempts.
And the walls come a'tumblin' down.

Braced against the doorway I protect myself from falling debris the first of which sends guards running to the site. Their faces crumble along with their job security. Standing on the rubble trying to discern which is inside/outside the guards busy themselves with frantic mortaring of pieces together. When I return from speaking to a Women's Studies class on transgender queer identity, no doubt, some of the inside will have become part of the outside.

It was only recently when I was asked, for the first time in an academic setting, to speak as a person who identifies as transgender and queer. It was amazing to speak to a group of people who had all read Stone Butch Blues and were eager to discuss the relationship between the novel and my “experience” as a gender transgressive butch. But as I've outlined above, the experience also entailed a good amount of border crossing. Crossing the borders of gender enforcement is common enough, but having never been asked before to speak from a transgender voice in the academy, crossing the border between my “personal life” and my academic studies was more of a challenge than I had imagined. My gender resonates with my working-class background, but feels alien to the educational institution. My education leaves me feeling like a traitor to my family and community most notably as I lose the skills to communicate in the vernacular I was brought up to speak; phrases such as “stone broke” become colloquialisms. I feel caught between two economic and social class strata. While my butch gender feels “down home” it serves as a reminder to some of my instructors, students, and peers, that I am not fulfilling my graduate school preparation of acculturation and
assimilation 101. As a survival strategy, I have built my own borders between my various roles inside the academy and outside it in the community. This particular speaking engagement for a Women's Studies class required me to traverse the separation between the two spheres in recognition of the foot planted on either side as my own.

The experience of border crossing is particular to certain groups of people whose performances of gender and desire resist a reading bound by dichotomies. It should be no surprise, then, that border crossing artists write novels which explore the borders between academy/community, and theories/histories in addition to those between borders of desire and gender. As neither homosexual/heterosexual women/men our performances of gender and desire have required us to adopt strategies for distracting those who risk/sacrifice their lives to preserve and defend the borders between the dichotomies. That something so basic as a trip to campus requires such strategy and self-defense highlights the urgency with which the borders are patrolled. That which is kept out/in could possibly destroy the very foundations for organizing society. The very existence of bisexual¹ and

¹ I respect and am elated by definitions of bisexuality which are expanded beyond the gender dichotomy such as the following offered by Christopher James in his essay “Denying Complexity”: “Bisexuality is defined here as the sexual or intensely emotional, although not necessarily concurrent or equal, attraction of an individual to members of more than one gender.” He continues to explain the grounding for such a definition which coming “out of respect for contemporary transgender activists, is an attempt to avoid dichotomized understanding of gender, despite the implied duality of the word ‘bisexual’” (218). In this research, however, I have relied on a less inclusive definition simply because Alice Walker’s conception of bisexuality has primarily relied on the gender dichotomy. This is demonstrated in the following excerpt from “All the Bearded Irises of Life: Confessions of a Homospiritual,” “My adult awareness of homosexuality comes from my own feelings of attraction to other women as well as to men” (164).
transgender2 people disrupts the familiar dichotomies by which members of society have been taught to live and abide.

When you live between opposites, you can not escape the s/he who will follow you, who must either be wrestled with or embraced. And I have seen the beauty in that embrace (Pratt 159).

Unfortunately too many have chosen to wrestle rather than embrace. This has meant lost lives of both border guards and border bandits3.

It sometimes seems as if borders are being erected more quickly than they can be dismantled:

At the campsite outside women’s land, a lesbian femme talks to me about her decision to come to the music festival. She was reluctant after she heard a transsexual lesbian had been thrown out the previous year, accused of being a man. Still, this was a vacation they could afford, just barely. So she told her butch—who didn’t look like someone who could pass the ‘woman-born-woman-only’ policy—that she would drive them in. Maybe the women at the gate would be less likely to notice them because as a femme, she looked the way people expected a woman to look (Pratt 181).

I remember how you and I rehearsed what we would say at the border, going into Canada, coming back to the U.S. You drove through; the guard would expect the husband to be driving. We dressed up, professionals on our way to a ‘writer’s

---

2 I use this term to refer to people who transcend their assigned gender boundaries beyond that which is normative in a given society. When Leslie Feinberg polled self-identified transgender activists as to who they believed were included under the umbrella term, transgender, the following list was generated: “transsexuals, transgenders, transvestites, transgenderists, bigenderists, drag queens, drag kings, cross-dressers, masculine women, feminine men, intersexuais (people referred to in the past as ‘hermaphrodites’), androgynes, cross-genders, shape-shifters, passing women, passing men, gender-benders, gender-blenders, bearded women, and women body builders who have crossed the line of what is considered socially acceptable for a female body.” (X). This list is certainly a starting point.

3 This term comes from Elias Farajaje-Jones, himself a multi-racial, bisexual border bandit.
workshop'...You casually rested your wedding-ring hand on the window's edge. We gritted our teeth and thought silently about all the reasons a nation-state regulates sex and gender and race and class. It was not for our protection that the policeman stared at us so fixedly before he waved us through (Pratt 181).

Taking the appropriate driver/passenger seat, wedding bands, gritting of teeth, and silence... necessarily, I have been trained in these strategies for coping/dismantling/ disarming/escaping borders and their guards by some of the best defense instructors, multi-racial/ethnic, bisexual, and transgender writers, activists, and performers. In an effort to stake out a voice as a member of both the academy and the community I am personally, as well as theoretically, invested in less rigid borders between the two realms.

Alas, the research presented here has required me to cross many borders and use many of the tactics in which I have been schooled. From a cross-disciplinary approach to an examination of false dichotomies, in this paper I will explore the border-crossing strategies offered in three novels, The Color Purple, Nearly Roadkill, and Stone Butch Blues. I will investigate the complex questions these novels ask regarding identity and literature. What is identity and how best to negotiate it? Which strategies of negotiation best aid survival? What is the relationship between the bodies inside and outside of the text? What has it meant in literature when the inside (community, history) meets the outside (academy, theory)?

Crossing Disciplines

I will be using an interdisciplinary approach of literary studies, women's studies, and sociology to gain a broader understanding of the effects of literary representation on bodies and bodies of literature which inhabit the
location of "the borderlands."\(^{4}\) In this particular case, sociology and women's studies add a community-based knowledge to literary theory allowing the researcher to move outside of the false dichotomies between the academy and the community, theory and personal history. The assumptions guiding such an approach include that literature does more than represent but actually engages in conversation with readers and the culture/s from which it is derived. This reflects the approaches taken by Walker, Feinberg, Sullivan, and Bornstein who move beyond representation and revelation into conversation with "the folk", with "the community." Another assumption being made is that theory is useful if, and only if, it does more than represent bodies but actually aids in their survival. I take these assumptions seriously aligning them with my own personal perspective from a location of converging axes of academy, community, theory, and personal history. This form of criticism should be seen as mirroring the many organized coalitions which have been built between bisexual and transgender communities across the United States.

Crossing Theoretic Approaches

The theoretical focus of this study will be gauged toward the polemics of humanist and postmodern feminisms. Feminism has never been without internal dispute, moving in and out of debates regarding suffrage and race, eurocentrism and heterocentrism in the second wave women's movement, and, of course, the great sex wars of the 1980s. Nancy Fraser and Linda Nicholson explain:

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\(^{4}\) From Gloria Anzaldua's novel, *Borderlands/La Frontera*. 
While gender identity gives substance to the idea of sisterhood, it does so at the cost of repressing differences among sisters. Although the theory allows for some differences among women of different classes, races, sexual orientations, and ethnic groups, it construes these as subsidiary to more basic similarities. But it is precisely as a consequence of the request to understand such differences as secondary that many women have denied an allegiance to feminism (31).

One might hypothesize from this that feminism, as a whole, has yet to successfully account for racial and sexual differences. This may be further supported by the current humanist/postmodern contention. Volume 6 of differences, subtitled "More Gender Trouble: Feminism Meets Queer Theory" (1994) made the tabloidesque announcement public: there's trouble and two clearly defined sides have been staked out. According to theorist J.K. Gibson-Graham, in her essay "Reflections on Postmodern Feminist Social Research," feminism through the last several years has created a substantial body of knowledge based on empiricism and standpoint theory which takes the construction of "women" as a collective for granted. When postmodern theorists began to deconstruct such categories as "women" the debates ensued.

While postmodern feminists deconstruct gender, sexuality, and race; humanist feminists are concerned that difference is being submerged in a way which prevents organizing toward political goals. Christine Di Stefano summarizes this feminist concern with postmodernism: "To the extent that feminist politics is bound up with a specific constituency or subject, namely, women, the postmodernist prohibition against subject-centered inquiry and theory undermines the legitimacy of a broad-based organized movement dedicated to articulating and implementing the goals of such a constituency" (76). Humanist feminists fear that if gender, sexual identity, and race no
longer exist as identifiable categories of identity then there will be no method for organizing against the oppression of women, lesbians, and people of color.

Postmodernists, however, argue that by deconstructing identity, the borders between oppressed and oppressor become blurred creating a situation in which organizing around alliances of the oppressed rather than unified identity becomes more useful. “Such practice is increasingly a matter of alliances rather than one of unity around a universally shared interest or identity” (Fraser and Nicholson 35). Both feminists and postmodernists agree oppression exists; they disagree, however, on the site of the oppression, and therefore, on the best methods for dismantling its existence. One group of feminists, the humanists, locates the source of oppression on one side of the dichotomy (the privileged) while the other group, the postmodernists, suggests it is the dichotomy itself which perpetuates oppression.

Crossing the Great Academy/Community Divide

While the feminist and postmodernist debates rage on, some communities of people, the ones perhaps most at the heart (or the borders) of the theoretical debates, are making the connections between feminist and queer theories of identity at the very locations from which identity is performed, their individual and collective bodies. The voices of two such communities comprised of people identifying as bisexual and/or transgender have largely been excluded or trivialized within the feminist debates between humanists and postmodernists. In the following passage, one of the editors to *RePresenting BiSexualities: Subjects and Cultures and Fluid Desire,*
explains the sometimes strained relationship between bisexuality and feminism:

One area in which theories of bisexuality have developed through a productive and sometimes painful interaction is within lesbian feminist discourse and politics, partly in response to the lingering postulate, prominent in Freudian psychoanalysis, of women’s unique relation to bisexual desire and partly because of the significant body of lesbian and feminist politics and theory which addresses the pleasures and dangers of sexuality (Hall and Pramaggiore 5).

Maria Pramaggiore’s statement may be compared to the numerous accounts by bisexual women, including Alice Walker, who have felt shunned by lesbian-feminist theories and communities.

A similar experience has been related by transgender women and females, including Leslie Feinberg and Kate Bornstein, who have also felt shunned by lesbian-feminist theories and communities. One lesbian-feminist, Janice Raymond, author of The Transexual Empire: The Making of the She-Male, has gone so far as to suggest male-to-females have their penises removed so they can penetrate “women’s space,” an act which she aligns with rape. Sandy Stone in her reply to Raymond, “The Empire Strikes Back: A Posttransexual Manifesto,” quotes from Raymond: “Rape... is a masculinist violation of bodily integrity. All transsexuals rape women’s bodies by reducing the female form to an artifact, appropriating this body for themselves... Rape, although it is usually done by force, can also be accomplished by deception” (Stone 283). Stone provides the following commentary:

I read Raymond to be claiming that transsexuals are constructs of an evil phallocratic empire and were designed to invade women’s spaces and appropriate women’s power. Though
Empire represented a specific moment in feminist analysis and prefigured the appropriation of liberal political language by a radical right, here in 1991, on the twelfth anniversary of its publication, it is still the definitive statement on transsexualism by a genetic female academic (283).

Even today, just six years later, transgender people are facing similar oppression from some feminists both inside and outside of the academy. Although many transgender and/or bisexual people, including myself, are informed by feminism, our voices continue to be drowned out by those deciding whether our lives may be encompassed within feminism or not.

In addition, the relationship between bisexuality/transgenderism and postmodern queer theory has also been strained.

Queer theory, unlike Queer Nation, has been far from the troubled world of actual coalition-building, and has, more often than not, treated bisexuality and transsexuality quite shabbily... Instead of exploring the radical connections of gender and sexuality, queer theory commonly makes 'sexuality' by extension stand for "homosexuality" or "heterosexuality," while "gender" comes to designate "women" or "men." Although queer theory often sets up cross-dressing or drag as practices that ostensibly undo the categories of "sex," "sexuality," and "gender," cross-dressing is almost always treated from the outside, with vested indifference, to misquote the title of Garber's widely read book. The fixation queer theory has on drag ends up seeming shallow, like the diversion of a tourist who can go home to the security of those very categories (du Plessis 32-33).

Although it is true that many queer theorists are attempting to work on issues of identity in which they have a personal stake, others, as Michael du Plessis points out, distance themselves from the subjects of their theories. du Plessis points to the now defunct Queer Nation which was an activist organization through which lesbians and gays formed alliances with bisexual and transgender people. In addition, bisexual and transgender communities
have created strong coalitions with one another in multi-cultural feminist/womanist settings. These alliances do not privilege one theory of identity over another, but rather engage the complexity of gender and sexuality as they are performed by the individuals and the collectives themselves.

The four authors in this study, Alice Walker, Kate Bornstein, Caitlin Sullivan, and Leslie Feinberg have written novels which engage theory and history from positions inside the community. While Walker in The Color Purple and Bornstein and Sullivan in Nearly Roadkill write from particular theoretical standpoints, respectively feminist humanism and postmodern queer, they blur the borders between academic theory and personal history in the community. Feinberg in Stone Butch Blues takes a slightly different approach by combining the theoretical strategies offered in the other two novels, once again blurring the boundaries between academy/community, and personal history/theory. These three novels all engage identity from positions which, although different from one another, are located where the body meets the text.

The objective of this project is not to declare a more "realistic" or "truthful" theory. As Linda Nicholson, the editor of Feminism/Postmodernism, states:

Thus each of the two perspectives suggests some important criticisms of the other. A postmodernist reflection on feminist theory reveals disabling vestiges of essentialism while a feminist

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5 Take, for example, the national bisexual organization BiNet USA whose name used to be "North American Multicultural Feminist Bisexual Network" until it was changed for the sake of brevity (a sacrifice which remains controversial to this day). Despite the name change, the spirit with which the original name was created remains strong, particularly in the Midwest Region of the organization.
reflection on postmodernism reveals androcentrism and political naïveté... In fact, each of these tendencies has much to learn from the other; each is in possession of valuable resources which can help remedy the deficiencies of the other. Thus, the ultimate stake of an encounter between feminism and postmodernism is the prospect of a perspective which integrates their respective strengths while eliminating their respective weaknesses. It is the prospect of a postmodernist feminism" (Fraser and Nicholson 20).

Though Nicholson may be a bit optimistic in envisioning a theory which would be remedied of deficiencies all together, her point that much may be gained from an alliance between postmodernism and feminism is quite valid. I would add to Nicholson's argument that not only are feminist theorists in a position to point out androcentrism and political naïveté, but also, feminism has struggled and faced eurocentrism in a way which postmodernism has yet to fully encounter.

This paper will examine the strength of collaborative theory which is rooted in historical coalitions between various identity-based groups and point out literary examples which could benefit from such collaboration. Though Feminism/Postmodernism has already successfully demonstrated the feasibility of such collaboration between academic feminist and postmodernist theories, this paper will attempt to highlight the possibilities of partnership between feminism and postmodernism in the relationship between culture and cultural production.

What theories and survival strategies, then, are at work in Alice Walker's The Color Purple, Leslie Feinberg's Stone Butch Blues, and Caitlin Sullivan and Kate Bornstein's Nearly Roadkill? And how do these novels and conversations about theories of identity aid the survival of the communities they engage? What accounts for the differences between the
authors' performances of sexuality and gender? Paying close attention to borders between and within desire, gender, class, and race/ethnicity, all of these questions will be addressed in the following chapters.
BEND, AND SHAPE, BUT DO NOT BREAK: THE NEGOTIATION OF GENDER AND SEXUALITY IN THE BLACK BISEXUAL WOMANIST TRADITION OF THE COLOR PURPLE

Womanist 1. From *womanish*. (Opp. Of “girlish,” i.e., frivolous, irresponsible, not serious.) A black feminist or feminist of color. From the black folk expression of mothers to female children, “You acting womanish,” i.e., like a woman. Usually referring to outrageous, audacious, courageous or *willful* behavior. Wanting to know more and in greater depth than is considered “good” for one. Interested in grown-up doings. Acting grown up. Being grown up. Interchangeable with another black folk expression: “You trying to be grown.” Responsible. In charge. *Serious.*

2. Also: A woman who loves other women, sexually and/or nonsexually. Appreciates and prefers women’s culture, women’s emotional flexibility (values tears as natural counterbalance of laughter), and women’s strength. Sometimes loves individual men, sexually and/or nonsexually. Committed to survival and wholeness of entire people, male and female. Not a separatist, except periodically, for health. Traditionally universalist, as in: “Mama, why are we brown, pink, and yellow, and our cousins are white, beige, and black?” Ans.: “Well, you know the colored race is just like a flower garden, with every color flower represented.” Traditionally capable, as in: “Mama, I’m walking to Canada and I’m taking you and a bunch of slaves with me.” Reply: “It wouldn’t be the first time.”


4. Womanist is to feminist as purple to lavender (Walker xi-xii).

Alice Walker’s definition is to a dictionary definition as community is to academy. The shading between the two axes, community and academy, is not a black/white dichotomy in any of Walker’s writings. It is, rather, a
lightly variegated highlighting of differences while, at the same time, a resistance of clear distinction between purple and lavender. The example of such shading in the definition of womanism may be found throughout Walker's writing.

Walker's role in academics, cultural production, and activism has centered her within various racial/ethnic, gender, desire, and class based communities of people. Her position as writer engages readers in a way which does more than simply speaks to, but rather speaks with her various audiences. This conversational strategy is never more evident than in her work with *The Color Purple*. When the 1984 novel appeared, Walker was targeted with a great deal of criticism related to anywhere from her "representation" of Black men to her inclusion of "lesbians." When she agreed to allow the novel to be produced by Steven Spielberg, making the work available to a wider audience, she received an even greater amount of criticism. In response to some people's support and others' reproach Walker has engaged in conversation with the community both through essays and, most recently, a non-fiction book, *The Same River Twice: Honoring the Difficult, A Meditation on Life, Spirit, Art, and the Making of The Color Purple, Ten Years Later.*, in which she chronicles her experience with this particular artistic venture. The conversations surrounding *The Color Purple* demonstrate the impact of Walker's art in both feminist/womanist and African-American communities as well as the impact of a community response on Walker.

In addition to impacting culture through writing, Walker also describes her desire to reflect it:
I belong to a people, heart and mind, who do not trust mirrors. Not those, in any case, in which we ourselves appear. The empty mirror, the one that reflects noses and hair unlike our own, and a prosperity and harmony we may have never known, gives us peace. Our shame is deep. For shame is the result of soul injury. Mirrors, however, are sacred, not only because they permit us to witness the body we are fortunate this time around to be in, but because they permit us to ascertain the condition of the eternal that rests behind the body, the soul...Art is the mirror, perhaps the only one, in which we can see our true collective face. We must honor its sacred function. We must let art help us (13).

Mirrors are typically thought of as they reflect a pure (though reversed) image of the beholder. Non-marginalized people may not consider the possibility of a second party gazing through from the other side. As Alice Walker points out, the marginalized are well-aware of the second party presence of culture which weighs heavily on the reflected image. Mirrors serve as the border between body and culture. Depending upon one’s societal position, the reflection may be more or less trusted. When art has been upheld as a mirror, as Walker suggests, and these mirrors have reflected only certain types of images, artwork serves as that border between the self and the often hostile culture which invisibilizes the marginal image. Because of Walker’s position within marginalized communities, she is aware of the necessity for art to do more than simply reflect from an academic (ivory tower) theoretical standpoint. For this reason Walker, in *The Color Purple*, writes about gender and desire from a position which juxtaposes her relation with “the folk” along side of theory and the academy, not as dichotomous, but rather as purple is to lavender.
Gender and Desire: Non-Dictionary Definitions

For a majority of the twentieth century, mainstream US culture has defined sexuality by one’s gender in relation to one’s partners’ genders. Kate Bornstein, in *Gender Outlaw: On Men, Women, and the Rest of Us* writes,

Here’s the tangle that I found: sexual orientation/preference is based in this culture solely on the gender of one’s partner of choice. Not only do we confuse the two words, we make them dependent on one another. The only choices we’re given to determine the focus of our sexual desire are these:

>> *Heterosexual model:* in which a culturally-defined male is in a relationship with a culturally-defined female.
>> *Gay male model:* two culturally-defined men involved with each other.
>> *Lesbian model:* two culturally-defined women involved with each other.
>> *Bisexual model:* culturally-defined men and women who could be involved with either culturally-defined men or women (32-33).

Because heterosexuality is upheld as the norm in this system of assigning sexuality outlined by Bornstein, to sustain one’s gender role includes sexual responsibility toward the "opposite gender." While in *The Color Purple* Alice Walker expands the woman's sexual role beyond responsibility toward men, she maintains the link between gender and sexuality. A discussion of sexuality in *The Color Purple*, therefore, must begin with a full analysis of gender which will then aid the examination of the connections Walker makes between gender and sexuality in her novel performance of bisexuality.

Gender Performance

Performances of gender in *The Color Purple* vary greatly from one character to another. Shug Avery represents the most gender-bent of Alice
Walker's characters as Shug rejects her assigned gender role by embodying traits which may be associated with both women and men. The first indication of Shug's gender appears when Celie is shown a picture of her. Celie writes “She grinning with her foot up on somebody motocar. Her eyes serious tho.” (7). That Celie is able to see into Shug's eyes indicates a head-on stare into the camera lens, a confrontation between the gaze of the subject and the beholder. Shug's location next to the "motocar" places her in the proximity of male space. In addition, Shug's position is connected to her freedom to travel untied to a specific person or place. Shug owns no property and no-body owns Shug. Her non-bourgeois gender role frees her of domestic responsibility historically assigned to Black women in the United States.

The experience of such a character is rooted in Black history and literary tradition. Shug Avery is a classic Queen B figure according to SDiane Bogus in her article 'The 'Queen B' Figure in Black Literature.” She is referred to as such on the poster advertising which proclaims "The Queen Honeybee is back in town" (Walker 26). The term “Queen B,” according to Bogus, “is a euphemism for Queen Bulldagger or Bulldyker” (275). This term was used because many Blues singers were bisexual and also were thought of as exhibiting aspects of a masculine gender. Bogus continues to describe the Queen B as a Black singer, often a Blues singer, who "can transcend the conflicts of her sexuality, the effects of oppression, racial or gender-related, and the distractions of ordinary life; when she does, she gains the potential to become as historic a figure as [Gladys] Bentley or [Bessie] Smith" (281).

Embedded in this description of the Queen B figure is a gendered meaning, especially given the term's association with the butch gendered "bulldagger."
Shug's freedom, founded in her ability to transcend oppression, disrupts stereotypical representations of Black women.

Walker's description of Shug also contributes to an understanding of Shug's non-bourgeois gender role,

She has the requisite 'stout' shape to qualify as sexy and 'womanly.' The exact opposite of Celie's. In addition she knows how to dress (flamboyantly), carry herself (sometimes merely like a queen, sometimes arrogantly, but always with self-possession) and she doesn't fumble verbally like Celie. She is a woman in control of her life (after the breakdown Celie pulls her through). She's gorgeous and knows it, with only positive thoughts about her very black skin (52).

All of these characteristics resonate with the Queen B figure and with a woman who challenges a definition of self based solely on culturally imposed identity roles. Shug's gender, rooted in resistance of cultural definitions, is related to her ability to transcend a racist and/or colorist devaluation of Blackness such as that represented by Albert's father who says, "just what is it bout this Shug Avery anyway, he say. She black as tar, she nappy headed" (56).

While Shug seems to be well versed in the art of gender bending, at the outset of the novel Celie and Mister have assimilated to the racial and gender roles they were assigned from birth. Throughout the first several chapters, Celie fulfills the role assigned to Black women during that particular cultural moment. From an early age, Celie is groomed to fulfill domestic duties caring for her (step) father and her siblings. After she is given away (literally) in marriage, her role remains constant as she cares for her new husband, Mister, and for his children. In this gender role, Celie lacks personal power and agency, placing her in a subordinate position to Mister. Celie's lack of power
is most notably demonstrated by the physical and sexual violence her father and Mister use to maintain power over her. Also, in her reply to Mister’s sister who tells her she has to fight back, Celie demonstrates a lack of agency: “I don’t say nothing. I think about Nettie, dead. She fight, she run away. What good it do? I don’t fight, I stay where I’m told. But I’m alive” (22). Both the example of violence and Celie’s lack of the tools necessary to respond to the violence align with the passive gender role she is assigned.

As much as gender roles restrict women, Walker suggests they also restrict men, as demonstrated by Mister. This character is bound by the compulsory male gender role which rewards power over women. Mister is skilled in transferring his lack of power in an oppressive environment, such as is demonstrated by the relationship between him and his father, Old Mister, into the desire to exert control over those with less access to power than himself. This is mainly demonstrated in his relationship with Celie, on whom he perpetrates violence, abuse, and control. Mister is so corrupted by his access and lack of access to power and privilege that he eventually loses the one woman he loves, Shug.

Gender Negotiation

One of the main strategies of feminism, the perspective from which Walker writes, was and is to offer women more options and choices. Walker builds upon this strategy by creating characters, Celie and Shug, who are transformed as they gain a womanist consciousness which allows them the tools necessary to negotiate gender and sexuality. As previously stated, Shug is the most successful of gender negotiators from the outset of the novel.
Shug's gender is represented in terms of her refusal to follow the non-bourgeois female model. When Mister describes Shug as acting like a man, Celie refutes this by insisting, "What Shug got is womanly it seem like to me. Specially since she and Sofia the ones got it" (276). This statement exemplifies Walker's feminist ideology of gender. The dichotomous system of assigning gender remains unquestioned. Negotiation occurs, rather, from the fixed gender position of woman. Celie's argument is that if a woman behaves a certain way, this behavior must then be attributed to women. This gender negotiation is rooted in feminist principles, as opposed to, for example, the postmodern strategy to dismantle gender roles and boundaries (not to be mistaken as gender itself) altogether. Celie, and by extension Walker, do not question the gender dichotomy per se, but rather attempt to expand women's roles within it. This type of gender negotiation which expands options without upsetting the basic foundations of gender assignment is consistent with the feminist concept of women's freedom through choices and options.

Not soon after the beginning of the novel, Celie begins to demonstrate a growing consciousness granting her more agency. Her womanist consciousness is not gained through an academic, predominantly white feminist movement, but rather grows out of her love for another Black woman, Shug. The first sign of Celie's agency occurs during a visit from Mister's father. As Old Mister begins to criticize Shug, with whom Celie has fallen in love, she explains, "I drop a little spit in Old Mister water...I twirl the spit round with my little finger. I think bout ground glass, wonder how you grind it" (57). Celie’s action, which is one of using her domestic role
(preparing a glass of water) to her advantage, begins her transformation toward a woman-identified consciousness.

Celie’s developing love for Shug parallels a growing self-love. Walker explains, “As she begins to create herself through her writing...and her love of Shug and Nettie, she begins to take on an outer beauty that approximates her extraordinary loveliness of spirit: and we begin to see that ‘ugliness’--in Celie’s case--was a matter of her physical environment and condition, and a state of mind that matched” (51). Celie first begins to redefine beauty when she finds this trait in the picture of the dark skinned Shug. Eventually this is reflected back toward self-appreciation when, with Shug’s encouragement, Celie uses a mirror to allow herself the simple pleasure of looking at her own body. “I lie back on the bed and haul up my dress. Yank down my bloomers. Stick the looking glass tween my legs. Ugh. All that hair. Then my pussy lips be black. Then inside look like a wet rose. It’s a lot prettier than you thought, ain’t is? she [Shug] say from the door. It mine, I say” (82). Having absorbed a cultural fear and hatred of that which is associated with Blackness and womanliness, this ability to simply look in the mirror and see herself reflected back through her own eyes rather than the eyes of the racist, colorist, and misogynist third party highlights Celie’s transformation.

Another recognizable moment of Celie’s metamorphosis occurs when she leaves Mister. At this pivotal point in the novel Celie recalls the curse she places upon Mister:

I say, Until you do right by me, everything you touch will crumble. He laugh. Who you think you is? he say. You can’t curse nobody. Look at you. You black, you pore, you ugly, you a woman. Goddam, he say, you nothing at all.
Until you do right by me, everything you even dream about will fail. I give it to him straight, just like it come to me. And it seem to come to me from the trees (213).

Celie’s curse corresponds with a growing self-esteem, as well as a growing Pagan, nature-based, spiritual connection. Celie’s movement away from a patriarchal, eurocentric religion toward a womanist Paganism gives her the power and strength necessary to move beyond a passive gendered role.

Mister’s gender transformation takes place at the insistence of the already transformed female characters in the novel. Mister loses his control over Celie as she becomes self-empowered. Loneliness, loss of love, and perhaps most importantly for the cynic, loss of anyone over whom to exert power and control seem to transform his character into one which is salvageable. Walker writes, “He is still following someone else’s lead rather than his own, but unlike his father’s blind alley of misogyny, Shug and Celie lead him to the source of love itself, i.e., wonder over the universe, existence itself” (52). Albert, too, is affected by compulsory gender as he is ridiculed as a child for stepping outside his assigned gender role. With the help of Celie, he learns gender negotiation and returns to behaviors which he enjoyed despite their not being socially acceptable for a male. This transformation is partly shown through his conversations and interactions with Celie such as the one during which Albert decides to help Celie sew after she explains,

And men sew in Africa, too, I say.

They do? he ast.

Yeah, I say. They not so backward as mens here.
When I was growing up, he said, I use to try to sew along with mama cause that's what she was always doing. But everybody laughed at me. But you know, I liked it.

Well, nobody gon laugh at you now, I said. Here help me stitch in these pockets.

But I don't know how, he say.

I'll show you, I said. And I did. Now us sit sewing and talking and smoking our pipes (279).

Albert's interest is peaked when Celie makes the cross-cultural comparison between African and African-American gender roles. Walker's use of African gender roles as incentive for Albert's gender negotiation demonstrates Walker's investment in linking gender negotiation and expansion to one's racial and ethnic roots. Albert's culturally specific gender negotiation leaves him not necessarily with less power, but rather with a different kind of power which is shared rather than a tool for domination. The newly found method for channeling power in a helpful way transforms Albert who, by the end of the novel, has regained his humanity and seems to be content with his newly expanded gender role.

The gender negotiations of Shug, Celie, and Albert indicate Walker's investment in the redistribution of gendered traits which are typically assigned to only one gender or another. Walker's goal, to open up opportunities for women (and men) which have not previously been available to them, is fulfilled as she offers her characters more possibilities for performing gender. By examining the various characters' negotiation of gender, Walker's refusal to disunite gender identity from racial/ethnic identity or to privilege one identity aspect over another becomes clear. As
will be demonstrated in the next section, Walker maintains a humanist holistic view of identity by fostering connections between these two aspects of identity, race and gender, as she connects them to sexuality and desire.

Toward a Black Bisexual Womanist Criticism: Feminism, Gender, and Sexuality

Returning to Kate Bornstein’s outline of the connection between sexuality and gender, we see that heterosexuality, at least in recent history, has been the norm for organizing relationships. Feminism, however, has worked against the norms of compulsory heterosexuality and attempted to reclaim lesbianism as it is valid and authentic as is heterosexuality. This is best demonstrated by lesbian-feminist Adrienne Rich, who through her use of the terms "lesbian existence," "compulsory heterosexuality," and "lesbian continuum," presents a guide for feminist reclamation of the “naturalized” relations among women. Rich’s claims were taken up with great enthusiasm by other second wave feminists. According to Gayle Rubin, “Because sexuality is the nexus of the relationships between genders, much of the oppression of women is borne by, mediated through, and constituted within, sexuality. Feminism has always been vitally interested in sex” (301). This feminist interest has, for the most part, focused on “monogamous lesbianism that occurs within long-term, intimate relationships and which does not involve playing with polarized roles, [which] has replaced married, procreative heterosexuality at the top of the value hierarchy” (301). The feminist valuation of lesbianism, as Rubin hints, not only retains the
compulsory link between gender and desire (which Bornstein critiques), but also privileges monosexuality\(^6\) over other forms of desire.

Though lesbianism won the second-wave feminist world over, (a phrase coming out of the second wave feminist movement: feminism is the theory; lesbianism is the practice), Alice Walker proceeded to introduce bisexuality as a specifically feminist concept. Walker aligns herself with feminist strategies for gender negotiation when she expands her characters' gender identities enough to include love for the "same" gender. With Walker's negotiation of sexuality two sexual options, rather than one, are available to women; they can love and be sexually involved with women or they can love and be sexually involved with men. Walker writes of the two characters, Celie and Shug, "It was clear the women loved each other. It was clear that Shug is, like me, bisexual. That Celie is lesbian" (35). While many second-wave feminists expanded sexuality to include love for women (lesbian monosexuality), Walker took this a step further by offering at least one character, Shug, whose sexual love for women did not exclude her sexual love for men (bisexuality).

Though Walker, along with feminism, retains the humanist definition of desire which is based upon gender, she does notably move outside the realm of monosexuality. This performance of bisexuality is significant as it comes at a time when bisexuality was (and still is) under attack by lesbian feminists who privilege woman-to-woman eroticism over all other forms. As one bisexual woman, Stacey Young, writes in Closer to Home: Bisexuality and Feminism, "One of the political effects of the

\(^6\) A term coming out of bisexual writings which refers to sexual desire which is oriented toward only one gender. Most often used to refer to homosexuality and heterosexuality.
'monosexual' model has been the definition of lesbianism as the only alternative, antipatriarchal sexuality" (80).

Though models of Black bisexuality are rare, Alice Walker and June Jordan, rooted in their personal histories as Black bisexual feminists/womanists, have created models which aid in this reading of *The Color Purple*. Walker's "All The Bearded Irides of Life: Confessions of a Homospiritual" (1987) and Jordan's "A New Politics of Sexuality" (1991) will be considered as they contribute to the reading of *The Color Purple* against the backdrop of a Black bisexual feminist/womanist tradition.

June Jordan cites the significance of claiming a bisexual identity as it "invalidates either/or formulation, either/or analysis" (13).

Bisexuality means I am free and I am as likely to want and to love a woman as I am likely to want and to love a man, and what about that? Isn't that what freedom implies? If you are free you are not predictable and you are not controllable. To my mind this is the keenly positive, politicizing significance of bisexual affirmation: To insist upon complexity, to insist upon the validity of all of the components of social/sexual complexity (13).

Jordan's statement highlights the freedom and empowerment implicit in affirming bisexuality. She goes to explain that by refusing to dichotomize her life, "I can voice my ideas without hesitation or fear because I am speaking, finally, about myself. I am black and I am female and I am a mother and I am bisexual and I am a nationalist and I am an anti-nationalist. And I mean to be fully and freely all that I am!" (12). Jordan acknowledges the positive consequences of affirming the multiplicity offered in a bisexual identity.

Alice Walker also writes about the sense of empowerment and freedom which stems from rejecting lesbian-separatism. Freedom, according
to Walker, comes from the ability to detach oneself from groups and individuals who insist upon dichotomizing sexuality and gender. When faced with the question, "How could they [her lesbian friends] trust someone who slept with a man?" Walker writes, "We are flung into a solitude so severe that it inadvertently increases our sense of freedom as it loosens our bonds to any specific group, whether racial or sexual" (166). Lesbian separatism, according to Walker, has created another set of rules based upon a monosexual identity which is dependent upon the dichotomies of female/male and lesbian/heterosexual. By rejecting this dichotomized view of sexuality and gender, Walker frees herself from adherence to one, politically correct, feminist sexuality. Walker requests that her reader "Accept me as I am, with this tendency I have of being able to love everyone, including you" (167).

Jordan also offers a critique of lesbian separatism and of the lesbian community's apprehension about women who desire both women and men. Jordan is well aware of the animosity between the gay and lesbian community and the bisexual community. Non-acceptance of bisexuals within lesbian and gay circles is reported in several early 1990s anthologies including Closer To Home: Bisexuality and Feminism (Weise 1992) and Bi Any Other Name: Bisexual People Speak Out (Hutchins and Kaahumanau 1991). Jordan's work follows in the tradition of these two landmark anthologies, discussing the "gay or lesbian contempt for bisexual modes of human relationship." She writes "among those who are in any case deemed despicable or deviant by the powerful, we find intolerance for those who choose a different, a more complicated--for example, an interracial or bisexual--mode of rebellion and
June Jordan writes of people with bi/multi-identities: "There are many men and women ... who seek to embrace the complexity of their total, always-changing social and political circumstance. They seek to embrace our increasing global complexity on the basis of the heart and on the basis of an honest human body. Not according to ideology. Not according to group pressure. Not according to anybody’s concept of 'correct'" (13). Jordan’s attempt to politicize the complexity of the middle ground align with Walker’s claiming of bisexuality as a specifically feminist form of desire. Both authors compare their experience of bisexuality with a sense of freedom and empowerment.

*The Color Purple:* A Black Bisexual Womanist Reading

A bisexual reading of *The Color Purple* is long over due. Both Walker’s and Jordan’s alignments of bisexuality with sexual freedom, choice, and empowerment are reiterated in this novel. Negotiation of sexuality which occurs from particular gendered positions, woman/man, which are stable and fixed, is just as prominent in *The Color Purple* as is gender negotiation. In the novel, both bisexuality and lesbianism serve to disrupt the gendered expectation of women’s sexual responsibility toward men.

The lesbian literary community has authors such as Barbara Smith, Jewelle Gomez, Ann Allen Shockley, Cheryl Clarke, and SDiane Bogus to thank for discussing Black lesbians in literature. However, while Alice Walker’s work *The Color Purple* is discussed in nearly every article written on Black lesbian literature, the discussion of bisexuality very rarely enters this discourse. Black lesbian writers, along with others who have written about
sexuality in *The Color Purple*, fail to mention bisexuality. The only reference to bisexuality may be found in one sentence of Barbara Smith's essay, "The Truth That Never Hurts: Black Lesbians in Fiction in the 1980s," in which she describes Shug Avery as bisexual (234). Three pages later, however, Smith interprets Shug's character based upon a lesbian model of authenticity (237). Other reviews of Walker's novel also measure Celie and Shug's relationship as lesbian. There has been nothing written to date which gives Shug a bisexual interpretation and which explores the differences between Celie's and Shug's sexuality, except in terms of the victimization they have both experienced.

The main function of sexuality in *The Color Purple* is to demonstrate the complexity of connections between various characters and their relationships with one another. Although Shug Avery is a secondary character, she is pivotal to the transformation plot of the novel. Shug is first introduced as Mister's lover. Throughout the novel, she has at least three other partners, Celie, Grady, and Germaine, two of which are male and one is female. Shug's performance of bisexuality offers her more choices in sexuality and frees her to love "either" gender. Consider the triangulated relationship between Celie, Shug, and Albert. Throughout most of this novel their relationship is strained by competing sexualities. Heterosexuality (Mister) and homosexuality (Celie) compete against one another with bisexuality (Shug) playing on both sides. This creates tension which culminates during a visit to Harpo's jook joint. First Mister takes the lead, "She [Shug] look over at Mister a little when she sing that. I look over at him too. For such a little man, he all puff up. Look like all he can do to stay in his
chair. I look at Shug and I feel my heart begin to cramp. It hurt me so, I cover it with my hand. I think I might as well be under the table, for all they care...Before I know it, tears meet under my chin" (77). Next Celie evens the score with a little help from Shug who sings "Miss Celie's Song." The juke represents sexual tension from the sexual overtones of the music and atmosphere to the presence of the bisexual blues singer catering to the sensory pleasure of both male and female audience members.

Sexual competition, Albert reveals after his transformation, contributed to his jealousy, which he unleashed in violence: "I wanted to kill you, said Mister and I did slap you around a couple of times. I never understood how you and Shug got along so well together and it bothered the hell out of me" (278). Mister's interpretation of his gender, and sexual role was to gain the attention and sexual love of Shug, warding off all others who would attempt to complicate his intentions. When he finds he has lost Shug to Celie, he is in a state of disbelief: “You black, you pore, you ugly, you a woman. Goddam, he say, you nothing at all” (213). Mister is not only hurt because he has lost Shug’s love, but he is also surprised that sexual competition comes from someone whom he has assigned less power than himself, Celie.

Eventually sexual competition turns into a crux on which Celie and Albert base their transformed relationship. It is through the love of Shug Avery, dependent upon her bisexuality, that Celie and Albert realize a middle ground on which they can both connect. Albert makes a remarkable realization and transformation at the end of the novel:

Then he say something that really surprise me cause it so thoughtful and common sense. When it come to what folks do
together with they bodies, he say, anybody's guess is as good as mine. But when you talk bout love I don't have to guess. I have love and have been love. And I thank God he let me gain understanding enough to know love can't be halted just cause some peoples moan and groan. It don't surprise me you love Shug Avery, he say. I have love Shug Avery all my life (276-77).

It is through their mutual love for Shug that they are able to work toward a caring relationship with one another. Note, though, that while heterosexuality and homosexuality meet here at the bisexual "fence," they do not dissolve into the dominant, heterosexuality. Celie, after all, refuses Albert's marriage proposal, "We still man and wife, you know, he say. Naw, I say, we never was" (261).

Jealousy not only negatively impacted Albert's relationships, but Celie's as well. Shug not only experiences disapproval of her sexuality from the community in general, but also from Celie. When she tries to tell Celie about being in love with Germaine, the following conversation takes place: "He's a man. I write on paper. Yeah, she say. He is. And I know how you feel about men. But I don't feel that way. I would never be fool enough to take any of them seriously, she say, but some mens can be a lots of fun. Spare me, I write" (257). Celie is motivated by jealousy, but also by a monosexual understanding of love and sexuality. She writes, "I'm so dense it still don't penetrate. For one thing, it been a long time since I thought about boys and I ain't never thought about men" (255).

At this point, Celie chooses to leave Shug's house because she does not want to be present to witness this "betrayal" not only of their currently monogamous relationship, but also of Celie's understanding of desire as monosexual. Celie makes this decision based upon an ideology that either
Shug loves her and no one else, women and not men, or Shug doesn't love her at all. Celie, perhaps, mistakenly believes once Shug ends her relationship with Albert that she will then be Celie's monogamous lover. When Shug tells Celie about being in love with Germaine, Celie assumes this means Shug doesn't love her anymore. Her thinking reflects the traditional model of relationships in which a person is supposed to contain her or his love to only one person. But Shug rejects this notion: "Celie, she say, through her fingers, I still love you" (256). Shug refuses to follow a definition of sexuality and desire which is possessive and restricts her autonomy.

Celie's transformation takes place when she realizes, "Shug got a right to live too. She got a right to look over the world in whatever company she choose. Just cause I love her don't take away none of her rights...Who am I to tell her who to love. My job just to love her good and true myself" (275-76). This demonstrates Celie's achievement of a more complicated understanding of love, sexuality, and relationships. She moves from a desire to control and possess Shug's love to an understanding of Shug's ability to love many people. She even encourages Albert by telling him, "She still care for you" (278).

The last bit of the novel speaks to these new understandings and transformations of Celie and Albert. Whereas before Shug served as the hinge in a V shaped relationship, the object of a tremendous amount of jealousy between Albert and Celie, the relationships evolve into a completed triangle of friendship, caring, and even love which crosses gender and sexual boundaries, as difficult and revolutionary as this may be. The relationships move toward a transformation creating not only a new vision for the novel
itself, but also a re-vision of a world where connections and relationships with others transcend sexual and gender boundaries. This transformation follows June Jordan's statements regarding the potential of a bisexual world view. Accepting others' bisexuality and the possibilities it brings with it for a world view full of multiplicity, in the case of Celie and Albert, creates healthy interactions based upon an interaction with the bisexual character, Shug, and her "ability to love everyone, including you" (Walker 167).

Alice Walker created a landmark novel in her reflection of the politically feminist potential of gender negotiation and bisexuality in bringing together a community filled with multiplicity. The holistic quality of identity represented here, reflects the work of many other Black queer artists, Marlon Riggs for example, who discuss the violence done to a person forced to choose one aspect of identity over another. Walker's academic and activist position as a humanist feminist allows her to integrate various aspects of a character's identity without losing the specificity of race, gender, or sexuality. In *The Color Purple*, Walker emphasizes the importance of being rooted in one's history and one's community. Such roots hold the transformative power of self-identity and the relationship between self, friends, family, and lovers.
LOGGED ON, PLUGGED IN, AND ON-LINE: GENDER AND SEXUALITY
(DOES NOT COMPUTE)
IN THE QUEER CYBERSETTING OF NEARLY ROADKILL

It stands to reason that one day, some student will be poking around in some old library books. And she'll blow the dust off these books and there'll be works in there by Split Britches, or Doug Holsclaw, or Holly Hughes, or Leland Moss. And she'll read this stuff and maybe she'll yawn and say 'yeah, so?'... And that just means that we as queer theater artists will have done our jobs very well indeed, and the artistic banner will have been passed on to the next and more enlightened generation of transformational artists in the spirit of Charles Ludlam—the spirit of the trickster, the shaman, the mystic performer, the outlaw (Bornstein 165-66).

Both Kate Bornstein and Caitlin Sullivan are invested in transformative performance theater and art of the sort mentioned above. In addition, Kate Bornstein’s Gender Outlaw is postmodern theory of gender and desire made accessible to the community. It should be no surprise, then, that Nearly Roadkill is written as a performance of gender and sexuality produced on the postmodern stage of the information superhighway.

In hir7 non-fiction work, Gender Outlaw: On Men, Women, and the Rest of Us, Kate Bornstein crosses the borders between personal history/autobiography and theory. In the following passage, ze demonstrates the biologically deterministic aspect of assigning gender:

7Obligatory statement on pronouns: I use those pronouns chosen by the authors themselves. This is complicated, especially in the case of Leslie Feinberg as s/he uses different pronouns depending upon audience. For Kate Bornstein and Caitlin Sullivan, I’ve chosen hir (pronounced “here”) and ze. For Leslie Feinberg I’ve chosen s/he (pronounced sea) and hir as these are the pronouns s/he requested be used by hir publishers (in mixed audiences of both trans and non-transgender people). For Alice Walker I use she and her.
In most cultures, we're assigned a gender at birth. In our culture, once you've been assigned a gender, that's what you are; and for the most part, it's doctors who dole out the gender assignments, which shows you how emphatically gender has been medicalized. These doctors look down at a newly-born infant and say 'It has a penis, it's a boy.' Or they say, 'It doesn't have a penis, it's a girl.' It has little or nothing to do with vaginas. It's all penises or no penises: gender assignment is both phallocentric and genital (22).

One of the main objectives of *Nearly Roadkill* is to critique and transform this system for assigning gender.

Sullivan and Bornstein are not the only ones to level such criticism. This system for assigning gender has been critiqued by a number of social scientists, perhaps most importantly Suzanne Kessler. Kessler has studied the medicalization of gender through case studies of intersexed infants whom she defines as "babies born with genitals that are neither clearly male nor clearly female" (3). Noting that intersexuality rarely presents any threat to an infant's health she writes, "the genital ambiguity is remedied to conform to a 'natural,' that is culturally indisputable, gender dichotomy...accepting genital ambiguity as a natural option would require that physicians also acknowledge that genital ambiguity is 'corrected' not because it is threatening to an infant's life but because it is threatening to an infant's culture" (25). This has implications not only for intersexed children, but also for those who are not intersexed. The case of medically constructed gender, which is based upon culturally functional ideas, allows one to see how one's own gender is assigned more than it is determined. Kessler and McKenna's book concludes that "biological, psychological, and social differences do not lead to our seeing two genders. Our seeing two genders leads to the 'discovery' of biological, psychological, and social differences" (163). This raises questions about why it
is important to identify ourselves based upon dichotomies of difference when in fact we may have more in common than we have in difference.

These very dichotomies are explored even further in the literature on transgenderism and transsexualism. One social scientist, David Grim, remarks, "though it is assumed that transsexualism contradicts anatomy and is therefore in some way pathological, the real problem (and one that may lead to pathology) lies in the dichotomization of feminine and masculine forms of behavior by society. The social creation of dichotomous gender restricts the options within which individuals (female, male, homosexual, heterosexual) can comfortably express themselves" (67).

Grimm asks interesting questions about the function of a gender dichotomy in society.

What does it mean, for our society, which assumes the existence of only two genders, to have among its members literally thousands of post-operative transsexuals, many more who are living the role of the other gender while not yet receiving a surgical operation, and even more members who are cross-dressing either in public or private on a part time basis? Given that it is difficult to provide exact figures especially on the cross-dressers who do so privately, there seems to be a significant percentage of the population that does not behave in accordance with the assumption of a gender dichotomy based on assignment at birth. How, then, can the dichotomy be upheld? What function is served by maintaining an either/or proposition for gender? (68).

Kate Bornstein answers Grimm's question by stating, "Gender could be seen as a class system. By having gender around, there are these two classes--male and female. As in any binary, one side will always have more power than the other. One will always oppress the other. The value of a two-gender system
is nothing more than the value of keeping the power imbalance, and all that depends on that, intact" (113).

To summarize the social scientific literature presented here, because there is little scientific research which provides evidence for intersexuality and transgenderism as abnormalities or illnesses, and because the only such evidence points to one's inability to cope in a two-gendered society which seeks to eliminate any deviance from this norm, the conclusion may be drawn that transgenderism and intersexuality provide case studies for demonstrating the fallacy of a two-gender system. It is, therefore, society's dichotomized gender system which is dysphoric in nature because it attempts to constrict a variety of genders into a realm where only two types may exist, male and female, and where these two types decide one's role in life.

Through cultural production, Bornstein and Sullivan level their critique of gender along side of these social theorists. The function of gender in Nearly Roadkill is revealed to be a system for maintaining access to power, privilege, rights and resources. To be permitted access to any number of these realms, one must first display not only a gender, but the appropriate gender which has been assigned based on the presence or absence of a penis at the time of birth. Anyone suspected of tampering with or evading the biologically determined system for assigning gender is subject to reprimand. Using the internet as the always changing but nonetheless consistently regulated landscape, Sullivan and Bomstein demonstrate the ways in which gender and sexuality can be enforced by anyone from the stranger on a modem across the world, to the advertising agent, to the public safety officer. Bornstein and Sullivan's fictional tale of the selling, sexualizing, protecting and defending
of gender all in the name of capitalism is never far removed from the
genderqueer history of both authors.

**Postmodern Theory Staged on the Internet**

Given Bomstein's postmodern tendencies, it should be no surprise
that ze and Sullivan chose the internet as the setting for their novel. As
feminists have been quick to point out, most people do not live in a world
where postmodernist notions of identity reign. Access to privilege, power,
rights and resources remains tied to one's race, sexuality, gender, ability, and
class. What tools, then, are necessary to create art which defies this societal
system of evaluation? Feminist and womanist thought offer some tools
which are used in *The Color Purple*. Feminist theory of gender, however,
does not yet encompass transgender existence. Therefore, these tools are not
sufficient for *Nearly Roadkill*. In addition, feminist negotiation of sexuality,
which values lesbianism and bisexuality in addition to heterosexuality, is
helpful for those people who both identify as women or men and base their
sexuality on another's gender in relation to their own. It is not helpful,
however, for those transgender people who don't identify along the gender
dichotomy and/or those people who base their sexuality on some other factor
besides gender.

*Queer postmodern theory offers another set of tools which aid in the
creation and reading of *Nearly Roadkill*. Queer theory acknowledges the
existence of transgender people. As rudimentary as this may seem, it is
important to understand that transgender people are systematically excluded
from mainstream histories and theories, and often even from non-
mainstream ones. This existence acknowledged by queer theory, however, is limited primarily to the stage as is pointed out by Ki Namaste in an essay subtitled "Transsexuals Are Not Your Entertainment":

...Butler's work has been instrumental in the advancement of queer theory and gender studies. But it fails to account for the context in which these gender performances occur. The drag queens Butler discusses perform in spaces created and defined by gay male culture. Although Butler locates these spaces in relation to heterosexual hegemony, she refuses to examine this territory's own complicated relations to gender and gender performance. Consider the paradox which drag queens live: while gay male bars have drag queens on stage, some of them deny entry to women...Elements of femininity and femaleness are highly regulated within gay male consumer culture (186).

Sullivan and Bornstein's alignment with queer theory, therefore, aids transgender existence in their novel, which feminism might not have. As a trade off, however, these authors relinquish their character's ability to perform anywhere other than the postmodern stage. The application of a feminist lens may raise questions about the accessibility of this stage. The internet, as a tool of communication, is accessible to a limited number of people familiar with and able to afford computers as well as an on-line service. Though the authors of Nearly Roadkill wish to pose the internet as a space in which no matter is paid to identity, bodies, and personal history, in fact, it is highly regulated by these very classifications.

Missing in the stage performance is a voice unfiltered by expectations of performance, in this case, drag performance. From the queer theorist's point of view, this lack of voice does not signify lack of power as in The Color Purple, but rather demonstrates the performer's ability to channel the performance through stage art and ultimately locates the power in interpretation. These stage performers "speak," however, through a medium
highly regulated by expectations of class, race, gender, and desire. To restate this more in line with Namaste's critique, expectations of class, race, gender, and desire are spoken through the stage performer who lacks agency and voice in her own performance. Such is the case in *Nearly Roadkill* as well. The two main characters, Winc and Scratch, are performers rather than speakers. Their actions are interpreted through the journals of a young person named Toobe, narrated through secondary characters, and related through newspaper articles and advertisements. As Namaste continues to note, however,

Critics in queer theory write page after page on the inherent liberation in the transgression of gender codes, but they have nothing to say about the precarious position of the transsexual woman who is battered and who is unable to access a woman's shelter because she was not born a biological woman...why is it that transgender people are the chosen objects of the field of queer theory, and why does the presentation of these issues ignore the daily realities of transgender people? (184)

While queer theorists seem fascinated with stage performance, they rarely mention the changing dynamics when drag queens and kings join the general club audience and certainly not when they walk home at two o'clock in the morning.

Namaste's critique may be leveled against *Nearly Roadkill*. Males may be women, females may be men, men may be lesbians, lesbians may be men and at any given moment this may shift. All of this, and much more, is possible on the internet. And while the main characters, Scratch and Winc, experience some problems from government censorship, they experience no violence. Is it possible to write a realistic novel about transgender characters who do not ever experience violence? This is a question worth exploring.
Certainly Bornstein and Sullivan have done it in a cybersetting, but surely the choice of location is no accident. For possibly the first time ever outside the genre of science fiction, transgender people have the opportunity to read about our lives without violence. But is this helpful? Does it allow us to imagine and therefore create a society in which we will be free from violence? Does it allow us to escape the harsh reality for a moment of rest? Or does it give us and others an unrealistic picture of our lives?

Consider a story which Scratch tells Winc. (In this story, Scratch's code name is "Gyrl;" Winc's code name is "Mythter"):  

**Gyrl:** Once upon a time...
**Mythter:** ...in a faraway land, there lived a very beautiful gyrl.
**Gyrl:** Only no one knew she was beautiful because she was invisible. They only knew her voice.
**Mythter:** So this gyrl, all she had was a voice?
**Gyrl:** Uh huh. And they all loved her until...
**Mythter:** Until?
**Gyrl:** Until one day, a child asked, "Is that a boy or a girl?"
**Gyrl:** Oh geeze.
**Mythter:** Right.
**Gyrl:** And she liked it that way.
**Mythter:** Right.
**Gyrl:** But everyone in the town "wanted" to see her.
**Mythter:** Hey, who's telling this story?
**Gyrl:** ::clamping hands over my mouth::
**Mythter:** They wanted to know if she was a boy or a girl...
**Mythter:** The mayor and the town council convened to do something about it. They brought her to trial on charges of sedition.
**Gyrl:** Eeeep!
**Mythter:** "You are disturbing the natural order," they said to her. "You must tell us if you are a boy or a girl!" On the day of the trial, a fool happened to walk into town.
**Gyrl:** ::softly:: And this fool stood up to speak?
Mythter: ::nodding:: Uh huh. And the fool asked the townspeople what all the fuss was. And the town’s people said "This gyrl is an abomination."

Gyrl: ::Wincing::

Mythter: "This gyrl is disturbing the natural order," they said. "How?" asked the fool. "She will not tell us if she is truly a girl," cried the townspeople.

Gyrl: ::Curling up closer to you, listening::

Mythter: "We can not see her!" cried the townspeople.

Mythter: And the fool said, "What's a girl?"

Mythter: "A girl is obedient to boys," proclaimed the Bishop.
   "A girl bears children" said the Doctor, quite sure of himself.
   "A girl is not a boy!" proclaimed the Lawyer.
   "A girl does the housework," cried the Merchant.
   "Well," said the fool...

Mythter: "It seems to me," said the fool, "That if you cannot agree on something as simple as what exactly a girl *is*,...then how can you agree to charge or sentence this person?"

Gyrl: And the Mayor, who was quite wise, after all, agreed, and everyone lived happily ever after.

Mythter: ::softly:: In the story, yeah, they all lived happily ever after.

Gyrl: And in real life?

Mythter: ::shrugging:: In real life, they listen to the herd's loudest voice, lynch the gyrl *and* the fool (54-57).

The bilateral ending of this story gets to the crux of the controversy between theory and experience. In theory, queered identity leads to a happily ever after existence. In practice, however, queered identity places one at the mercy of the herd's loudest voice.

Sullivan and Bornstein resist this dichotomization of theory and experience, as they situate their novel in a territory which is still in the process of negotiating authenticity. Society has yet to determine, for example, whether cybersex is experience or thought. Is cybersex authentic, or somehow counterfeit? To broaden this question, what is the distinction between on-
line and off-line? What is the connection between "real" time and cybertime? While I can be fairly certain of my safety if I choose to go on-line as a biologically gendered man, I place my safety in jeopardy when I leave my computer terminal in such drag. Does the fact that I would experience no violence as a man on-line mean my time on-line is inauthentic? Or, does it mean new spaces are being created which allow for the possibility that I can be a man despite my biological female gender? Rather than provide a simple answer to any one of these questions concerning gender (in general and specifically on-line), Sullivan and Bornstein take the opportunity to explore the undetermined and unsettled territory of the internet.

In the novel, cyberactivity which allows for the deconstruction of gender and sexuality does not seem to have a large impact on human relations off-line. While on-line, both Scratch and Winc seem content to not know one another's gender. When they meet for the first time, however, the difficulties begin. Their on-line discussions afterward detail the situation.

**Scratch:** If you can change, then what does that make me? If I'm talking to a guy and all of a sudden he becomes a girl, what does that make me? Especially if I'm attracted...

**Scratch:** I have exactly the same fluidity in my mind that you describe. But haven't been so willing to push, and let go, and just float ::looking around:: out here...

**Winc:** ::murmuring:: yes yes yes.

**Scratch:** ...and if our two genderless spaces are attracted to one another, as they clearly seem to be, no matter the package...why did *we* of all people...immediately put them into such tight extremes of male/female? (111).

Deconstruction of gender works in cyberspace. However, it doesn’t necessarily transfer into other realms. In addition, the question of whether or not these spaces are any more or less authentic because of their current
inability to fully transfer off-line also is still in the negotiation process. According to *Nearly Roadkill*, on-line interactions, experiences, and negotiations certainly have some capacity to spill over into daily life, but this process might take even longer than snail mail.

Queer Formatting

How does the internet work in a novel? The layout of the novel is presented as it would look on-line on the computer screen. Combining these two forms of writing, electronic and fiction, does more than simply provide a workable setting and a creative layout. It also provides the reader with an voyeuristic point of view. The reader, therefore, is allowed to eavesdrop on private conversations and personal observations. On the other hand, the novel is primarily told through the perspective of a young boy named Toobe. The novel consists of his cyberjournal in which he often excerpts articles and chat logs. This filter serves to distance the reader from the two main characters, Scratch and Wine. Though many of Wine's and Scratch's e-mail messages and copies of their chat logs are excerpted, the reader is made aware that Toobe makes the choices about what gets printed in his journal (the novel). This feature of the novel corresponds with the emphasis placed upon interpretation in postmodern performance.

Another effect of combining internet communication and the novel form places the power of naming and language formation in the hands of those who use it. By giving the power of language to the people, the authors use a language which counters that which is heterocentric, eurocentric, and defined only in the academy. New words are being created on the internet
faster than meanings can be grasped. This allows the characters in *Nearly Roadkill* to name and define themselves in the language which they find most suitable. The power of language, here, belongs to those who make a conscious decision to either use it or not. For example, though "third gender" pronouns have yet to be used widely throughout society, they give transgender people on-line (and more slowly, off-line) the opportunity to name and speak about themselves in ways which do not acknowledge the gender dichotomy (enforceable even through language). Communication on the internet has become a process which builds community based upon shared language. Sullivan and Bornstein’s use of this community created language connects them to the process of language formation, thereby undermining the distance between themselves, their characters, and the readers.

The instability and fluidity of language on the internet is present in other aspects of on-line communication as well. Perhaps the most important characteristic of the internet which serves this novel is the concepts of movement. This is signaled by the many metaphors such as "the information superhighway," "surfing the web," and "cyberstroll." The movement necessary in the novel to escape becoming "roadkill" is not unlike that which is necessary for transgender people in public spheres. This movement is necessary for the survival of transgender literary characters and should be seen as a reflection of transgender lives. Changing one’s position on the gender continuum may provide safety for some.

According to Anne Bolin, "For transsexuals the surgery is their only hope for 'normalcy' in a society where genitals are the minimum common
denominator for gender role in a Western bipolar gender system that is biologically deterministic" (47). Society determines that a man is not a man unless he has a penis. Not quite conversely, a woman can not be a woman with a penis. "In a society that could tolerate lack of correspondence (between gender and genitalia), there would be no transsexual individuals. There would be men with vaginas and women with penises or perhaps different signs of gender" (Kessler and McKenna 120). Since this is not the case, however, many transsexuals seek safety in gender movement. Many other transgender people find gender movement to be congruent with their understanding of their gender identity. This fluidity is not always a physical change of position, but may be shapeshifting, role-playing, gender bending, and/or switching. Winc writes to Scratch, "Okay, this may sound weird, but we need to role play. Although I guess you don’t need to be told that.
::Glancing up at your note:: I have no idea who's reading what these days, and a role play won’t get us as much attention if our letters are snagged and read, okay? It needs to be very...different. We need to build a world that’s safe to talk in" (160). The role-play not only provides Scratch and Winc with safety, but it also grants them agency to create their own identities in their own on-line worlds.

Gender Resistance: Refusing to Pay/Play

_Nearly Roadkill_ tells the story of two gender outlaws who resist the government's attempts to require all internet users to register. This registration process is enacted to give the government more control over the chaotic existence of the internet. It is touted as a method to help curb
cybercrime, particularly child pornography. Registration requires users to fill out the following information:

>>>Registration Information
Name:
Credit Card #:
Sex: (M) or (F)?
Social Security #:
Income Level (round off to nearest ten thousand)
Address:
Phone:
Age:
Spouse's name:
Spouse's work phone:
Ethnicity (choose one): Caucasian/Black/Hispanic/Asian/Other
Sexual Orientation (choose one): Heterosexual/Homosexual
Number of children, and their ages:
Computer:
Occupation:
Employer's Name:
Work phone number:
Number of people in the household:
Names of other residents:
Brands:
(Registrants must fill out the Product Survey Questions 1-125) (40-41).

As an incentive, registrants receive "entry by special invitation to special areas of the Net, harassment insurance and protection by the Eye network, personalized advertisements which focus only on what "you" want!, a chance to win our SIX MILLION DOLLAR LOTTERY!" (15). In addition, anyone who doesn't already have a computer will receive one. The seduction of this advertising scheme is important as it grants access to those who have none. Though the advertising strategically omits this information, Scratch and Winc question whether free access granted is really free access at all. It should be noted that this is the only passage which deals with attempts to account for the fact that in reality, many people do not have access to the internet. It is unfortunate that the privilege of internet access is not further explored.
The heroes in the novel don't make it past the third question as they refuse to identify along the lines of dichotomized gender. Thus, they are tagged as evading registration and are hunted down for their assumed criminal acts. After all, if they refuse to register, they must be involved in the illegal activities which registration is attempting to solve. As one character explains, "those who don't go along with the program will simply be put in a category called Other, where they will languish until they figure out what to do with them. As it stands now, if you don't Register, you don't get to go play where you were able to play before" (36).

Bornstein and Sullivan provide an interesting twist to their critique of consumerism as they connect it to genderist, racist, and heterosexist assumptions. It isn't a far stretch of the imagination to recognize the similarities between the registration process and one's expected requirements in society. Fulfilling one's appropriate identity (class, gender, sexuality, and race) role will permit movement in privileged areas of society, provide protection against violence, allow one to be reflected in advertisements and other forms of popular culture, and allow one to work in most any job to make a good living. When one's identity does not register as one of two clearly defined categories (rich/poor, male/female, heterosexual/homosexual, Black/White), they are labeled "other" and are restricted in many areas of life.

But..."Products have labels, not people" exclaims the frustrated talk show host, Ricki Lake, to guests who have come on her show to tell their friends and relatives, "You say you're bi. I say it's a lie. Today you have to declare yourself." Perhaps in the land of Go Ricki, but not so in this novel. People have labels so they will buy the appropriate products. Nothing is
more frustrating to the gender enforcer than the person who shops inter-
departmentally or equally as frustrating, in the "wrong" department. A
certain number of the appropriately gendered products, from clothes to
appropriately colored razors, must be purchased to gain access to men's or
women's rightful share of power, privilege, rights and resources.

Toobe excerpts an article in his diary which explains, "As consumers
indicate their preferences for certain information systems, those preferences
are made into a permanent file, so that with each use the computer does the
work of choosing the consumer's point of interest. What's more, each time a
consumer buys something, his or her preference will be noted, so that the
range of services offered to them will grow narrower, thereby thinning out
the traffic on the internet" (39). Toobe, explains the organization of such
advertisements:

This all started cuz the businesses cooperated for once (I think a
phone company's behind it), and people are believing anything,
and panicking. They're really freaked about missing out.
There's just enough differences in what Registered people get,
and what you miss if you don't register. It's like cable TV,
people without it miss all the cool movies, so after awhile
everyone thinks they should have cable (38).

This system concocted by Sullivan and Bornstein reflects the advertising
industry which tailors its ads to fit various populations. Such advertising
strategies prey upon the use of stereotypes to determine what a given
population wants. The drawbacks and restrictions of this system are
explained again by Toobe.

When you fill out all the profile crap, you'll start getting
advertisements and product samples just for you! How exciting.
This one friend of mine went on as a girl in the lesbian room
(he's a guy--they always figure him out, but he keeps trying) and
he got tampon ads. His mail's flooded with them. If he tries to get out of it, they'll give him menopause stuff. Cracks me up. But if you register just right, you'll get just what you 'need.' It's seductive (37).

In Toobe's example, the assumptions are clear. Anyone interested in talking to or about lesbians must be a menstruating female. This advertising strategy only reinforces who a woman is and in what she should be interested, thus maintaining the oppressive gender dichotomy. While this system for advertising is sold on its convenience ("the computer does the work") and its practicality ["you'll get just what you need" (39)], Bornstein and Sullivan suggest the ways in which it reinforces stereotypes and strict roles of gender, race, and sexuality.

The advertisement industry's reinforcement of gender stereotypes is further demonstrated in a company advertiser's profile of one internet user, Miss Thing. "Miss Thing buys a wide range of products not consistent with her profile. In addition to the usual feminine hygiene products, she also requests information about tools, lawn products, and geriatric goods, rarely buying anything at all to date, but we feel confident that the target advertising will result in increased consumption shortly...We find it hard to believe that she is who she says she is. In addition, she has listed her occupation as welder, which is highly unlikely" (117). The genderist assumptions here are easily identifiable. Miss Thing's profile was being considered to discern whether she was involved in criminal activity. She was tagged as a possible suspect because of her supposed inconsistency. While "cross-shopping" and even cross-dressing are not illegal as they are in Stone Butch Blues, they certainly have legal implications.
According to *Nearly Roadkill*, people have labels/roles so the public can be protected from those who defy the laws of biological determinism and attempt to gain access which is granted only to those who subscribe to the laws. As it turns out, the gender outlaws are not criminals and do not pose a threat to public safety. Gender congruity and other forms of conformity are therefore required, not to protect the individual or the society, but rather to maintain the class system. This system works because it is invisible until one refuses to play/pay by the rules. Gender enforcement must be sold as being for the good of the public.

Strategic Distractions of the Gender Enforcement Guards

Toobe explains in a journal entry, "I'm trying to understand Winc's thing about losing your gender. Or rather, choosing it. Consciously. Ze sez everybody's obsessed with guessing what people really are, behind their screen names. Ze sez ze's found, without exception, that once people's covers are blown they can't seem to keep going, as people" (41). As was stated earlier, some theorists have suggested gender attribution is important only as it allows one to identify another's proper role in society. This is precisely the kind of attribution Winc is interesting in escaping. How should one interact with hir? Is ze a potential friend or lover? Is ze to be paid full attention, or can ze be overlooked? Should ze be treated as an important contributor to society, or is ze disposable? Gender is a class system whose assignment is not a matter of achievement or personal preference, but rather based upon a doctor's declaration. This social system comes into conflict with both feminist and queer theorists, as well as those whose identities defy their gender assignments.
While feminism has taken this theory of gender and used it to demonstrate the way in which the gender dichotomy restricts and oppresses women, Bornstein and Sullivan demonstrate the ways in which it disadvantages all people who do not subscribe to/register with this system. Consider *The Color Purple*. Celie is oppressed by Mister when their genders are clearly dichotomized. Mister is expected to fulfill the role which required dominance and power over Celie, while she is expected to submit. Gender theorists, with whom Bornstein and Sullivan align themselves, take this in a slightly different direction claiming that the compulsory gender dichotomy oppresses all people whose choices are limited to either masculine male or feminine female. *Nearly Roadkill* provides not only examples of such gender oppression, but also examples of negotiation of gender and its enforcement on the internet. In this novel, oppression comes from the corporate/state apparatus and is then filtered down through those who practice genderism including some feminists, lesbians, gays, and bisexuals. Oppression, therefore, comes from some of the most unlikely places if one is genderqueer.

It should be noted that the concept of genderism does not exclude the feminist one of sexism, but rather adds to it. The feminist analysis does not disappear completely, as the authors make no attempt to disagree that the system was set up to give the most power, privilege, rights and resources to heterosexual, able-bodied, masculine gendered, white males. Bornstein and Sullivan, along with queer/gender theorists and activists, have aligned themselves with feminism as they provide visibility and voice to the

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*The assumption that two and only two genders exist, and that those two genders are determined by the primacy of biology over any other aspect of one's existence.*
problems of the gender system. The difference lies in the site of negotiation and following from this, the strategies used. Sullivan and Bornstein have chosen their site of gender revolution not within the gender dichotomy, but rather outside of it altogether. These authors have chosen a location which does not operate based upon the norms of oppression common in mainstream society. In this way, humanist feminists have sought reform whereas gender/queer theorists have sought revolution in that the latter wish to tear down the old system and begin anew. Celie transforms her relationship with men, specifically, Albert. The main characters in *Nearly Roadkill*, Scratch and Winc, destroy the computer system which controls registration.

Just as *Nearly Roadkill* is offered as a challenge to the current conception of gender, so it also challenges the way in which sexuality is conceived. Scratch and Winc make valiant efforts to disassociate compulsory gender from sexual desire and practice. This does not happen, however, without some challenge as demonstrated in one conversation between the two (Winc is using the code name "Karn," Scratch is using the code name "Leilia"):

**Leilia:** ::smiling:: Hmm, I just realized something. My body, my real one, mind you, in the sex scene *I* had, got into it right away. But my head didn't. It snagged on what that would *make* me. My whole sexuality would have changed in the real world, but my body didn't give a damn.

**Karn:** ::excited:: Right. Now take that principle of what you're saying, and apply it to the real world. What would we have? (75).

In this passage, the two main characters continue to work out the difference and connection between on-line and the "real world". While the interaction
between Leilia and Karn (Scratch and Winc) might not have taken place offline due to their opposing sexualities and genders, the internet gives them the opportunity to meet and develop a relationship. Their ability to negotiate sexuality based upon something other than gender is necessary for the sexualities of transgender people. In the system which assigns sexuality based upon the assumption that there are only two genders, transgender people are rendered invisible (our genders, therefore sexualities, don’t register), asexual (who would have sex with one of them?), or exotic sexual deviants (consider the pornography industry). The internet provides one forum which, although not the “real world”, allows for acquaintanceships which might not otherwise have come to pass.

Where does feminism fit into this performance? Walker’s novel presents the feminist strategy of providing more sexual options for women: lesbianism and bisexuality are added to the realm of possibilities for women’s sexualities. This strategy provides more options, but it does not separate gender from sexuality, nor does it envision the existence of genders outside of the male/female binary. The strategy was certainly helpful for the non-transgendered characters, Celie and Shug. However, if it is to work for Scratch and Winc, they would have to abide by rules which contradict their understanding and performance of gender. In *The Color Purple*, Shug’s gender in relation to Celie’s gender places them in current and historical alignment with Black women loving Black women. Sullivan and Bornstein ask if there is something other than gender which allows Celie and Shug, and Winc and Scratch, to love one another.
Conversely, while *Nearly Roadkill* offers tools for the creation of art inclusive of transgender and pansexual experiences, what does it do for multi-cultural/racial experiences? Juxtapose the way a racial/ethnic context is woven into The *Color Purple* with *Nearly Roadkill's* (lack of) racial performance. In Walker's work, race is central to character development, plot formation, diction, and all other aspects of the writing process. Sullivan and Bornstein are not entirely unconscious of race; however, because they have situated their novel on the internet, race is explored from the eurocentric assumption of whiteness which dominates cyberspace. This contrasts with the performance of gender and sexuality for which the internet provides the necessary landscape to deconstruct gender and sexuality. As many Black feminists/womanists have pointed out, the postmodern deconstruction of race has been less successful than other identity deconstruction. It should be noted, however, that race is being deconstructed in really interesting ways, not only by theorists, but by bi/multi racial individuals. Maureen Reddy, in *Crossing the Color Line*, discusses the cultural definition of race:

Nevertheless, the idea that 'one drop of black blood' makes one black remains current. This formula does not work for other racial categories...nor does the color of the rest of the blood ever get articulated, as the culturally shared assumption of whiteness underlies all racial designations. Furthermore, the norm of whiteness is treated as 'pure,' a laughable fiction that relies upon a willful ignorance of history (85).

The author continues to explain the racist implications of such a definition of race. Reddy also offers a fascinating image of a friend's her son who is multi racial, part Black, part Irish-American: "On Saint Patrick's Day this year, Sean went off to school in a Cross Colours outfit—which he loves largely because the
clothing company is owned by young blacks in South Central Los Angeles—with a pin that read '100% Irish.' The combination of the two signifiers of not only racial heritage, but of political alignment with two racial-based communities exemplifies the meaning of race for multi-racial individuals living in multi-cultural settings. The “100% Irish” button juxtaposed against the Cross Colours clothing calls into question both the 100% (racial purity) and the compulsory expectation to choose “which side one is on”.

Interestingly enough, this question about the purity of race and the possibilities for deconstruction are coming from mixed-race couples and their biracial children: the subtitle of Reddy’s book is *Race, Parenting, and Culture*.

Unfortunately, however, Bornstein and Sullivan do not engage such examples of racial identity. Rather than presenting the possibilities for racial deconstruction or pointing out the difficulties of deconstructing race, these two authors choose not to comment by devoting little space to the matter at all. Only one conversation addresses eurocentric assumptions on-line.

(Leilia is Scratch/Karn is Winc)

**Karn:** ::rocked:: Side note: I hadn't even considered your race.
**Ouch.**

**Leilia:** Exactly. You probably assumed I'm white, right?
**Karn:** ::wearily:: Yeah, sorry.

**Leilia:** ::also wearily:: It’s OK, happens all the time. One of the cool things for black folks on-line is they are assumed to be white, too. Not that they want to be white, but they’re assumed to be "in the club," without having to prove credentials at the door (74).

This is a good example of the way in which the setting ties the reader closely to the characters and the action as many readers may also have assumed Scratch was white. While all users are permitted to log on as a person of any race, they will most likely be assumed to be white by a majority of users.
According to the authors' account, racial deconstruction does not erase eurocentrism, at least not in this novel. This point is unfortunately not explored any further.

In addition, the assumption of class here is never addressed. "Black folks on-line," who are "in the club," are, of course, a very different class of characters than those in *The Color Purple*. The impact of class or even the lack of attention to which Black folks (and other folks) *aren't* on-line signals a deficiency in the theoretical approach of the novelists. *Nearly Roadkill* offers one more example of the reasons many feminists are skeptical of postmodernism, especially when it comes to representation of race and class.

*Nearly Roadkill* provides a significant contribution to the recording of transgender experiences and history, postmodern theory, cultural production, and the literary academy. Gender and sexuality never looked so different as they do in this cross-breed of electronic communication and in the fictional novel. Bornstein and Sullivan are successful for offering one of the first settings and plots, outside of science fiction, in which transgender people not only survive, but thrive. This places the novel in a very different position than *The Color Purple*, which relies upon a method for negotiating gender that ultimately renders the transgender person invisible, or completely nonexistent. On the other hand, *Nearly Roadkill* seems to have done similar damage in the (lack of) representation of people of color (even though the main characters are African American and First Nation). The next chapter will explore another novel, *Stone Butch Blues*, which attempts to make some sort of compromise between these two different strategies for creating art centered on issues of identity.
Along with Walker, Bornstein, and Sullivan, Leslie Feinberg, the author of *Stone Butch Blues* and *Transgender Warriors*, is one person who has located hir work and writing at the site of contested borders between community/academy, personal history/theory. Unlike the other authors, however, s/he does not ground hir writing in a particular theoretical perspective. In the preface to hir revolutionary text *Transgender Warriors*, Feinberg critiques academic theory which is distanced from the community: “Today a great deal of “gender theory” is abstracted from human experience. But if theory is not the crystallized resin of experience, it ceases to be a guide to action” (XIII). To avoid the same mistakes theorists make when they disassociate theory from experience, Feinberg writes with the intention of creating “a guide to action” based upon survival strategies of transgender people throughout history. The complex relationship between Feinberg, a transgender person aware of hir community, and gender theory is tentative. While hir work is shaped by both personal and collective transgender history, Feinberg does not align hirself with one theory or another in an attempt to help explain this past. The community, rather than the academy, is at the center of Feinberg’s texts to de-center theory as the sole explanation of identity.

Feinberg’s overall critique of gender theory is of the distance placed between theorists and transgender people. Much like groupie fans, gender theorists are charmed with drag performance. The theorist’s vision, impaired by sequins and glitter, lacks an in-depth engagement with a holistic
transgender existence both on and off the drag performance stage. The focus on the adorned body, the queen in all her glory, emphasizes the queer contradiction. "She has a bodily past as a he!?” But force of contradiction can only be temporary, since it quickly becomes ordinary. Likewise, drag performance is temporary; the heels do come off, and once they do: exit the gender theorist. In this way, the theorist is dis-located away from the transgender queer community. Not only does the positionality of theory maintain the distance between theorist and subject, but it also, as was pointed out in the last chapter, limits transgenderism to a confined space, the stage.

Some factions of feminism, on the other hand, theorize gender from a position which maintains, and perhaps strengthens, the gender dichotomy. Despite the fact that “feminism questioned the content of gender roles, demanding expansion of them and changing the balance, claiming that gender shouldn’t matter anymore and that it was a false constraint” (Nataf 39), when it comes to thinking about transgender both academic and non-academic feminists apply a dualistically gendered lens. The following statement from Janice Raymond’s book *The Transsexual Empire* as quoted in *Lesbians Talk Transgender* is representative of some lesbian-feminists’ inability to expand their understanding of gender beyond the female/male dichotomy.

Because transsexuals have lost their physical ‘members’ [note Raymond’s association of transsexual with male to female, silencing the female to male experience all-together] does not mean that they have lost their ability to penetrate women—women’s mind, women’s space, women’s sexuality. Transsexuals merely cut off the most obvious means of invading women so that they seem non invasive. However, as Mary Daly has remarked in the case of the transsexually constructed lesbian-feminists their whole presence becomes a ‘member’
invading women's presence and dividing us once more from each other" (Nataf 35).

This theoretical position invisibilizes and silences gender expression outside of the dichotomy. As Nataf has stated, "Separatists have re-entrenched behind the view of gender as bi-polar, policing the borders. Not only do multiple genders seem unthinkable in separatist lesbian feminism, they are simply not the issue...All difference, not just men, maleness, and patriarchy, has become a target of suppression" (40).

Most notably, both queer and feminist theoretical camps share roles as spectators and non-participants in the "gender as drag" performance. A clear separation between subject/object and theoretician must be maintained for either theory to work. Queer theorists maintain a position as audience member and feminist theorists distinguish between "women/us" and "transgender/other." As Feinberg demonstrates, when these theories are tested and positioned in close proximity to the experiences of live transgender people, neither theory is fully upheld. In exchange, therefore, Feinberg offers border crossings between history and community as the basis of hir work.

Feinberg, through hir novel and non-fiction writing, suggests the stage should not be the privileged site of transgender experience. S/he is not only interested in drag performance, but also in the walk home from the drag bar through the streets of the gay ghetto. As Feinberg demonstrates, when gender theories are tested and positioned in close proximity to the experiences of transgender people, no one theory fully pans out. In exchange, therefore, Feinberg's writing replaces an academic distance with hir position and history within the working-class transgender community; thus breaking down the
distance between culture and cultural production. Stone Butch Blues, hir 1993 novel, reflects this position from which s/he writes as is revealed in three formal dimensions of the novel: 1) Cross-genre writing combining history, autobiography, and fiction. 2) Strategic breaks and symbols to reflect the "silent language" developed between and among femmes and butches. 3) Characters and plot developed from a personal and collective butch history, and the use of this development as testing ground for identity theory.

Cross-Genre Writing

"To avoid monotony, to express a many-layered identity more adequately, or to achieve a closer connection with self and reader, border-crossing poet-critics may write alternately or simultaneously in multiple genres, crossing discursive boundaries even as they blur the distinctions between writer and reader, author and subject" (Freedman 38). For all of the above cited reasons, Feinberg weaves history, autobiography, and fiction together in Stone Butch Blues. This cross-genre technique is appropriate as it coincides with a strategy used by butches in reciting personal histories. For example, in an interview by Julie Peters, when Feinberg is asked whether Stone Butch Blues is autobiographical or not, s/he insists it is a work of fiction. "Stone Butch Blues is a complete work of fiction. It's not autobiographical." When Peters persists, "Is there any of you in Stone Butch Blues?" Feinberg dodges the question with the following answer: "I didn't put myself into this novel as a character" (25). In contrast, however, the cover of the novel reads "A Novel/Leslie Feinberg." It would appear the author, and by extension hir community, is much closer to the fictional novel than
Feinberg’s comments suggest. While *Stone Butch Blues* is fiction, the meaning of fiction need not be far removed from the history of the author and hir community.

Sharing personal history places one in a vulnerable position, particularly when that history is one of an exploited and oppressed population as demonstrated in the following statement from the introduction of *Dagger: On Butch Women*:

> We’re so vulnerable in our lives that pinning ourselves to a page is terrifying—for those of us who have grown up dodging and ducking, standing still seems foolish. Guaranteeing pseudonyms wasn’t enough. ‘Anyone can look at me and see what I am,’ one woman said as she refused an interview. ‘But if I say it, then it’s on me.’ Even naming yourself to *yourself* can be scary—we duck and dodge inside too (Barana et al. 9-10).

The history of butches, therefore, appears in fiction and any other genre which may be written at a distance from the pain and vulnerability of our collective and individual pasts. Even when fiction is mixed with history, however, the outcome is powerful and requires a great deal of courage both on the part of the author and the reader. “To defend our right to be visible, even when that visibility puts us at risk, is courage born both of desperation and hope” (Burana et al. 12).

From the black leather jacket, to five layers of binding and packing, little of what lies below the stone butch’s armor is revealed to the general public. She is literally and figuratively impenetrable. Writing *Stone Butch Blues*, therefore, required Feinberg to traverse the protective chasm between hirself, hir community, and those unfamiliar with butch history. Even though the novel’s primary audience is lesbian, gay, bisexual, and/or transgender it is important to understand that butch history and existence is
widely unknown and/or contested even in the queer community. Similar to the experience outlined below by photographer Jill Posener, balance between revelation and self-protection was one with which Feinberg had to struggle.

Photographing butch is hard. I certainly would resist any photographer who wanted to photograph me for a book on butches. Butches are isolated and vulnerable. This isn’t a period of celebrating butch/femme identity. I know in my own work the process of asking a butch to reveal herself in front of the camera brings up the sense of being even more exposed in a world which has held our image up to ridicule. I am scared of continuing that. So I love it when butches emerge from the photos as completely at ease with their identities. Sometimes I apply my own skewed sense of modesty, my own discomfort. If someone unzips her jacket a little too far and her breasts are revealed, I have a hard time resisting the temptation to cover them up (44).

Likewise, to unzip autobiographical history a little too far exposes that which butches have attempted to cover—the pain, loss, and acknowledgment that we are vulnerable to a hostile environment. Fictional retelling, or the use of cartoons, zines, and urban folklore, become strategies for making ourselves visible. “Humor lets us speak what we might otherwise not say” (Barana et al. 10), but only as much as we are willing to reveal. Selective visibility aids protection from voyeurism and cooptation such as in the example of “butch women on the covers of popular magazines [who] are thus absorbed into the general culture to be cast aside as yesterday’s icon, or ‘mainstreamed’—stripped of sexuality and meaning, as if we were adherents to a quirky style, no more than a fashion statement” (Burana et al. 10). Writing the fictional novel centered in butch history, therefore, facilitates the process of revealing only what the author is willing to share about himself and his community. That
which lies just below the place where the zipper is fastened is strategically protected from the gaze of the uninitiated. It is ours.

Bordering Silence/Narrative

"I lightly tapped my Zippo lighter against the whiskey glass: butch Morse code" (96).

The border between silence and narrative is as tentative as is the one between genders. On the one hand, silence (leaving the zipper up) carries with it a tremendous amount of power, the channeling of which has been one strategy used by transgender people. This contradicts, however, the feminist concept of naming and giving voice to "women's experiences" which have been left out of history. Consider not only Celie's example in The Color Purple, but also feminist performance artists such as Annie Sprinkle, who undo the zipper all of the way to reveal the forbidden, the taboo, which as it turns out, offers no erotic objectification as was assumed the tooth by tooth unzipping would provide. There is also power in the zipper undone. A feminist strategy has been to claim this power rather than allow it to be used against women. Consider the following narrative from a woman named Kacha who, quite possibly unknowingly, sets up an ideal situation for transsexual subversion of power:

I'd met a male-to-female transsexual. And that freaked me out and I thought, no I can't cope with this. In essence your body is still male, even with the operation. S. told me what the operation involved. And I guess if she hadn't told me that—that it is the penis and it's been inverted—then maybe I wouldn't have reacted to way I did. But my reaction was, 'Oh my God, that is a cock.' And I just didn't want to be anywhere near it (Nataf 37).
S. had two options. The zipper goes up, or it goes down. This particular transgender woman chose to trust Kacha with the details of her surgery. Revelation placed S. at risk of abandonment and yet she chose this strategy over rendering herself and her history invisible. Though the zipper reveals flesh is flesh whatever shape into which it is assigned, Kacha demonstrates her inability to disassociate an assumed history and cultural meaning of the flesh from its current form. This narrative demonstrates that revelation brings with it the possibility of misunderstanding. For this reason, butches and other transgender people have chosen silence as survival strategy. It is important to note, however, that S. does not lack power in this situation. Kacha's refusal "to be anywhere near it" gives S. a certain amount of power. In addition to silence, therefore, voice also harbors strategic power. What lies behind the zipper, whether done or undone, may be flesh, may be silicone. Regardless, power lies in both concealing and revealing.

Revealing butch history in the novel does not prevent the author from using narrative strategies which maintain the butch mystique. Conversely, giving in to language does not prevent Feinberg from using narrative strategies which maintain the butch mystique. The most notable strategy is the use of breaks, which occur when writing about emotional pain, loss, sex, and violence. For example, one of the most notable breaks occurs when Jess states, "Theresa could always melt my stone." ZIP! The next sentence reads "It was 1968. Revolution seemed to glimmer on the horizon" (124). This example demonstrates the relegation of power to the butch reader, author, or character. There is something to be known, but only those who
know it, know it. This butch strategy, once again, serves as a buffer against those who would coopt and exploit transgender history and experience.

The lack of voice in the broader culture often transfers into the personal relations among butches and femmes such as in the example of what Jess calls a “silent language.” Feinberg carefully blends the concepts of feminist voice and butch armor in an effort to prevent the violence imposed by cultural silence and yet maintain aspects of butch culture. Consider the following courtship ritual between Jess and one of her femme partners, Milli. “One of them is Milli, hands on her hips, looking me up and down as if the bike and I were one lean machine. Her body language, the gleam in her eyes, the tease in her smile, all combined into an erotic femme challenge. Milli set the action into irresistible motion by lifting one eyebrow. Without a word I took off my brown leather jacket and offered it to her. Neither of us were in any hurry. Once this dance began there was no reason to rush and every reason to take it deliciously slow.” (106). These symbols and signifiers originate from a broader cultural silencing and fear of queer sexuality and gender presentation which often transfer into the personal relations among butches and femmes such as in the example of the symbolic language created within the community. Jess admits to one of her friends, Frankie, “I feel like I’m clogged up with all this toxic goo, Frankie. But I can’t hear my own voice say the words out loud. I’ve got no language” (275). In the novel, lack of voice equates with lack of power. The presentation of a silent language in the novel does more than provide a window into butch-femme culture. It gives Feinberg control over the meticulously watched zipper.
Character and Plot Development

Character formation and identity are shaped from Feinberg’s knowledge (which is considerable given hir personal history and also hir research presented in *Transgender Warriors*) of butch history and experience. “I offer history, politics, and theory that live and breathe because they are rooted in the experience of real people who fought flesh-and-blood battles for freedom. And my work is not solely devoted to chronicling the past, but is a component of my organizing to help shape the future (XIII).” Centralizing experience rather than theory allows Feinberg the freedom to create characters who have a historical basis and a stake in the future. “SBB [*Stone Butch Blues*] certainly lives with that emotional truth that many trans people here--transsexual, transgender, drag and intersexual--live with day in and day out” (Peters and Feinberg 25). At the same time, it validates the experience of the audience bringing readers into the center of the text. “I wrote a novel because of its ability to reach readers. I also chose a novel because of its ability to reach down into emotional truths” (Peters and Feinberg 25).

Lack of alignment with any one academic theory allows Feinberg to explore and make visible various contradictions between butch identity and a changing landscape. This parallels the experience of butches throughout history whose survival strategies invoke the ability to adapt to every unknown possible danger awaiting just around the corner. “Every street corner was a new crisis. Turn left? Turn right? Go straight?” (155). *Stone Butch Blues* is placed at the crux of one of these transitional periods when the femme-butch community comes under strong opposition not only from mainstream culture, but from within the community itself as academic
feminists use the heterosexual paradigm to measure butch-femme relationships. This time period is described in the introduction to an interview of two butch females who lived during the time in which *Stone Butch Blues* is set: “Two women discuss the different accommodations they made to adapt to a world of rapidly changing social definitions that nevertheless did not, during that period, expand enough to encompass them” (Bender and Due 96). This description of the time period resonates with Feinberg’s presentation of it. The violence incurred by the femme-butch community during the 1970s height of lesbian-feminism, what Carol Queen calls “the purge” (16), did not become widely recognized until the 1980s during the sex wars. In fact, the butch-femme community has yet to fully recover; and certainly relations between the femme-butch community and feminists remain strained.

This conflict between queer, on the one hand, and feminism, on the other, is presented early in the novel in the “Letter to a Fifties Femme from a *Stone Butch*”9 The author of the letter describes a blind date, “I was looking at her while she was talking, thinking to myself that I’m a stranger in this woman’s eyes. She’s looking at me but she doesn’t see me. Then she finally said how she hates this society for what it’s done to ‘women like me’ who hate themselves so much they have to look and act like men” (5-6). The author continues to describe the violence and harm this sort of “theorizing” has done to the femme-butch community as she recalls the femme to whom the letter is addressed.

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9 This fictional letter which was the planted seed for *Stone Butch Blues* was published in Joan Nestle’s *The Persistent Desire: A Femme-Butch Reader*. 1992. The letter then reappeared as chapter one of *Stone Butch Blues* in 1993.
When did we get separated in life, sweet warrior woman? We thought we'd won the war of liberation when we embraced the word gay. Then suddenly there were professors and doctors and lawyers coming out of the woodwork telling us that meetings should be run with *Roberts Rules of Order*. (Who died and left Robert god?)

They drove us out, made us feel ashamed of how we looked. They said we were male chauvinist pigs, the enemy. It was women's hearts they broke. We were not hard to send away, we went quietly.

The plants closed. Something we never could have imagined.

That's when I began passing as a man. Strange to be exiled from your own sex to borders that will never be home.

You were banished too, to another land with your own sex, and yet forcibly apart from the women you loved as much as you tried to love yourself (11).

The placement of the letter is important as it lays the framework for the novel which centers around conflict and contradiction. While the plot may move in and around the actual debates within feminism, the broader context of conflict between culture and genderwarriors always remains central.

While feminism is not wholly embraced, neither is queer theory. The unique position of *Stone Butch Blues* in the context of *The Color Purple* and *Nearly Roadkill* demonstrates the difference between various theoretical approaches.

One difference lies in the theories used to summarize the identity conflicts presented throughout the novels. As was discussed in Chapter one, the characters in *The Color Purple* rely on the feminist construction of gender and sexuality to create a holistic sense of self founded in one's roots, one's body. Then in chapter two, *Nearly Roadkill* was found to provide the main characters with the power to construct their own gender and sexual identities.
void of socially or biologically determined boundaries placed upon the body. *Stone Butch Blues*, on the other hand, is founded both in the feminist importance of being rooted in one's body and in the queer transcendence of the body and the forces (culture and identity) which act upon it. Feinberg places various aspects of butch identity in relation to culture, not to align *Stone Butch Blues* with one theory over another, but to create characters and perform identity from first and second-hand knowledge and history. Ultimately, by juxtaposing numerous aspects of butch identity with various situations in society, Feinberg demonstrates that no one theory aids survival at all times either in the novel or in butch lives.

Feinberg's strategy which combines theories and history is helpful as it reveals the shortcomings of one theory at the same time it highlights the usefulness of another. For example, while postmodernism has had some difficulty theorizing race and class, Feinberg combines feminist and queer strategies to offer a careful consideration of the implications of race and class privilege in hir novel.

Issues of class are as central to *Stone Butch Blues* as race is to *The Color Purple*. The novel is set in a working class environment which allows Feinberg to explore the connections between class, sexuality, and gender. Not only does class combine with transgender identity to affect one's access to privilege, but Feinberg demonstrates the direct correlation between the two aspects of identity. For example, loss of job due to genderism and/or homophobia is directly linked to the butch characters' economic and social class. Another example, also rooted in the interlocking aspects of identity, might be Jess's political activism to gain butch access to the union. Such an
approach to identity echoes that of Walker’s feminist humanism which values the holistic nature of one’s self.

Race and ethnicity is also linked to other aspects of one’s identity in the African American butch, Ed. Like many queer people of color, Ed experiences racism in the queer community. This is especially evident in the contrast between the two bars, one predominantly White and the other predominantly Black. Ed tells Jess, “I work all day with these old bulls at the plant. I like coming in here and spending some time with y’all. But I like being with my own people too, you understand?” (54). That race is not separable from gender and sexuality is made evident when Jess and Ed are beaten by cops after their night out at the bar. “I could see the boot of the cop standing over me pull back. ‘You fuckin’ traitor,’ he spat, as his boot cracked my rib for punctuation” (57). Perhaps the officer’s motivation is racist, or genderist, or homophobic, or maybe some combination of the three. That either race, gender, or sexuality could have been the motivational factor demonstrates, once again, demonstrates Feinberg’s holistic approach to identity.

Standing apart from this take on self-identity, however, is the representation of Jewish ethnicity. As a child, Jess is not only treated differently because of her gender, but also because of her ethnicity. Aside from her childhood, and a couple other episodes of anti-semitism, Jess’s ethnicity is widely invisible. While certainly Jess, with her lack of place/home, may be read as a character in exile, displaced, without a home, this is one of a number of possible readings. Without running the risk of suggesting “Jess isn’t Jewish enough,” it is curious given Feinberg’s approach
to all other elements of identity. It may be helpful to examine the accounts of a Jewish, lesbian, identity struggle as told by Adrienne Rich. Consider the following quotations from Rich’s essay, “Split at the Root: An Essay on Jewish Identity”:

I have to face the sources and the flickering presence of my own ambivalence as a Jew; the daily, mundane anti-Semitism of my entire life. These are stories I’ve never tried to tell before. Why now? Why, I asked myself sometime last year, does this question of Jewish identity float so impalpably, so ungraspably around me, a cloud I can’t quite see the outlines of, which feels to me to be without definition (224).

Sometimes I feel I have seen too long from too many disconnected angles: white, Jewish, anti-Semite, racist, anti-racist, once-married, lesbian, middle-class, feminist, exmatriate southerner, split at the root—that I will never bring them whole (238).

And sometimes I feel inadequate to make any statement as a Jew; I feel the history of denial within me like an injury, a scar. For assimilation has affected my perceptions; those early lapses in meaning, those blanks, are with me still (238).

Rich’s struggle to claim, and at times deny, her Jewish ethnicity may, perhaps, be related to Jess’s struggle, and/or to Feinberg’s struggle to tell Jess’s story. But, of course, this is merely speculation. Rich’s experiences may be very different from Feinberg’s or Jess’s. Regardless of the reasons for the shift in identity representation more appropriately falling under Rich’s metaphor “split at the root” than Walker’s essential roots, there is an obvious lack of textual evidence to point the reader toward a particular reading. Perhaps, for Feinberg, Jewish ethnicity resonates more along the lines of queer fluidity, than do other racial identities more visibly rooted in the body, the skin.
From a humanist holism to a rootless absence, both queer and feminist theories of identity are presented in *Stone Butch Blues*.

**Feminist Rootedness Vs. Queer Fluidity**

The borders between feminist and queer theory continue to be made visible, challenged, negotiated, and crossed throughout this novel. Jay Prosser, the one academic who has performed a full reading of the novel *Stone Butch Blues*, summarizes the contrast between feminist and queer theory: “And if border crossing has become a queer motif, it is surely because of what queerness has positioned itself against: the homeliness of identity politics (lesbian feminism for example) in which the subject starts out with where she ‘comes from,’ her narrative of returning/rediscovering home grounding her politics and her identity” (486). The feminist concept, therefore, focuses on finding oneself rooted “at home” in her body, in her politics, in her identity. In contrast, the queer conceptualization of identity places emphasis on movement within and coalition between identities.

Prosser reads *Stone Butch Blues* as a transsexual narrative which does not entertain a postmodern queer interpretation of gender. He reads the novel as a narrative journey from rootlessness toward a stable fixed home, as opposed to an anti-narrative account of gender (which he positions along side queer theory). Transsexual journeys, according to Prosser “have been represented as a means to depart from gendered home (identity, the body)—that place of origin and return which begins and ends classical narrative.”

My reading of *Stone Butch Blues* differs from Prosser’s mostly on account of methodology. I believe it is a mistake to position transgender and
queer theories against one another in a monolithic binary. The borders between these two sets of theories need not be envisioned as distinct particularly in light of Feinberg's text which resists a clear separation between theoretical approaches to identity. My reading, therefore, does not present an opposition in which one theory will be proven as more "real" than another. I do not define one theory in opposition to the other, in fact, I find more in common than in difference as theories are presented in the novel and the culture from which they derive. Instead, I locate my reading at the borders between theories and bodies, a location at which I find both fluid and fixed performances of identity in *Stone Butch Blues*. Strategies for survival range from queer fluidity to a feminist/transsexual/post-colonialist return to the "natural" body. None of the survival strategies offered by each of these theories is successful at all times, a truth found not only within the boundaries of the novel, but also within the butch female experience.

Prosser signifies the metaphor of "home" as it relates to the body: "her fictional autobiography shares with transsexual autobiography a narrative trajectory that centers on the sexed body, driven by the subject's sense of not being at home in his/her body, promising to reach closure once the body is hormonally and surgically reconstructed" (491). Prosser uses passages such as Jess's description of her double mastectomy as "a gift to myself, a coming home to my body" (Feinberg 224), and "It had been so long since I'd been at home in my body" (Feinberg 171), as support for the body as the determined site of home or home-lessness. In these passages, Jess specifically cites the body as a place of not belonging. Jess's personal journey toward locating and
remaining in a fixed permanent home aligns with certain aspects of feminist, transsexual, post-colonialist, and anti-racist theory.

Feinberg's focus on the surrounding environment, however, often to the exclusion of the individual's experience, leads me to question whether Jess's feelings can or should be separated from the cultural surround. Another reading of "the body as home" might be to read it as the contested site between identity and culture. Jess also feels "at home" in the femme-butch bar community. "I propped myself up at a back table and watched all my friends dancing together. It felt good to be back home" (57). This feeling of the safe and familiar, however, does not transfer into the larger society in which Jess and the other butches experience extreme levels of violence. These negative external messages directed toward butches had an effect on Jess's decision to alter her body from a non-culturally acceptable male type to a culturally acceptable male type.

Prosser, however, negates the possibility that Jess's discomfort in her body is an outgrowth of her environment. "Her narrative thus ostensibly externalizes her motivation for beginning hormone treatment, suggesting that her transition is economic and political, a historical rather than a psychic necessity; it is apparently her means to being at home in the world, not in her body." Though Jess explains, "I don't feel like a man trapped in a woman's body. I just feel trapped" (159), Prosser isn't convinced:

Such a constructionist explanation is not convincing: it represents Jess's displacement of body to world, of desire to history. Jess's depersonalization of transsexuality (for she represents transitioning as simply a politically meaningful act, the only thing to do for a stone butch at this particular cultural moment) is radically contradicted by her transsexual desire: that
feeling of displacement from the sexed body and the yearning to resolve it, the desire for home (494).

While Prosser and I both agree that Jess is invested in finding a home, we disagree about where that desire comes from and what exactly it means. Prosser suggests that the transsexual desire stems from an internal male self. Prosser’s assertion, however, can not be upheld given Jess’s disassociation of herself from a male identity in the above statement. She repeats the same movement away from a male identity as she recites a portion of a dream in which she has a beard and other male signifiers. She says, “I didn’t feel like a woman or a man, and I liked how I was different [read: queer]” (143). But Prosser insists,

Then as now, the space of butch-femme erotics, itself unconsciously enabled and authorized by this transsexual desire, may temporarily contain it. Once this community becomes inaccessible or insufficient as it does in *Stone Butch Blues*, Jess must find an alternate system for channeling this desire: somatic transitioning. The point to be emphasized is that the desire for a different body (a gendered home) has been there all along, as the narrative of discomforting shame suggests, at least since childhood; the shift is in the literalization of this desire through the body (494).

To understand more about the discomforting shame cited by Prosser, consider the following assertion: “Butch-femme code expects butches to conceal the femaleness of their bodies, bind their breasts, wear men’s clothes, and remain untouchable in bed: the female body, as something to be ashamed of, is to be hidden” (494). According to Prosser, not wanting to be touched “in bed” signifies an underlying desire to be a man. In Prosser’s configuration, butch-femme erotics becomes a mere screen for the underlying gender of the FtM.
The female who embodies a masculine gender and mapping of the body must have "an underlying desire to be a man." Prosser's inability to conceptualize genders outside of the man/woman dichotomy gives him no other option than to read Jess as a female who fails to submit to her cultural role (show breasts, wear "women's" clothes, and be sexually available). Prosser agrees with the cultural equation of the feminine body with permeability. Jess's impenetrability (literally and figuratively) under Prosser's rubric leaves her with only one optional desire: to become a man. Since the gender "man" does not square with Jess's self-identity, and because she comes to value her identity over cultural messages of gender, she ceases Prosser's transsexual journey. At this point Jess decides to utilize identity rather than culture as navigation toward home.

Though the search for home seems to be one of Jess's main strategies, she consistently fails at her attempts to locate and remain in one. Jess, like the transgender person who finds constant movement the only way to escape oppression, is a nomadic character who rarely stays in one place. In addition, the continuous movement and search for home may be read as a class and/or ethnic signifier. When Jess moves to New York City, her first "home" is torched by the landlord attempting to collect insurance money. The fire, consuming all of Jess's collected possessions except for her leather jacket--a butch's second skin, signifies the impossibility of a stable permanent home. Jess is stripped of all connections to home and forced back into her transitory state.

By passing, Jess is once again mobilized, symbolized by her purchase of a new Triumph motorcycle. "I took it out of the garage, put a fresh quart of
oil in it, and drove it crosstown to a barbershop in a neighborhood I'd never have to come back to if it turned out badly.” The dangerous potential has not yet dissipated; however, the entering of the unmistakably male-defined space of the barber shop demonstrates the permeability of gender-bound spaces; queer theory in practice. She moves from the butch-femme bars, to the male barber shop. “The barber smiled at me. 'I'll be with you in a minute, sir.' I tried to hide my excitement as I leafed through a copy of Popular Mechanics. I'd never dared enter men's turf like this before” (172). Jess's ability to pass is solidified by entrance into the men's bathroom, the cite of much contention for transgender people. “I could go to the bathroom, whenever and wherever I needed to without pressure or shame. What an enormous relief” (173).

This newly found mobility, however, does not last. “At first everything was fun. The world stopped feeling like a gauntlet I had to run through. But very quickly I discovered that passing didn’t just mean slipping below the surface, it meant being buried alive. I was still me on the inside, trapped in there with all my wounds and fears. But I was no longer me on the outside” (173). Prosser's transsexual reading may once again be questioned as this statement clearly suggests Jess is trapped, not as “a man inside a woman's body,” as Prosser's transsexual narrative reading suggests, but rather by a culture which requires her to pass for survival. Jess comes to the realization that passing does not align with a movement toward her identity, but rather a bending to cultural definitions of who she should be.

Jess describes two situations in particular which shape her dissatisfaction with passing as a survival strategy. In the first scenario, Jess explains, “A woman on the sidewalk ahead of me looked over her shoulder
nervously. I slowed my pace as she crossed the street and hurried away. She was afraid of me. That's when I began to understand passing changed almost everything" (173). By passing, Jess is segregated from the very women she loves, and placed into the unfamiliar territory of men. In yet another situation, Jess is questioned about her history. She realizes she needs to speak in generalizations to avoid "the constant terror of discovery." Jess states "I was running from my own past" (173). For these reasons, Jess decides to abandon her search for an essential self, and attempts to return to her past and roots as a gender transgressive butch. "I think I really believed that when the hormones wore off I would discover I'd traveled full circle and returned home to my own past" (222). Jess finds, however, that history has not waited for her and even if it had, she had changed: "but the real motion was taking place inside of me. I had to be honest with myself, it was as urgent as breathing. When I sat alone and asked what it was I really wanted, the answer was change (224)."

After having moved to New York City, Jess and the woman from next door, Ruth, roadtrip back to Buffalo. They take "The world is our restroom!" as their motto and begin their journey toward a home full of past history. Jess notes, "We brought plenty of toilet paper so we wouldn't have to risk a rest stop" (278). This humorous example of queer gender de-segregation exemplifies the strategic benefits of transgressive movement, the roadtrip, to avoid the most gender enforced space: the restroom.

When Jess arrives "home," however, she finds the community in a state of immobility. When she seeks out her mentor from youth, Butch Al, she finds her locked in an asylum. This, coupled with the memory of her
friend Ed’s suicide, brings about the frightening realization of a butch’s fate in a hostile climate. The trip provides Jess with mobility while the destination, back home, leaves Jess with an overwhelming desire to get back on the road before she becomes locked into the traps which have caught Butch Al and Ed. Both of their situations symbolize ultimate immobilization reminding Jess that the journey itself is more pivotal to survival than is the destination.

In a strategic move to de-center theoretical explanations of identity, the ending statement of the novel leaves the question: “Who am I in relation to the cultural gender dichotomy?” unanswered. Jess, reflecting on advice from Duffy, the union organizer who once told her to “Imagine a world worth living in, a world worth fighting for” (301), states, “I closed my eyes and allowed my hopes to soar. I heard the beating of wings nearby. I opened my eyes. A young man on a nearby rooftop released his pigeons, like dreams, into the dawn” (301). The author leaves the text open-ended to resist a particular reading of identity. The released pigeons/dreams, emphasizing non-restrictive movement, may represent a symbolic abandonment of the search for a gendered home. Or the release of the pigeons/dreams may be read as Jess’s awakening to the importance of negotiating identity in grounded, non-dream states since in the “real world” stable categories of identity shape everyday reality. This open-ended conclusion reflects Feinberg’s successful displacement of theory allowing hir to remarkably span the chasm between culture, cultural production, and theory.
CONFESSIONS, COMPARISONS, AND CONNECTIONS: EVERYBODY'S DOING IT (EXCEPT THE THEORISTS)

This is my home/this thin edge of/barbwire.

Gloria Anzaldúa, Borderlands/La Frontera

Personal confession: Despite my own theoretical position of converging axes, I was searching for the theoretical explanation of identity which would best aid in the survival of people who are located on/in what Gloria Anzaldúa calls “the borderlands.” Early on it was brought to my attention by a local bisexual activist that such a search was reductive and mostly futile. But I had already decided.

When I was first discovering my own sexuality, The Color Purple gave me fixed identity positions from which to model myself. Having never heard anything positive about queer sexuality and having a growing interest in feminism, this novel offered a framework for understanding myself and my growing awareness of communities to which I might belong. Alice Walker's novel served as a gateway to my reading of other Black, female writers such as Audre Lorde, Pat Parker, Jewelle Gomez, June Jordan, Cheryl Clarke, Octavia Butler, Barbara Smith, Nella Larsen, Angelina Weld Grimke, Zora Neale Hurston, Ntozake Shange, Cherry Muhanji, Gloria Naylor, Toni Morrison, and many others. It was from these artists I gained a position from which to analyze and examine my role and descent from history, and based upon this knowledge, to understand the direction to which I wished to dedicate my life's work and play. The Color Purple and the novels shelved beside it
allowed me to acknowledge my role as both marginalized in terms of class, gender, and sexual status and privileged based upon racial/ethnic status.

My reading of *The Color Purple* planted a seed of desire for what would be my home, my familiar ground. And yet, this was not my home. Only parts of my identity fit within these boundaries, not solely based upon my racial/ethnic difference, but also because the sum of the parts could not be constrained within the cover of these pages. I read this novel from the borders because the lives of the characters brush against my own at times and yet maintained their distinctness as Walker's aesthetic is informed by stable, fixed notions of racial, sexual, and gender identities in the Black community. As complicated as was this relationship (between my reading and the author's writing), somehow my reading created in me a sense of belonging. I read of a community similar to that of my own borderlands, one I had yet to discover in literature. I discovered self-knowledge and a complex relationship to what Cheryl Clarke has identified as the purpose of her writing: "My work has been to imagine an historical Black woman-to-woman eroticism and living—overt, discrete, coded, or latent as it might be. To imagine Black women's sexuality as a polymorphous erotic that does not exclude desire for men but also does not privilege it. To imagine, without apology, voluptuous Black women's sexualities" (1993). My relationship to this purpose for writing was familiar: I understood, in my own way, the necessity of naming and voicing the marginal sexual experience. Yet it was also one to which I was unaccustomed, an experience which I at least knew better than to claim as my own. In the words of Adrienne Rich,

I am suspicious—first of all, in myself—of adopted mysticisms, of glib spirituality, above all of white people's tendency to sniff and
taste, uninvited, and in most cases to vampirize American Indian, or African, or Asian, or other ‘exotic’ ways of understanding. I made no claim upon the heron as my personal instructor. But our trajectories crossed at a time when I was ready to begin something new, the nature of which I did not clearly see...When this happens, a piece of the universe is revealed as if for the first time (7-8).

_Stone Butch Blues_ also came at a critical time when I was just opening myself to an acknowledgment of my relationship with compulsory versus deconstructed gender. The first time, I read the novel in two days, one night. I understood Jess’s feelings upon meeting the female-to-male Rocco: “It was a fantastic tale. I’d only half believed it, but it haunted me...I wanted her to be different than me. I was afraid to see myself in Rocco” (95). I, too, found Jess’s tale a very interesting story about anyone but myself. I placed myself at the margins of this novel, solely for self-protection. Though I was unaware of it then, my marginal reading position had everything to do with the author’s writing to include me. There is a different type of power involved in my position as a reader of _Stone Butch Blues_ than with _The Color Purple_. My positionality this time was self-induced. Feinberg wrote the novel to include “people like me,” which is the exact reason I placed myself at the margins, to exclude myself from “people like me.”

My second reading took me weeks. I would read ten pages at a time before I would be overwhelmed by a desire to set it aside. My re-reading brought with it nightmares and flashbacks and a deep understanding of the reason the novel still lies only half-read on my mom’s coffee table. Not only had I begun to recognize the familiar history and experience embedded in the pulp of this novel, but those around me, my family had begun to realize the
same. Despite the nightmares, however, I learned self-defense of my history, present, and future. *Stone Butch Blues* offered me tools which come only from a knowledge of one's place in history. The theme of survival is one with which many transgender warriors are acquainted. This novel adds to our knowledge of a history of struggle and survival.

*Nearly Roadkill* was a Winter Solstice present from my parents. I never meant to include it in my thesis at all. Surely there was too much sex, too much S/M, too much fantasy, too much fun for a thesis. As my research began to take form, however, I realized I lacked the perspective of a novel informed by queer postmodern feminism. As I sat at my computer terminal wondering who would write *fiction* from a postmodern perspective of gender and sexuality I regretted that Kate Bornstein's *Gender Outlaw* was non-fiction. Just then my vision crossed *Nearly Roadkill*. After two days of reading the novel, the action dreams began. I became various people fighting the law, fighting censorship, fighting the "bad people" *and* winning each and every time. Never have I dreamt such dreams where I, a gender outlaw queer, won! I placed myself in the center of this text. I wanted Bornstein's theoretical position, I wanted to fight, survive, and *thrive*! Surely Wine and Scratch have a better lot than Celie, Shug, Albert, Jess, Butch Al, or Ed.

When I returned my thoughts to the lives of those whose genders and sexualities are outlaw, I found many trying to decide how to cross the border patrol with a passport which reads "the wrong" gender. Many were trying to decide how to convince one side they aren't passing to gain privilege and the other side they refuse to access ascribed status and privilege. Many were trying to decide where to live to escape the most violence and receive the
most support. There were no easy solutions to any one of these situations. Humanist feminism offers some methods for negotiating these positions. It offers various tools to create more opportunities for being gendered and for being sexual. What if, however, neither M or F on our passports grants us permission to cross nor safety while doing so? What if one side or the other, one location or another, doesn't offer safety and support? Humanist feminism ignores the realities of border bandits. Dichotomies are upheld for the sake of the majority, but the so-called minority is left on the fence, that place between the dichotomy which offers little mobility in life for those who continue to deny the existence of the dichotomy at all. "This is my home/this thin edge of/barbwire" (Anzaldúa 3).

A postmodern queer orientation offers fascinating theory which focuses on border identities, but it too ignores the realities of border bandits. The limitations of these theories are numerous. Bornstein and Sullivan's book, informed by queer theory, offers a landscape in which people may explore gender and sexuality: deconstructed gender and sexuality operate in effectual ways in boundariless, undefined spaces. This experiment with gender and sexuality, however, is not replicable under any other conditions. Attempts to transplant deconstructed categories of identity into the world "off-line" fail as was demonstrated by Scratch and Winc's inability to communicate in non-gendered/sexualized ways off-line. Outside the realm of the "novel written in cyberspace," that is to say "an infobahn erotic thriller without any boundaries--virtual, sexual, legal, or otherwise," gender enforcement remains a threat to the lives of those deemed outlaws. The

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10 Taken from the cover of Nearly Roadkill.
internet, the setting of the novel, can not be likened to anyplace currently accessible off-line. Likewise, postmodern queer theory is inaccessible to those who risk and sometimes lose their lives in a society where genderbending is punishable to the fullest extent. *Stone Butch Blues* speaks to this danger as Feinberg moves from the drag queen on the stage to the drag king on the streets. Note both the differences of gender and location. The loss of an e-mail account is trivial compared to that which is at stake off-line.

In addition, postmodernism, and specifically *Nearly Roadkill*, lacks a thorough investigation of the effects of deconstructing race. Racial difference, in the postmodern landscape, is replaced by eurocentrism. The "generic" person on-line is subsumed by eurocentric racial norms. Aside from one paragraph containing a gentle critique of the eurocentrism on-line, Bornstein and Sullivan's novel has little to offer in terms of a critique of postmodernism's lack of attention to matters of race and ethnicity.

By contrast, Walker's text centralizes racial identity. The presence of Africa throughout the novel ties racial heritage and roots to other identities of gender and sexuality. This holistic approach to identity reflects a more authentic engagement with race than does the one conversation regarding Scratch's racial identity in *Nearly Roadkill*.

*Stone Butch Blues* also centralizes fixed notions of race from the conflicts in the bars to Jess's self-recognition of her own lack of a racial consciousness. Interestingly enough, however, Jess's Jewish identity is subsumed by other aspects of herself. In the beginning of the novel, Jess becomes aware of her Jewishness. This awareness dissipates as the novel progresses. Because Feinberg represents ethnicity in an ambiguous manner,
the reading of racial and ethnic identity remains open-ended in my reading of the text.

Each of these novels and their respective theoretical basis has offered something important to communities of border bandits. I finally agreed with my bisexual friend: to try to discern which theory best aids in the survival of our communities is reductive and futile. Humanism offers better attention to race and ethnicity. It allows feminists and other marginalized populations to organize in a way which postmodernism does not. Postmodernism offers theory which encompasses identities that morph, switch, and remain in flux. As Feinberg demonstrates in hir novel, a postmodern/feminist combination, rooted in the history of the community, makes for a successful conversation about identity between culture and those who produce it.

To further examine the convergence of feminism and queer theory, consider the two documents “The “Resolution for Trans Support” (Appendix B) passed by the New Jersey National Organization of Women (NOW) and the “Mission Statement” (Appendix A) prepared for a gathering of transgender people, including Kate Bornstein and Leslie Feinberg. Both of these statements represent the recognition of the interlocking systems of oppression which serve to disempower marginalized communities. The work being done in these areas where transgenderism, bisexuality, and multi-racial communities form coalitions should serve as a useful example for coalition building in the future.

The NOW resolution demonstrates the political usefulness of recognizing the connections between sexism and genderism. The “Mission Statement” was written for many of us who traveled to Kansas City to
mourn and protest the death of Brandon Teena, a female to male transsexual who was murdered after being "discovered" by three police officers who reported Brandon's biological gender to the local newspapers. This message of this statement was reiterated by guest speakers, Kate Bornstein, Leslie Feinberg, and Minnie Bruce Pratt who all met at the location where theories of identity, feminist, queer, humanist, postmodern and communities of lesbians, gays, bisexuals, transgenders, leathers, allies, butches, femmes, fairies, drag artists, and many more, all came together. Identity theories and the communities they attempt to explain all converged at this historical moment where we met our lives with honesty, a strong will to survive, and most importantly the desire to speak for ourselves. The people are making these connections between explanations of and tools for identity negotiation. It is time academics and theorists begin to make similar recognitions by positioning ourselves at the places where theory, art, identity, and history all convene.

We are a people whose identities are multiple, whose realities are based both in the humanism of The Color Purple and in the postmodernism of Nearly Roadkill. There is a tremendous need for more art such as these three novels, which take the human community as seriously as the theories which attempts to explain them. The concept of writing about border identity from the borderlands themselves is most appropriate. Ki Namaste encourages writers to examine the "familiar binary oppositions between academics and 'our' objects of inquiry. Transvestites are those figures 'we' look at; they are not those people with whom 'we' speak. And 'they' are certainly not 'us'" (190).
Authors also can benefit, as these four authors do, from recognizing their roles as negotiators of identity. Gloria Anzaldúa explains “The ability of the story (prose and poetry) to transform the storyteller and the listener into something or someone else is shamanistic. The writer as shape-changer, is a nahual, a shaman,” (Anzaldúa 66). Art is anything but stable and fixed, requiring no movement. Art produces culture and offers to both reflect and transform the community. To create art which is for the good of the people, the artist must be close to both the community and the outcome of the transformation. Such is the role of the artist who has a stake in the borderlands.

The borders which uphold the dichotomy between the academy and the community are being torn down. While guards attempt reconstruction, no doubt pieces get misplaced as the distinction between outside/inside becomes less and less clear. Certainly this is the destruction site at which feminists and genderqueers, humanists and postmodernists, academics and community members can all grab their picks and axes and join in the distraction.
The murder of Brandon Teena was not an isolated incident, erupting in stark contrast upon an otherwise peaceful terrain of gender tolerance. Violence against genderqueer and trans-identified people happens, it happens regularly, *it will happen again.* Our bodies are the battleground where a war to regulate and control gender expression is increasingly being fought. We are the inevitable casualties in this bloody and unsought conflict. We come here today to commemorate and press for freedom on behalf of all people who are gender oppressed. And by 'gender oppressed,' we do not just mean those specimens inevitably corralled in the binary zoo: the leather queens and faghags, the drag kings and drag queens, the stone butches and diesel dykes, the nellie queens and radical fairies, the transvestites and transsexuals, the crossdressers, leatherdykes and dykedaddies. But also for the 17 year-old midwestern cheerleader who dies from anorexia because 'real women' are preternaturally thin. The Joe Sixpack who wraps his car around a crowded school bus on his way home from the bar because 'real men' are heavy drinkers. The aging body, crippled in an unnecessary hysterectomy because certain kinds of bodies simply don't matter as much. In fact, we are here today to press for freedom, not just for people like Brandon Teena and Marsha P. Johnson, who died for their expression of gender, but also for those who felt *impelled* and even *empowered* to kill to preserve regimes of gender:
in short *until each and every one of us* is delivered from this most pernicious, divisive and destructive of insanities" (Teena Memorial Program).
APPENDIX B. RESOLUTION FOR TRANS SUPPORT

WHEREAS, gender discrimination is at the heart of Feminist politics;

WHEREAS, the Transgendered and Transsexual Communities confront the same gender system that oppresses women and therefore are the target of marginalization, loss of medical care and economic and civil rights;

WHEREAS, there is a lack of understanding and information on the issue;

THEREFORE LET IT BE RESOLVED that NOW-NJ adopt a policy that supports the lives and identities of Transgendered and Transsexual people;

LET IT FURTHER BE RECOMMENDED that NOW-NJ chapters examine current policies and practices that discriminate against the Transgendered and Transsexual Communities and engage in dialogue with organizations and groups fighting for the rights of Transgendered and Transsexual people.

LET IT ALSO BE RECOMMENDED that this resolution be submitted to the National NOW Conference in 1995 (Feinberg 119).
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"You Say You’re Bi, I Say it’s a Lie. Today You Have to Declare Yourself."