SUBVERSIVE VERSES: THE SUBLIM(INAL)ITY OF HYBRID CULTURES AND SEXUALITIES

by

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Master of Arts
in the Joint Women's Studies Programme

at

Mount Saint Vincent University
Dalhousie University
Saint Mary's University
Halifax, Nova Scotia

March 1998

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HALIFAX, NOVA SCOTIA

DEPARTMENT OF WOMEN'S STUDIES

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Dated Friday 13th March '98

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HALIFAX, NOVA SCOTIA

DATE: MARCH 1998

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TITLE: SUBVERSIVE VERSES: THE SUBLIM(INAL)ITY OF HYBRID CULTURES AND SEXUALITIES

DEPARTMENT: WOMEN'S STUDIES

DEGREE: MASTER OF ARTS CONVOCATION: SPRING YEAR: 1998

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DEDICATION

For my grandmother Louiselle Trépanier

who has Metis blood running in her veins

she has told me of her grandfather who was hidden from her

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ABSTRACT

Cultural and sexual hybrids have been overlooked due to the reinforcing and simplifying ideologies of normative and binary thinking. This neglect has led to the marginalization and invisibility of multiracial, multiethnic, multicultural, and bisexual identities. In this thesis, narrative, verse, theory, and the stories of fifteen young Canadian women are used to illuminate the nature and complexities of hybrid identities. Theorizing about hybridity is important because it deepens analyses of identity while expanding political strategies in the struggle for social justice. In the context of identity politics, the recognition of hybridity can reinforce a commitment to coalitional politics and can encourage a valuation of narratives and stories. Drawing on feminist, postcolonial, queer, bisexual, and postmodern theories, I challenge some widely held assumptions of the normativity of monoracial, monoethnic, monocultural, and monosexual identities, in addition to pointing out the limitations of binary oppositional categorization. Examples of these assumptions and limitations are explored through a discussion of hybrid identity and community formation, and an analysis of the unique forms of oppression that affect hybrids such as monoracism, colourism, monosexism, and biphobia. I conclude by proposing ways in which hybridity can be rendered more intelligible in the context of mononormative binary oppositional categories, through storytelling, coalition building, continuums, fluidity, fragmentation, syncretism, and border-crossing.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Many thanks must go to my supervisor, Sue Campbell, for validating the organic development of this thesis, and to my committee member, Margaret Conrad, for playing an active role in the supervision of this thesis. Sue and Marg provided invaluable feedback and detailed suggestions, for which I am grateful. Thanks to Marjorie Stone for reading my manuscript and to Sue Sherwin for her enthusiasm towards a paper that was the seed for this thesis. Thank you to all those who made the interuniversity MA in Women's Studies a reality; I am truly grateful and honored to be one of the first to graduate from this innovative programme.

Thanks to Farhad Dastur—my emotional and intellectual partner—for his love and support. His insights and encouragement helped me at all stages of writing. I hope we share many more years of creative and academic collaboration. Many thanks must go to Danielle Smith and Justin Jagosh for listening to me think out loud and for sharing many inspiring conversations about hybridity, privilege, and marginalization. To all the friends who supported me in multiple, magical ways: thank you.

Thanks to my mother, Carole Reese and her husband, Cote Reese for reminding me that there is life after a Master's Degree and for helping me see the lighter side of my obsession with all things "multi, multi, multi!" Thanks to my father, Jean-Guy Trépanier, who has always expressed such pride and joy at my accomplishments.

Finally, to all the hybrid women who shared their stories and secrets with me, thank you from the bottom of my hybrid heart.

some days the line i walk
turns out to be straight
other days the line tends to deviate
i've got no criteria for sex or race
i just want to hear your voice
i just want to see your face

Ani DiFranco <u>In or Out</u>

INTRODUCTION

Most of the discourses on identity politics set marginal groups in opposition to privileged groups. In North America, gay and lesbian identities are discussed in terms of heterosexual privilege, and the experiences of immigrants and people of colour are negotiated in the context of a dominant, white, Eurocentric culture. However, people's experiences and identities do not always fit neatly into these binary oppositional categories, and a more complex theorizing on culture and sexuality is long overdue. Theories of social change tend to neglect the experiences of people with hybrid identities, including bisexuals, people of mixed race and ethnicity, and people who have grown up in multiple cultural contexts. These hybrids tell new stories about privilege, power, and marginality.[1]

Perhaps newness can be achieved through asking the following questions: What do I hope to accomplish in writing on hybridity? Why theorize about hybridity? What is my perspective? These are crucial questions to keep in mind when embarking on a critique and discussion of existing and emerging theoretical frameworks. In the novel, The Satanic Verses, Salman Rushdie asks further questions about newness:

> How does newness come into the world? How is it born?
> Of what fusions, translations, conjoinings is it made?
> How does it survive, extreme and dangerous as it is? What compromises, what deals, what betrayals of its secret nature must it make to stave off the wrecking crew, the exterminating angel, the guillotine? (Rushdie 8)

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[1] I will touch on several additional forms of hybridity in this thesis such as the experiences of transgendered people, people who are "somewhat disabled," or who have "invisible" disabilities, and people who have "mixed-class" experiences. While these forms of hybridity merit treatment, it is not in the scope of this thesis to provide an in-depth discussion of these kinds of hybridity.

Newness is extreme and dangerous because it threatens old ways of thinking. There are certain norms that we hold true, and when these are challenged, it is like discovering the world is round when everyone thought it was flat. I propose that hybridity of race, ethnicity, culture, and sexuality presents us with a newness that disturbs and excites. In his essay, "In Good Faith," Rushdie answers his own questions about newness:

> *The Satanic Verses* celebrates hybridity, impurity, intermingling, the transformation that comes of new and unexpected combinations of human being, cultures, ideas, politics, movies, songs. It rejoices in mongrelization and fears the absolutism of the Pure. *Mélange*, hotchpotch, a bit of this and a bit of that is *how newness enters the world.* It is the great possibility that mass migration gives the world, and I have tried to embrace it. *The Satanic Verses* is for change-by-fusion, change-by-conjoining. It is a love-song to our mongrel selves. (Rushdie 394)

The first part of the title of this thesis makes reference to Rushdie's controversial novel in that it celebrates the same things Rushdie celebrates; my thesis is a love song to our hybrid selves. My verses are subversive because I challenge—through poetry, stories, and theories—binary oppositional categorization and a form of normativity which I call "mononormativity." The second part of the title, sublim(inal)ity of hybrid cultures and sexualities, has multiple meanings: first, hybrid sexualities and cultures are largely subliminal, because they are not perceived by most people at a conscious level; second, I see hybridity as sublime, in that hybrid narratives and voices are awe-inspiring and ought to be valued; and third, hybridity is synonymous with liminal positions, which are peripheral and transformative. [2]

I argue that theorizing about multicultural experiences and multiracial identities can enrich discourses on race and ethnicity; likewise, an inclusion of bisexual or "multisexual" experiences can contribute insights to queer theory. Effective coalition-

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[2] I am indebted to Farhad Dastur for the original inspiration for my title.

building will take place when theoretical discourses—both in and out of the academy—acknowledge the existence of hybridity and multiplicity. This wisdom, I suggest, is what a multisexual, multicultural theory can contribute, not only to feminist theorizing, but to broader discourses taking place in the social sciences and humanities.[3]

The first chapter outlines my methodological principles and methods. Postcolonial and feminist methodologies inform the hybrid methodology that frames my research. In this chapter, I discuss my rationale for using interviews, poetry, and theory to discuss hybrid identities. In chapter two, I define hybridity and offer a historical and theoretical overview of the attitudes and representations of hybrids, providing a framework for a later discussion of hybrid identity and community formation. I provide an analysis of how mononormativity and binary oppositional categorization reinforce each other to devalue hybridity and render it invisible. In chapter three, I discuss identity and community formation, exploring how hybrids deal with issues such as self-identification, belonging, and choice. In chapter four, I address forms of discrimination that affect hybrids, which include forms that affect hybrids because they are part of marginalized groups (racism, heterosexism, xenophobia, and homophobia) in addition to forms of discrimination that are particular to hybrids (monoracism, monosexism, and biphobia). In this chapter, I also examine some of the unique issues that concern hybrids, such as passing and privilege.

[3] Throughout this thesis my use of the terms multiculturality and multicultural should not be confused with the terms used in Canada's official multicultural policy. By calling for a theorizing which includes multicultural*ity*, I am not fully endorsing state sanctioned multicultural*ism*, which I feel has problems that merit a separate discussion.

I conclude that hybrid identities problematize mononormative binary oppositional categories, encouraging us not to resort to labels to understand identity. I argue that hybrids may introduce and new and emerging strategies for coalition building based on political commonalties in addition to static identity categories. In addition, hybridity emphasizes the need for storytelling in the context of identity politics. Finally, I offer a brief epilogue on magic realism as a hybrid genre, entreating my readers not to forget the magic in the mundane. This literary tradition demonstrates that magic realist treatments of social and political realities may help bring us closer to the equality and justice we seek.

Throughout this thesis, I work with the basic assumption that hybridization is irreducible. Once someone is hybrid, it is not possible to separate the components of that person's identity. Instead, something new emerges—an original creation—its parts inextricably enmeshed. It is a newness that can, in Rushdie's words, be "extreme and dangerous." One of the women I interviewed provided an apt metaphor for this process of hybridization:

> Sooner or later some are going to speak both [languages] and after a while you'll start to get new words from these people who speak both, and the words are neither French nor English. *Something has changed, something is new, and in a way that's the way I think about hybrid identities. It's not just a bit of one and a bit of the other; it's a whole new thing.* (Barbara, my emphasis)

By fundamentally challenging the notions of hierarchy, singularity, and mutually exclusive binary opposites, I affirm newness through admixture, multiplicity, and hybridity.

CHAPTER 1: METHODOLOGY

> I have not been alone in my dilemma, nor in my search for an appropriate methodology. When one's private anxieties find a reflection in public discourse, clearly there is scope for articulating and moving back to the field again...Feminist researchers have, over the last decade been increasingly emphasizing the need to hear the voices of women. (Karlekar 136)

Introduction

My methodological principles stem largely from an amalgamation of postcolonial and feminist approaches. I use multiple methods and espouse interdisciplinary strategies; these principles lie at the center of my research methodology. Judith Cook and Mary Fonow propose that "methodology refers to the *study* of methods and not simply to the specific techniques themselves" (Cook and Fonow 70). They refer to Abraham Kaplan's 1964 treatise on the conduct of contemporary social inquiry, which asserts that methodology is about analyzing methods and clarifying the limitations, presuppositions, and consequences of these methods (Cook and Fonow 70). Methodology includes not only an investigation of methods as techniques for social research, it also includes a study of how and why certain techniques are applied. In Feminism and Methodology, Sandra Harding understands methodology as a theory and an analysis of how research does or should proceed (Harding 3). In this chapter, I outline the influence of postcolonial and feminist methodologies on my research and describe my hybrid methodology. I outline three methods which I use to explore hybrid cultures and sexualities: interviewing, storytelling, and theorizing.

Postcolonial Methodologies

Postcolonial theories analyze contemporary social and economic relations in the context of a colonial past. These theories include an analysis of power and privilege that reveals continuing imperialistic and racist relations. Postcolonial theory emerged in the 1970s as theorists began to seriously discuss the legacy of colonialism and its effects on power relations world wide. Postcolonialism has been influenced by poststructuralism and postmodernism, resulting in a sophisticated analysis of the relationship between power and culture. Postcolonial methodologies are useful when discussing hybridity because of their concern with boundaries and shifting positions. Mike Featherstone defines postcolonial theory as "mobile, or as constructed from an eccentric site, somewhere on the boundary" (Featherstone 10).

Jayati Lal, the daughter of a Yugoslavian-American mother and an Indian father—a postcolonial hybrid herself—articulates a postcolonial methodology. She sees postcolonial dislocation as an important site from which research positions may start:

> It is only an examination of our politics and accountability, in questioning where and how we are located, that will get us out of mere reversals of the dualisms of native:non-native and insider:outsider positionings and on to a more productive engagement with the nature of our relationships with those whom we study and represent, on to questioning the nature of our insertion into the research process and its resultant representations...(Lal 200)

A postcolonial methodology provides a framework within which we may start breaking down some of the conventional notions of what it is to be the researcher or the researched. I believe this approach is exemplified in my research, as I see myself not so much as a researcher, but rather as a writer and a storyteller. This means that my "research" is as much a story in which the "characters" include the women I interviewed,

the poets, the writers and me; we are all on a theoretical journey on a road less traveled in-between binary oppositional categories.

Postcolonialism, like feminism, encourages us to look closely at the connection between power and knowledge. What sources of knowledge do we value? What is the relationship between knowledge and power? Who has control over knowledge production? Trinh T. Minh-Ha calls for a deconstruction of language and meaning when she asks in Woman, Native, Other: Writing Postcoloniality and Feminism:

> Finding a voice, searching for words and sentences: say some thing, one thing, or no thing; tie/untie, read/unread, discard their forms; scrutinize the grammatical habits of your writing and decide for yourself whether they free or repress. Again, order(s). Shake syntax, smash the myths, and if you lose, slide on, unearth some new linguistic paths. Do you surprise? Do you shock? Do you have a choice? (Minh-ha 20)

The postcolonial goal of finding new ways of talking about experience, oppression, and privilege is one that is shared by many feminist methodologies. My postcolonial and feminist methodological principles include an analysis of the ways meaning, language, and theory are constructed, providing a critique of past and present constructions of race, ethnicity, culture, and sexuality.

A postcolonial methodology also recognizes the problematic relationship between the researcher and the researched, particularly the traditional anthropological model of the white Western scholar studying "natives" of other countries. Lal asks, "what happens when the traditional boundaries between the knower and the known begin to break down, are reversed, or are crosscut with mixed and hybrid identities?" (Lal 190). Yet, as Kamala Visweswaran, another postcolonial scholar, points out in Fictions of Feminist Ethnography, "As 'hybrid' or 'hyphenated,' 'halfie' or postcolonial anthropologists begin

to renegotiate the terms of distance and intimacy informing social analysis, theory itself begins to change, leading often to a strategic redeployment of the category of experience" (Visweswaran 135). As more postcolonial scholars begin to redefine relationships between the researcher and researched, the look of the research itself changes.

By situating myself in a hybrid place as a researcher and a writer, I acknowledge the complex and shifting relationship I have with my work, with the women I interview, with the women I claim to represent, and with myself as a hybrid woman. Lila Abu-Lughod defines the "halfie" or hybrid researcher as one "whose national or cultural identity is mixed by virtue of migration, overseas education, or parentage" and one who, like many feminist researchers, works from multiple sites (qtd. in Visweswaran 131). The understanding that I am never just a researcher or just a woman or just bisexual or just "multicultural" leads to a richer, more critical exploration of my topic.

Yet Lal warns against "creating a new fetish—hybridity as a new site of epistemic privilege" (Lal 199), and my response to this caution is that a hybrid position must not be seen as a *better* site, but rather as a *possible* site from which to theorize and work for social change. Visweswaran raises another concern that stems from the privileging of hybridity as a site from which research is done; hybridity becomes an excuse for no-authorship. She is wary of "valorizing a generalized hybrid condition. Such a generalized hybridity, coupled with theories of multiple positioning, runs the risk of inaugurating, once again, the freely choosing modal subject that is at once everywhere and nowhere" (Visweswaran 132). Ultimately, I agree with Lal's assertion that "a postcolonial methodology…enjoins us to 'examine the hyphen at which the Self-Other join in the politics of everyday life,' and to work against inscribing Other" (Lal 200).

Feminist Methodologies

Because of the diversity of feminist approaches, the term "feminist methodology" must be used carefully. In Feminist Praxis, Liz Stanley and Sue Wise acknowledge the wide range of views regarding the existence of a feminist methodology, suggesting that:

> Such startlingly divergent views on the very existence and the acceptability of 'feminist methodology' should alert us to a semantic problem, the possibility that these commentators are referring to rather different things whilst using the same technical term, 'methodology.' (Stanley and Wise 26)

A discussion of feminist methodology must be accompanied by a careful and rigorous explanation of the research as well as the researcher's assumptions and goals, recognizing that a multiplicity of methodologies exist within feminist approaches. Renate Klein writes, "I use the word 'methodology' (as well as 'theory') in the singular, but by no means do I wish to suggest we work towards the one and only 'correct' feminist methodology: clearly feminist methods can and must differ according to the specific circumstances of our research projects" (Klein 89). Klein and other feminist scholars recognize that feminist methodology is diverse and must be context specific. In short, we have come to a moment in the women's movement when it is appropriate to use the plural: feminist methodologies.

As I am also informed by postcolonial methodologies, I am inclined to question the usefulness of the term "feminist," for there is much woman-centered, or woman-empowering research, or research dedicated to social change for women that does not call itself feminist. This is especially true for "postcolonial subjects" who have not participated or been represented in a Western (white) women's movement. Madhu Kishwar, editor of the Indian women's journal, Manushi, states that:

> ...in the overall context of a highly imbalanced power relation, feminism, as appropriated and defined by the West, has too often become a tool of cultural imperialism. The definitions, the terminology, the assumptions, even the issues, the forms of struggle and institutions are exported from West to East, and too often we are expected to be the echo of what are assumed to be more advanced women's movements in the West. (Kishwar 3)

In some contexts, it is perhaps more appropriate to speak of research that takes women's voices into account, that does not ignore women, or that is concerned with improving the condition of women.

Although feminist researchers do not agree on all aspects of what constitutes feminist methodology, there are several recurring characteristics of feminist methodological principles that inform my research. They are: an emphasis on reflexivity; a concern with self-disclosure; the goal of social change; a concern about power relations; and a focus on research about and for women. Reflexivity is an important part of the research and writing process and usually involves a discussion of the researcher's role, the relationship with the researched, and the process of writing the research. Mary Fonow and Judith Cook define reflexivity as, "...the tendency of feminists to reflect upon, examine critically, and explore analytically the nature of the research process" (Fonow and Cook 2). As a young hybrid woman interviewing other young hybrid women, my position as researcher is sometimes sublimated by my position as an ally and as someone who has experiences of hybridity. All the women I interviewed were undergraduate or graduate students or had attained some level of post-secondary education, so many of the "researched" were also "researchers" and were exploring similar issues around methodology, methods, and ethics. The result was a dialogue which did not feel like a

"researcher-researched" relationship, but felt more like discussions between women with similar subjectivities and unique perspectives.

Renate Klein's description of the researcher-researched relationship as "dialectical" seems fitting here, as does her use of Marcia Westkott's term "intersubjectivity" to describe the nature of this relationship (Klein 94). As I theorize about hybridity, it is the voices of the women who spoke with me and the women whose words I read, in addition to my own voice, that provide the insights, theories, and knowledge. In some of the interviews, reflexivity took place spontaneously. For instance, Helen, one of the women I interviewed, said to me:

> You encompass a lot of multiculturalism just because of how you grew up and talking to you, it just threw me for a loop, because everything that I started to understand, it was like, "oh shit, there's something new." Hybridity is so prevalent, I don't know. Are people willing to look at it as hybridity and accept it? Just the way that the whole system is running, it's so based on labels and categories and power and ownership. (Helen)

In this example, Helen and I were exploring ideas about hybridity, categories, and power relations together, sharing our perspectives and learning from each other. Viewing the research project as a lived experience to learn from is articulated by Shulamit Rienhartz: "In addition to describing the personal origins of a research question, the feminist researcher is likely to describe the actual research process as lived experience, and she is likely to reflect on what she learned in the process" (Rienhartz 258).

Related to the reflexivity is the notion of self-disclosure; revealing the researcher's position forces us to be honest about our conceptual baggage. By incorporating my own narratives into my writing, I acknowledge that it is my subjectivities that touch all of the material. As the author or storyteller, I choose the

women to talk to; I choose, in consultation with these women, what words to include in my writing; I choose how to structure this material; I choose the poems; I chose what narratives of my own to tell. Although this may seem obvious, it is too easy to pretend that the information presented is simply "women's voices" emerging and it is tempting to make generalizations based on the information selected. To resist this temptation requires an integrity of scholarship and a confidence in one's writing that enables one to say, "I have a position, it is my own, it is worthwhile and important." Claiming authorship leads to more honest scholarship; it is a move in the opposite direction from normative ethnographic research which encourages the invisibility of the author and maintains the pretense of no-authorship by "severing relations between what the ethnographer knows, and how (s)he came to know it" (Marcus and Cushman qtd. in Visweswaran 84). Maria Mies argues for an abandonment of the notion of "value free research" and instead espouses "conscious partiality," which can be achieved through partial identification with the research objects (Mies 122). In Feminist Praxis, Stanley and Wise call the description of the researcher's position the "intellectual autobiography" of the researcher (Stanley and Wise 23). Harding believes that the inquirer must place her/himself in the same "critical plane" as the researched. She is convinced that "we need to avoid the 'objectivist' stance that attempts to make the researcher's cultural beliefs and practices invisible..." (Harding 9). In short, these feminist scholars emphasize the importance of reflexivity and self-disclosure at all stages of the research and writing process.

The goal of social change is often cited as an important component of feminist methodology; research of this nature is often known as "action research." Mies states that

feminist research must involve active participation in actions, movements, and struggles and must attempt to change the *status quo* (Mies 124-125). Many feminist scholars agree that political action and influencing public policy are crucial aspects of feminist research (e.g., Fonow and Cook, Klein, and Reinharz). This leads me to question what implications my research will have for social change. How does theorizing about hybridity lead to a changing of power relations? My research is not done in isolation from community or political activism; they are inseparable. This hybrid form of scholarship, which is also emphasized by postcolonial methodology, is a kind of grounded theory, so when I write about bisexual and multicultural identities, my hope is to enunciate theories that will have implications for anti-racist, anti-homophobic, anti-sexist, liberatory work. Making the connections between women's accounts of their experiences of hybridity and the social structures that influence those experiences is the first step to affecting social change. Mies calls this kind of scholarship a "view from below," suggesting that research should serve the interests of oppressed groups (Mies 123). Harding refers to this approach as "studying up" and calls it the "underclass" approach (Harding 8). Fonow and Cook also suggest that when doing feminist research, especially research that has an activist stance, one must look closely at the power relations between the researcher and researched. They point out that "the researcher is free to leave the field at any time and is generally the final author of any account" (Fonow and Cook 9). I espouse a methodological approach described by Stanley and Wise as "interactive methodology" (Stanley and Wise Breaking Out Again 32). This approach explicitly includes an analysis of power relations. I am concerned with analyzing power

differentials that exist in society at large as well as those that exist between the researcher and researched during the research process.

Finally, feminist methodology recognizes the value of studying the everyday experiences of women and attempts to foster a consciousness in the women who are being studied. These characteristics of feminist methodology are articulated by Renate Klein, who advocates documenting women's life-histories and collective experiences (Klein 93); by Mies, who calls for a look at women's individual and social history and a "conscientization" of the researched (Mies 126); by Fonow and Cook, who recommend studying the everyday lives of women (Fonow and Cook 11); and by Harding who writes that "one distinctive feature of feminist research is that it generates its problematics from the perspective of women's experiences" (Harding 7). I wish to do research about and for women, and I have chosen to limit my exploration of hybrid identities to women. While the experiences of men with hybrid identities may be similar to those of women in many ways, there are likely particular experiences and unique insights that hybrid men could discuss, and it would be a valuable undertaking to compile and compare the experiences of hybrid men and hybrid women. While I am doing research about and for women, I also do research about and for people. Although my research is framed by an analysis of imperialism and patriarchy, my postcolonial and feminist methodological principles are also informed by a hybrid methodology, the goal of which is to move, to a certain extent, beyond simplified categories of male and female.

Toward A Hybrid Methodology

I am a self-identified hybrid woman;

by virtue of being neither straight nor exclusively lesbian;

by virtue of identifying with different countries and cultures;

by virtue of growing up in the "Third World";

by virtue of having multiple citizenship;

by virtue of my belief that researchers are also the researched;

by virtue of never specializing in one discipline;

by virtue of my aversion to simple binary oppositional categories;

by virtue of all this and more;

I think, learn, read, and write from a hybrid space.

Working within a feminist postcolonial methodological framework, I must be willing to recognize the difficulties of multiple positionalities and the value of working from a hybrid site when exploring identity politics and the politics of categorization. My methodological principles are holistic, interdisciplinary, and integrative. I have worked collaboratively with bisexual women and women of mixed/multiple race, ethnicity, and culture to better understand our unique experiences of discrimination. I am particularly concerned with my position and I wish to make my authorship clear through self-disclosure. I am part of a discourse in which the voices of women, bisexuals, and people of mixed race, ethnicity, and culture are heard.

This emphasis on experience as knowledge production is influenced by phenomenological methodologies:

> Phenomenology is a system of interpretation that helps us perceive and conceive ourselves, our contact and interchanges with other, and everything else in the realm of our own experience in a variety of ways, including to describe a method as well as a philosophy of thinking. (Wagner 8)

My phenomenological strategies are threefold: to tell the stories of some hybrid women, to talk about these stories, and to work out how these stories can provide some insights into how we understand power and privilege, and how we can work for social change.

Methods: From Interviews to Storytelling, from Poetry to Theory

It is not enough to discuss methodology alone, for while my methodology informs what methods I use, it is the methods themselves that have significant implications for my research. Academic writing should include one or more of the following epistemological elements: analysis, evaluation, and synthesis. What defines a piece of research as "scholarship" is that it must provide new insights, illuminate patterns, and reveal the nature of relationships between things.[1] While other forms of knowledge can effectively achieve these goals, my research is an attempt to present and create knowledge in a way that reveals new connections and insights. To challenge the notion that scholarship can only be presented within a particular model is a valuable undertaking, as it prevents us from adhering to particular formats and methods simply because they have become standard and conventional ways of working in academia. We must endeavor to question the dogma of convention in all its manifestations.

In her book Feminist Methods In Social Research, Shulamit Reinharz emphasizes that it is not accurate to speak of a feminist method, but feminist *methods*. She says,

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[1] I am indebted to Farhad Dastur for discussing these ideas with me regarding what qualifies as scholarship.

"instead of orthodoxy, feminist research practices must be recognized as a plurality. Rather than there being a 'woman's way of knowing' or a 'feminist way of doing research,' there are women's *ways* of knowing" (Reinharz 4). I have employed triangulation in terms of my methods, which entail drawing on the following three "sources of knowledge": 1) interviews with bisexual women and women of mixed ethnicity/culture/race; 2) poetry and stories by bisexual women and women of mixed ethnicity/culture/race collected from various sources, including published works in anthologies in addition to my own stories; and 3) theoretical works about hybridity, sexuality, race, ethnicity, and culture. By integrating these various methods, I hope to validate sources of knowledge that are traditionally considered non-academic. I write poetry as theory and I draw out the theoretical from the poetical.

Interviewing as a Way of Knowing: Participant Selection

I used a combination of snowball and purposive sampling to recruit interviewees, contacting friends, acquaintances and friends of friends, or through the interviewees themselves (Patton 51-56). I also contacted women through the following organizations: *JUKA*, an organization for black gays, lesbians, and bisexuals in Nova Scotia; *BiNet BC*, a provincial organization for bisexuals; and *Out on Campus*, a queer student organization at Simon Fraser University. I do not claim to have a representative group of bisexual or mixed women. My criteria for selection was that the participant identify as hybrid in some way, and I was particularly interested in speaking to women whose sexuality, race, ethnicity, or culture was hybrid or fluid. This included women who identified as bisexual or who were experientially bisexual but did not identify as such, as well as women who

had either a multiracial or multiethnic identity, or who claimed some sort of hybrid racial, ethnic, or cultural heritage. Although sexuality and race/ethnicity/culture are the primary locations for discussing hybridity in this research, I am also interested in hybridity of class, religion, ability, and gender. While I was not specifically looking for women with these forms of hybridity, I talked with women of mixed class (e.g., working-class and middle-class), mixed religion (e.g., half-Quaker and half-Jewish), and mixed ability (e.g., hearing impaired). Unfortunately, I did not interview any transgendered women, and I suggest that transgendered individuals are perhaps still among the most under-researched and marginalized of hybrids.

All the women who revealed their age were young women in their twenties and most were students like myself. I wish to make my choice of young women as my cohort explicit; besides having greater access to women in my age group, I am interested in looking at hybridity as it is understood and experienced by young women after the advances of the women's, civil rights, and gay liberation movements. I am not suggesting that there is no longer a need for these movements; instead, I am proposing that these young women's understandings of hybridity and hybrid identities have developed in an environment which is different from the one that most women one generation their senior would have known. Although it would be important to conduct research which emphasizes age representation, I have chosen to interview young hybrid women who are finding that they are marginalized despite the gains of the liberatory movements of the last few decades. As a result, themes that I do not explore in great detail include: family formation, raising children, spousal rights and benefits, and the ethics of care.

I interviewed fifteen women in total over a period of one month, eight in Halifax and seven in Vancouver. Of the fifteen women I interviewed, eight identified as bisexual (of those eight, four had identified as lesbian at some point in the past ranging from several months to ten years); four identified as lesbian (of those four, three were behaviorally bisexual); two identified as straight (of those two one said that she thought she might be bisexual); and one woman did not identify as straight, gay, or bisexual at the time of the interview but later told me she identified as bisexual. In terms of race and ethnicity, I interviewed seven self-identified women of colour (all of whom were mixed or hybrid in some way) and eight self-identified white women (of these women, six were racially, ethnically, or culturally mixed and two were in inter-racial relationships). Clearly, it is difficult to describe the categories these fifteen women fit into as they are fluid and complex; adding qualifiers does not necessarily give us complete information. Describing the women I interviewed (and perhaps every individual) using reductive labels often obscures important aspects of particular women's identities, such as the frustrations and privileges of "passing" as white or lesbian, or the apparent paradox of being multiracial but self-identifying as white due to a sense that one has grown up with white privilege. In addition to these fifteen interviews, I conducted a pilot interview. The pilot interviewee was aware that hers was a preliminary pilot interview that would allow me to become familiar with how I would use the interview questions as a guideline. After this interview, I was able to make minor changes to my interview guidelines and the pilot interviewee, who is also a graduate student doing thesis research, was able to give me valuable feedback on methodological and ethical issues.

The Interview Process

I began each interview with an explanation of my methodological principles and my research methods so that each interviewee was aware of the context of her interview in my research. Throughout the interviews, I shared my own stories about bisexuality and my mixed cultural background and made the interviewees aware of my theoretical framework, which includes an analysis of identity politics that emphasizes continuums and complexity. In this way, self-disclosure was not immediate, but mutual and gradual as the conversation progressed.

The interviews were semi-structured and recorded on audio tape. I found this format worked well as it allowed the interviewees and myself to share our stories in a way that was intimate and unhampered by extensive note taking.[2] Also, a semi-structured interview facilitated the discussion of the particular issues and concerns of each woman, allowing me to ask questions relating to what they were saying and allowing them to explore topics which I had not thought of asking about. I did center the conversation specifically on the issues I was most interested in by asking a few questions which focused mainly on aspects of the interviewees' sexual and ethnic identities and some of the particular experiences relating to the hybrid nature of those identities. What I kept in mind throughout the interview and transcription process was that *individual* women's experiences be emphasized, to ensure that these women are not taken to represent *all* women's experiences.

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[2] I recognize that this may be a consequence of my relative comfort with recording technology, which may be seen as hampering the flow of an interview by some people.

Ethical Guidelines when Interviewing

My ethical guidelines are influenced by my methodological principles in that my concerns about oppression, power relations, and valuing women's experiences are also reflected in my research practices and ethics. While on a practical level, certain ethical guidelines are important, my methodological and philosophical principles influence my research ethics. In Breaking Out Again, Stanley and Wise emphasize the "situatedness" of ethics: "…we find preferable an approach which is concerned with a contextual approach to ethical ideals and practices. That is, while we need ethical principles, these should be constituted as 'recipes' which can and should be adapted…" (Stanley and Wise 203). Specific ethical guidelines which I am concerned about include: mutual respect, trust, reciprocity, confidentiality, and informed consent. I also ensured that all the participants were involved in my research voluntarily and that they were familiarized with the nature of the research. In addition, when research topics are personal, emotional, or considered taboo, it is sometimes difficult to question women about them, and I made it clear to each woman that it was her prerogative not to answer particular questions or to ask that the audio tape be switched off at any time.

Each participant was informed of the objectives and nature of my project and each filled out an informed consent form. I have ensured confidentiality by changing the names of the interviewees, but I made it clear to each interviewee that she could choose to have her name included in my thesis if she wished (eight women said they did not mind if their names were used, but I have chosen to be consistent in changing all the names). I have removed references to Halifax and Vancouver, changed the names of any towns mentioned. If names are mentioned within an interview, I have also changed them.

Interview Questions

I first asked each woman to introduce herself with her name, age, and occupation. I made it clear that they did not have to disclose any of this information if they did not want to, and that they could also add any information about themselves that they wished to share with me (all but two women disclosed their ages which ranged from twenty to twenty-nine). After this brief introduction, I used the following questions as a guide to talk about sexuality:

1) How do you identify in terms of your sexuality? When did you first start identifying this way? How did you reach this identification? (for everyone)
2) Have you at any point wanted to be just straight or just gay? (for bisexual interviewees)
3) Can you describe situations where you have experienced biphobia or monosexism in addition to homophobia and heterosexism? (for bisexuals) What are some of your experiences of homophobia and heterosexism? (for lesbians)
4) What have been some of your experiences, good or bad, living in a "monosexual" world? (for everyone)
5) What are your thoughts about community? (for everyone)

Question number three introduces to the interviewee the terms "homophobia," "heterosexism," "biphobia," and "monosexism." Homophobia is the irrational fear and hatred of people who love and are sexually attracted to people of the same gender. Heterosexism is the assumption that heterosexuality is the only "natural" form of

sexuality.[3] Biphobia is the irrational fear and hatred of people who love and are sexually attracted to both men and women. Monosexism is the assumption that it is "natural" for people to be either heterosexual or homosexual and "unnatural" to be sexually attracted to *both* men *and* women. I inquired as to whether each interviewee was familiar with these terms, and if she was not I gave her the definitions as they are described above. Many of the women I spoke to were familiar with many or all of these terms; some women were familiar with the experiences which the terms describe, even if they had never used these particular terms before.

I then asked a number of questions specifically about ethnicity, with the following questions providing a guideline:

1) Where were you born and where did you grow up?
2) What race/culture/ethnicity are your parents and what is your racial, ethnic, and/or cultural self-identification?
3) What racial/ethnic/cultural heritages do you claim? (through your ancestry and/or lived experience)
4) What are some of the joys and/or difficulties that you have experienced as a multiracial, multiethnic, and/or multicultural individual? (such as incompatibility of cultures, racism, feelings of displacement, etc.)
5) What are your thoughts about community?

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[3] In A Piece of My Heart, Audre Lorde defines heterosexism as a belief in the inherent superiority of one form of loving over all others and thereby the right to dominance, and she defines homophobia as a terror surrounding feelings of love for members of the same sex and thereby a hatred of those feelings in others (Lorde 94).

Finally, I asked questions dealing with hybridity in a broader context, suggesting to the interviewees that they draw on their experiences of sexuality, race, ethnicity, and culture. They are:

1) Do you see any connections or parallels between (your) sexual and/or cultural hybridity/fluidity?
2) What insights do you feel you have gained living as a hybrid individual?
3) Do you think anyone fits neatly into oppositional categories in terms of culture or sexuality?
4) Do you think there is a danger in privileging hybridity over singular identities?
5) What is your vision of a better, more just society?

Profiles of Interviewees

In a previous section, I attempted to describe the women I interviewed, by listing how many were bisexual, lesbian, women of colour, white, and mixed. I pointed out the limitations of those labels. Here I dedicate a short paragraph to each of the women who talked with me, telling a "mini-story" of each woman's situation at the time of the interview.

Alice is interested in community work. Her parents are black-Canadian, and her ancestors came to British North America after the war of 1812. Her family background is black, white, Blackfoot Indian, Irish, German, and Dutch. She sees herself as a light-skinned black woman. She identifies as a lesbian but prefers the term "free-spirited" to describe herself. She has a partner who is white.

Barbara is 25 years old and works at a community radio station. She is completing a Masters degree, so considers herself middle class by virtue of her education, but also feels working class as she grew up immersed in a working class culture. When forced to identify, she will say she is a lesbian. She is presently involved with a man and feels that she is going to take on a bisexual identity soon. She has identified as bisexual in the past and sees her sexuality as very fluid. She identifies as white and grew up with Acadian cultural influences. Because she has some Native blood, she also sees herself as being "off-white," and has been treated as such by others.

Chris is a 29-year-old artist from Ontario who says she is under-employed and is doing lots of different projects. She is in the process of coming out as bisexual and she finds this "a little scary" as she has identified as a lesbian for over a decade. She sees her lesbian and feminist identities as connected. Her ancestors came from Ireland, Scotland, France, and Wales. Her father's father was from a working class family and her father's mother was from a wealthy family, so she sees her father as inter-class.

Dorothy is a 22-year-old white woman who was born in Toronto. She is a student in public relations. She sees herself as middle class, and she sometimes works for her parents' business. She says of her sexuality, "I must admit for a while, in my early twenties, I was confused sexually, confused about monogamy. I think I probably wondered what was going on. I used to wonder what was wrong with me." She now identifies as bisexual.

Ellen is a 27-year-old graduate student, born and brought up in a small town in Nova Scotia. Her mother is British and her father is ethnically Indian, born and raised in Zanzibar. Her parents came to Canada in 1968, after their marriage. Ellen says, "I

identify as Canadian first, Nova Scotian second, maybe Indian third. I don't really identify with the British part." At the time of the interview, she did not identify as straight, bisexual or lesbian. Since the interview, she has contacted me and explained that she has taken on a bisexual identity for personal and political reasons.

At 23 years old, Fatima is a recent International Development Studies graduate who is presently job hunting. She was born in a small town in Ontario and grew up in towns around Ontario. Her parents are originally from India, and her father grew up in Europe. Her mother was brought over from India and her parents had an arranged marriage. She prefers to label herself as Canadian rather than Indo-Canadian. She sees herself as multiethnic and she identifies as straight.

Gerri is a 20-year-old undergraduate student who grew up in Newfoundland. Both her parents are Anglo-Saxon, and her ancestors are from Wales. She has identified as a lesbian for the past two years and before that she identified as bisexual. She describes herself as eighty per cent lesbian and twenty per cent straight. She likes the labels gay, queer, and dyke in addition to lesbian. Gerri is hard of hearing in one ear, her father is hard of hearing, and both her grandparents are deaf. As a result, she feels part of both the hearing and the deaf communities.

Helen is 24-year-old registered massage therapist. She grew up in a small town in Ontario and lived in Toronto for four years. Her mother is white, originally from Alberta and her father is black, originally from Barbados. When she was growing up she said that she was mixed, and now she identifies as a black woman. She identifies herself as heterosexual and adds, "but I'm realizing more and more that women have been the key

role models in my life and they still are and that's where my number one loyalties lie, is with women…maybe I'm bisexual, who knows?" (Helen).

Isis is 20 years old, a student in an undergraduate program, and also works as a civil servant. She identifies as a bisexual woman. She grew up in a town in Ontario that she describes as "very white, very upper middle class." She explains that her ancestors on her father's side were United Empire Loyalists, and on her mother's side her ancestors were Irish terrorists.

Juliet is a 26-year-old artist who works in the photography business. She calls herself bisexual, and has identified this way for about two years although she says she has been attracted to girls since she was about thirteen. Her father is mostly Russian and her mother is mostly German. She is presently involved with a Filipino man who is also bisexual. She says, "I've grown up mostly in a white background and didn't really think anything of being in a mixed relationship."

Kate is a 26-year-old student who is a single mother with a five-year-old daughter. She was born in San Francisco. Her father, who she never knew, was African-American and her mother was half-Native and half-white, and identified strongly with black culture. She identifies as bisexual, and says that she is more attracted to men than to women.

Lily is 24, born and raised in Vancouver. She has a BA in African-American Studies. She is going into medical school and she plants trees in the summer. She says that her tendencies are more towards loving women. She identifies as bisexual and will also say that she is a lesbian. Her mother is an atheist Jew and her father was raised as a Quaker in Scotland. She says that she is culturally Jewish, not religiously Jewish.

Meena is 20 and in her third year of an English and Communications program. She says she grew up lower middle-class in a suburb. Her mother is one quarter African-Canadian and three quarters East Indian and her father is British and Scottish. She identifies as an invisible woman of colour and also identifies as bisexual. She says that she has been attracted to women since she was fourteen. Later in the interview, she describes herself as being seventy-five per cent dyke and twenty-five percent "het" (heterosexual).

Naomi is a 26-year-old artist who identifies herself as half-Sekani and half-Gitksan. She suspects that her father is half-Tlingit and that her mother could be half-white or half-Cree. She says, "Half my blood is Sekani, but I was raised in a lot of Gitksan tradition so I don't know much about Sekani culture so that the half that is Gitksan actually constitutes a lot of me 'cause it's where I get the language, the ideals, all that stuff." She explains that a lot of people mistake her for Chinese or Filipino. She prefers being called First Nations, not Native. She says that she is behaviorally bisexual, but she says that "emotionally," she has been a lesbian since she was 20 years old.

Oriani has a degree in Psychology and is now working as a teaching assistant. She grew up in Edmonton until she was fourteen. She identifies as bisexual and says that she might call herself a lesbian sometime in the future. She also identifies with the words dyke and queer, and says that right now lesbian is a word she feels excluded from. She identifies as white and also says that she is not really white, as her father is half-Check and half-Hungarian and her mother is half-British and half-Cree. She identifies as Canadian because she believes that it is Canadian to be so mixed.

Storytelling and Poetry: Valuing Written Narratives

> Write with your eyes like painters, with your ears like musicians, with your feet like dancers. You are the truthsayer with quill and torch. Write with your tongues of fire. Don't let the pen banish you from yourself. Don't let the ink coagulate in your pens. Don't let the censor snuff out the spark, nor the gags muffle your voice. (Anzaldua 173)

I propose privileging poetical discourses alongside theoretical and philosophical discourses as valid forums for discussing ideas and strategies of resistance. Something can be learned from the poetry of women who are struggling and celebrating their hybrid identities. Audre Lorde declares that poetry is not a luxury (Lorde Sister Outsider 36). Minh-Ha reminds us that poetry is a kind of truth, echoing Aristotle's belief that poetry can potentially tell greater truths than history. Minh-ha writes, "Storytelling as literature (narrative poetry) must then be truer than history" (Minh-ha 120). The blending of discursive modes is a project that has long been resisted by many academics, though some writers working both in and out of the academy have challenged the separation of theory and narrative. One such proponent of the hybridization of modes of discourse is Rosi Braidotti, who writes, "I would much rather fictionalize my theories, theorize my fictions, and practice philosophy as a form of conceptual creativity" (Braidotti 4). Fictions tell strong truths and good stories can help us identify with the experiences of others, articulate experiences we share in common, and provide strategies for resistance and survival. Honor Ford-Smith astutely states:

> The tale-telling tradition contains what is most poetically true about our struggles. The tales are one of the places where the most subversive elements of our history can be safely lodged, for over the years the tale tellers convert fact into images which are funny, vulgar, amazing or magically real. (Ford-Smith qtd. in Mohanty 35)

Chandra Talpade Mohanty identifies the narratives that have transformative potential and that make visible the complexities of experiences of oppression and privilege as "counterhegemonic narratives" (Mohanty 11). Emphasizing this kind of narrative underlines the importance of paying attention to the complexities of multiple subjectivities, identities, and experiences. Susan Friedman sees these "relational narratives" as a way of getting beyond binary narratives of denial, accusation, and confession that prevent us from working together for real social change. She writes:

> The legitimate insight of binary narratives is blind to many other stories that cannot be fully contained within them. Most especially, binary narratives are too blunt an instrument to capture the liminality of contradictory subject positions or the fluid, nomadic, and migratory subjectivities of what I have elsewhere called the "new geography of identity." (Friedman 7)

Ruth Colker also emphasizes the importance of valuing storytelling: "where individualized storytelling is possible in addition to or instead of categorization, we should seek to promote storytelling" (Colker 20). In her essay "Storytelling for Social Change," Sherene Razack reminds us that it is important to pay attention to context when engaging in storytelling. She asks important questions such as: to what uses will stories be put? Will someone else then take and theorize from them? Who will control how they are used? (Razack 84). The idea of using storytelling as resistance and social change is not new; for different reasons many groups of people have used storytelling—in the form of writing, song, drama, shadow puppetry, or oral history—as a tool for survival, self-affirmation, and resistance. One clear example within feminism is the consciousness raising groups of the 1970s, when women started to mobilize as they began to tell each other their stories.

Another testimony to the power of narrative is the persecution of writers, novelists, and poets around the world who speak out about oppression and injustice in their writing. Take the case of Ken Saro-Wiwa, who was executed in Nigeria, or the well known death sentence given out by *imams* in Iran to Salman Rushdie for writing The Satanic Verses. Taslima Nasreen was also given a *fatwa* because of her novel Lajja (Shame) and she was forced to leave Bangladesh and go into hiding. Censorship of narratives exists in oppressive regimes around the world where stories are banned and the people who write them silenced. While in North America, our writers and storytellers are not usually killed or jailed, the stories of marginalized groups are often suppressed because of economic conditions or political pressure.

This is also true within academia, which purports to be an enclave of freedom of expression. Dell Hymes suggests that "the concrete, narrative, storytelling form of discourse is deprecated and drummed out of students at prestigious institutions…" (qtd. in Martin 196). Throughout my academic career I have resisted the devaluation of narrative by emphasizing interdisciplinarity and focusing on stories through literature. In this thesis, I employ a technique known as "textus interruptus," which is a "kind of narrative consistently subject to intertexual interferences, which result in meaningful excursions during the process of its reading" (Klinger 120). Poems and narratives "interrupt" a more recognizable theoretical mode, hopefully providing the reader with a richer understanding of my theoretical positions. I use stories and poems as sources of knowledge because I believe that the telling and writing of stories reflects the culture, politics, and lives of people more genuinely than do many "pure" theoretical discourses. In the social sciences, a disproportionate amount of time and energy is put into upholding

the myth of no-authorship, reifying disciplinary superiority, and arguing about the superiority of certain theoretical frameworks.

While discourse around theoretical and epistemological frameworks are important, there must be some attempt to apply these frameworks to wider political and social issues and concerns. Isabelle Allende, Kim Chernin, Bharati Mukherjee, Evgeniia Semenovna Ginzburg, and Raden Adjeng Kartini are women writers who have something to say about their society, their struggles, and their lives. Women telling their stories and writing about their lives provides us with a source of knowledge that is too often overlooked. One does not need to be well versed in theoretical frameworks to understand the raw experiences transmitted through women's words. Emily Martin further emphasizes that, "we must not make the mistake of hearing the particularistic, concrete stories of these and other women and assume that they are less likely than more universalistic, abstract discourse to contain an analysis of society" (Martin 201).

I argue that by telling women's stories about living as bisexual in a monosexually defined world, or living with mixed race, ethnicity, or culture in a world which puts so much meaning in "pure" race and ethnicity, I am effectively creating new knowledge. The importance of telling stories about our lives and our experiences of oppression and privilege is paramount, not just for bisexuals and those with a multicultural, multiethnic, or multiracial heritage, but for everyone. Ursula Le Guin believes that, "in the tale, in the telling, we are all one blood. Take the tale in your teeth, then, and bite till the blood runs, hoping it's not poison; and we will all come to the end together, and even to the beginning: living, as we do, in the middle" (Le Guin 195). Let us tell each other our stories with renewed passion.

Theorizing

I combine theoretical discourses around power and privilege with storytelling and poetry with a particular facility; a hybridity within myself has led to a willingness to hybridize genres of writing and discourse. Many feminists theorists draw on the life experiences of women to construct their theories, as Malavika Karlekar observes:

> Feminist theorists base many of their sensibilities and observations on the lives of other women: women in poverty, in struggle, in situations of oppression and exploitation, and in joy and victory. It is in these contexts where the stories lie and give strength to those who reach out. The quest for new realities is firmly rooted in women's experiences, and their expressions of these experiences. (Karlekar 137)

Theorists working in the academy often feel that integrating lived experiences and multiple modes of discourse into their theorizing somehow makes their theories less refined. Minh-Ha discusses the resistance within academia to this blending of genres in Framer Framed:

> The mixing of different modes of writing; the mutual challenge of theoretical and poetical, discursive and "non-discursive" languages; the strategic use of stereotyped expressions in exposing stereotypical thinking; all these attempts at introducing a break into the fixed norms of the Master's confident prevailing discourses are easily misread, dismissed, or obscured in the name of "good writing," of "theory," or of "scholarly work." (Minh-Ha 138)

Minh-ha is writing within a postcolonial framework that encourages the "displacement of theory to the boundary, with a weakening of its authority" (Featherstone 10). According to Featherstone, "there is a lowering of theory's capacity to speak for people in general, to a greater acknowledgment of the limited and local nature of its assertions" (Featherstone 10). Postcolonial theorists join postmodern theorists in recognizing the limitations of "metanarratives" and in placing greater importance on the specificity of context and position when we theorize. The "weakening of authority" of theory need not mean that

we abandon theorizing altogether, but rather, we must radically change our notions of what constitutes theory. Bell hooks explores the limitations of postmodern theorizing in Yearning:

> It is sadly ironic that the contemporary discourse which talks the most about heterogeneity, the decentered subject, declaring breakthroughs that allow recognition of Otherness, still directs its critical voice primarily to a specialized audience that shares a common language rooted in the very master narratives it claims to challenge. (hooks 25)

Issues of accessibility and representation are particularly relevant today as more and more people speak about the multiplicity of their experiences and identities. Still, theory continues to be defined narrowly. Minh-ha writes that:

> it is commonplace to say that "theoretical" usually refers to inaccessible texts that are addressed to a privileged, predominantly male social group. Hence, to many men's ears it is synonymous with "profound," "serious," "substantial," "scientific," "consequential," "thoughtful," or "thought-engaging"; and to many women's ears, equivalent to "masculine," "hermetic," "elitist," and "specialized," therefore "neutral," "impersonal," "purely mental," "unfeeling," "disengaging," and—last but not least—"abstract." (Minh-ha 41)

Combining women's narratives, poetry, and stories with theoretical frameworks has the potential to lead to a sophisticated and insightful analysis of hybridity. Theorizing provides a framework which makes it possible to discuss issues around methodology, identity, and positionality; interviews with women with hybrid identities reflect some of the issues that are important to them; and the inclusion of poetry by bisexual and hybrid women in North America reveals experiences of racism, heterosexism, identity formation, and feelings of displacement. I argue that the narrative accounts of women, both oral and written, are a powerful and effective method of theorizing.

Since I am a hybrid woman, it is not surprising that my theorizing about race and culture should include an analysis of hybridity and multiplicity. Through the invisibility

of my own "living heritage," and my experiences growing up in the "Third World," I feel that much of the theorizing that goes on around race and ethnicity are dichotomous and over-simplified. In addition, through my experiences as a bisexual woman, I feel that recent queer theory is just beginning to theorize about sexuality in a way that takes into account the complex and fluid realities of sexual desire and identity.

What is the use of telling stories and theorizing identities? In doing this research, my intention is not to calculate statistics and numbers, finding how many "former" lesbians identify as bisexual, or how many women sleep with what number of men and women. Nor was it my intention to discover what percentage of the population is mixed race and how many of these people identify as one particular race or ethnicity. While these questions may generate useful knowledge, collecting such information is an enormous undertaking that requires careful sampling and sophisticated quantitative research methods.

Even if I did have the means and expertise, quantitative research is only useful insofar as the things being quantified are quantifiable. Statistical measures are not enough when we discuss race, ethnicity, culture, and sexuality. A well-known statistic that came out of the research done by Alfred Kinsey is that ten percent of the male population is gay (LeVey 48). This "one in ten" figure had been popularized in the gay movement to indicate strength in numbers. But what does this really tell us about sexual behavior? What does it mean? Does it include people who are so closeted that they rarely admit their same sex attractions to themselves? Does it include people who have same sex *and* opposite sex attractions? And how do numbers untangle self-identification from sexual behavior, which are often fluid and changing? And what does it mean when

census forms do not allow us to record multiple and hybrid racial, ethnic, and cultural identities? We must recognize that there will always be limitations, qualifications, and stipulations when it comes to self-identification, particularly in terms of culture and sexuality.

Part of the problem is that too often the social sciences try to emulate the sciences in the ways "data" are collected and discussed. When it comes to race, class, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, culture, or any other "determinants" of social identity, it is not useful to limit the discussion to numbers. What are the alternatives? I suggest that in addition to collecting figures and compiling statistics, we need recognize that individual people's lives lie behind the numbers, which rarely reflect the intricacies of their experiences. We need to talk about how we see ourselves, how we identify ourselves and others, how we feel, and how we treat each other.

Conclusion

Statistics can lie; so can theory; and so can stories. We need to move away from the dualistic notion of "compartmentalizing literature as false and the social sciences as true, merging the two instead, we will begin to open the doors for a more sensitive type of theorizing about cultures and individuals" (Quintana qtd. in Gwin 874). Where does this leave us then? Theory can oppress and reify the *status quo*, but it can also subvert; as Minh-ha puts it, "theory oppresses, when it wills or perpetuates existing power relations, when it presents itself as a means to exert authority—the Voice of Knowledge" (Minh-ha 42). Consequently, I triangulate my methodology and do not rely solely on theory as my "Voice of Knowledge." It is the voices of the women who spoke with me, the poets, the writers, the storytellers, as well as my own voice that are "Voices of Knowledge." Hybrid experiences require theorizing about narrative and telling stories which contain theories. Theory and poetry are not synonymous, but rather, they are subsumed in one another, creating meaning and newness.

CHAPTER 2: HYBRIDITY

> 'Imitations of life! Historical anomalies! Centaurs!' she declaims. 'Will you not be blownofied to bits by the coming storms? Mixtures, mongrels, ghost-dancers, shadows! Fishes out of water! Bad times are coming, darlings, don't think they won't, and then all ghosts will go to Hell, the night will blot out shadows, and mongrel blood will run-o, as thin and free as water.' (Rushdie The Moor's Last Sigh 172)

Introduction

In this chapter, I develop the notion of hybrid races, ethnicities, cultures, and sexualities. In particular, I explore how "transformative" hybridity as a positive identity has the potential to challenge frameworks of mononormativity and binary oppositional categorization. Although hybridity has been viewed with negativity in the past, positive hybrid identities are now being reclaimed, particularly in a North American context. Multiracial, multiethnic, multicultural, and bisexual identities are being embraced in unprecedented ways, with postcolonial and queer theories providing some of the groundwork that makes this acceptance possible. Through movements comprised of these hybrid individuals, it is becoming clear that the effects of mononormativity and compulsory binary oppositional categorization are felt not only by hybrids, but by everyone. In the last half of the chapter, I discuss how the organizational frameworks of mononormativity and binary oppositional categorization work in practice by illustrating their influence on labeling, specifically investigating how hybrids are effected by such frameworks.

Definitions and Representations of Hybridity: Are Hybrids Deviant or Good?

> …the hybrid sheep goat I saw
> in a magazine once
> with pitiful pleading eyes
> trying to bust out
> of her genetically altered face
> …I saw my face there
> no matter how much I am loved
> no matter how much woman
> I am no matter how many women
> hold and suck me
> I am mirrored in those pitiful
> lonesome
> product of mutation
> eyes. (Moraga 100-101)

I use the term "hybrid" to refer to people who are multiethnic, multiracial, multicultural, or bisexual in a late twentieth century, North American context.[1] Over the past two centuries, the meanings of the word "hybrid" have evolved and the concept of hybridity has acquired a variety of connotations. A few examples of the word can be found as early as the seventeenth century, but the term was not widely used until the nineteenth century (Furnivall 1354). For the most part, a hybrid referred to the offspring of two species. Most notably, Charles Darwin used the term with reference to the fertility of hybridized plant and animal species in The Origin of Species. Yet, the word hybrid was also employed figuratively in The Life and Letters of Charles Darwin (1887): "I will tell you what you are, a hybrid, a complex cross of lawyer, poet, naturalist, and theologian!" (Furnivall 1354). During the nineteenth century, the notion that hybridity could also be applied to people of different "races" grew in popularity, stemming from a

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[1] Although the parallel to multiethnicity would presumably be multisexuality, I use the term bisexual instead, as this term is commonly understood to mean multisexual, largely because of the assumption that there are only two mutually exclusive genders.

dubious view that different racial categories among humans were analogous to different species. This belief has persisted well into the twentieth century, and has supported many racist and eugenic arguments for the maintenance of the "purity" of different races. Today, most dictionary definitions include a broader definition of hybrid as "anything of mixed origin or of incongruous or different elements" (Avis 656).

Nineteenth and twentieth century representations of hybridity in literature and film have often been horrific and fantastical, intensifying the imagined danger of hybridity in the popular imagination. The following are hybrids that have both fascinated and horrified us: Dr. Frankenstein's monster, werewolves, centaurs, sirens, the half-machine half-human of *The Terminator* (1984) and *Edward Scissorhands* (1991), and the hybrid creatures of numerous alien films (see figure 1 on page 42 for examples of some hybrids in mythology). In Salman Rushdie's most recent novel, The Moor's Last Sigh, the protagonist Moraes Zogoiby is a half-Catholic and half-Jewish hybrid ("a jewholic-anonymous," writes Rushdie, "a cathjew nut") living in India (Rushdie 104). In the novel, Rushdie repeatedly taps into our ambivalence about hybridity:

> Aurora had apparently decided that the ideas of impurity, cultural admixture and melange which had been, for most of her creative life, the closest things she had found to a notion of the Good, were in fact capable of distortion, and contained a potential for darkness as well as for light. This 'black Moor' was a new imagining of the idea of the hybrid—a Baudelairean flower, it would not be too far-fetched to suggest, of evil…and of weakness. (Rushdie 303)

An emphasis on the potential for multiple meanings of hybridity allows us to grasp the many ways in which the hybrid has been conceived and perceived, both past and present. As Rushdie points out, a hybrid can be seen as good or evil or, I might add, both at once. Alternatively, hybridity is sometimes represented as an impossibility. An example of

this representation of hybridity is found in the classic film *Love is a Many Splendored Thing* (1955), which tells the story of a Eurasian woman living in Hong Kong who reluctantly falls in love with an American journalist. In one scene, the Eurasian woman urges her Westernized Eurasian friend to be proud of her Chinese heritage. Her friend replies curtly, “You can’t be two things.”

Under the influence of imperialist and racist notions of purity, hybrids have been predominantly defined and represented as degenerate, impure, and threatening. Ironically, hybrid species as they are discussed in biological literature are believed to have “hybrid vigor” which means that they tend to be larger, faster growing, and healthier than their parents (“Hybrid”). But this specific understanding of hybrids has not prevented the persistence of negative associations. The polarization of race and sexuality into good, superior types (white, heterosexual) and deviant, inferior types (non-white, non-heterosexual) continues to provide a conceptual justification for viewing hybridity as negative, for any mixing of the “good” with the “deviant” will be seen as a degradation of the “good.”

Figure 1

SOME HYBRIDS IN MYTHOLOGY

Taken From:

Walker The Woman's Dictionary of Symbols and Sacred Objects

A Continuum of Hybridity: From Hegemonic to Transformative Hybridity

Hybridity exists in different contexts and for different reasons, and the circumstances of hybridization have a bearing on how hybrids see themselves and how they are seen by others. What is relevant in the process of hybridization is who sets the rules for hybridization and who determines the forms, parameters, and conditions of hybridity. Jan Pieterse suggests that there is a continuum of hybridities: "on one end, an assimilationist hybridity that leans over towards the centre, adopts the canon and mimics the hegemony, and, at the other end, a destabilizing hybridity that blurs the canon, reverses the current, subverts the centre" (Pieterse 56-57). Robert Young suggests that these kinds of hybridity can work simultaneously: *organically*, "hegemonizing, creating new spaces, structures, scenes," and *intentionally*, "diasporizing, intervening as a form of subversion, translation, transformation" (Young 25). Hybridity is a hegemonic force when it is imposed and when the terms of mixture are determined by those with power and privilege. Colonialism, imperialism, certain kinds of economic globalization, Americanization, and "Cokacolonization" all provide examples of assimilationist or hegemonizing hybridity whereby the goal is to make the "other" conform to the "center." In contrast, intentional or destabilizing hybridity is a disruptive act of admixture which subverts the dominant paradigm and blurs the lines between the "other" and the "center." This disruption can be found in migrant, postcolonial, and bisexual literature, for instance.

This continuum of hybridity can also be understood as a hierarchy of hybridity. Hybrids who are the result of assimilationist hybridization have a superior status to those who are the result of transformative hybridization, for the more a hybrid conforms to the

rules and conditions of the center, the more acceptable they are to those in power. Kamala Visweswaran points out that, "while all identities may ultimately be multiple and shifting, surely there are also hierarchies of hybridity. Not all identities are equally hybrid, for some have little choice about the political processes determining their hybridization" (Visweswaran 132). In this thesis, I primarily discuss destabilizing, transformative hybridity which currently occupies the lowest ranks of the hierarchy of hybridity because of its potential to subvert and displace the center.

Hybrid locations are fast becoming empowering sites from which to speak and live. As hybrids increasingly determine their own terms of hybridity, we are seeing a shift from viewing hybridity as negative, degraded, or non-existent, to viewing hybridity as a positive identity. Hybridity can be seen as a liminal positionality; both hybridity and liminality suggest transformation, and represent a state in which one is neither here nor there, this nor that. In her article "Structure/Antistructure and Agency Under Oppression," Maria Lugones notes that:

> ...one may also inhabit the limen, the place in between realities, a gap "between and betwixt" universes of sense that construe social life and persons differently, an interstice from where one can most clearly stand critically toward different structures...the limen is the place where one becomes most fully aware of one's multiplicity. (Lugones 505)

Hybrids often inhabit a liminal space which fosters an awareness of the possibilities of occupying multiple identities. Combined with the transformative potential of hybridity, this awareness makes the hybrid position particularly valuable in our increasingly fragmented and chaotic world.[2]

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[2] Another kind of hybrid continuum might include a discussion of dihybrids, multihybrids, and monohybrids. The distinction between levels of hybridity is not discussed in this thesis, though it may merit further theoretical exploration in future work on hybridity.

Racial, Ethnic, and Cultural Hybridity

> Where is home
> Mulatto woman mulatto woman
> Are you white—No
> Are you black—No (Baines 37)

Ethnicity and culture are so intricately tied up with notions of race that I have found it impossible to discuss race without also discussing its relationship to ethnicity and culture. Coming to a singular satisfactory definition of race, ethnicity, and culture is difficult because history and context often change their meaning. As Alan Goodman remarks in a special issue of The Sciences on race: "racial differences are interpreted differently. Sometimes people consider them genetic, sometimes ethnic or cultural, and sometimes they use the term 'race' to mean differences in lived experience" (Goodman 24). Lucius Outlaw suggests:

> Among engaged contemporary thinkers who have turned their attention to racial and ethnic matters are those who argue in favor of discarding the very term "race" because, they reason, it is now loaded with centuries of pernicious valorizations accumulated from dehumanizing mobilizations of sentiments and practices ranging from the merely impolite to the genocidal. (Outlaw 13)

Scientists, social scientists, and philosophers will continue to debate long and hard about the usefulness or "realness" of race as an organizing concept. For the purposes of this thesis, I agree with Outlaw's premise that we must critically re-think raciality and ethnicity. I work with the basic assumption that race is not a meaningful biological criteria for categorization, but that socially, politically, economically, and culturally, it has far-reaching and significant implications.

Ethnicity, as I understand it, is a set of customs, values, and behaviors that are specific to a particular group of people, manifested in language, music, dance, religion,

and other social indicators. The term culture includes these behaviors and also incorporates other social indicators such as class, gender, or sexuality. The conception that race, ethnicity, and culture necessarily coincide must be understood as socially constructed with little basis in biology or genes. Yet for centuries, scientists and social scientists have put a remarkable amount of intellectual energy into creating racist theories of race that have virtually no biological or evolutionary accuracy. While I challenge the general understanding that race consists of the physical characteristics of an individual—including facial features and skin colour—in addition to ethnic or cultural characteristics, I also recognize that this definition of race is one that is widely used and accepted and one that largely determines how we are treated and seen in society. Throughout this thesis, I use the term "race" with the understanding that race is not meaningful as a biological category, but is extremely powerful as a social one.

During the increasing contact of "races" due to European colonization, the notion of hybridity was employed to discuss the mixing of different races and revolved primarily around discourses on fertility and the purity of race. In Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Theory, Culture and Race, Robert Young outlines the dominant positions on hybridity in discussions of human hybridity over the last century (Young 18). Some theorists denied that different races could successfully mix at all, suggesting that hybridity was an impossible project, leading to infertility and a reverting to the original races. The dominant understanding was that hybridity was possible, but that hybrid offspring would be degenerate and inevitably die out. It was also proposed that hybridity was more likely to take place successfully between "proximate" races, and less likely to take place successfully between "distant" races. Proponents of these positions suggested that

hybrids were a corruption of the original races and posed a threat to the "pure" races (Young 18).

More recently, these positions have been challenged and theorists have proposed new positions on racial and ethnic hybridity. Gloria Anzaldua's Borderlands—a work that is hybrid itself with its mix of poetry and theory—has proven to be groundbreaking work in critiquing the notion of degradation of the races which informed theories about hybridity for so long. In it she writes:

> At the confluence of two or more genetic streams, with chromosomes constantly "crossing over," this mixture of races, rather than resulting in an inferior being, provides hybrid progeny, a mutable, more malleable species with a rich gene pool. From this racial, ideological, cultural and biological cross-pollinization, an "alien" consciousness is presently in the making—a new *mestiza* consciousness, *una conciencia de mujer*. It is a consciousness of the Borderlands. (Anzaldua 77)

This new consciousness is one that is shared by the hybrid women I interviewed. Many of us specifically discussed the possibilities of newness and strength that result from affirming our hybridity and from viewing hybridity as a site of resistance.

Postcolonial Contributions to Hybridity

Postcolonial theories have made important contributions to the discussion of racial, ethnic, and cultural hybridity. Homi Bhabha has made the connection between hybridity and colonialism explicit, suggesting that hybridity is both a result of colonialism and a site of colonial resistance. According to Bhabha, hybridity enables a critique of the univocal meaning created by colonial discourses (Young 22). In The Location of Culture, Bhabha suggests a "Third Space"—which hybrids create and inhabit—that may "open the way to conceptualizing an *inter*national culture, based not on the exoticism of

multiculturalism or the *diversity* of cultures, but on the inscription and articulation of culture's *hybridity*" (Bhabha 38). Hybridity emerges, in what Edward Said calls "hybrid counter-energies," and becomes a new cultural space, a Third Space from which postcolonial subjects may find their whole selves and where, as Bhabha puts it, meanings are continuously shifting:

> It is that Third Space, though unrepresentable in itself, which constitutes the discursive conditions of enunciation that ensure that the meaning and symbols of culture have no primordial unity or fixity; that even the same signs can be appropriated, translated, rehistoricized and read anew. (Bhabha 37)

Anzaldua describes her version of the Third Space as El Mundo Zurdo (the Left-handed World). In her essay, "La Prieta," she writes:

> The mixture of bloods and affinities, rather than confusing or unbalancing me, has forced me to achieve a kind of equilibrium. Both cultures deny me a place in *their* universe. Between them and among others, I build my own universe, *El Mundo Zurdo*. I belong to myself and not to any one people. (Anzaldua 209)

Postcolonial theorists have been among those who have articulated the value of speaking and living from a hybrid place. In addition, they have laid some of the theoretical groundwork for discussion of racial, ethnic, and cultural hybridization.

Hybrid Sexualities

> Q: Is the bisexual theorist or activist?
> Authentic or deceptive?
> Opportunistic or dabbler?
> Reprobate or Revolutionary? (Williamson 58)

Just as we can talk about racial, ethnic, and cultural hybridity, it is also possible to talk about a continuum of sexuality with "pure" homosexuality at one end and "pure" heterosexuality at the other. Because sexual "orientation" has been predominantly

constructed as the mutually exclusive categories "heterosexual" or "homosexual," the continuum—the area between two constructed opposites—can be seen as hybrid. This form of hybrid sexuality has been recently theorized and politicized as "bisexual." In this section I develop an argument for the recognition of hybrid sexualities by tracing a brief history of the definitions and discourses around constructions of sexuality and the emergence of bisexual theorizing and politics.

Homosexuality as a sexual "orientation" was constructed and pathologized in the mid-nineteenth century in Europe (Dynes 144). Until that point, sexuality had been constructed so that a homosexual identity remained largely invisible, while heterosexuality was compulsory. In the early part of the twentieth century, homosexuality became increasingly visible, though compulsory heterosexuality continued to be the norm. With the construction of homosexuality and heterosexuality as oppositional categories of sexual identity, bisexuality was, in turn, rendered invisible. Even until the 1960s, theorists and psychologists were suggesting that bisexuality did not exist. For example, the psychologist Edmund Bergler claimed that once homosexual behavior started, any heterosexual behavior was counterfeit and bisexuality was an "out and out fraud" (qtd. in George 31).

Until quite recently, bisexuality has more often been discussed as a behavior within the orientations of homosexuality or heterosexuality as opposed to a sexual orientation or identity. An early definition of bisexuality was developed by Richard von Krafft-Ebing in "Psychopathia Sexualis" (1886), in which he lists degrees of homosexuality, which included categories such as physical hermaphrodites and psychic

hermaphrodites (i.e., bisexuals).[3] He believed that psychic hermaphrodites had a heterosexual element which could be encouraged by will and control, hypnotism and treatment, or abstinence from masturbation (George 28). Just as racial hybrids have been encouraged to value their whiteness, so too have sexual hybrids been encouraged to embrace their heterosexual side.

By the mid-twentieth century, bisexuality became more visible partly due to the work of Alfred Kinsey and Sigmund Freud. Freud explicitly discussed bisexuality, calling bisexuals "amphigenic inverts" (totally inverted). He also described a second category of bisexuals he called "contingent inverts," individuals who only exhibit homosexual behavior when a person of the opposite sex is not available (George 29).[4] In a paper entitled "The Psychogenesis of a Case of Homosexuality in a Woman" (1920), Freud stressed the universal bisexuality of human beings, and argued that all "normal" people have strong unconscious homosexual feelings (George 29). Kinsey proposed a continuum model of sexuality in the "Kinsey Reports" published in 1948 and 1953 (LeVay 47). In the first volume of his report he argued:

> Not all things are black nor all things white. It is a fundamental of taxonomy that nature rarely deals with discrete categories. Only the human mind invents categories and tries to force facts into separated pigeon-holes. The living world is a continuum on each and every one of its aspects. The sooner we learn this concerning human behavior the sooner we shall reach a sound understanding of the realities of sex. (Kinsey 639 qtd. in LeVey 47)

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[3]The notion of the "psychological hermaphrodite" can be found in the ancient texts of Jainism in India: "...when there is sexual desire for both due to the arising of the third type of libido (napumsakaveda), and there is the simultaneous sexual desire for both (males and females), that person is said to be psychologically hermaphrodite (bhavanapumsaka)" (Meghavijaya qtd. in Jaini).

[4]This description of bisexuality has contributed to the notion that bisexuality only exists if there is no possibility for opposite sex contact, as in Manuel Puig's Kiss of The Spider Woman, in which a heterosexual man eventually becomes lovers with a gay man in jail.

Although the actual results of his study did not strongly support his conclusions (which were drawn largely from male subjects), Kinsey nonetheless made an important contribution to the discourse around human sexuality by presenting the possibility that sexuality could be seen as a continuum.[5]

Contemporary bisexual theorists have taken up the notion of the continuum, theorizing about the space between dominant binary oppositional categories. In her comprehensive book on bisexuality entitled Vice Versa, Marjorie Garber writes:

> If the standard opposition is heterosexual/homosexual, or straight/gay or queer/straight, that slash mark, that virgule, is the fulcrum on which oppositional energies depend. To replace the virgule with an ellipsis, a series of dots (heterosexual…homosexual), to replace the opposition with the continuum or, even more disturbingly, to print the words over one another, overlapping, is to challenge the very basis on which a "politics of sexuality" is predicated. (Gerber 80)

It is this overlapping that fundamentally challenges the notions of either/or that are so integral to normative structures of knowledge and experience. We fear the spaces—the ellipses—between dominant categories and the "other," as we have been taught to fear hybridity in many of its forms.

There is a recognition among bisexual theorists of the tendency to engage in what Clare Hemmings calls "otherisation"; what is placed as the "other" will vary, but the paradigm does not (Hemmings 49). She believes that:

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[5] The Klein Sexual Orientation Grid (KSOG) was developed as an expansion of Kinsey's continuum model to include attraction, behavior, fantasy, social and emotional preferences, self-identification, and lifestyle as variables measured in the past, present, and as an ideal. The KSOG was first published in 1980 in Forum magazine in an article entitled "Are You Sure You're Heterosexual? Or Homosexual? Or Even Bisexual?" (Klein et al Bisexuality 68).

> a contemporary bisexual identity (and in particular a bisexual *feminist* identity) is intricately bound up with theories, practices and politics of difference versus sameness. Discourses of bisexuality come out of the relationship between these conflicting positions. Bisexuality could almost be seen as the embodiment of those tensions. (Hemmings 45)

Contemporary bisexual and hybrid identities are forcing us to examine the tensions of difference versus sameness, shifting the paradigm of the "center" and the "other" in unprecedented ways.

Queer Contributions to Hybridity

Just as postcolonial theory has made contributions to discussions of cultural, ethnic, and racial hybridity, so too has queer theory contributed to discussions of sexual hybridity. According to Annamarie Jagose, the term "queer" is sometimes used as "an umbrella term for a coalition of culturally marginal sexual self-identifications" and other times to describe "a nascent theoretical model which has developed out of more traditional lesbian and gay studies" (Jagose 1). Sue George writes that queer politics "bring together people of both sexes and of all races whose sexuality is proscribed, actively including bisexuals, to participate in the struggle" (George 186). In our discussion of sexuality, Barbara—one of the women I interviewed—explained how queer describes her life:

> In my life, queer really makes sense to me, because I still feel queer, I still live a queer existence. The only thing is, to the rest of the world, my life won't look very queer…I've found queer a very useful label for encompassing a lot of people. The only thing that I worry about this is that some individual labels get lost, like bisexual…I think there really is a place for more succinct labels. (Barbara)

Queer theorizing and a queer identity have emerged both in and out of the academy in recent years as more inclusive of non-heterosexual sexualities and, in some cases, of

"deviant" heterosexualities and sexual practices.[6] Queer theory makes a space in the gay and lesbian liberation movement for a recognition of the complexity and diversity of sexual, erotic, and political realities, so that bisexuals, transgendered people, two-spirited people—and all those with hybrid or deviant sexualities—can participate in a queer liberation movement which challenges heterosexual norms.

Queer theory is not without its opponents; a contemporary example is found in the writing of Sue Wilkinson and Celia Kitzinger, who suggest that queer theorizing is conservative and "deeply dangerous" (Wilkinson and Kitzinger 379). They presume that bisexual and queer theorists have no analysis or critique of heterosexuality as an oppressive or compulsory institution. However, bisexual theorists' critique of compulsory *mono*sexuality (the idea that one must be attracted either only to people of the same gender or of the opposite gender, but not both) certainly does not preclude critiquing compulsory *hetero*sexuality. Karin Baker has used the term "compulsory heteromonosexuality" to describe this twofold sexual norm (Baker 266). A homonormative position which is uncomfortable with bisexuality and queer theory, like the heteronormative one, reifies the hetero/homo divide, rendering invisible hybridity and contributing little to "cross-sexual" understanding.

[6] The term "deviant" sexualities can mean different things to different people. For instance, it could mean SM (sado-masochistic) practices or the practice of nonmonogamy, also called polyamory. Deviant heterosexualities include a lesbian-identified biological male having sex with a woman, or a dyke and a gay man having sex with each other. Implicit in queer sexualities is the challenging of normative correlations of gender, sexual identity, and sexual practice.

Other Kinds of Hybridity

I have focused primarily on discussions of hybridity of race, ethnicity, culture, and sexuality. While it is not in the scope of this thesis to discuss other forms of hybridization in great detail, I would like to mention other kinds of hybrid identities I have encountered. Conceptualizing hybridity in different aspects of identity such as religion, gender, class, and ability is also an important project. In the interviews, Chris and Barbara discussed their mixed-class backgrounds, and tried to determine their economic position as well as their relationship to the cultures that emerge out of a particular class experience. Chris explained:

> My father's father is from a working class family; he was a miner, and then his mother is from a very rich family and they married. I see how it influenced my father in many ways; he was living an upper middle class life, but yet he was in contact with his working class father's family. So just noticing how my father had made decisions, it's trickled down to my generation. (Chris)

Barbara says, "They tell me that I'm middle class. Don't really feel it" (Barbara). She goes on to explain that she grew up working class but now sees herself as middle class by virtue of her university education. Both these women revealed that their parents' and their own hybrid class experiences involved negotiating a mix of different cultures and expectations specific to different classes.

In another example, Gerri discussed her experiences as a woman who is hearing impaired. She explained that she has experienced living at the fringes of both the hearing world and the deaf community:

> The deaf community is very hierarchical. The people who are at the top of the ladder are the people who have been deaf from a very early age, yet who can communicate with the hearing world. They've gone to a deaf university...then it goes down the ladder to those with less education, and then the ones at the bottom are the hard of hearing and friends and family of deaf people…so I'm at the very lowest rungs of the community. (Gerri)

Gerri is a hybrid, for she is not completely a part of the hearing world or the deaf world: she is somewhere "in-between." She is a part of and apart from the deaf community, and her "membership" in that community is suspect or invisible. She explained to me that a feature of deaf culture is that your friends give you a sign name. She said, "the day that they gave me that name I was so proud…it's an acceptance thing" (Gerri). This experience of acceptance by people in the deaf community is similar to the pride some bisexual women feel being accepted by people in the lesbian community, or the pride of that a light-skinned woman might feel upon being accepted into a women of colour community. While different kinds of hybrids might share similar experiences of displacement and feelings of wanting to be accepted by some communities, each kind of hybridity has unique characteristics which must be respected. In making parallels between different forms of hybridity, I hope to elucidate patterns of invisibility and better understand why hybrids are often not easily understood nor accepted.

Postmodern Contributions to Hybridity

As we have seen, postcolonial theorizing has done much to explore the notion of racial, ethnic, and cultural hybridity, just as queer and bisexual theorizing have done much to explore hybrid sexualities. In addition, postmodern theory has provided a useful framework for exploring hybridity and fragmentation of identity in general. The

portmanteau term "pomosexual" has been coined (the *pomo* referring to postmodern) in a recent anthology. Pomosexuality is, "the queer erotic reality beyond the boundaries of gender, separatism, and essentialist notions of sexual orientation" (Queen 202). This anthology, entitled PoMoSexuals Challenging Assumptions about Gender and Sexuality, has taken the notion of hybrid sexualities to heart. In their introduction, Carol Queen and Lawrence Schimel explain:

> Pomosexuality lives in the space in which all other non-binary forms of sexual and gender identity reside—a boundary-free zone in which fences are crossed for the fun of it, or simply because some of us can't be fenced in. It challenges either/or categorizations in favor of largely unmapped possibility and the intense charge that comes with transgression. (Queen 23)

In addition to challenging either/or categorizations (or binary oppositional categorizations), "pomosexuality" and hybridity also challenge mononormativity. I elaborate on the concepts of mononormativity and binary oppositional categorization in the following two sections.

Hybridity as a Challenge to Mononormativity

The historical contexts and theoretical treatments of hybridity provide an understanding of the origins of what I call mononormativity, which I argue is the episteme of the day. Until very recently, there has been a widespread assumption underlying the discourses and strategies around race, ethnicity, gender, and sexuality: each of these aspects of identity are seen as having a single category that each individual fits into along a particular "axis" (i.e., black, Indian, gay). In most emancipatory theoretical frameworks, what is understood to be "normative" is white, of European decent, male, heterosexual, middle or upper class, and able-bodied. Audre Lorde calls

this normativity the "mythical norm." She says that in North America, "this norm is usually defined as white, thin, male, young, heterosexual, christian, and financially secure. It is with this mythical norm that the trappings of power reside within this society" (Lorde 116). What is understood to be deviant or marginal is non-white, non-European, female, homosexual; essentially all those who fall outside of the mythical norm. In "Queering the Center by Centering the Queer," Naomi Scheman discusses two versions of normativity:

> Heteronormativity and Christianormativity both have, in addition to their dichotomizing aspect, a universalizing aspect: They both imagine a world of sameness, even as they continue to require not only objects of desire (proselytizing or sexual) but also abjected others. The emphases, on maintaining difference or striving toward sameness, may differ, but the tensions between the two animate both discourses. (Scheman 128)

Although it is useful to present normativity as what constitutes the "center," most contemporary discourses around normativity render invisible hybridity and establish a dichotomy of difference versus sameness that does not make room for the area in-between a universalizing norm and what Scheman calls the "abjected other."

I propose that we see *both* normative *and* marginalized singular identities as mononormative. Categorizing people this way does not take hybridity into account and presupposes that everyone is monoracial, monoethnic, monocultural, monosexual, and monogendered. Hybrid identities—those that are multiracial, multiethnic, multicultural, and multisexual, in addition to multigendered, or transgendered—are either marginalized or they are thought not to exist at all. Within a mononormative framework, hybrids, who do not have a singular identity, will usually be forced to find the mononormatively

defined categories that most closely fit their subjectivities. Oriani discusses mononormativity in terms of ethnicity:

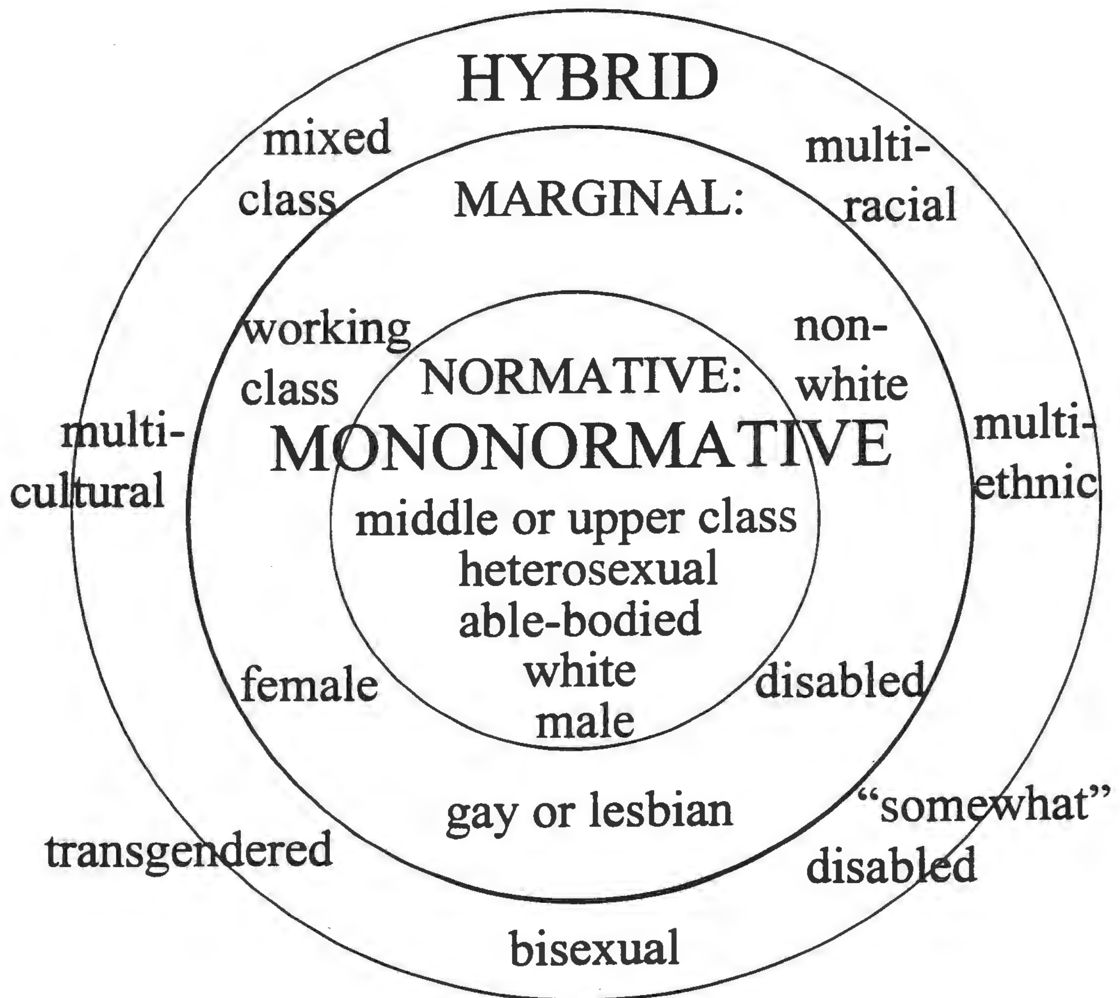
> It goes with my bisexuality in terms of encouraging me to see continuums, to see the bluriness of it all and to see that the idea of who's a person of colour and who's white is totally arbitrary. It's not based on anything genetic, although it's constructed to be entirely biological. But I think that so many people are mixed in a way…especially in North America, but there's a lot of passing and a lot of erasing people out of the family tree that happens so that people end up with nice clean ethnic identities. (Oriani)

Kate describes her position in the black lesbian community as a mixed bisexual woman, demonstrating how mononormativity can work with respect to sexuality:

> There's a whole black queer community here, and I really wanted to fit in, but I don't. I know a few of the women. I met this woman at this bar, she's a black lesbian woman. We exchanged phone numbers and everything. She calls me and we talk and then she says "you're straight, aren't you?" and I say, "I'm bisexual," and I had to explain the whole thing. I felt really strange about it. I felt defensive, like she's going to think I'm a flake. (Kate)

These two examples—the erasing of people's mixed ethnicities and the need to explain bisexuality—illustrate some of the ways that mononormativity is experienced by those who are hybrid. The reasons hybrids are discriminated against by people who inhabit the mononormative center and the mononormative margins differ in many respects. Mononormativity is maintained by privileged groups because hybrids pose a threat to their privilege by blurring the lines between the center and the margins, and mononormativity is often supported by oppressed groups as a protective measure against forms of discrimination such as homophobia and racism (see figure 2 on the following page for a model of binary oppositional categorization and mononormativity).

Figure 2



Hybridity as a Challenge to Binary Categories

Mononormativity is complicated and reinforced by binary oppositional categorization. As Donella Meadows explains in the following analogy, we tend to understand social categories as opposites, and we generally do not see the possibilities of the middle ground and the "in-betweens"; nor do we value them:

> The places that are not-land, not-sea, are beautiful, functional, fecund. Humans do not treasure them. In fact, they barely see them because those spaces do not fit the lines in the mind. Humans keep busy dredging, filling, diking, draining the places between land and sea, trying to make them one or the other. (qtd. in Kaplan 278)

Land and sea; us and them; outsider and insider; center and periphery; oppressor and oppressed; First World and Third World; North and South; woman and man; straight and gay; white and black; the overemphasis on binary oppositional categories in understanding identity and social organization suggests we have a deep propensity to dichotomize. The way we create categories when we try to understand identity lends itself to binary thinking, for when we establish a central category, we tend to place everything that does not fall within that boundary as an opposing category (if you're not straight, then you're gay; if you're not a man, then you're a woman; if you're not white, then you're black; if you're not with us, then you're against us).

According to Rebecca Kaplan, binary thinking is based on two ideologies: bipolarity, which requires exactly two oppositional groups, and categorization, which requires that those groups be discrete and discontinuous (Kaplan 268-269). These ideologies of categorization and bipolarity are deeply engraved in the way we think about social identity categories and are challenged at multiple levels by hybridity. While theorists such as Michel Foucault, Jeffrey Weeks, and Jean Francois Lyotard have played

important roles in deconstructing binary thinking and have been influential in challenging the essentialism that results from such thinking, these scholars still do not satisfactorily deal with the issue of hybridity and bisexuality.

Admittedly, categories may serve as useful and necessary tools when trying to understand the world we live in. They may help us to analyze, critique, and change ourselves and society. I do not suggest doing away with categorization or with bipolarities, for we sometimes need to find ways of ordering information and experience. Instead, I challenge the way ideologies of categorization and binary oppositions combine to create a framework in which the complexity of human experiences is inhibited and the continuous nature of identity is ignored. To challenge binaries of woman/man, black/white, homosexual/heterosexual, researched/researcher, and so on, is to challenge the assumption that two dominant opposing categories will always effectively or accurately describe reality. Categories can obscure the complexity of identity and community, particularly when they are set up as immutable, mutually exclusive, static, and universal. Identity categories not only obscure; they may also reify systems of oppression. In "Imitation and Gender Insubordination," Judith Butler suggests, "identity categories tend to be instruments of regulatory regimes, whether as the normalizing categories of oppressive structures or as the rallying points for a liberatory contestation of that very oppression" (Butler 13-14).

I argue that binary oppositional categories tend to support hierarchical ideological practices and limit our understanding of the complexity and multiplicity of experience. In addition, they limit the kind of research that is done and the way it is done, as well as maintaining structures and conventions such as the presumed and often undisputed

authority of the researcher. According to Liz Stanley and Sue Wise, categories are "ready-made classificatory packages which are used as short-cuts to reading social situations and the persons which constitute them" (Stanley and Wise Breaking Out Again 216). A further problem with binary categories is that they often influence how we behave. For instance, a lesbian who feels attracted to a man may deny this attraction exists, or a heterosexual woman may deny she is attracted to a woman because she identifies as straight.

Mononormativity and Binary Oppositional Categories at Work

What are some of the implications of theorizing hybridity when we apply this concept to the social and political realities of late twentieth century North America? Mainstream conceptions of identity categories generally assume singular identification, which implicitly suggests an impossibility of belonging to more than one category along a particular axis (such as race or sexuality). In addition, the way identity categories are generally conceived, it is thought that one cannot belong to categories that are "opposite" to each other (i.e., you can't be both gay and straight). This mononormativity and binary oppositional categorization is reflected in some of the experiences of mixed and bisexual women as they try to make sense of their own identity within existing frameworks of categorization. Both mononormativity and binary oppositional categories reinforce each other, resulting in a conceptual framework that informs how we think about identity in North America. It is not enough to simply challenge one or the other. A challenge to mononormativity alone might lead us to create a new binary: hybrid/non-hybrid, leaving the possibility of creating new hierarchies and new forms of mutual exclusivity.

Conversely, a challenge to binary oppositional categories alone might encourage us to conceive of identity as fluid, but our conceptualization would only include singular identities along a continuum. In fact, this is already happening in the bisexual and multiethnic communities, as these identities are reified as single separate categories; new boxes, if you will.

Alice and Kate were among the women with whom I spoke who pointed out the limitations of labels and categories as they are presently and popularly conceived. Alice describes her experience as "not being white enough to be white, or black enough to be black." Kate says, "you're more than being black, and you're more than being First Nations, and you're more than being white." These two explanations of personal identity reflect a struggle to come up with ways of describing the unique experiences of being hybrid. Alice and Kate see themselves as more than black or not black enough, more than white or not white enough. The difficulty they have with expressing who they are indicates that they strive to find words that describe their experiences in a mononormative world.

In the following sections, I will explore some of the evidence that supports the notion that mononormativity and binary oppositional categorization work together to maintain the invisibility and marginalization of hybrids. I explore some of the ways that mononormativity and binary oppositional categorization affect how we understand and use identity labels. The first point is that there is a lack of labels that describe hybrids, due to an exclusion of hybridity, in what Marilyn Frye calls our "active conceptual repertoire." Secondly, there is an awareness among hybrids of the limitations of labels when describing identity and community. And third, hybrids are conscious of the ease of

fitting into a mononormative label. Because hybrids have often been frustrated with the way people are labeled within our existing active conceptual repertoire, we can provide some strategies for coping with the limitations of such a framework. I explore some of these strategies in the final sections of this chapter, which include creating new labels, rejecting labels, and conceiving of labels as fluid and temporary.

A Lack of Labels for Hybrids

> In what language do I pray?
>
> Do I meditate in language?
>
> In what language am I trying
> to speak when I wake from dream?
>
> Do I think of myself as an American,
> or simply as a woman when I wake? (Der-Hovanessian 109)

There is a paucity of linguistic labels for those with hybrid identities, and if labels for hybrids exist, they are usually negative words used to describe "deviant" sexualities and "diluted" ethnicities (e.g., fence sitter, freak, half-breed, mongrel). In Woman Native Other, Trinh T. Minh-ha discusses the importance of words and the meanings they carry:

> The *abc* lesson says that for letters to become words and for words to take on meanings, they must relate to other letters, to other words, to the context in which they evolve—be it verbal or nonverbal—as well as to other present *and* absent contexts. (Words are think-tanks loaded with second- and third-order memories that die hard despite their ever-changing meanings.) (Minh-ha 21)

Words and labels provide us with a way of recognizing the existence of a particular thing. When we label something, we give it ontological value within a certain conceptual scheme; we are, what Marilyn Frye calls "ontologically committed" to that thing (Frye

161). Within a mononormative conceptual scheme, we are not committed to the idea of the hybrid; it does not fit into our "active conceptual repertoire." In "To Be and Be Seen: The Politics of Reality," Frye outlines three implications of this lack of ontological commitment. First, "there is no simple direct term in the system for the thing or class, and no very satisfactory way to explain it"; second, "the term which ostensibly denotes the thing is internally self-contradictory"; and third, "the thing could not exist in nature" (Fyre 161). These implications are all true for hybrids as we find ourselves struggling with terms that are inadequate, imprecise, or simply unknown.

Juliet discusses the term bisexual as an unknown and decontextualized word: "I didn't actually know the word until a few years ago. The thought never occurred to me" (Juliet). As hybrids, we often go through a process of discovery to find words to describe ourselves. When Frye wrote "The Politics of Reality" fifteen years ago, she suggested that lesbians were excluded from our society's active conceptual repertoire. Now, with films and television shows such as *Ellen*, *The Incredibly True Adventure of Two Girls in Love* (1995), and *In and Out* (1997), and out performers such as k.d. lang and Melissa Etheridge, we are seeing an increased visibility of lesbians and gays in public life and popular culture, suggesting that gay and lesbians are entering into our active conceptual repertoire. Bisexuality and hybridity are still largely excluded from the active conceptual repertoire of most North Americans and this exclusion is reflected in the struggles of hybrids as we try to find words to describe who we are. "I found out that that was a word I could be," Oriani says, "I know I'm not heterosexual and I guess I'm not a lesbian although I still don't know that. I wouldn't say that I would never at some point in the future call myself a lesbian, although I don't think that makes me any less bisexual now"

(Oriani). Even when we do find labels to describe who we are, Oriani illustrates that labels change over time and in different contexts. I discuss this fluidity in greater detail later.

The Limitations of Labels for Hybrids

How, then, do hybrids unite to end common experiences of oppression when there are inadequate labels to define who we are? Must hybrids, who do not fit into a mononormatively defined identity according to race, ethnicity, culture, or sexuality, continue to have to find the closest mononormative approximation to their identity? When I asked Oriani and some of the other bisexual women I spoke with what they thought of labels, there were various comfort levels with different terms. For example, during a discussion of labels that have to do with sexuality, Oriani discussed a number of different labels in an attempt to describe her hybrid sexuality:

> I identify with the word dyke—but not with the word lesbian—dyke in a broader way. I don't feel excluded when somebody says all of us dykes, whereas the word lesbian I feel very excluded from. Queer, I totally I identify with that word. I like it 'cause it's more inclusive; it's meant to include bisexual and transgender and anybody who wants to call themselves queer. (Oriani)

Barbara first came out as bisexual, and later found it more "useful" to call herself a lesbian, perhaps because the term lesbian is understood by both straights and gays:

> The way I came out was by calling myself bisexual. I think at the time the reason why I chose that label was two-fold: one, it is really how I felt at the time, and two, politically it was the best descriptive label I could choose…I continued to grow politically and my feminist consciousness woke and I think it was through that that I came to decide that if I'm going to choose any label the one that is actually more politically astute and probably a more useful label than bisexual is lesbian. (Barbara)

Why is it more useful? Useful to whom? Barbara has moved from a hybrid identity towards a mononormative identity which she feels is more "politically astute" and "useful." This move from a hybrid identity to a mononormative one also happens in terms of race. Helen speaks about the development of her racial identity:

> Growing up in Nipigon I would always have said that I was mixed, but not until I moved to Toronto did I start labeling myself and categorizing myself as a black woman. I found it very difficult to do that at first. I think it has to do with growing up in Nipigon and the lack of black representation and because I never identified as a black woman. (Helen)

Just as Barbara was discouraged from identifying as bisexual, Helen, who grew up in a white environment in small town Ontario, was discouraged from seeing herself as black. Her exposure to black culture began when she moved to Toronto and found black communities. In a mononormative world, her options were either to embrace the black part of herself and identify as black or reject a black identity. There is no "mixed" culture to speak of, and, according to Helen, she shifted her identity from mixed to black "as a form of empowerment." The lack of hybrid empowerment is another manifestation of mononormativity and further illustrates the limitations of labels for hybrids.

As soon as we ascribe labels, we think we begin to know a person and we speculate on their political position. An example of this leap of logic can be found in my brief correspondence with a bisexual feminist woman in Oakland who I ended up having nothing in common with. This experience led me to think about some of the assumptions I had made about "automatic connection." A bisexual feminist could be: a liberal feminist, married to a man, in love with a woman, a radical feminist, woman-identified, and so on. What I wish to illustrate is the fallacy of automatic connection based on a

particular label or any combination of labels alone. In her essay, Report from the Bahamas, June Jordan writes:

> Yes: race and class and gender remain as real as the weather. But what they must mean about the contact between two individuals is less obvious and, like the weather, not predictable...they may serve well as indicators of commonly felt conflict, but as elements of connection they seem about as reliable as precipitation probability for the day after the night before the day. (Jordan 29)

Labeling in an attempt to better understand people is almost always inadequate in revealing who someone really is. I agree with Gerri's explanation that, "categories have a use but when the categorization starts to shape how an individual within a category develops themselves or expresses themselves it's harmful then because initial generalizations made on a group of people may not apply to that one person" (Gerri). Barbara has this to say about labeling:

> Lesbians as much as anyone else have this really conservative tendency to just need a label; they need to know what you are. And often if you're a lesbian, it's like, "that's great, I understand what you are, I know everything about your life because I know this one thing." I think it's ludicrous and untrue. The same thing goes if you have the bisexual label. (Barbara)

The over-reliance on mononormative labels not only affects hybrids, it affects us all and limits the ways we communicate and interact with each other. We need to see labels as changeable and overlapping, as tools that only begin to help us understand each other and ourselves.

The Ease of Claiming a Mononormative Label

In a mononormative framework, it follows that a hybrid—who does not have a mononormative identity—will likely feel that it would be easier to claim a mononormative label. Many of the bisexual women I interviewed felt that it would be

easier to identify as a lesbian, for although lesbians are marginalized, their identity is mononormative. Dorothy says, "I think for many people I had to come out to—for most people it's a non-issue—but for a few I think it would have been easier if I would have been able to say, 'I'm a lesbian' " (Dorothy). This feeling is shared by Juliet who says, "When I think about telling people and having to explain that I'm bisexual, I think a lot of times it would just be easier to tell people I'm a lesbian. It's pretty self-explanatory…more people know it and somehow accept it, whereas being bisexual is just, like…weird" (Juliet). Oriani's words resonate with those of Dorothy and Juliet:

> I felt and I feel really isolated a lot of the time and certainly at the beginning I thought it would be so much easier if I was a lesbian and I still think that to some degree in terms of community, in terms of people understanding. My family would deal with that so much better, they all wish that I would just become a lesbian and get married and have a picket fence and all of that. (Oriani)

Part of the reason why bisexual women may feel that it would be easier to be lesbian is that most of the people around them—friends and family, for instance—have developed an understanding of what it might mean to be a lesbian, but have yet to conceptualize what it means to be bisexual. Meena also expresses her family's discomfort with her bisexuality:

> It would be easier for them to deal with if I just said I was a lesbian because there's a certain amount of stereotypes that everyone has in their head and attributes to certain categories of people, like "okay, if you're black I know all these things that I've set up in my mind that are supposed to be correct assumptions about you so I know how to deal with you." So with my parents they've set up these things in their heads to deal with lesbians but they haven't really thought about bisexuality and I think it's the same with being mixed. (Meena)

In addition to her bisexuality, Meena feels that people have trouble dealing with her because she is racially mixed.

Some lesbian feminists are not convinced that it is "easier" to be lesbian. For instance, Cheryl Clarke sees the label bisexual as one that is adopted by lesbians to feel safer, so they still have some remnant of the "normalcy" of "professed" heterosexual desire. In the anthology This Bridge Called my Back she writes:

> There is the woman who engages in sexual-emotional relationships with women and labels herself *bisexual*. (This is comparable to the Afro-American whose skin-color indicates her mixed ancestry yet who calls herself "mulatto" rather than black.) Bisexual is a safer label than lesbian, for it posits the possibility of a relationship with a man, regardless of how infrequent or non-existent the female bisexual's relationships with men might be. (Clarke 130)

She suggests that it is easier or "safer" for a lesbian to call herself bisexual, just as it is easier for the black woman who is part white and part black to call herself mulatto. While there may be some truth to this suggestion in the context of a racist and homophobic society which constructs black and lesbian as "other," Clarke negates the possibility that a bisexual mulatto may use these terms simply because this identity is what best describes her experience. In a later anthology, Clarke revises her earlier position:

> I see my lesbian poetics as a way of entering into dialogue—from the margins—with Black feminist critics, theorists and writers. 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.* (Clarke 224, my emphasis)

Black women's solidarity with black men, based on a common experience of racism in North America, provides the grounds for what Clarke calls a "polymorphous erotic." The proposition that a lesbian eroticism does not count out desire for men sounds a lot like bisexuality, though Clarke does not name it as such.

Contrary to Clarke's earlier notion that it is easier to call oneself bisexual or mulatto, the bisexual women who spoke to me shared feelings of frustration at being read as straight or lesbian and having to explain themselves. Juliet says:

> At my work, they all thought I was lesbian because I took a woman to the Christmas party. So then I took Alan to something. And they're like, "what's going on? What are you anyway?"...it just would be easier in a lot of cases if you could just be one or the other and you wouldn't have to explain it. But honestly, I wouldn't want to be straight. I'd rather be thought of as a lesbian than straight. (Juliet)

Juliet suggests that she would rather be seen as homosexual than heterosexual, indicating her commitment to queer politics. Barbara also shares this feeling when she says of her present relationship with a man: "No matter what happens with this relationship, I wouldn't want to present myself being this one thing, being heterosexual. I mean, the thought of calling myself heterosexual; that would blow my mind more than anything" (Barbara). Interestingly, although these and other bisexual women see their bisexuality as being similar to lesbianism, others believe that lesbianism is similar to female heterosexuality. Oriani says, "my mother sees lesbian as closer to what she [my mother] is than bisexual" (Oriani). This notion, which is also shared by my own mother, stems from the mononormativity of both lesbian and heterosexual identities.

The feeling these bisexual women express that it would be "easier" to fit into a mononormative label is yet another example of the exclusion of hybrids from our "active conceptual repertoire." That so many of the bisexual women I spoke with thought that it would be easier to fit into a marginalized category like lesbian, rather than a hybrid category like bisexual, indicates how powerfully mononormativity and binary oppositional categories reinforce each other.

Hybrids Resisting Labels: Celebrating Individuality

Because of the potential for misunderstanding when using labels, some people reject labels altogether. Some hybrids have this reaction as they feel the pressure to fit into mononormative oppositional categories. The celebration of oneself that is not necessarily tied to a particular category is a strategy I encountered among some of the women I talked to.[7] Alice resists self-labeling and moves towards celebrating her uniqueness:

> I've been thinking about it. People label people to fit in a specific category. And I never did, I never ever fit in a category…Why would I fight for that? That's who I am. Because there was a sense that something was missing. I had to learn who I was and then celebrate that. It was a process. (Alice)

Coming to terms with aspects of one's identity that are denied or that have been a source of shame is an important process. As Meena says, "It's a process. You have to come out of it saying, 'I'm not shit and I'm not god' " (Meena).

Ellen is another women I interviewed who resists self-labeling. She says, "I resist labels generally speaking. It probably does have its roots in the fact that I grew up with this confusion, this cultural confusion. It's there, it's still there now, and it's probably always going to be there" (Ellen). After the interview, however, Ellen felt that it was necessary to name her bisexuality until a time when her attractions to men and women become an accepted part of who she is. Indeed, many activists have pointed out the necessity to use labels and words to describe particular groups and to name and work to end a common experience of oppression, marginalization, or invisibility.

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[7] As Walt Whitman, who defied labels and wrote poems celebrating same-sex and heterosexual love, so eloquently wrote, "I celebrate myself and sing myself,/And what I assume you shall assume." (Whitman 29)

New Labels, New Meanings

The discourse around identity labels and naming indicates that hybrids, like other people in society, strive to find adequate words to describe themselves and their experiences. As we have seen, hybrids either resist labels or try to find the closest label that describes their experience. Another strategy for those who inhabit the margins is the use of new words, labels, and meanings. One example of this is Alice Walker's term "womanist," used by some black women who reject the term feminist as a label associated with a white woman's movement fraught with racism. Other examples include words such as pomosexual, queer, and multiethnic. Resorting to labels to describe a political position such as feminism is problematic. Bell hooks believes that women should think less in terms of feminism as an identity and more in terms of "advocating feminism." She says we must "move from emphasis on personal lifestyle issues toward creating political paradigms and radical models of social change that emphasize collective as well as individual change" (hooks 182).. When we talked about identity and labels, Alice explored these alternate terms:

> "Free spirited" is a term that I've heard around the black women's community because there are black women who are lesbian and bisexual—whatever—and identify primarily as free spirited because it's felt that the terms lesbian and bisexual are white women's terms and free spirited is more alive and has soul. Even the word "feminism," we felt that it was a white woman's term and so we came up with the term "womanist." That seemed to fit. Even hearing the words, to hear free spirited and womanist, it's like music to my ears. (Alice)

Alice says her experience of using terms like "free spirited" and "womanist" is like music to her ears because she has created her own sets of associations with those words; they are disassociated from a racist white women's history and movement. For a black woman, the terms lesbian and feminist may be loaded both because of the history they invoke

(i.e. a white woman's liberatory movement) and because of the misogynistic and homophobic reactions the terms evoke in society. Hybrids too strive to come up with terms that are like music to our ears.

Hybrids Understanding Labels as Fluid and Changeable

Overall, despite the pressures to fit into mononormative oppositional categories, there seems to be a feeling among many hybrid women that labels are chosen, fluid, and context specific. The idea of choice and the importance of context play particularly important roles in self-identification and labeling for those with hybrid identities. People who have hybrid or multiple identities can easily be chameleons. As Barbara explains:

> I started to choose how I identified depending on the situation I was in...I find that identifying as a lesbian is the most challenging. But for me personally I have a whole lot more turmoil and it's not resolved at all. I can't just say to myself, "oh, I'm a lesbian and that makes sense of my entire world." Because I don't feel like that. (Barbara)

Like some whose sexuality is hybrid, some racial, ethnic, and cultural hybrids also think that labeling and self-labeling is very context specific, so that labels shift according to the situation. Fatima says:

> I think it depends who's doing the asking. I don't think there's a straight answer. I mean I don't want to say that I'm Indian, because I'm not. I want to say that I'm Canadian, because that's what I am, and Indo-Canadian is way too formal, but it's the quickest way...people have often asked me what's my nationality...I usually start off saying I was born here. (Fatima)

Because of the stigma often associated with having a hybrid identity, some hybrids take on a mononormative identity in certain situations to make other people more comfortable or to fit in more easily. As Lily reports:

> If I'm in a crowd of lesbians, I'll say, "okay, I'm gay, I'm a lesbian." I think it's just a matter of the circumstances. What someone says at one given time really doesn't mean all that much; it's just the context of the situation…when I'm in a situation where I think maybe people will appreciate me more if I say I'm a lesbian, I'll do it, I think. But if it ever goes deeper than that, and we start talking, I'll explain that I like men too. (Lily)

Many of these hybrid women's identities change according to the context, either because when they are among lesbians they feel like lesbians and when they are among straight people they might feel more inclined to come across as straight, or because they want to feel a sense of belonging and be accepted in a particular community.

Another possibility is that identities change over time because of changing circumstances and feelings. Barbara explores the temporal fluidity of her sexuality:

> With myself, my sexuality is going through a change right now, it changed three years ago, it changed four years ago, it changes all the time. At the same time, when I'm in a crowd where I need to identify, you have to pick something because sexuality is still such an important issue and something that we're not comfortable with. (Barbara)

Kate explores the fluidity over time of her racial and ethnic identities:

> I identify as being black mostly, although I will say I'm mulatto, but then it's shifted in the last two or three years. I've started to talk about being Native and having Native blood…I still identify mostly as being black. I'll say I'm black, and then people will look at me, and I'll go, "well, okay, I'm mixed." (Kate)

Identity labels are not necessarily fixed; many of us are continuously juggling different labels, claiming different labels at different times and situations. Some people, particularly hybrids, treat labels like clothes that can be put on and taken off at will; they are not central to one's identity. I propose that if the label is the clothing, then it is stories and narratives that are the skin and bones.

Conclusion: A Hybrid Look at Labels

Labels will inevitably be based on broad characteristics and generalizations. Being hybrid often results in a heightened awareness of the shortcomings of using binary oppositional mononormative categories to understand people. Isis makes an analogy between simplified binary categorization and psychological models for understanding personality types. She illustrates the shortcomings of the two models of classification:

> It doesn't make sense. It's like the type A and B personalities and what we fit into and it seems so ridiculous just to think that someone could just look at me and say, "oh, you're a type A" and know everything about me. It's just ridiculous; that's not the way people are. Everybody's so completely different that you can't fit them into two categories. Maybe six hundred categories, but two! (Isis)

What seemed to make sense to most of the hybrid women I interviewed was to find labels and ways of talking about identity that take their hybridity into account. For Barbara this means accepting ambiguity. She says, "I'm a little bit more comfortable than most with being ambiguous to myself. In fact in some ways, that's the only way my sexuality makes sense, not to box it into a label" (Barbara). For Chris, this means relating her hybridity to other aspects of her life:

> I guess this shift—to be bisexual—it's been really great for me, it really makes sense, bisexual fits the other parts of my personality. I'm a visual artist. I love to write and I love working with sound. So I've never been able to stick to one media when I express myself creatively. I like to try to figure what material or thing will fit the idea…I can't specialize…with bisexuality, it feels like coming home in a way. (Chris)

For Fatima, hybridity means finding a balance that she is happy with: "If you grow up as a multiethnic person you're always struggling with what culture do you follow, how do you balance things, so that you come up with your own happy medium as a person" (Fatima). For me, hybridity poses a challenge to mononormativity and binary oppositional

categorization in exciting ways, furnishing possibilities for new ways of understanding and envisioning society that are revolutionary.

Despite the emergence of a new consciousness of hybridity, such as Gloria Anzaldua's notion of the "borderlands," the negative image of the hybrid is still deeply rooted in the way we think about identity. In the context of patriarchy, the suspicion, resentment, and animosity towards hybrids is compounded by misogyny, so that hybrid women are marginalized in two different but often reinforcing ways. Robert Young warns that, "there is no single, or correct, concept of hybridity: it changes as it repeats, but it also repeats as it changes. It shows that we are still locked into parts of the ideological network of a culture that we think and presume that we have surpassed" (Young 27). Rather than try to untangle the many significations of hybridity of the past, theorizing about hybridity must continue, particularly in feminist, postcolonial, postmodern, queer, and anti-racist discourses. In addition, it is crucial that hybridity be integrated into discourses around identity politics, as hybrid identities are increasingly being celebrated and claimed as positive identities. Fatima expresses her gratefulness for being hybrid:

> There are all these cultural pointers or societal pointers that tell you that it's got to be either/or. I think as a hybrid, I value both sides of myself a lot. I love talking about hybridity, the idea of how do you accommodate culture is so interesting…I think it's opened me up to learning about other cultures. I mean it's not negative at all…I wouldn't want to be just "plain Jane Anglo-Saxon." (Fatima)

Still, my sense is that feelings about hybridity and representations of the hybrid often remain ambiguous. Chris remarks, "I think people want things to be straight forward, not straight necessarily (laughter), but clearly defined because chaos and fluidity are very

threatening. It is full of possibility and excitement but you can also feel lost and isolated" (Chris).

I propose a valorization of hybridity in our discussions of identity politics. If we can celebrate hybridity despite the racist, colonial, and homophobic associations with the concept over the last century, we may have found a "lens" that moves us away from our proclivity to essentialize and beyond the stalemate of identity politics. By exploring some of the ways the term hybrid and the concept of hybridity have been used and abused in the past and the present, we can perhaps understand some of the reasons why people who are hybrid or "in-between" are viewed with suspicion and discomfort. Certain kinds of hybridity in particular have been and continue to be seen as threatening, such as racial, ethnic, cultural, and sexual hybridity. The reinforcing forces of mononormativity and binary oppositional categorization as frameworks for identity politics have done much to keep hybrid identities from emerging as positive options. In the next chapter, I show how these forces influence identity and community formation, and in chapter four, I explore the various forms of discrimination and oppression that result from mononormativity and binary oppositional categorization.

CHAPTER 3: IDENTITY AND COMMUNITY FORMATION

you tell me you don't
want to hear it, you don't
want to hear what I have to say

I tell you, *what you are doing to me now is*
killing me
negating my existence
denying me my voice, my life. (Manyarrows 190)

Introduction

The processes of identity and community formation have gained considerable attention in the last half of the twentieth century, particularly in North America. Heterosexist assumptions that everyone is straight are being challenged by discourses such as queer theory which address lesbian, gay, bisexual, and heterosexual identity formation and raise questions about the meaning and boundaries of identities. How many women does a woman have to sleep with before she is a lesbian? How many men before she is straight? Does sexual fantasy count? Does self-identification count? Recent discussions around the intersection of race, ethnicity, and culture found in some postcolonial and postmodern theories have also prompted questions. What does it mean to be black? To be white? Who has access to which identities? Where does cultural hybridity end and cultural appropriation begin? Is there a set number of years you have to live in a particular cultural context before you can claim this culture as part of your identity? Is there a shade of skin that marks the separation between "people of colour" and "white" people? In this chapter, I discuss the processes of identity and community formation in an attempt to answer some of these questions and explore some of the particular challenges that hybrids face during this process of formation.

The Limitations of Identity Politics and Theories of Fragmentation

> Taking us by and large, we're a queer lot
> We women who write poetry. And when you think
> How few of us there've been, it's queerer still.
> I wonder what it is that makes us do it,
> Singles us out to scribble down, man-wise,
> The fragments of ourselves. (Lowell 8)

In late twentieth century North America, identity politics converge with postmodernism and feminism, providing the context in which I discuss hybrid identity formation. Framed as it is by white supremacy, heterosexual privilege, and patriarchy, the discourse around identity politics is emotional. But many are tiring of the rhetoric of identity politics, characterized by accusations of "political correctness" and expressions such as "Why can't we just all get along!" This exasperation suggests that rather than abandon the discourse around identity politics, we need to change its direction—and attempt something new.

Feminist theorists have proposed that the multiple positions or "fragmentation" of communities leads to the notion that women's identities are themselves fragmented. Lawrence Grossberg describes identity fragmentation as follows:

> Identities are thus always contradictory, made up out of partial fragments. Theories of fragmentation can focus on the fragmentation of either individual identities or of the social categories (of difference) within which individuals are placed, or some combination of the two. (Grossberg 91)

This fragmentation usually refers to the recognition that race, ethnicity, culture, religion, gender, sexuality, class, ability, and a slew of other identities all exist within one person. In a postmodern mononormatively defined world, it is assumed that most of us fit into one identity and one community along a particular "axis" or "vector" of identity or community. Following this logic, a lesbian fits into a lesbian community and has a

lesbian identity. Generally, straight people will not be considered part of a lesbian community, although they may be gay positive, or "straight but not narrow." In a similar way, a black woman fits into a black community and has a black identity. In most cases, white women will not be considered part of the black community. The existence of black lesbian communities in urban centers demonstrates the fragmented identity that "emphasizes the multiplicity of identities and of positions within any apparent identity" (Grossberg 91). The notion of fragmentation has also been useful in recognizing and discussing the conflicts between different identities and communities; for instance, racism in a women's community or homophobia in a black community.

Many feminist and postmodern discourses which include a discussion of fragmentation still do not explicitly recognize that fragmented identities and multiple communities may be complicated by hybridity, creating at least two levels of fragmentation: one level involves multiple singular identities and another level involves multiple identities within a particular "axis." What is not recognized is the fragmentation *within* a particular axis or vector, felt primarily by hybrid individuals, which is the result of the basic mononormative assumption that there is a clear single category for each individual within a particular race, ethnicity, culture, or sexuality. Will a mulatto bisexual woman be accepted by a black lesbian community? In the last chapter, we saw how Kate is questioned about her sexuality by a black lesbian: she is suspect. And where does a white woman who grows up in the "Third World" situate herself in a society that is made up of white women and women of colour? A white woman who has more affinity with "Third World" experiences may be regarded with suspicion by women of colour: she too is suspect.

Identity Formation: Making Connections Between Sexuality, Ethnicity, and Race

> First they said I was too light
> Then they said I was too dark
> Then they said I was too different
> Then they said I was too much the same
> Then they said I was too young
> Then they said I was too old
> Then they said I was too interracial
> Then they said I was too much a nationalist
> Then they said I was too silly
> Then they said I was too angry
> Then they said I was too idealistic
> Then they said I was too confusing altogether:
> Make up your mind! They said. Are you militant
> or sweet? Are you vegetarian or meat? Are you straight
> or are you gay?
>
> And I said, Hey! It's not about *my* mind. (Jordan "Short note" 98)

Many of the mononormative assumptions which underlie identity formation make it difficult for hybrids to find an identity that describes who we are and a community that allows us to be ourselves. Several of the women I interviewed discussed the intersection of racial, ethnic, cultural, and sexual hybridity and how they have to struggle to integrate their hybrid identities:

> *I identify as bisexual. I see it so connected to my race. I think that one of the reasons that I feel comfortable about bisexuality is I was already forced to be comfortable with the fact that I was mixed race and that it's possible to be both.* So being bisexual, I always knew that there was something wrong, and I would write about it and try to affirm that I was indeed a dyke but it never felt right. But then I realized that being bisexual was an option and I totally think that being mixed helped me to feel like that was okay. (Meena, my emphasis)

Oriani also makes a connection between her sexuality and her ethnicity, although in her case, the associations between different forms of hybridity were made after claiming a bisexual identity. She says:

> *I think that coming out as bisexual has made me think about my ethnicity in different ways in that they both could come together to encourage me to think about a lot of other things in different ways, in less dichotomizing ways.* But when I came out as bisexual I don't remember thinking about mixed ethnicity and thinking that that had anything to do with it, but it's come out that way. And thinking about one sheds light on the other in terms of my experiences. (Oriani, my emphasis)

A number of bisexual activists have pointed out the connection between racial, ethnic, cultural, and sexual hybridity. "I need to speak on bisexuality," says June Jordan, "I do believe that the analogy is interracial or multiracial identity. I do believe that the analogy for bisexuality is a multi-cultural, multi-ethnic, multi-racial world view. Bisexuality follows from such a perspective and leads to it, as well" (Jordan 14). Another high profile bisexual activist, Lani Ka'ahumanu, made this connection in a speech entitled, "It Ain't Over 'Til the Bisexual Speaks" at the March in Washington for Lesbian, Gay, and Bi Equal Rights and Liberation in 1993. The following is an excerpt from her speech, which is in the form of a poem:

> No simple either/or divisions
> fluid—ambiguous—subversive
> bisexual pride challenges both
> the heterosexual *and* the homosexual assumption.
>
> Society is based
> on the denial of diversity
> on the denial of complexity.
>
> Like multiculturalism,
> mixed heritage and bi-racial relationships,
> both the bisexual and transgender movements
> expose and politicize the middle ground. (Ka'ahumanu 64)

Another author who has made the connection between different forms of hybridity is Ruth Colker in her book Hybrid: Bisexuals, Multiracials, and Other Misfits under American Law, in which she explores the legal implications of living as a hybrid. She

sees the term hybrid as an apt one for describing those who fall between bipolar legal categories such as bisexuals, transsexuals, multiracials, and the somewhat disabled (Colker xi). In her book, she makes the argument that there are serious legal implications of being hybrid in a society which depends so much on a bipolar framework. With books like Colker's, and the increasing number of people in North America who claim hybrid identities, the sense of displacement that is felt by more people as they do not fit into existing categories may provide important insights into cross-racial, cross-cultural, and cross-sexual understanding.

The Emergence of Multiracial, Multiethnic, and Multicultural Voices and Identities

> 2 sets of arms
>   reach across
> 2 different cultures
>   to give birth to
> 2 different entities
>   in one
>
> half breed = half devil
>   metis mestiza hupa
>   combo
> 2 in one equals
>   discrimination amongst
> 2 different cultures
>
> I fight I struggle to keep
>   identities
> I fight I struggle to keep
>   2 feet planted in one self (Tanguay 8)

In unprecedented ways, multiracial and multiethnic people are speaking about their experiences; they are writing articles, publishing anthologies, and forming

organizations.[1] In an article in the multicultural magazine Urban Mo-za-ik, Phalana Tiller writes about her frustrations with a U.S. census taker when she tries to explain that none of the boxes describe who she is as the daughter of a black mother and white father. Another article entitled, "Black, White or Other?" which appeared recently in the black lifestyle magazine Essence is also critical of the U.S. census system as it presently exists. In this article, Deborah Thomas, a multiracial woman, writes that "a new mixed-race category on the census would officially expose the fallacious American notion of racial purity" (Thomas 118).

The numbers of people are increasing whose experiences of oppression are at least in part due to their mixed heritage, whether it be their mixed race, culture, ethnicity, or religion. In the 1991 Canadian census, nearly 1 million people in Toronto identified themselves as having multiple ancestry. There is a clear demographic trend in Canada and the United States which indicates that white people of European descent will no longer constitute the large majority of the population in North America over the next few decades. Given current immigration and fertility rates, by the year 2055, groups now classified as minorities will outnumber whites of European descent (Stix 22). This shift will be even more dramatic in urban centers such as Vancouver, Toronto, New York, and San Francisco which are already so racially and ethnically diverse. For instance, in the San Francisco Bay area, whites make up 43 percent of the population, blacks 27 percent, Hispanics 14 percent, people of Asian origin 13 percent, and Native Americans 0.5

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[1] Examples of such anthologies include Two Worlds Walking: Short Stories, Essays, and Poetry by Writers with Mixed Heritages (1994) edited by Diane Glancy and C.W. Truesdale and Miscegenation Blues: Voices of Mixed Race Women (1994) edited by Carol Camper. Examples of organizations that have emerged include the Association of MultiEthnic Americans based in San Francisco and the International Interracial Association.

percent of the population ("San Francisco"). Projections of racial and ethnic diversity in North America are already a reality in many urban centers. Given the present census system of accounting for ethnic demographics, the figures for the San Francisco Bay area probably do not reflect an accurate representation of people of mixed heritage.

Many hybrids have experienced the ambivalence and confusion of living with a mixed identity, of being misunderstood, or of feeling part of an oppressed group and a privileged group at the same time. Our "living heritage," or the cultural heritage that comes from lived experiences in different cultures, needs to be valued in addition our ancestry. For instance, Kate's mother, who was mixed First Nations and white, identified with black culture:

> It's weird, instead of embracing Native culture, she embraced Black culture. My mom was blacker than I am. Everything was curry, spice, this, that, black art, black literature, and I'm thankful for that, because I learnt a lot about it even thought I didn't grow up with my black father. (Kate)

The intersections of racial, ethnic, and cultural identities become increasingly complex when we begin to recognize lived experiences of ethnicity and culture. Meena, whose mother is South Asian and whose father is British, discusses the tension of being this particular kind of hybrid:

> Being half a person of colour and half not, half colonizer, half colonized. And that's what the conflict is mostly about for me so that's what my activism has been centered around and my issues around identity have been around those things. Having a huge relationship to Indianness and a huge relationship to Britishness has been about more a different kind of division and different levels of privilege. (Meena)

Meena explains that her experience of growing up with a sense of being both the "colonizer" and "colonized" has been a central part of her identity formation and has

influenced her political activism. She points out further difficulties with her position as a woman who can "pass" as white:

> If I feel safe enough I'll say I'm quarter black too. But because people have actively denied me access to my colour heritage because I look white, I'm less inclined to claim it. Because people won't believe me and I don't want to have to go through that every time so usually I just claim to be half and half. (Meena)

Meena's dilemma is that her skin colour does not correspond to perceived notions of the relationship between race, ethnicity, and cultural heritage.

This experience is one that many hybrids, including myself, have shared, albeit in different ways. My living heritage, and by this I mean my lived cultural experiences which inform my cultural identity, is multicultural and interracial. I am the daughter of a white American mother and white French-Canadian father. From the age of six to fifteen, I lived in the Comoro Islands, Malawi, and Trinidad and as an adult, I have lived in India and Mexico. Since returning to Canada, most of my relationships have been inter-racial and inter-cultural. A journal entry indicates my sentiments about the complexity of my living heritage:

> April 1st 1993. I wish I was completely mixed. I wish my grandmother was East Indian, my grandfather Chinese, my other grandmother black and my other grandfather another whole mix altogether. The whole issue of appropriation of culture is so complex—who has the rights to access what culture? ... Race is so important, and at the same time it is meaningless. (Trépanier)

The experience of being born in one culture, growing up in another, and living as an adult in a third is one that is shared by more people as migration and hybridization increases. My own experiences growing up in Africa and the Caribbean have indelibly marked me. As a child in Africa and as a teenager in the Caribbean, my desire to be brown and "fit in"

co-existed with a sense that my whiteness was a sign of privilege. Among many of my friends, white was associated with Americans, who were envied for their access to the "American dream," but who were also ridiculed and stereotyped.

I am a teenager, and I have to prove that I can be just as "Trinidadian" as them. So I dance and wine to calypso music and speak the way my friends speak ("leh we go lime an' ting! All yuh make me real vex!") I have been accepted as a "Trini gyal," and one friend tells me that when she first met me she asked our classmates scornfully, "Who is dis gyal wit' de corn coloured hair?"

Corn coloured hair. I am a child in Africa, and my friends and I spend hours braiding beautiful black kinky hair. It is my turn to have my hair braided, and I giggle nervously. My hair is slippery and limp.

I am now a young woman in Jobner, a small village in Rajasthan in northwestern India, and the women I work with are astonished by the colour of my blonde hair; they ask me if I have a disease or if I have prematurely aged. Images of beauty; black thick hair and smooth brown skin. I want to look like the girls and women that surround me.

I am completing high school in Canada. Standards of beauty shift and I am now envied for my white skin, slim figure and blonde hair. But I still want to be brown.[2]

While in Malawi and Trinidad, my whiteness gave me a visibility I did not want, in Canada my whiteness renders invisible my experiences growing up in the "Third World." Can I call myself a Third World woman because of my lived experiences? My position as the child of academics growing up in Third World countries was a position of

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[2] All narratives in italics are based on my lived experiences as I remember them. This is not fact nor fiction; these are accounts that are true to my memories and feelings.

privilege in many ways, made possible by some of the structures put in place by colonialism. With this always in mind, I still wish to create a space where I can recognize and validate the impact of my experiences growing up in places where I was different and where I was sometimes viewed with suspicion.

Sexuality and Identity Formation: Bisexuality as a Hybrid Sexuality

> Q: What's in a name?
> Is bisexuality the Janus-face of female sexuality?
> Is the hybridity of our identity an ineffective dis-ease?
> What is the Janice face of bisexuality? (Williamson 58)

Like ethnic and racial hybrids, sexual hybrids such as people who are bisexual and transgendered, have been increasing their visibility through articles, publications, and conferences.[3] It has only been after the emergence of the feminist movement and the gay liberation movement that a bisexual "movement" and a positive bisexual identity is emerging. Although feminist psychologists such as Dorothy Dinnerstein and Nancy Chodorow were developing pro-bisexual theories as early as the 1970s, the publication of works which explore bisexual identity formation in empowering ways is a fairly recent phenomenon. Psychologist Beth Firestein has recently published an anthology entitled Bisexuality: The Psychology and Politics of an Invisible Minority, which provides counseling and theoretical perspectives on bisexuality. Other feminist books on bisexuality have been published recently such the anthology Closer to Home: Bisexuality

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[3] Bisexuals in the United States have a national magazine to call their own. It is based out of San Francisco and carries the tongue-in-cheek name Anything That Moves. Bisexuality has also featured as cover stories in the last few years in several magazines such as Newsweek ("Bisexuality. Not Gay. Not Straight. A New Sexual Identity Emerges" article by Leland) and The Advocate ("Beyond Bi" article by Gideonse).

and Feminism (1992) edited by Elizabeth Weise, and the anthology Plural Desires: Writing Bisexual Women's Realities (1995) edited by The Bisexual Anthology Collective (Acharya et al).

An example of the exclusion of bisexual women's realities in the eighties can be found in Marilyn Frye's essay "To Be and Be Seen: The Politics of Reality," in which Frye likens phallocratic reality to a dramatic production on a stage. She writes, "The motions of the actors against the stage settings and backdrop constitute and maintain the existence and identities of the characters in a play" (Frye 168). In short, men are the actors on the stage, heterosexual women are the stage hands behind the scenes, and lesbians are the audience. It would appear, to extend the metaphor, that no one thought to invite bisexual women to the show.[4] Frye expands on the idea of the play:

> There is nothing the actor would like better than that there be no such thing as stagehands, posing as they do a constant threat to the very existence, the very life, of the character and hence to the meaning of the life of the actor; and yet the actor is irrevocably tied to the stagehands by his commitment to the play…to escape his dilemma, the actor may throw caution to the wind and lose himself in the character, whereupon stagehands are unthinkable, hence unproblematic. (Frye 168-9)

A hybrid rewriting of the metaphor of the stage might propose that those in the theater—the actors, the stagehands, and the audience—would like to imagine that there is no such thing as hybrids, who do not participate in the play. Hybridity poses a "constant threat to the very existence" of binary oppositional categories. Furthermore, those involved in the dramatic production, like Frye's actors, may "lose themselves" in the play, in which case

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[4] A more sardonic extension of this metaphor might propose that bisexual women came to the theater, but were refused entry. Too often, bisexuals are not accepted by both the gay/lesbian community and the straight community.

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those outside the theater, those who do not conform to mononormativity, are "unthinkable, hence unproblematic."

For some people, bisexuality makes sense right away, and they know they are bisexual with certainty as their sexuality develops. For others, coming to a bisexual identity means going through a process of thinking one is gay, then straight, then bisexual. As Meena says, "I've gone through periods where I'm like, 'okay, I'm a dyke and I'm just going to deal with it and I'm going to do that.' And I've done that for a few months. And I've been like, 'no, that's wrong,' and then I've done the same thing with being 'het' " (Meena). Oriani had a similar experience of coming to a bisexual identity: "I was in a relationship with a man and then I broke up with him and then I started getting crushes on women and then I started to think that maybe I was a lesbian, and I thought that for a couple months maybe" (Oriani). In other cases, this process does not take mere months, but the shift—one way or the other—takes place after living for years as gay or straight. The circumstance of coming out as bisexual can be just as difficult as first "coming out" as lesbian:

> I'm coming out again and it's a very different coming out process. I'm finding it much more difficult than my initial coming out as a lesbian, which felt really scary as well; I mean it really created a lot of problems and stress in my life back then. But this is really different, it's open to a lot of interpretation from all sorts of different people…it's pretty damn tricky if you happen to get attracted to a man and you've been a lesbian for a while, and that happened to me. (Chris)

With mononormativity and binary oppositional categories reinforcing each other, the situation of loving men, then loving women, then loving men again is not seen as an acceptable possibility. An individual must be one or the other, and when Chris became involved with a man after living with a lesbian identity for ten years, she experienced

similar consequences—rejection, suspicion, fear—in a lesbian world as she did in the straight world when she first became involved with a woman.

Sometimes sexual identity formation is intricately tied up with politics. Chris makes a connection between her lesbian desire and her feminist politics. She says, "Before I came out as a lesbian it felt like a really big decision, and politically it felt like, 'oh yeah, I'm on track here.' In terms of my feminist ideals it fit in really well" (Chris). The political connection between lesbianism and feminism is one that Oriani also makes: "I became more politically active in feminist organizing and that connected me with more lesbians. I still hadn't met anyone except this one bisexual woman and it didn't occur to me that I could be bisexual" (Oriani). In her landmark essay, "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence," Adrienne Rich makes the connection between radical rebellion (against male tyranny) with the physical passion of women for women (Rich 57). This proposition does not take in account the possibility that men can be allies—erotically or politically—perpetuating the idea of "sleeping with the enemy"; a notion that is particularly problematic for women of colour who may share a common experience of racism or colonialism with men of colour. Similarly, it is an unconvincing argument for bisexual and heterosexual feminists who may not equate their desire for men with an acceptance of patriarchy.

Rich also introduces the notions of compulsory heterosexuality and the lesbian continuum, suggesting that the continuum includes the friendship and support women get from each other regardless of who they are sleeping with. She defines the lesbian continuum "to include a range—through each woman's life and throughout history—of woman-identified experience, not simply the fact that a woman has had or consciously

desired genital sexual experience with another woman" (Rich 51). Like Frye's stage metaphor, Rich's writing provided excellent theoretical frameworks for discussing the exclusion of hybrids, without naming them. For instance, in her discussion of the possible "double life" which women lead, she refers to a lesbian continuum rather than a bisexual (or even sexual) continuum. Theorizing in the eighties, Rich describes a fluidity within a framework of lesbian existence while at the same time failing to move beyond the infallibility of binary categories and mononormativity. A clear example of bisexual invisibility in Rich's article is in her placement of literary figures on the lesbian continuum, such as the bisexual poet H.D. She also explains that both Emily Dickinson and Zora Neale Hurston "...were drawn to men of intellectual quality; for both of them women provided the ongoing fascination and sustenance of life" (Rich 56).

Many bisexual and postcolonial theorists would agree with Rich that, "...we need a far more exhaustive account of the forms the double life has assumed" (Rich 67). Rich recognized the importance of an on-going discourse on sexual politics, demonstrating this awareness by including a letter from Marxist-feminists Ann Snitow, Christine Stansell, and Sharon Thompson who posit, "...a complex social model in which all erotic life is a continuum, one which therefore includes relations with men" (qtd. in Rich 69). I suggest rewording this statement by proposing a continuum which includes the possibilities of relations with women, or men, or *both women and men.*

Desire varies from one bisexual to another; it does not follow that one must desire men and women equally just because one is bisexual. There are as many ways to be bisexual as there are bisexuals. As Indigo Som, whose writing has appeared in both lesbian and bisexual anthologies, says, "My sexual orientation is towards creative people

of colour who can cook" (qtd. in Leland 50). Some bisexuals explain that they have a tendency to lean more towards one gender or the other. When I interviewed Dorothy, she felt that she leaned more towards women:

> Many people reject the argument that everybody's bisexual but I think everyone has the capacity to love, and it's just allowing yourself to recognize it, and I'm glad that I've recognized it. So that's why I use the word bisexual. *Probably right now I'm a bit more woman-identified.* (Dorothy, my emphasis)

When I interviewed Kate, she identified as bisexual and leaned more towards men:

> I was bi for a long time then about a year and a half ago, I was like, "oh, I'm just not going to be bisexual any more. I'm just heterosexual"...*I don't find as many women attractive as I find men attractive.* But I don't know, I definitely like having sex with women so that would definitely make me bisexual. (Kate, my emphasis)

These two experiences of desire illustrate the diversity of bisexuals in terms of gender preference. Bisexuals differ from one another in a multitude of other ways: some are monogamous, while others are nonmonogamous or polyamorous; some enjoy SM (sado-masochism), while others prefer "vanilla" sex; some are into threesomes, while others prefer a single partner; some are active in the queer movement, others are raising families in the suburbs, while others are doing both! Evidently, identity formation for bisexuals takes place very differently for different women. No one is "more" bisexual than anyone else.

Identity formation is often not easy, and this can be particularly true for people with hybrid or marginalized identities. This is what Isis has to say about her sexual identity formation:

> When I went and analyzed it and I knew more about being gay and being straight and being bi and I knew at that point that I couldn't be gay because I had too much sexual desire for men to be gay but then I had a lot of interest in women too and it just made sense. It never really occurred to me that you wouldn't be allowed to be bi. And then once I developed that into my identity I realized that being bi is a difficult thing to be. (Isis)

How did I become bisexual? Is it genetic? I know some of my father's cousins are gay men. Did having queer relatives unconsciously make me open to idea of queerness? Or was it growing up in multiple cultural contexts that made me more open to hybridity and multiplicity?

I am pre-adolescent and I am in love with a girl. We are lovers, but we don't call each other that. We hold hands and kiss, and then laugh at a private joke we share: everyone must think we are lesbians. People must think we are lesbians because this is what lesbians do. But we are not lesbians. And we are certainly not bisexual.

Now, we are fifteen going on sixteen and I tell her we can't do what we do anymore. It is now time for boys. It broke her heart when I said this—she tells me much later. No room in my teenage homophobic head to continue (not) being a lesbian. She is now in love with a man.

Now, I am twenty-six and I both embrace and reject the bisexual label. While for visibility and political reasons, I identify as bisexual, it is never enough to simply say that I am bisexual. I am constantly searching for terms to describe myself such as bi-lesbian, bisexual dyke, multisexual, omnisexual, polyamorous, polysexual, homoheteroautosexual, and pomosexual. I believe we cannot always define sexuality as a static singular identity. As long as I am told by some and made to feel by others that I am confused, promiscuous, sex-starved, unfaithful, and largely responsible for the spread of AIDS, I fight for

bisexual rights. I take on the bisexual identity as long as bisexuals are accused of not being able to let go of "heterosexual privilege" by people in the gay and lesbian community. And as long as it is not acceptable for the same person to love and desire both men and women, I identify as bisexual.

There is both internal and external pressure to fit into an existing, reified category, exemplified in this journal entry as I try to name who I am:

> 23rd October 1993. She is my lover. Now questions arise: does this mean that I am a lesbian? Well, I guess right now I am. But I also liked the men who were my lovers, and I can see myself being sexually involved with a man again. So am I heterosexual? No. Am I homosexual? No. I am, for lack of a better term, bisexual…or how about just SEXUAL!!?! (Trépanier)

The narratives of the women I interviewed in addition to my own narratives are consistent with Paula Rust's conclusion in her article, " 'Coming Out' in the Age of Social Constructionism: Sexual Identity Formation among Lesbian and Bisexual Women":

> Identity change should no longer be understood as a sign of immaturity but as a normal outcome of the dynamic process of identity formation that occurs as mature individuals respond to changes in the available social constructs, the sociopolitical landscape, and their own positions on that landscape. (Rust 74)

Sue George suggests that a positive bisexual identity can allow individuals to work out what it means to be bisexual. She believes that "one is bisexual through feelings, fantasies, attractions, identifications, friendships, community and political activity—whether one is celibate, in a monogamous relationship with a person of either sex, or having multiple relationships" (George 182).

Belonging to Community: The Wisdom of Rain Puddles

The previous two sections dealt with hybrid identity formation, focusing first on race, ethnicity, and culture, and then on sexuality. The next few sections in this chapter address community formation as it relates to individual identity formation. Community may develop around a particular disability, a common experience, or a passion for Star Trek. Most of us are not just part of one community; we have multiple communities which play differing roles in our lives and have differing levels of influence on our identity formation. Communities overlap like the ripples in a rain puddle, like Minnie Pratt's "world of overlapping circles" (qtd. in Gwin 900).

When a group of people experience oppression, they often form a space or a community that is distinct and sometimes separate from mainstream society. This "space" or community takes many different forms, ranging from social spaces such as bars or clubs, to support groups that deal with specific issues. What constitutes community is not necessarily highly structured; it can include friends, role models, and the people who share your joys and who you turn to in times of need. A community should provide support, love, and companionship. When communities form, there are sometimes particular criteria for acceptance. For example, to be accepted in the lesbian community, one must be a woman who has sex with women. Conforming to certain rules results in a common set of customs, beliefs, experiences, and histories that are shared with other members of that community.

What happens when a hybrid has characteristics of both a marginalized community and the dominant (i.e., white, Western, heterosexual) community? Or, what if a hybrid has multiple marginalized identities? What is their identity? Where is their

community? Must they create their own hybrid communities? These are questions that people of mixed ethnicity and mixed sexuality may face. Barbara, who identifies as a lesbian and has been part of a lesbian community for several years, expresses the difficulties of fitting into this established community because of changes in her circumstances:

> Now that I'm in a relationship with a man I'm finding it difficult to continue to be a part of the women's community in the same way that I was. I mean it's very subtle—it's like heterosexism in that way. It's not a particular person saying to me, "oh, you're with a man and that's terrible." It's just, there's a construction of community that goes on in the women's community and the lesbian community that men are not central to...what it means in my life, now that I'm more bisexual than ever, is that it's really hard to continue to keep my place. (Barbara)

Barbara's difficulty in situating herself in community is an experience that many hybrids share. In the next two sections, I explore the struggles hybrids face in belonging to communities.

My life is like a rain puddle. I am part of a queer community, a lesbian community and a women's community; they ripple into each other. I am also part of a Parsi (Zoroastrian Indian) community, by virtue of my partner's ethnicity. I am part of an artistic community, through my participation is art shows and film festivals. I am also part of an international development community, an activist community, and an academic community. Many of these communities overlap; they are not separate spheres, but rather rings that change depending on my particular circumstances at any particular time, like ripples in a rain puddle. Community is formed in different ways, with each rain drop representing some aspect of my identity or an activity, belief, or political conviction. The rain puddle represents the complex reality of community formation, always changing and overlapping.

Racial, Ethnic, and Cultural Hybridity and Community Formation

> I am half, my children half again,
> our blood thinning as our skin whitens,
> the half-life of my culture one generation long.
> My sisters don't recognize in me
> the long cry back to the high hills
> where I watched my sheep,
> a warm cape for the chill night. (Rodrigues 30)

In her recent novel, Leave it to Me, Bharathi Mukherjee writes, "If you're part ethnic Chinese, part French Vietnamese, definitely part Pakistani and part you-never-figured-out-what, what does that make you?" (Mukherjee 229). This question represents the complexity of ethnic and racial identity formation that exists for an increasing number of people in North America today. The intersection between race, ethnicity, and culture is not often clear; and yet these are words that are used with so much emotion and imbued with so much meaning. How do multiethnic or multiracial individuals fit into community? They are similar to their parents, but are also different, and may not be accepted or may not feel at ease in either of their parent's cultural milieus. Community is often, but not always, made up of families or individuals of the same ethnicity. People who are of a particular ethnicity or race will generally have the support and solidarity of their family, which is in contrast to gay, lesbian, and bisexual identity formation, in which community is generally separate from traditional family structures. Gay, lesbian, and bisexual individuals often get little or no support from their families for their "chosen lifestyle."

Issues around race, racism, cultural appropriation, and representation are not getting any simpler. A historical legacy of virtual genocide of First Nations peoples added to a history of slavery and racist laws in North America have ensured the

subordination and suppression of non-white peoples well into the twentieth century. Moreover, the intersection of race, ethnicity, and culture is becoming increasingly complex as hybridity is increasingly acknowledged. Still, scholars are grappling with definitions and distinctions between the concepts of race, ethnicity, and culture. Until recently, race, ethnicity, and culture were equated. Sneja Gunew points out that the notion of racial or genetic purity has been fundamentally challenged since the Second World War:

> At this juncture, we recall that the link between genes and culture is always a problematic one and shapes such questions as: does one write differently as a woman or as an 'ethnic'? Nowadays 'race' tends to be spoken of as a social formation rather than in terms of bloodlines. (Gunew 9)

The existence of racial, ethnic, and cultural hybrids supports the notion that race, ethnicity, and culture are social constructions. Bloodlines in North America are so mixed; yet we still cling onto simplified notions of racial purity and ethnic saliency.

Social formations are powerful formations. Ellen describes how ethnic communities are reified:

> I think most ethnic groups do it. You go to a new place and why wouldn't you choose to hang around with the people you have something in common with? And so a wall gets built up, and the more people that come and join, the higher the wall gets and it's really hard to break it down. (Ellen)

Proponents of racial and ethnic purity point out that these "walls" serve to preserve race and ethnicity. The assumption that admixture necessarily leads to dilution echoes the nineteenth century position which sees hybridity as a threat. As long as racial, ethnic, and cultural groups do not accept hybridity, members of these communities will feel fearful and threatened by admixture and dilution. Although it is an important option for visible minorities to "stick to their own kind" in a white racist society, this kind of exclusivity

can limit avenues for communication and is likely to prevent hybrids from joining communities in complete ways.

An important aspect of community formation is the question of visibility. What are the indicators that mark people who belong to a particular racial, ethnic, or cultural community? Dress, behavior, skin colour, language, religion, food, and other indicators mark us as belonging to particular communities. Sometimes these markers become ambiguous or unintelligible in the case of hybrid women. Meena relates:

> There have been so many times when I've been sitting there on the bus or in a class room and there'd be a group of Indian women talking in a way that I recognize in my own family and I'd not be able to participate and not have them identify me. Just being constantly separated from your community by your skin which is what usually brings you together. (Meena)

Being racially ambiguous can have profound effects on the ways in which people interact with you. Naomi describes another consequence of being racially hybrid:

> I don't think that a lot of First Nations people feel that comfortable approaching me because I'm so fair and I look different so they're not too sure. But a person who looks more First Nations, it's easier for them to walk up to them and say whatever. But with me a lot of people look at me and they look confused, trying to figure out what I am. (Naomi)

Visual clues often tell us who does and does not belong to a particular community, but it is clear that women who are mixed race blur these clues.

Hybrid Sexuality and Community Formation

> Here, there is a circle of lesbians, I stand within it.
> Here, there is a circle of bisexual women, I stand within it.
> Here, where these circles overlap, I stand.
> In this sweet, fresh space I am history, I am present and I am future.
> There is no point in being afraid of anything.
> Especially yourself. (Decter 9)

In the case of sexuality, the organizing characteristics of community are somewhat different from ethnicity and race, as many queer individuals are rejected from their "traditional" families, and are forced to create new "families" of partners and friends. A highly structured example of this phenomenon is the "houses" that are formed in the black gay community in Harlem, whereby gay men belong to a particular house and take on the roles of "mothers" and "fathers."[5]

Much like racial and ethnic community formation, the formation of a queer community is based in part on sets of common experiences of oppression in society. Gerri says:

> If something really terrible did happen to me I know that there's people to turn to in the community. I definitely feel that there's pluses. I feel like I fit in the community. I can be sitting down and having a chat, and you're talking to the person and it's like "yeah, I've been through that, I totally understand what you're saying," and meanwhile, you talk to anybody else you almost feel bad for saying things that you're thinking. You almost have to censor what you say and what you do. (Gerri)

Queer people often go to each other for support because there is an assumption—oftentimes accurate—that people in the queer community will be more understanding of experiences of homophobia and heterosexism. Yet, as the queer community insulates

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[5] An excellent portrayal of the lives of these black gay men is rendered in the documentary *Paris is Burning* (1991), which was filmed between 1985 and 1989.

itself from the heterosexual community and as the heterosexual community continues to make people in the queer community feel like they have to "censor" themselves, the two communities have fewer opportunities for communication and greater possibilities for misunderstanding. As the queer community becomes reified, sets of "cultural indicators" develop to identify and strengthen the community. Proof of this phenomenon is the existence of a queer culture. According to Oriani, "Queer almost feels like it's submerged in a queer culture and less concerned with fighting heterosexism…it has got its own set of cultural norms, its own set of standards, but because it exists in a straight world it does challenge heterosexism…it's a big city phenomenon" (Oriani).

The visibility of sexual identity can be as ambiguous as racial identity when we try to make sense of who someone is based on how they look. The idea that you can "look" queer or look like a lesbian is perpetuated not only by heterosexist stereotypes, but also by pressure within the lesbian community to look certain ways. This is true primarily in situations such as the bar scene or at certain events such as demonstrations or rallies. Dorothy says:

> I think it's also problematic if we try to look queer. As much as I'm attracted to tattooed lesbians with nose rings and ball caps who wear jeans and boots with their keys hung off their belts, I mean that's a role too. I don't think that it's bad; I mean we always play roles, I think, as long as we recognize it. (Dorothy)

As in the case of race, ethnicity, and culture, visual clues are used to immediately identify members of a particular community. Women who are more butch or who conform to certain lesbian "looks" are often seen within the community as being more truly lesbian and their sexuality is not generally questioned. Similar to darker-skinned people of colour, "visible" lesbians are higher on the hierarchy of oppression because they

theoretically experience less heterosexual privilege and more homophobia than queer women who have a more "straight" feminine appearance (often referred to as "femmes"). Again, hybrids and those who are non-conformist can challenge some of the ways in which "looks" are constructed. What about the straight or bisexual woman who looks like a dyke and is therefore a visible target of homophobia? Should she be able to join a group like "The Lesbian Avengers"? The saying "she's queer in the streets and straight in the sheets" implies that a straight woman trying to pass as gay is co-opting a "lesbian chic." This appropriation is parallel to that of black culture by white, middle-class America. There is often a lack of respect and understanding of certain "ethnic" or "queer" looks as they are commodified by the mainstream. At the same time, by moving into the mainstream, marginalized cultures and their symbols may become more visible and the possibility for intercultural understanding may be increased.

Gay and lesbian communities can be just as repressive as the heterosexual mainstream community in expecting people to behave and live according to certain norms. Sometimes the norms of gay communities do not look very different from the norms of the heterosexual world. As Lily attests:

> When I went back to Vancouver and I became very active in the gay community, I found it to be just as annoying as the straight world, as far as people just trying to meet people to have sex with. It might just be me; I worry when I meet people that they're trying to pick me up or they're thinking that I'm trying to pick them up. (Lily)

Bisexual women are viewed with suspicion by some lesbians, while other dykes see bisexual women as valuable additions to the lesbian community. Sidney Abbot and Barbara Love, who both identified as lesbians in 1972, wrote:

> The most important group yet to speak up in the women's movement on the whole topic of sexuality may well prove to be the bisexual woman...bisexual women bring out fears of homosexuality in straight women and also fears of heterosexuality in women who live as lesbians. (qtd. in George 45)

Nonetheless, Sue George points out that bisexual women continue to be excluded in political lesbianism and revolutionary feminism. In the remaining sections of this chapter, I further explore some of the implications of being hybrid in a mononormative world, suggesting a number of different coping strategies that hybrids use and positions that hybrids inhabit as a result of binary oppositional categorization.

Coping with Identity and Community: Inhabiting Multiple Communities

There are a number of ways that hybrids have found to cope with the pressures of mononormative identity and community formation. One of the ways in which women with hybrid identities have dealt with their hybridity is by inhabiting multiple, sometimes conflicting communities. In her essay on "world" traveling, Maria Lugones suggests that there are multiple worlds within one society. She writes:

> A "world" in my sense may be an actual society given its dominant culture's description and construction of life, including a construction of the relationships of production, of gender, race, etc. But a "world" can also be such a society given a nondominant construction, or it can be such a society or *a* society given idiosyncratic construction. (Lugones 281-282)

Lugones describes four ways which create a sense of ease in a particular world: first, by speaking the language, or *knowing* the norms; second, by not only knowing the norms but also *embracing* the norms, or what Lugones calls, "being normatively happy"; third, by having relationships with the people in that world, or what she calls "being humanly

bonded"; and finally, a fourth way of being at ease is by having a shared history (Lugones 284).

Hybrids may inhabit both the dominant culture's world and the nondominant construction, or they may inhabit a number of dominant worlds or a number of nondominant worlds; in either case, they are often pressured to select one or another world and may not feel at ease in any world. How can one be a colonizer and colonized, or oppressor and oppressed at the same time? It is a failure of imagination resulting from a rigidity of categorization, and a commitment to dichotomous thinking that creates a situation in which people with hybrid identities do not feel completely themselves in any one "world."

The criteria Lugones outlines for feeling at ease do not easily apply to hybrid women because her analysis of feeling at ease in a particular world assumes that one has *at least* one world to feel at ease in. Hybrids may not even find one community in which they feel completely at ease. Bisexual, mixed and culturally displaced people, as well as other hybrids are often forced to be "world" travelers because there is an increased likelihood that they will not inhabit just one world. Isis explains how she inhabits multiple worlds:

> I have a really varied community. I have different groups of friends. I live with two lesbians and my landlady is a lesbian and I live in a lesbian area but that's not so much for the lesbian aspect, but it's for the multicultural aspect that I live there. My best friend is a bisexual multiracial mixed woman, but I have another community. I used to work at Granville Island and that's where I hang out and go for beer and they're all straight expect for a couple of gay men. (Isis)

Lugones adds that, "we inhabit worlds and travel across them and keep all the memories" (285). My own experiences of both literal and metaphorical world traveling have made

me value memory and fear forgetting, and this is an experience that is shared by some hybrids who may world travel between spaces, identities, and communities.

Experiences of being part of multiple communities clearly have both benefits and limitations. Inhabiting multiple communities presents hybrids with joys, insights, and frustrations. The possibility of having more than one community is seen by some hybrids as a positive thing:

> I think that one of the benefits of being bisexual is being able to identify with different groups. You can identify with lesbians—because you know the issues they face, and you often know what it's like to be involved in a lesbian relationship, be involved in a relationship with a woman—as well as people who identify as straight, if you have been involved in a traditional heterosexual relationship in your life. (Dorothy)

This ability to move between communities, inhabit different spaces, and understand aspects of the experiences of members of multiple communities can be enriching and exciting.

Balancing Multiple Worlds: Feelings of Not Belonging

> who are we?
> the ones who dance between worlds
> tossed in the windstream
> that slips between the clouds
> noblewomen in exile (Malanka 157)

Many hybrids share a feeling that we do not belong anywhere, that each community presents some form of "dis-ease" and that we are "in-between worlds." A number of the hybrid women I interviewed expressed feeling a sense of loss of place, a sense of being "between two worlds." As Juliet says, "I do feel that I'm living between two places, even though by right I should have a place of my own. No matter how much

we say 'no, we are who we are, and this is our place,' we still end up feeling that we're in between places" (Juliet). The experience of not feeling at ease in mononormatively defined communities is expressed by Barbara:

> In the way that someone who's lesbian goes into work and can't really talk about their partner and can't really express themselves fully; I do feel that in the lesbian community. And I feel the other side when I'm looking awfully darn heterosexual with this boy. Some people have no idea that I have this lesbian side and I hear heterosexist comments, homophobic comments. I'm really not used to hearing that kind of stuff at all. I definitely get it from both sides. (Barbara)

Not fitting neatly into a particular category can lead to feelings of displacement. Feelings of not belonging are also true for Ellen who is half-British and half-Indian:

> I never felt accepted. I never felt part of the group, never did the whole time I was in Antigonish....I've always felt that I didn't really belong here or anywhere. I mean I've been to India and I definitely don't belong there. I don't belong up in Toronto with my family. I'm the black sheep of the family, I'm the Westernized one. And then when I'm here with Canadian friends they think I'm very Indian. I have never belonged. Somehow I seem to be coming to terms with that. (Ellen)

In her attempts to belong, Ellen struggles with geographic locations, trying to make sense of belonging though place. This approach has been explored by various scholars and anthropologists, such as Claude Lévi-Strauss' notion of "dépaysement" and Deleuze and Guattari's "deterritorialization" (Visweswaran 105). This sense of displacement can result in frustration and anger for some women:

> Something that's really frustrating is I'm trying to learn about my culture and about blackness but I'm emerged in all this whiteness all the time and it's so difficult for meeting other people who are black, for exploring any issues around being black. Things that I want to learn for myself and about myself are difficult because I don't have a sense of personal community. *Sometimes it's like I have one foot in one world and the other foot in the other and I'm trying to balance in both of them but not really knowing how*. (Helen, my emphasis)

The experience of displacement that hybrids feel can be exacerbated by the conflicts between an individual's race, sexuality, gender, class, or other identities. For example,

the experience of homophobia in a particular racial or ethnic community is reflected in Alice's comments, "Being black in Nova Scotia, religion plays a big role. Many of us belong to the Baptist denomination. People within the black community, it's one of the first things they point out is what a sin it is to be gay" (Alice). Inversely, the experience of racism within predominantly white queer or feminist organizations or communities can be emotionally draining and alienating for queers of colour and women of colour who wish to do feminist work.

Another factor that may intensify feelings of displacement is the situation of being hybrid in more ways than one. Of the women I interviewed, Barbara, Ellen, Kate, Meena, and Oriani identified as both bisexual and mixed race. While they saw connections between their racial and sexual hybridity, they also expressed the frustration of having to cope with more than one kind of hybridity. Meena expresses this sentiment:

> I'm not active around queer rights and one of the reasons is that I've had so much trouble with the whole race thing. I know that the queer community has trouble dealing with bisexuals and that there's been a lot of conflict. There are parallels. I don't want to do that again. (Meena)

Meena explains that she is forced to have white experiences and person of colour experiences but not mixed experiences. By staying away from queer activism, she is trying to avoid being forced to have gay experiences and straight experiences but not bisexual experiences.

Some hybrids cope with the feeling of not belonging by being adaptable. Isis discusses her adaptability:

> I don't fit in. I certainly don't fit into the lesbian community…or the straight community. So I can't say that I've ever actually wanted to fit in to one or the other. I can adapt myself to fit in to a certain extent. I can't do it for a long period of time. I feel like I'm shutting a part of me down, and I can't do that. (Isis)

Alternately, feelings of not belonging can create a stronger sense of individuality and pride. When I asked Alice what she felt about belonging and identity she said:

> Feeling very different. Not being a part of any community. A sense of not belonging anywhere. On the other hand, being grown up now I see it as a positive thing. Yes, I am unique and that in itself gives me pride. Proud to be who I am. And I'm learning the language to express who I am. (Alice)

As hybrids continue to feel that we are balancing between communities, we find ways to cope with feelings of displacement by being adaptable and learning new ways of expressing who we are.

Hybrid Spaces and Coalition Building: Moving Towards Inclusion

Activists and theorists such as Black, Third World, and radical lesbian feminists have emphasized the need for people of colour, lesbians, or members of any oppressed group to have their own "safe space." In this way, women of colour who are angry as a result of the double blow of racism and sexism can take time away from whites to heal. Ruby Rich takes a look at race relations in North America today:

> The politics of race are more present than ever, but relations between the races seem to be the worst in many years, maybe in my/your lifetime. Races collide! But more often, they don't. Separatism, self-determination, and old-fashioned segregation—both enforced and elected—have made social spheres more and more uniracial. (Rich 318)

Marilyn Frye defines feminist separation as "separation of various sorts or modes from men and from institutions, relationships, roles and activities which are male-defined, male-dominated and operating for the benefit of males and the maintenance of male privilege—this separation being initiated or maintained, at will, by women" (Frye 96). We can apply this definition to race or sexuality by simply replacing "male" with "white"

or "heterosexual". This expanded definition might read: separation from institutions, relationships, roles, and activities which are *white or heterosexually* defined, *white or heterosexually* dominated and operating for the benefit *of whites and heterosexuals* and the maintenance of *white and heterosexual* privilege—this separation being initiated or maintained, at will, by people of colour and queers. In her essay "Bridge, Drawbridge, Sandbar or Island," Gloria Anzaldua discusses this separatist reaction to racism:

> I think that some women-of-colour are, in these reactionary times, in these very racist times, choosing to be islands for a little while. These race separatists, small in numbers, are disgusted not only with patriarchal culture, but also with white feminism and the white lesbian community. To be an island, you have to reject certain people. (Anzaldua 223)

However, Anzaldua also points out that being an island cannot be a way of life. If separatism is a protective reaction against racism, homophobia, and sexism, it must be a temporary measure, particularly when it comes to forming alliances to end white supremacy, heterosexual privilege, and patriarchy.

Hybrid women, who often blur the categories "us" and "them"—by sometimes embodying both "us" and "them"—pose a challenge to the notion of separate space. Meena discusses the pain and anger she felt when she was discouraged from joining a group made up of people of colour:

> My aunt was involved with a group called "Roots of Resistance" and it was a support and action center for people of colour and I remember I really wanted to get involved with it. She's my own blood and she's actively denying me this space, saying, "no, you can't be there, because you're an invisible person of colour. You can't go, you'll hurt someone, you'll make someone feel uncomfortable"...I was crying. (Meena)

Through these kinds of experiences, hybrid women are beginning to challenge the boundaries of separate space. All of us are affected by mononormatively defined spaces,

but it is hybrid women who feel the effects most profoundly. The rationale for creating separate exclusionary spaces does not recognize the possibility that there are "white" women, like Meena and myself, who have a deep commitment to anti-racist work and a profound connection with "non-whiteness" by virtue of family, ancestry, or lived experience. Nonetheless, I recognize the necessity for separate spaces in a society that is still so racist, homophobic, and sexist. Oriani says that she has no problem with "lesbian-only space." She adds, "I think all groups, especially marginalized groups, should have a space that excludes whoever they feel they need to exclude in order to get what ever they want" (Oriani).

Given that hybridity suggests fluidity and temporality, is the notion of a hybrid space an oxymoron? Some of the women I spoke with suggested that hybrid spaces can have a similar function as spaces created by marginalized groups. Until hybrid identities are seen as legitimate, it can be argued that spaces which exclude those with mononormative identities are necessary, as Juliet suggests:

> I would have felt more uncomfortable if I knew that there were straight people there and gay people there, rather than people who were really trying hard to deal with these bisexual issues. I think you need that space to get together and support each other and figure out how you feel, how to deal with things. But it worries me because I don't want people to get stuck in those spaces and not get together with other communities. It's just so segregated and that bothers me. (Juliet)

By warning against getting "stuck" in separate spaces in addition to pointing out her greater comfort in a separate space for bisexuals, Juliet points out the limitations as well as the value of separate space. I argue that we need to see separate spaces as an unfortunate necessity and that we need to work towards spaces that are hybrid, spaces that celebrate diversity and find strength in difference.

Because being hybrid often defies categorization and requires narratives to explain positionalities and realities, it is difficult to define what criteria would determine who belongs to a hybrid community. Isis says, "It's so hard to find a bisexual community. I don't think you can even have a bisexual community because then that would be excluding. I think bi to me is not about exclusivity and so if we were a community we would be excluding people. That's the way I see it" (Isis). In recent years, bisexual communities have been emerging in many urban centers in North America. More than ever before, there are bisexual support groups, international and local conferences on bisexuality, and social situations where bisexuals can meet. While the lack of a bisexual look, culture, and history still make bisexuals a relatively invisible group, this is slowly changing, as t-shirts, buttons, and symbols such as the blue triangle express bisexual realities. Visible bisexual symbols, added to a short history of bisexual activism, inform the public of the existence of bisexuals with positive self-identifications.

I suggest that hybridity forces us to see identity or community formation and construction differently, and it encourages us to deal with racism and homophobia in different ways. The increased visibility of mixed people, bisexuals, and hybrids is changing the ways we understand gender, race, and sexuality. Wendy Lee-Lampshire suggests that:

> Perhaps the sense of disloyalty experienced by some bisexual women is in part the result of a lesbian politics lacking a conception of subject capable of embodying both cultural and sexual multiplicity. Any lesbian ethic grounded on resistance to oppression must recognize the multiplicity of sexualities within lesbianism in the same way that it must recognize the cultures, ethnicities, and religions that inform the perspectives of its community. (Lee-Lampshire 44)

Perhaps one of the difficulties we have in understanding what a hybrid community would look like lies in the explicit recognition of diversity that hybridity encourages. Juliet describes a bisexual group that she is involved with:

> The diversity of people that show up in the group, they're anything from artists to computer programmers, who are fifty or fifteen…You kind of forget that we're in a group because we're bisexual and we may have nothing in common other than that. There's maybe more you have in common with someone from another group or in the lesbian community. (Juliet)

With the exception of established bisexual communities in a number of urban centers in North America, communities for bisexuals and hybrids in general are still difficult to find. Barbara says:

> I think right now quite often there isn't a community for people with hybrid identities, whoever that may be. Like, I don't feel that there's a bisexual community in the same way that there's a lesbian community…So I can see the benefits of people with hybrid identities getting together and talking about their experience and then identify some of their experiences and coming to build community over time…but of course that would create a more highly articulated sense of self and probably create a binary between lesbians and bisexuals…but in some ways I think that building of identity and community needs to happen before we can just all meld into one again. (Barbara)

Barbara discusses the benefits of forming a hybrid community based on a common experience of oppression, which, she also points out, leads to a more "highly articulated sense of self." It is with this sense of self that hybrids can then face the mononormativity of our society and work to build bridges once again and form new inclusive communities. Sue George recognizes that in order to work for change in attitudes about sexuality, we must work together on different oppressions:

> A society in which true freedom of sexual expression is possible would require the transformation not just of attitudes to sexuality, but of all areas in which oppression operates. Bisexuality is, will be and has to be part of the struggle to build that society. (George 199)

George's statement indicates an awareness of other forms of oppression which must be dismantled simultaneously in order to create a society that is more equitable. Naomi reiterates the notion that working together rather than separately ultimately has the most promise when she asks, "How can people learn about each other by being separate? By reading someone's literature? That's not enough. You've got to get used to that person writing that book. Human contact is really the answer to a lot of things" (Naomi).

Conclusion: A Hybrid Look at Identity and Community Formation

As we have seen, multiethnic and bisexual individuals deal with community formation in a number of ways: we may be part of multiple communities, we may choose one community over others, or we may form new communities based on our unique hybrid identities. While many hybrids experience the possibility of choice in terms of what communities we belong to, and what identities we claim, none of these choices may be satisfactory. "I love being Indian, but there are a lot of things that I disagree with, but I think being hybrid lets you choose what. And that's what I've done. I've chosen what I want…I've found a group of people that will accept me and who will think it's perfectly normal" (Fatima). Hybrids are often made to feel that we must choose a mononormatively-defined category. "Maybe I *am* white, maybe I should just give it up and *be* white," Meena says, "As if you have to do your activism from either a white space or a people of colour space...it totally pisses me off, it totally makes me mad" (Meena). In terms of sexual desire and experiences of sexuality, a self-identified bisexual woman may be married to a man and be completely immersed in a lesbian community and queer culture, while another may have a lifetime commitment to a woman and have little

connection to the queer community. Self-identification is based on desire, experience, political commitment to anti-racist work or queer issues, and a myriad of other factors.

The conviction that we ought to be able to choose what identities and communities to claim and inhabit would benefit all individuals in addition to hybrids. For example, Kate, who claims black, native, and white ancestry could choose to be a part of all or none of black, native, and white communities, she may also choose a people of colour community, or she may be part of a movement that creates new communities of mixed people. Also, a hybrid vision of community formation recognizes that if she (or anyone) has a deep connection with Chinese culture, for instance, she can be unproblematically part of a Chinese community. In another example, Lily, who is bisexual, could be part of a lesbian community, a straight community or both, or she may choose to help build a bisexual community. Lily could also be part of a transgendered community, for instance, if she is in a long term relationship with a transgendered individual or has a deep understanding of the issues and struggles that transgendered people face. Hybrid individuals are more likely to experience a greater degree of choice than those with mononormatively defined identities. But the bottom line for hybrids is this: identity formation and access to community must never be prescriptive, there is no set number of years, genes, or experiences that determines "membership." Instead, individual stories and idiosyncrasies will determine the motivations, experiences, and "access" to identity and community that each of us have.

The project of valuing hybrid experiences and identities is far from over. However, as we work to make hybrid identities accepted and valid, we must be wary of privileging hybridity over mononormatively defined identities. "I have a little theory

about people who embrace multisexuality or alternative sexualities or hybrid sexualities," says Dorothy, "oh, I'll just say it. I think we are more open minded" (Dorothy). As we find ways to become visible and legitimate in the eyes of society, we must ensure we do not start to see our hybrid selves as "better" or "more evolved." In Juliet's words:

> Just because I'm bisexual and I'm in an inter-racial relationship, doesn't mean that...I'm fair to everybody, even though I try really hard to be I'm sure that without even knowing, just because I don't experience those things I maybe squash people too when I shouldn't. I think that just requires learning. I think a lot people do tend to think, "oh, you know I'm important because I'm part of this oppressed group and I love everybody and I'm evolved."...and I'm like, "no, not really." (Juliet)

Bisexual and hybrid identities are often seen as "better" in the context of a bisexual movement in North America which has gained strength and visibility in recent years. The claim that hybrid is "better" will only serve to alienate the allies with whom we hope to work, and does not facilitate coalition building. Clare Hemmings proposes the following solution:

> Perhaps a way of ensuring against (i) the privileging of a specific bisexual identity, or (ii) the privileging of difference for its own sake in the search for methodologies and homes, is to emphasize the relationships between particular locations at particular times (e.g. lesbian-bisexual; bisexual-bisexual, ad infinitum). In this way different bisexual acts or subjectivities might be theorized in conjunction, not as if in a vacuum. (Hemmings 51-52)

The emphasis on location and positionality that Hemmings suggests can best be done by valuing narratives, for one of the most effective ways of communicating a particular location at a particular time is by telling one's story.

The other claim sometimes made by those with hybrid identities is that we are "more oppressed" than those with mononormative identities because we face discrimination from both privileged groups and marginalized groups. This attitude is not

a useful conceptualization of oppression, for implicit in the claim of being "more oppressed" than others is the notion that oppression is quantifiable. The incorporation of hybrids into a hierarchy of oppression is no more useful that attempting to create a hierarchy of oppression which places women, people of colour, queers, people with disabilities, or any other marginalized group above or below another. Instead of conceiving of hierarchies of oppression, a more useful strategy is to struggle to end oppressions concurrently.

I am in Vancouver again after two years. I have made tentative contacts by e-mail with some members of Binet BC, an organization that has taken off only in the last few years. I go to their meeting, and as I approach the building, I feel nervous and excited. I am introduced to the people sitting around, and I see friendly faces eager to make me feel comfortable and I think, this is a "bisexual community." As I begin talking to people about their jobs and journeys in life, I realize how unusually pleasant it is to be in a social setting where bisexuality is just a given, rather than a source of anxiety.

As the evening wears on, I remember the plans I have made to meet my friends in the "lesbian community." For weeks I have been looking forward to going to women's night at the Lotus. When it is time to go, people start to ask me if I want to join them at a gay club nearby. I tell them I am going to meet some friends at the Lotus, and ask a few women if they would like to come. They say they prefer to go with the others, because the men in the group wouldn't be allowed in at the Lotus. I have to choose between this newly found bisexual community and my old friends in the lesbian community. I finally go to the Lotus, wanting to be surrounded by women and some familiar faces.

As I make my way to Gastown, I ask myself, where am I more comfortable? In the bi setting, I could be totally honest and open about my attractions to both men and women, I could openly talk about my feelings of loss over a recent break up with a girlfriend, and also talk about my present male partner and my struggles with polyamory. In the lesbian setting, I could be surrounded by beautiful women and old friends and feel no threat from men. I could still talk about my ex-girlfriend, yet be closeted about my relationships with men. What is my community? Can I compromise my feelings of safety? Can I push aside my feelings of being closeted about a male partner? Is that a small price to pay for a safe place, away from the homophobia that exists out in the world? As I walk through the quiet back streets of downtown Vancouver, I am a hybrid looking for a home.

CHAPTER 4: FORMS OF DISCRIMINATION

> When I was young I used to dream…of peeling off my skin plantain-fashion, of going forth naked into the world, like an anatomy illustration from *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, all ganglions, ligaments, nervous pathways and veins, set free from the otherwise inescapable jails of colour, race and clan. (Rushdie The Moor's Last Sigh 136)

Introduction: The Isms and the Phobias

In the previous chapter, I discussed the processes involved in identity and community formation for those with hybrid and multiple identities. This chapter will explore some of the forms of discrimination that hybrids experience, drawing largely from the interview material. Until recently, racism, xenophobia, heterosexism, homophobia, and sexism have been insufficiently written about within academia. Finally, postcolonial, postmodern, queer, and feminist thinkers are developing various sophisticated, and sometimes contradictory, analyses of race, ethnicity, sexuality, and gender.

Discussions of oppression often exclude forms of discrimination that specifically affect hybrids. Hybrids may experience forms of oppression due to mononormativity in addition to the aforementioned forms of discrimination. Those with hybrid identities may experience what I call ***monoracism***, the discrimination against those with multiple racial identities by those with monoracial identities, in addition to biphobia, monosexism, (defined in chapter one) and genderism. Genderism is the assumption that it is "natural" for all people to fit into two biological sexes (female and male) which correspond to gender identity (woman and man). This form of discrimination affects the transgendered

community in particular, and I explain how some theorists argue that genderism also provides a basis for sexism, heterosexism, and monosexism.

These forms of discrimination have implications that differ somewhat from the forms that are typically discussed within a mononormative framework. Hybrids experience oppression through the invisibility and marginalization that results from not fitting into established binary systems of categorization. Stereotypes of hybrids emerge as a result of the inability to find appropriate categories; hybrids are seen as disloyal and confused, and we are often mistrusted and feared. Hybrids blur the lines between "us" and "them," unsettling those who inhabit the "center" by making it unclear who does and does not have access to privilege, and unsettling those who inhabit the margins by making it unclear who exactly the "oppressor" is. While I emphasize the forms of discrimination that specifically affect hybrids, I also treat racism and homophobia separately, as there are important differences between these forms of oppression.

Racism and Monoracism

> He said that I was this urban native person working for the Vancouver Sun, writing big stuff, and still trying to maintain a First Nations identity. I guess he was stuck in the teepee in regards to what a Native person could be or can be. I don't like that because it's just horrible to put me in a place where, you know, I should be smoking salmon and bearing as many children as I possibly can. Anybody can be anything regardless of their race. (Naomi)

A history of colonialism, slavery, segregation, and racism in North America makes it crucial to discuss racism and xenophobia in the context of racial and ethnic hybridity. Charles Mills suggests that, "race has not traditionally been seen as an interesting or worthy subject of investigation for white Western philosophers" (Mills 1).

It is finally becoming clear that concerns about race, ethnicity, and culture in Canada and the United States can no longer be ignored by intellectuals of any racial, ethnic, or cultural background. Yet, as more researchers point out the importance of race in the outcomes of their research, and as more scholars contextualize their theorizing in a racist and colonial past, the concerns of those who are negotiating multiple racial, ethnic, and cultural experiences and identities tend to fall through the academic cracks.

The work of Naomi Zack, in Race and Mixed Race, is an exception to this trend. She presents a philosophical discourse about mixed race and ethnicity in the United States, particularly black and white miscegenation. She writes,

> Perhaps the fragmented, suppressed, denied, and alienated history of mixed race in the United States should raise questions about the value of any racial identity. What in theory is involved in racial and ethnic identities from the standpoint of one who *identifies*? Can it really be so much more difficult to identify oneself as *on* the line of black and white—Du Bois's famous "color line"—than it is to identify oneself with either side of it? Or are there problems in principle with any affirmation of personal identity as an identification with the "blood" of one's ancestors? (Zack 144)

These questions have not been addressed satisfactorily. Most scholarly discourses around race have been ethnocentric, and recent debates about race in North America have tended to focus on white and black race relations in the United States. Today, it is obvious that discussions of race in a North American context cannot be severed from matters of ethnicity and culture. The complicated ways that culture and ethnicity intersect and combine with race in people's lives illustrate that it is not simply a "black and white" issue.

Nonetheless, race has been, and continues to be, one of the most divisive and emotional identity characteristics in most parts of Canada and the United States. In her

essay, "On Being White," Marlyn Frye struggles with definitions of race and racism. In addition to identifying skin colour as an indicator of race, Frye also sees the construction of whiteness as a celebration of male conceived notions of kinship and common ancestry (Frye 114). She says that, "to be white is to be a member of an in-group, a kin group, which is self-defining. Just as with fraternities or sororities, the power to draw the membership line is jealously guarded" (Frye 115). Whites carefully protect their white privilege, and examples of this privilege abound. In a paper she presented at conferences in 1986, Peggy McIntosh lists forty-six examples of her white privilege, such as, "I can go into a book shop and count on finding the writing of my race represented, into a supermarket and find the staple foods that fit with my cultural traditions, into a hairdresser's shop and find someone who can deal with my hair" (McIntosh 79). Incidentally, at the end of her piece, she suggests that in many ways the list applies to heterosexual privilege, with some additions and alterations.

Many monoracially or monoethnically defined non-white groups also guard membership lines. Lucius Outlaw draws on the work of W.E.B. Du Bois, who theorized at the turn of the century that people belonging to a particular race are bound together by shared cultural "life-worlds" based on "a common history, common laws and religion, similar habits of thought and a conscious striving together for certain ideals of life" (Du Bois qtd. in Outlaw 10). Membership lines may also be drawn as a reaction to white racism or as a way of maintaining certain privileges that exist within a particular group. This can be true of the gay and lesbian community as well, who may "jealously" guard their membership lines from straight and bisexual "intruders." When Naomi and I talked about membership and communities she said, "I think there's a fear of breaking the club.

It's the whole club house mentality. It's like, 'oh yeah, [s]he likes the cub scouts better these days and [s]he's been wearing their hat more often, and we're the wolf scouts and we can't really deal with this'...it's all about membership requirements" (Naomi).

White imperialism and a history of colonialism provide the backdrop for present-day race relations in North America. Himani Bannerji recently compiled a collection of her essays on feminism, Marxism, and anti-racism entitled, Thinking Through. She writes:

> Europe or America created (and continues to create) myths of imperialism, or barbarism/savagery, a general inferiority of the conquered, enslaved and colonized peoples and also created myths of exoticism at the same instant as it defined itself also as an "other" of these. The negative determinations of Europe's or America's/Canada's racism manifest themselves everywhere. (Bannerji 47)

While I agree with Bannerji, discourses around race now need to delve into some of the contemporary complexities of race and racism as well as explore the intersections and "in-betweens" of race, ethnicity, and culture more deeply. I maintain that the monoracial, monoethnic, and monocultural assumptions underlying most present-day discourses around race can perhaps be best revealed through the experiences of people of mixed race, ethnicity, and culture.

Hybrids may also experience racism within the particular racial or ethnic groups to which they belong, because they are not monoracial. Naomi discusses this kind of racism with me:

> A lot of the racism I've experienced is back home from the Gitksan people, because Gitksan build is very square, they have more flat noses and they're darker than I am and their hair is usually straighter, and I don't fit into that category. And I think it was obvious the very first time I set foot into a nursery classroom back home that I wasn't full Gitksan. A lot of the racism came from the Gitksan kids, they would pick on me; they were cruel, they used to make fun of my nose. I never really fit in with them, I was never really accepted by them. (Naomi)

With dominant discourses around race and racism providing critiques of the ways that white supremacy affect all of us who live in North America, the kinds of discrimination that hybrids face are sometimes neglected. It is crucial to discuss the ways in which white racism permeates our society, but at a time when ethnic and racial diversity are steadily increasing, we must begin acknowledging the many different manifestations of racism and xenophobia. Because white supremacy is still the dominant form of racism in Canada and the United States, there is concern that an exploration of the existence of racism between non-white groups and against mixed people will detract energy and attention away from institutionalized white racism. I propose that we continue to address white supremacy in addition to opening an honest dialogue about other forms of discrimination such as monoracism.

A number of the mixed race women I interviewed spoke about their experiences of racism. Racism is sometimes subtle, or racism may have blatant manifestations, and I discuss race and ethnicity and some experiences of racism that are particularly relevant to women who are mixed in some way. The themes that emerged from the interviews are: the questioning of non-white women; the tendency for others to "box" non-white women into a single racial category; the exoticization and eroticization of mixed women; the internalized racism of mixed women; the erasure of parts of mixed women's racial identities; the mixed women's desire to fit into a monoracial category; the idea that mixed women dilute particular racial or ethnic communities; and the white/light privilege of mixed women.

Where Are You *Really* From? Questions of Belonging

> People say
> to me, I can't place you.
> I tell them we're all
> from another place, really,
> its faint flower odor
> of pure release
> on our skin. (Olinka 212-213)

Several of the hybrid women who I interviewed have experienced the racist assumption that if you are not white, you are from "elsewhere." Ellen expresses her frustrations over this assumption:

> One thing that happens often is that somebody comes up to me and asks me, "Where are you from?"...I'll say, "Antigonish, Nova Scotia," and then they'll say, "No, where are you *really* from?" and that bothers me a lot. I am from Antigonish, Nova Scotia. There is no other place, I was born in that hospital there. (Ellen)

Several of the mixed and hybrid women I spoke with echoed the frustration of continuously having to answer questions such as: What are you really? Where are you from? What is your nationality? Where are your parents from? This line of questioning moves very quickly from innocent curiosity to blatant racism when the inquirer's motivation is to confine "otherness" to a single category so as to feel more comfortable. Kate relates her experiences of being questioned about who she is:

> It happens to me at least five times a week that they'll ask me my nationality, and I'll say "American," and they say, "No, that's not what I meant; what are you?" I don't make it easy for anyone and you just getting tired of answering it. People think I'm Polynesian...or Egyptian...Hawaiian...or Chinese...it's just strange when people always try to put you in categories so they feel more comfortable around you. (Kate)

People who ask such questions often presume once they know where she is from, they then will know how to treat her and how to behave around her based on the information they have about her racial or ethnic origin.

> "Devi, where are you from?"
> "Upstate New York."
> "I mean, where are you really from?"
> I knew, but played dumb. "From Schenectady. Up near Albany."
> "You know what I really mean, Devi. Come on, where are you from?"
> "Some toxic dump. I'm a radioactive geek, can't you tell." (Mukherjee 130)

This conversation with the hybrid protagonist in Bharati Mukherjee's novel Leave it to Me illustrates this line of questioning.

For people who are mixed race or have mixed ethnicities, these questions can become particularly overwhelming, as the goal of containing "otherness" is even more elusive when racial features or indicators are not clearly monoracial or when a person's behavior does not correspond with preconceived notions of racial characteristics. As Kate's description suggests, ambiguous racial features and multiple ethnic identities make it even more difficult to place someone neatly into a racial or ethnic category. Monoracism occurs when we try to make sense of people by understanding them as one race, ethnicity, or culture. Meena points out how conceptually challenging hybridity is to most people. She says, "when you say 'I'm half and half,' their mind goes blank" (Meena). Being continuously questioned about belonging may prompt people to question their own sense of who they are and where they belong. As Kamala Visweswaran puts it:

> Certainly the question "Where are you from?" is never an innocent one. Yet not all subjects have equal difficulty in replying. To pose a question of origin to particular subjects is to subtly pose a question of return, to challenge not only temporally, but geographically, one's place in the present. For someone who is neither fully Indian nor wholly American, it is a question that provokes a sudden failure of confidence, the fear of never replying adequately. (Visweswaran 115)

Also, part of the problem, suggests Kate, is white people's discomfort bringing up the very thing that they are asking about, namely "race."

> There's ways of doing it. Be straightforward and to the point. Don't say, "what is your nationality?" Well, I happen to be American. No, that's not what I meant. You know, what do mean? What is your racial identity? What do you self identify as? What's your ethnicity? Use words. Say what you mean. I hate that. If you just ask me something point blank, I'll answer it… you're not trying to say race. (Kate)

Another motivation put forth by Kate is that some white people want to know the race of racially ambiguous people so that "they know what jokes they can tell. Because if you're black, they assume that you're not going to care if you say something about South Asian people, then they can say their Hindu jokes" (Kate).

Hybrids as Exotic and Erotic

> to all you, white and black who eroticize mi light brown skin, who see me as different but never angry, who checking fi a hot pussy under dat deh skin, who see me as politically non-threatening because mi blackness nuh apparent as real
> back off, mi tyad
> to dem all who define me as it suit dem interest, as anodda black sistah
> in solidarity, as a lover, or as a light skin ooman who cyaan be trusted
> tru mi have no race fi defend
> mi seh, kirout, define unnu self
> as a mix race gal ah me fi say who mi is (Martin 158)

Another manifestation of racism is the exotizing and eroticizing of women of colour by white people. Some hybrid or mixed race women feel eroticized and exoticised by both whites and monoracial people of colour. Stephanie Martin, who is mixed race, addressed the above poem to "all you, blacks and whites who eroticize mi light brown skin" because she feels eroticized by both whites and blacks. She reveals that monoracial

groups see her as "other," as "different but never angry," and she feels that they define her as it suits them.

Exoticizing and eroticizing does not only take place in a heterosexual context. Barbara points out that in her experience, white lesbians as well as white men have exoticized her "off-white" skin. "I think lesbians tend to exoticize nonwhiteness," she says, "That's really the only experience about being or looking a little off-white that I can think of. A lot of different lesbians have asked me about my heritage" (Barbara). This exoticization is also experienced by Naomi, who feels that it is specifically related to the fact that she does not clearly fit into one racial category. She says, "a lot of hybrid children, to me they're obvious 'cause I can see them. For people who aren't hybrid, maybe it's just all based on this theory of exoticism, like I'll do some kind of rain dance, or I have some sort of magic cure, something like that" (Naomi).

Hybrids Internalizing Racism

> The lies I could tell,
> when I was growing up—
> light-bright, near-white,
> high-yellow, red-boned
> in a black place—
> were just white lies. (Trethewey 250)

In her essay "Bridge, Drawbridge, Sandbar or Island," Gloria Anzaldua discusses internalized racism. She suggests that "introjecting" takes place when racial minority groups internalize the racism of the white majority, resulting in internalized racism and racism between different racial minorities (Anzaldua 226). It is difficult to separate white racism from other forms of racism when European colonization has had such profound

effects on North America. In Yearning, in her chapter entitled "Third World Diva Girls," bell hooks entreats women of colour to be "…ever vigilant, living as we do in a society where internalized racism and sexism make it a norm for us to treat one another harshly and with disrespect" (hooks 94). Internalized racism has many manifestations, ranging from rejecting outright one's racial identity, to associating strongly with a dominant white culture and erasing or degrading your own racial and cultural heritage (the term "oreo cookie" refers to this category of people, Frantz Fanon employs the phrase, "black skin/white masks," and V.S. Naipaul calls them "mimic men.") When we discussed racial and ethnic identity, Lily expressed internalized anti-Semitism:

> There's the JAPs, that was my main association of Jews…so for a long time I wouldn't say that I was Jewish, not that I'd really hide it at all. I remember there was one place, and there was a Jewish woman in the circle and she wanted there to be another Jewish person in that circle, and they asked, "is there another Jewish person here?" and I didn't speak up, which I feel is kind of mean. But I just felt, "why did she have to be singled out and why did she feel vulnerable?" It just didn't make any sense to me that she should need that. (Lily)

In her article "From 'Kike' to 'JAP,'" Evelyn Beck explains how misogyny, anti-Semitism, and racism all intersect to create an association with the JAP (Jewish American Princess) like the one Lily has. She writes that when Jews use the term, "it is a form of self-hating or internalized anti-Semitism. It is a way of thinking that allows some Jewish women to harm other Jewish women who are just like them…" (Beck 18). Lily's concealment of her Jewish side was perhaps facilitated by her mixed ethnicity and religion, in a similar way that a bisexual woman might hide her lesbianism by only talking about her opposite-sex relationships. The ability to disguise a part of one's identity because of internalized racism, anti-Semitism, biphobia, or homophobia is no less painful or difficult for hybrids, as we deny parts of ourselves.

The Erasure of Race: Hybridity and Passing

> This is not new.
> Colored, poor white, latent queer
> passing for white
> seething with hatred, anger
> unaware of its source
> crazed with not knowing
> who they are
> choose me to pick at the masks. (Anzaldua Borderlands 171)

For women who are a mix of white and "other," a denial of the non-white, non-European parts of their racial and ethnic heritage may take place because of racism and internalized racism. Barbara relates this erasure to the inhibiting of same-sex desire:

> I felt ripped off because if people would have told me it was an option to have relationships with women, I probably would have considered it my whole life...in that same way I feel kind of ripped off that culturally I didn't get a whole lot more in terms of my French heritage or the Native part of my ancestry. I feel like those things should have been there but because of racism they weren't. (Barbara)

Barbara, who is fair skinned, has experienced the erasure of her "coloured" heritage through a denial by her family and also by members of the community who would disapprove if a "white" family started claiming "Native" blood. Although many people in North America cover up their First Nations ancestry, First Nations people in both Canada and the United States have had to prove their Native ancestry by showing that they are at least one-eighth Native American. This system stands in contrast to the "one drop of blood" rule that applies to the mixing of white and black "races." In her article "Passing for White, Passing for Black," Adrian Piper explains that the reasons for the differing conventions of racial classification are largely economic:

> a legally certifiable Native American is entitled to financial benefits from the government, so obtaining this certification is difficult. A legally certifiable black person is disentitled to financial, social, and inheritance benefits from his (sic.) white family of origin, so obtaining this certification is not just easy but automatic. (Piper 252)

In North America, the phenomenon of "passing" is contentious, particularly in the United States, where an individual's "black" ancestry is exposed to protect white privilege (Piper 252). Historically, the racial classification system in the United States espoused the "one drop of blood" rule to ensure that mixed race people would not be able to benefit from white privilege. Piper explains that in the black community they "do not 'out' people who are passing as white in the European-American community. Publicly to expose the African ancestry of someone who claims to have none is not done" (Piper 246). The parallel etiquette in the queer community is the unwritten rule that one should not "out" queer friends and acquaintances to others (usually straight people).

Some people "pass" as white involuntarily; because of the lightness of their skin, they are seen as white. Meena explains:

> When I first started actively trying to claim that heritage and telling people that I'm half-East Indian and that meant something to me, white people are much more comfortable with people if they can identify with them as white. And people will actively ignore that part of me. It's easy for them to ignore that I'm half-East Indian and not have to deal with it because I look white, but I stopped letting people do that. (Meena)

Again, the desire for white people to see "white" relates to the comfort derived from identifying people as white who look or act "white." Marlyn Frye discusses this tendency for whites to "white wash" people who are light-skinned:

> The concept of whiteness is not just used, in these cases, it is *wielded*. Whites exercise a power of defining who is white and who is not, and are jealous of that power. If a light-skinned person of "colored" kinship claims to be white, and white people discover the person's background, they see that a person who might be a marginal case has *decided* what she is…On the other hand, when someone has been clearly and definitively decided to be white *by* whites, her claim that she is *not* white must be challenged; again because anyone who is even possibly marginal cannot be allowed to draw the line. (Frye "On Being White" 115)

Whiteness, then, is a protected status from which mixed people are barred, while at the same time, white people ascribe whiteness to mixed people they see as white, regardless of whether they are "truly" white or not. Kate describes how there is a reoccurring questioning of her race as a mixed woman:

> It's strange being mixed race, like I don't feel white, like what does it mean to feel white. But I don't feel it, it's so annoying when you have these people…who say, "I just didn't know that you were mixed," and I'm like, "were you looking at me?" and they're like, "I just thought you were white like me." (Kate)

In her article "White Like Me," Judith Levine explores the implications of the assumption of whiteness:

> I'm not white. I just am. Most striking, this dual lens has magnified something usually invisible to whites: whiteness. Whiteness purports to be both nothing and everything. It is the race that need not speak its name. Yet it defines itself as no less than whatever it chooses to exclude. (Levine 22)

Many white people in North America do not see themselves as "raced," not because they are aware of the notion that biologically there is no meaningful category known as "race," but because whiteness has been constructed as the norm.

Colourism and Monoracial Categories

The ways in which white supremacy and institutionalized racism have dichotomized race make it difficult for hybrids to work out where they stand with regards to race relations and racial categorization. The complicated evolution of the census in the United States provides an example of the uses and abuses of racial categorization. For instance, before 1980, a mixed person was categorized as her father's race, and since 1980, the same individual is assigned her mother's race (Colker 237). The fact that a

person could be classified as black one year and then white the next provides an illustration of the problematic and arbitrary methods for determining the race of mixed individuals.

The inability to classify hybrids under the present system causes some conflict within various racial minority communities. For instance, blacks who have darker skin are sometimes seen as higher on a hierarchy within black communities because it is assumed—often accurately—that darker skinned black people are the ones who have experienced the most discrimination and racism. Their membership in the black community and their identity as black people are not questioned. Alice calls this attitude colourism:

> We talked about colourism and the shade of your skin and the impact that that has had on one's life. We were in a circle and we shared a bit about our lives growing up and the colour of our skin and what impact that has had and there were a lot of tears shed and a lot of joy expressed. At the end there was a group of us that were really light skinned and we just went for each other and formed a little group… I never did want to be white because that wasn't really a cool thing to be when I was growing up. *I think I would have preferred to have been a little darker to blend in.* People were always questioning. So that was a painful experience. (Alice, my emphasis)

Several of the mixed race women expressed to me their desire to be darker, either to fit in to a monoracially defined community or to be more readily recognized as a person of colour. Kate experiences colourism as a self-identified black woman with fair skin: "I am very pale, I am really light…I wanted it to be clear right away what I was. I don't feel that because I'm not dark skinned I'm not black…I always wanted to be darker" (Kate). Meena feels similarly: "in my family there's always been that dynamic of people of colour are strong, white people are not. And my father did not act hurt by that kind of attitude because he knew that that's a reaction against racism and that it's sometimes

necessary emotionally to do that. I always wanted to be darker" (Meena). Helen says, "Well, my whole life would be different if I was dark skinned. But I remember in high school, I wished that I was either so albino or just really really dark, one or the other so I could make a distinction. But now, I'm starting to be more comfortable in my skin, so to speak. (laughter)" (Helen). These women, whose racial, ethnic and cultural identities are ambiguous or do not coincide, inhabit a racially and ethnically uncertain location which Nathalie Cohen calls "questionably-white" (Cohen 1).

Am I questionably white? Growing up with mixed messages of privilege and identity meant that while I recognized that my whiteness gave me privileges, it also gave me a status as "other."

I am walking to school on the streets of St. Augustine in Trinidad. Every so often, someone shouts "WHITEY!" One day, a man shouts to me, "Go back to South Africa, Afrikaner!" When I reach school, I go to morning prayer in the school auditorium; a sea of brown faces. As we file out of the auditorium and to class, I catch my reflection in the glass, and I am almost surprised by the presence of an albino girl.

I want to have dark skin. I want to fit in. My friends, my teachers, my classmates, most of the people who surround me are shades of brown. Except for my family, of course. But Canada is a far away dream land and these places, these cultures, these people are part of me. How can I claim them, being white and knowing that one day my family and I will return to the cold distant land I think I belong to?

Hybridity and the Fear of Dilution

As bisexuals are thought to dilute the lesbian community, mixed people are thought to water down monoracial and monoethnic communities. Many people are wary of interethnic and interraical relationships and marriages because of the misconception that hybridity will necessarily lead to a dilution of ethnicity and race and a belief that different racial or ethnic groups are inherently incompatible. The monoracist perception of "watering down" or "fading out" is given as a reason for people of the same ethnicity to stay together and protect their ethnic integrity and identity. This perception belies an inherent xenophobia. Yet, some people have pointed out that often times the opposite is true: "What do we make of the case (and writings) of Sandra Birdsell, half-Mennonite and half-Metis, who far from showing a decline in ethnic salience, instead provides considerable insight into problems of inter-minority relations within the larger Canadian culture?" (Padolsky 29-30). When I asked Meena what she thought about this notion of dilution she said:

> The problem is that mixed race people are not accepted. I don't buy into that "diluting-the-race" thing. Just because I'm mixed doesn't make me less Indian. I don't feel that anyone should give up their right to claim their heritage just because it's mixed with something else. They just have more to claim…it hurts though when people say that. (Meena)

The children of racial and ethnic mixing can contribute to the complex matrix of race relations in North America, as their hybridity provides them with an increased awareness of difference. Still, many mixed individuals are made to feel that they dilute the potency of a particular racial or ethnic identity. Barbara feels that by claiming her multiple ethnicities, she may potentially "wash down" their saliency:

> There is such a pride right now in people's cultural heritage, people are really building senses of community and senses of separateness and I think that has to happen before we can have any mass social change…part of it is politically these groups need to go at it and I don't want to wash that down at all. (Barbara)

Moreover, the fear of watering down a community, added to internalized racism (or homophobia) can lead to a situation in which people within a marginalized community take on an internal policing of members of the community to remain "loyal." Helen expresses this pressure to stick to your "own kind":

> A lot of times in the black community, black people get razed by other blacks if they're dating whites, and they're called whitewash, sellouts, you name it. And in one sense I can relate to that, because there's been so much internalized racism and mental emotional sickness in the black community. (Helen)

Being mixed or wanting to interact and "mix" with other racial groups becomes difficult in a climate of distrust and fear, fueled by racism and internalized racism. This can foster a sense of not being able to celebrate hybridity in the community or communities that one belongs to, whether they be dominant or nondominant communities, an experience sometimes shared by bisexual women in lesbian circles.

The notion of dilution is reinforced by the stereotype that those who are mixed—as well as those who incorporate their lived experience into their identities—are not "real":

> I don't know how many times I've been told by an "Indian-Indian" person that I'm not really Indian. And I'm like, "what do you mean?" But I think our version of being Indian has definitely changed. If I were to grow up in India, I'd probably be different…a lot of Indian guys that I know, I don't appeal to them because I'm too opinionated and I travel around and I'm ambitious and I just want to live the way I want. (Fatima)

When Fatima is explicitly told by an "Indian-Indian" person (i.e., an Indian person from India) that she is not really Indian, there is an implicit questioning of her authenticity as

an Indian person, or even a part Indian person. By not being s*olely* Indian, she is not permitted to be Indian *at all.* In her short story "Out on Main Street," Shani Mootoo writes about the negativity associated with not being "really" Indian: "...we is watered-down Indians—we ain't good grade A Indians. We skin brown, is true, but we doh even think 'bout India unless something happen over dere and it come on de news" (Mootoo 45).

Hybrids Experiencing White/Light Privilege

Several of the women I interviewed struggle to negotiate white/light privilege in addition to a mixed racial and ethnic heritage. Sometimes, like bisexual women in a lesbian community, they are viewed with suspicion and distrust by darker skinned women of colour. For instance, Meena expresses her feelings about being denied access to people of colour spaces:

> Then I started getting involved in race politics, and there were a lot of people, particularly at the university, who wanted to put together activist groups that were only for people of colour and I was denied access to those spaces because people were saying to me "oh, you haven't experienced racism, you haven't *really* experienced what it is to be a person of colour because you can pass and you have all this white privilege." And there's no space for mixed people, there's no space to do activism around that, so I was kind of stuck and really angry and really frustrated and really hurt because I knew it was totally valid to want a space to do activism and to talk and to have support from other people of colour. (Meena)

For Meena, being able to pass as a white woman has meant that her identity as a woman of colour has been suspect because of her white privilege, causing her pain and frustration as she has attempted to belong to people of colour communities. She says, "I was always ashamed of white privilege but sometimes I wish I was just white. You always want a

wholeness" (Meena). Like Meena, Oriani has also experienced "passing" as white, yet unlike Meena, she identifies as a white woman:

> I identify as white, but I'm not really white…but I identify as a white woman because I'm not visibly a person of colour, but the odd person will say, "what are you? You're kind of a little bit dark"…yeah, I have white privilege. I see it everywhere. It's offered to me left, right, and center. (Oriani)

Meena and Oriani, who are both "questionably-white," have formed their identities differently, though they both have an understanding and analysis of how white or "light" privilege works in their lives.

Do Some Racial Hybrids Experience No Racism?

While some of the hybrid women and women of colour that I interviewed talked at length about their experiences of racism, other women I spoke with expressed that they do not experience much racism. Fatima relates that:

> As a teenager I went to Hindi school in Ottawa. I still didn't have a lot of Indian friends, so Indian culture was on Saturdays and in the home too, but for some reason I never knew racism existed, I mean I wasn't affected by it. Except for once when my brother was called something, that was it. (Fatima)

In discussing experiences of racism, I fear that statements such as these may be used by people who will claim that racism is no longer a problem in North America. It is important, however, to recognize, and perhaps draw strength from, the feelings that some people of colour and hybrids have that they experience little or no racism. Many argue that people of colour living in North America who say that they do not experience racism simply lack an analysis of the subtle and institutionalized ways that racism works. While this may be true to a certain extent, it is important to acknowledge the diversity of experiences as they are expressed.

Yet, it is equally important to recognize the subtext of perceptions of no racism. While Fatima says that she was not affected by racism, she also says that, "I don't think I've ever wanted to be white, but I've wanted to have the freedom of knowing that if I do get rejected from something it's not because I'm brown" (Fatima). In expressing her desire not to be white, she reveals that she has wished to know with certainty that she is not being discriminated against because she is brown. I argue that living with this doubt is a form a racism because of the difficulties of distinguishing between when you are being judged because of your race and when you are being judged on your credentials.

Hybrid Experiences of Homophobia and Heterosexism

> Some folks say that bisexuals are not oppressed because at least we are accepted by mainstream society when we are involved with members of the opposite sex. Agreed, society may like us when we show that piece of who we are. But conditional acceptance is not really acceptance at all. When we show our other side, our gay side, we suffer the same discrimination as other gay men and lesbians. We don't lose only half our children in custody battles. When homophobia hits, we don't get just half fired from our jobs (put on half time, perhaps?). We don't get just half gaybashed when we are out with our same-sex lovers ("Oh please, only hit me on my left side. You see, I'm bisexual!"). We, too, get discriminated against because we are gay. (Robyn Ochs qtd. in Geller 2)

Bisexuals may face homophobia and heterosexism along with lesbians and gay men. Heterosexism is the assumption that to be homosexual is to be deviant or "unnatural," and, therefore, any "normal" acting or looking person is assumed to be heterosexual. Marilyn Frye makes a connection between white arrogance and heterosexism:

> If the question does not arise, or does not arise explicitly or blatantly, one will generally be assumed by white people to be white, since the contrary assumption might be (by white judgment) insulting. A parallel to this is the arrogant presumption on the part of heterosexual people that anyone they meet is

> heterosexual. The question often must be *made* to arise, blatantly and explicitly, before the heterosexual person will consider the thought that one is lesbian or homosexual. (Frye 116)

The arrogant assumption that everyone is heterosexual is perhaps the most common manifestation of heterosexism. Isis shares her strong feelings about this form of discrimination:

> The one that I've experienced the most and I cannot stand the most is heterosexism. It makes me sick, like I just get so angry with people that just assume that you're going to be heterosexual. And I just look at them and go "wow, you suck." I can handle homophobia because I can deal with it, I can argue against it, I can at least say to the person, "wow, you're homophobic" and generally they'll say, "yeah, I am." (Isis)

Homophobia is the fear or hatred of homosexuals. Michael du Plessis suggests the term has limitations: "we may well ask if 'homophobia' *alone* can explain the complicated oppressions to which everyone living outside a normative sex-gender system is subject" (du Plessis 25). The word homophobia conjures up psychologically and physically violent manifestations of hatred and fear such as gay-bashing. How do we talk about more subtle, institutionalized forms of discrimination against queers? The threat of losing custody of children or of losing a job, as Robyn Ochs suggests, or the lack of spousal benefits or access to a variety of services taken for granted by heterosexuals; all these forms of discrimination affect gays and lesbians as well as bisexuals involved in a same-sex partnership. Experiences of homophobia also relate to how people treat you as an individual, as Lily discloses:

> At tree planting camp, it became apparent that I was gay or whatever. And there was one woman there, and I definitely got the impression that she was tentative about hanging out with me because she was worried that I would come on to her. And that's what bothers me more than anything, that subtle don't-get-too-close. (Lily)

A number of the women who I interviewed who identify as bisexual shared their experiences of homophobia and heterosexism with me, confirming my belief that bisexual women face some of the same forms of discrimination as our lesbian counterparts.

Gendered homophobia is a form of discrimination that is specifically directed against lesbians for not worshipping the phallus. As Elizabeth Armstrong explains that, "the horribly homophobic notion that 'lesbians just need a good fuck' to 'cure' them stems from the obviously phallocentric belief that all 'good' or 'real' sex involves a penis" (Armstrong 205-6). Dorothy expresses the attitudes towards female bisexuality she encounters with many straight men "who couldn't understand it, others who could understand it as long as I wasn't involved with a woman while I was involved with them. It can't be at the same level if there's no penis!" (Dorothy). Phallocentrism reinforces compulsory heterosexuality, which informs much of what is considered "normal" human sexuality. It becomes clear why some lesbians might see bisexual women as caving in to gendered homophobia through their continued attractions to men.

A day in the life of a bisexual woman. I am at my dad's party and I am getting ready to go out dancing. As I put on my black leather jacket, one of dad's friends asks me where I am going. I tell her I am going to the Lotus. It feels as though a hush has descended upon the room full of people. "What's the Lotus, is it a new bar?" she asks, "I've never heard of it before." I reply that it is a gay bar in Gastown. Without hesitation she asks, "Oh, are you doing some kind of sociological study?" Also without hesitating I reply, "Actually, I'm bisexual." I explain that I am in a relationship with a woman and leave.

Later, my girlfriend and I hold hands as we walk down the street minding our own business. A little black convertible is driving by real slow. As it passes us these men inside shout, "dykes!" their voices dripping with disgust. I am too stunned to respond, but feel that next time I will scream back at them, "Breeders!"

After the dance, we sit at the back of the bus and this drunk guy staggers on. He comes right to the back and sees me with my arm around her shoulders. We don't move. He looks at us and finally he slurs, "you're lesbians aren't you? Suck my cock, that'll show you!" And he goes on and on, it feels like a long time, swearing and spluttering and I keep thinking, he's drunk, he's harmless, he doesn't know what he's saying.

Hybrid Experiences of Biphobia and Monosexism

Biphobia is a term that has been used as early as 1982 to describe the irrational fear and mistrust of bisexuals (Ka'ahumanu in Tucker 28). Just as homophobia and heterosexism reinforce each other, so too do biphobia and monosexism. Bisexuals experience biphobia in addition to homophobia when we are in same-sex relationships, but also when we are in opposite-sex relationships, in more subtle ways. For example, if a bisexual woman is involved with a woman, she may be ostracized at her work place for being in a same-sex relationship in addition to identifying as bisexual. If she then breaks up with her female partner and gets involved with a man, she may still experience discrimination based on her past same-sex relationships in addition to disapproval for being bisexual. How does biphobia persist? Sue George suggests that, "As with homophobia, biphobia is kept in place by fear—fear of the unknown; of the freedom to

choose lovers regardless of gender; of the weakening effect this could have on the norms on which the heterosexual and/or lesbian and gay communities are based" (George 187).

In most environments, bisexuals may find themselves silenced and unable to talk about half their feelings, or we find ourselves only half understood. As Barbara states, "When you're with your lesbian friends you have to do this work, and then with straight people you have to do this other work. So it's only when you're alone that you can really relax" (Barbara). Because bisexual invisibility protects us somewhat from the kind of hatred that relates to homophobia, biphobia should not be seen as completely analogous to homophobia. Du Plessis suggests:

> Despite the formation of the term "biphobia" by analogy with "homophobia," it is useful to insist that "biphobia" is a specific term which has a political, if not linguistic, closeness to "heterosexism." Indeed, "heterosexism" may name our oppression far more effectively than "homophobia" does, and using "heterosexism" to name a structure of oppression can lead to considerably more powerful ways of thinking against it. (du Plessis 25)

Biphobic and monosexist assumptions posit that it is not possible or it is "unnatural" to be attracted to *both* men *and* women. As Kate says, "if you go to a lesbian bar, nobody knows you're bisexual, you don't have this big bisexual stamp…they just assume that you're a lesbian or that you're straight" (Kate). Clearly, monosexism reinforces bisexual invisibility. Lily ponders the related oppressions of biphobia and monosexism:

> I guess biphobia has affected me. I never want to come out because I don't want people to say, "oh, she's that way." Like, if I tell them that I dated women, they'll think, "oh, she's a gay woman and she doesn't like men." So that is definitely monosexism. I'll actually have to say I'm bisexual before they appreciate that that's a possibility. (Lily)

Bisexuals experience biphobia and monosexism from both the gay and straight communities, but some of the manifestations of the discrimination are different between

the two. In her essay "Present Tense: Biphobia as a Crisis of Meaning," Amanda Udis-Kessler explores these two manifestations of biphobia:

> The collective myth behind American sexual discourse includes two facets that lead directly to biphobia. First, we consider sexuality to be an essence, an unchanging core identity, and the way that lesbian and gay communities have adopted this view (which can be called essentialism) has led to a great deal of lesbian and gay biphobia. Second, we are still suffering the effects of a sex-negative cultural history which contributes greatly to homophobia and heterosexual biphobia. (Udis-Kessler 350-351)

In the following two sections, I discuss the biphobia that comes from gays and lesbians who see sexuality as an "unchanging core identity," as well as the biphobia that comes from straight people because of a "sex-negative cultural history" which puts "deviant" desire in a category to be despised and feared.

Biphobia and Monosexism Coming From Gays and Lesbians

Given that many gays and lesbians are familiar with experiences of homophobia and heterosexism, why would they discriminate against bisexuals because of our "sexual orientation"? Oriani has an explanation:

> I think that biphobia coming from gays and lesbians in some ways is a reaction to homophobia, from having to struggle so hard to exist and to draw the line around them saying, "this is us and we exist." And when you blur that boundary it can be really scary, thinking, "there's the homophobia coming at us." And if it's not clearly "us" and "them," how is that going to work? It calls into question their identity 'cause a lot of gays and lesbians have a heterosexual past that they disown. (Oriani)

Amber Ault is a lesbian feminist who has written several articles on some of the relationships between bisexual women and lesbians. In her article "Hegemonic Discourse in an Oppositional Community: Lesbian Feminists and Bisexuality," she identifies a number of ways in which negative sentiments felt by lesbians towards bisexual women

find expression. In describing four discursive techniques of bisexual neutralization within lesbian discourse (suppression, incorporation, marginalization, and delegitimation), she argues that "the dualism, sexism, homophobia, and male-dominated dynamics of sexual social control of western culture pervade lesbian resistance to the idea of bisexuality and to embodied bisexual women" (Ault 119). Her conclusion:

> Decoding lesbian discourse hostile to bisexual women begins to raise new questions and to press further our understandings of how systems of domination along lines of social demarcation reinforce one another…when it comes to the denigrating construction of the bisexual other, what are the stakes? (Ault 120)

Ault's findings are consistent with my own. A number of the bisexual women I interviewed expressed that they had felt some animosity from gay and lesbian communities. Juliet explained that at a pride march in Vancouver, she was walking with the BiNet BC banner and people yelled at her and other members of the group, "Make up your mind!" Her present partner is a bisexual man, and she expresses her frustration at not being read as bisexual or queer: "I feel funny walking down Davie street holding hands with him because it's like, 'Traitor! Traitor!' I feel like everybody's looking at me, saying 'what are you guys doing down here?'—but I belong here!" (Juliet)

In the lesbian community, there is sometimes a conditional acceptance of bisexual women as long as their partner is a woman. As Isis says:

> When I moved into my place a year ago, I wanted a place on the drive specifically and I called a lot of places that had gay friendly in their description for a roommate, and I found that I would really have to be gay to live there. And of course I'm gay friendly, of course I'm straight friendly but if I ever wanted to have I guy over for coffee, it would not be acceptable at all. So I guess that's biphobia in some ways. (Isis)

Not all lesbians are hostile to bisexual women, and many lesbians have made it very clear to their bisexual sisters that they are welcome in the community. Isis describes the attitude of her roommates:

> My lesbian roommates are totally cool with it. They think it's great. They love it when I bring guys over. They get all excited because they like to dress them and look at them, and they go, "wow, I should get some of those shoes." Jackie especially is a GQ kind of a dyke, so I was dating this really preppy guy at one point and she used to just have a great time with him. She loved it when I brought him over. (Isis)

Oriani shared an anecdote with me in which her lesbian friend who was looking for a roommate encountered a woman who said, "No bisexuals are allowed in my house." Oriani continued, "And of course my friend said 'Forget it! My best friend is bisexual!'" (Oriani) Chris, who had identified as a lesbian for about ten years prior to coming out as bisexual, relates her understanding of biphobia as a member of the lesbian community: She says, "and now it's like all these things that I've heard over the years, in the lesbian community especially, I guess, biphobic comments have come up, and people say, 'oh, did you hear so-and-so, she's sleeping with a man now, she's sleeping with the enemy' " (Chris). A further example of the biphobia Ault describes is found in the writing of Sue Wilkinson and Celia Kitzinger, who suggest that queer politics "validate" bisexuality and imply that bisexuality is a reviled practice and illegitimate identity. They say, "Whether celebrating the joys of bisexual sex, or promoting bisexuality with explicitly anti-lesbian arguments, these queer-inspired proponents of a "new" bisexual politics completely fail to engage with radical feminist analyses" (Wilkinson and Kitzinger 381).

What is troubling about biphobia in the gay and lesbian community is that homophobia has widespread and serious implications for gays, lesbians, *and bisexuals.*

All queer people will benefit from working together to end discrimination based on sexual orientation. When we understand that gay, lesbians, and bisexuals share common experiences of discrimination and we all have a stake at ending homophobia, the notion of the bisexual threat to the gay liberation movement or to gay and lesbian communities becomes preposterous.

Biphobia From Straights: Bisexuals are Homosexual

Straight people often categorize bisexuals as "gay" or "queer," because they know bisexuals engage in homosexual behavior. Bisexual is seen as more similar to homosexual than heterosexual by most people. Oriani explains:

> I think it often happens that biphobia and monosexism come more from gay and lesbian people and 'het' people are being monosexist in that they don't differentiate. You can't be half-queer, you're just queer and they're going to hate you in the same lump if they're going to hate you, which is homophobic, but I suppose it's monosexist too in that they don't even think that you could possibly be bisexual. (Oriani)

Chris reiterates the notion that bisexuals are seen as gay by much of society: "they don't care if you're lesbian or bisexual, you're just a queer sick pervert anyway," she says, "which makes it so frustrating when some people in the lesbian community are biphobic or monosexist, because really we're lumped together by so much of society anyway" (Chris). So where does biphobia overlap with homophobia? It could be argued that when straight people are biphobic, it is simply an extension of their homophobia:

> If their crisis of meaning is based around their fear of homosexuality which has been driven into them since they were born, they need some of the same information and encouragement that lesbians, gay men, and bisexuals need; their biphobia may simply be homophobia in drag. (Udis-Kessler 357)

By suggesting that biphobia is homophobia in drag, Udis-Kessler makes the connection between the two forms of discrimination and proposes that biphobia coming from heterosexuals is homophobia as experienced by bisexuals. Equally consequential is the tendency for bisexual women to be read as lesbian as soon as they express or display same-sex desire, also resulting in bisexuals' experience of monosexism in addition to homophobia.

Biphobia and the Fear of Loss

The fear of coming out as a bisexual woman is sometimes linked to the possibility of losing a community of women. Some lesbians feel that bisexual women, along with their heterosexual privilege, benefit from the work that lesbians have done to create a woman-positive space. It could be argued that many of the women who do the work to create woman-positive and lesbian-positive spaces are bisexual and closeted bisexual women. The fears of disapproval and excommunication that threaten bisexual women who have been part of lesbian communities and cultures can make it difficult to come to terms with their bisexuality. Chris admits that:

> ...having been in both places, I've felt those feelings like some women that I've really admired and looked up to as an out lesbian, and then she gets with a guy, and I remember feeling, "oh no that's so disappointing, she's getting married." I felt this loss. (Chris)

Why should it feel any more of a loss that a woman gets married to a man than if she gets married to a woman? The gender of a woman's partner, particularly if she has a history of involvement and activism in a lesbian or queer community, tells us nothing about the possibilities of her continued commitment to feminism or to lesbian and queer rights. It

is biphobic to assume that a woman's involvement with a man is going to necessarily mean a loss to the community or the loss of an activist committed to ending gender-related oppressions.

Biphobia in Action: Stereotypes of Bisexuals

The stereotypes of bisexuals that persist are perhaps one of the clearest manifestations of biphobia. Even today, bisexuals are stereotyped as any one of or combination of the following: in transition; on the way to becoming lesbian; sex-crazed and hedonistic; politically motivated; responsible for the spread of AIDS; irresponsible; untrustworthy; nonmonogamous; promiscuous; and sitting on the fence.[1] Straights and gays alike often accuse us of having the best of both worlds ("oh, you bisexuals, you think you can have your cake and eat it too!") Several of these stereotypes are revealed in Isis' account of her visit home:

> I went to visit my grade seven teacher who's a really good friend of mine and we were talking about various people who were in our class...Alan's gay, but I didn't want to out him that far for some reason, so I said Alan's bisexual and he's into men right now. And she's like, "oh my goodness, that's how diseases get spread," and she got all upset, and she was saying how bisexual people are just really really horny and they can't make any decisions. I got really frightened. (Isis)

Being the recipient of biphobia, particularly for someone who has already gone through a coming out process as a lesbian, can be a frightening and painful experience: "I was operating under a lot of fear," says Chris, "it just didn't fit my philosophy because when I was considering myself lesbian I was coming out all the time, just because I didn't want

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[1]Christine Taylor, a Vancouver-based bisexual entertainer and performance artist, made fun of this stereotype of bisexuality when she said "I'm not a fence-sitter, I'm a fence-rider." As in any struggle to fight oppression, humor is important sometimes.

to live a closed life. So why would I want to live a closed life as a bisexual?" (Chris). The fear of being stereotyped plays an important role in bisexual closetedness and invisibility.

Bisexual women are often accepted in the lesbian community, but are still viewed with suspicion by some lesbians, who may see bisexual women as potential friends, but not potential lovers:

> I've heard a lot of lesbians say, "I'd never get involved with a bisexual woman, one could be my friend, but— " And these are the ones who consider themselves fairly accepting, "bisexuality—yeah, that's cool—but I'd never go out with one." I've heard women not accepting choices, like, "oh, they're really straight chicks who just want to have some fun on the side." (Chris)

When I talked to Gerri about bisexual acceptance in the lesbian community, she expressed the same sentiment:

> For me personally, I don't know if I would date someone who's bi, which is very strange, you know because I identified as that once. But I think it's more a personal thing. I think I'm a little bit more insecure in that I think I would have a problem with having to feel like I'm watching out for both men and women as potential threats...but I have no problem with them in the community. (Gerri)

As a self-identified lesbian who previously identified as bisexual and who says that she has not ruled out the possibility of getting involved with a man again, Gerri recognizes that her insecurity about bisexuals is "strange." The stigma of the bisexual identity has encouraged Gerri not to trust other bisexuals. Dorothy agrees that bisexuals are often mistrusted: "It's that whole trust issue, that you can't trust bisexuals" (Dorothy). She explains that just because she is bisexual does not mean that she cannot be trusted or be in a trusting relationship. For bisexuals "it's an attraction that they don't deny, whether they choose to act on it or not is totally separate" (Dorothy). Oriani also feels that as a bisexual woman, she is mistrusted by both lesbians and straight women. She feels that

she has to work harder to be "out" as a result, saying, "You have to prove yourself even more 'cause you're automatically suspect" (Oriani).

Part of the distrust some lesbians feel towards bisexual women is the presumed possibility that a bisexual woman will leave her lesbian lover for a man:

> We've all heard the story of the lesbian who gets involved with the bisexual woman who leaves her for her ex-boyfriend or a man at some point. What's the difference between leaving her for a man or for a woman? If you were involved with a lesbian woman who left you for her ex-girlfriend, there's not that same sort of bitterness. But when you leave her for a man, it's, "those damn bisexuals, they can't make up their mind." There's a definite mistrust. (Kate)

The mistrust that some lesbians feel towards bisexual women is perhaps an extension of the mistrust some women, including lesbians, feel towards men. Lesbians who mistrust bisexual women may mistrust us because of our potential connection to (heterosexual) men.

Another stereotype associated with bisexuality is the idea that bisexuals are really heterosexuals in sheep's clothing, entering into the queer community for some fun, and when the going gets rough, they shed their queerness to reveal the "wolf" underneath. While this may describe some bisexual behavior, it is problematic to stereotype all bisexuals as "dabbling in queerness." Juliet expresses her concerns about some of the stereotyping of bisexuals:

> The issue of having to decide and people think that you have to choose, and you can't make up your mind. I know that we have to deal with that a lot. The queer community doesn't a lot of the time accept you for how you identify yourself because, I don't know, they just think that it's illegitimate, like it's somewhere in between. Like, "Xtra West" won't put bisexual in their title because, I'm not sure their reasoning, but they just think that you're dabbling in queerness. (Juliet)

The idea that bisexuality is an illegitimate position or identity was expressed by a number of the women I spoke with, and it is also a theme that permeates much of the literature

and theorizing on bisexuality. Bisexuals are made to feel that we must make a choice and that we are in a state of immature indecision. Kate relates:

> There's not a lot of acceptance among the queer community for bisexuals. I find a lot of the lesbian women I know will be like, "make up your mind." Or they see you just as being straight. And then in the het community, it seems like guys want what I call recreational lesbians, because what I mean by that is that they want you to have a threesome, and it's okay for you to be a lesbian in that context. (Kate)

Both straights, gays, and lesbians are uncomfortable with bisexuals' position "in-between," often seeing bisexuals as "really" straight or "really" gay. Yet, the narratives of bisexual women indicate that we are "really" bisexual and not the stereotypical "bi-curious" types of the personals ads.

Bisexuals are Nonmonogamous, Sex Crazed, and Spread Aids

A popular stereotype of bisexuals is that they are *de facto* nonmonogamous. Some bisexuals who have claimed bisexuality as a positive self-identification have already challenged the institutions of heterosexuality and monosexuality, and so have found it easier to challenge the institution of monogamy. Annie Murray suggests that "monogamy is such a powerful social norm that it is rarely questioned. It is practically invisible" (Murray 294). Monogamy can be defined as "the formal exclusion of all others from erotic contact with the marriage (sic.) partner" (McMurty qtd. in Murray 294). Nonmonogamy, also known as polyamory, takes on many forms: it can mean two partners who agree to have short term or "secondary" sexual relations with others; it can mean a partnership of three people; or it can mean having multiple emotional, but not sexual, commitments to people. Claiming a bisexual identity tends to involve a recognition of temporality in a way that monosexual identities do not. With a

monosexual identification, the pretense that a partner is the "only one" and the ideal of romantic love that will last "forever" can more easily be maintained than with a bisexual identification, which is seen to recognize the possibility of past and future lovers regardless of gender. Why should the possibly of "everlasting love" be any different for heterosexuals, homosexuals, or bisexuals?

Because bisexuality challenges mononormativity in terms of sexuality, there are a number of bisexuals who question the institution of monogamy as another manifestation of mononormativity. Several of the women I interviewed spoke to me about nonmonogamy. Dorothy calls it "another cultural power system" in addition to heterosexuality (Dorothy). Chris worries about fitting the stereotype of the nonmonogamous bisexual:

> I've come out as being bisexual but it's also a nonmonogamous relationship and that's a whole new thing for me as well. So it's really hard for me to separate the two because it's all happening simultaneously. I guess I feel a little scared because I think I'm fitting some of those stereotypes right now. (Chris)

Barbara sees nonmonogamy as an ideal, but one that is difficult to live by because of our conditioning to be monogamous and because so many people, whatever their sexual orientation, do not work within a nonmonogamous framework:

> But the nonmonogamy thing, it's such a great ideal and it is something that I'd like to live by but because of the way we learn to have relationships, to unlearn that has been much more of a struggle than anything about being queer, because being queer, I guess we have this sense of community…but nonmonogamy, there's not a lot of support for doing it. (Barbara)

While there may in actuality be more bisexuals who are nonmonogamous, many bisexuals are also monogamous. So while bisexuals, who already challenge

mononormativity, may be more likely to question monogamy, we are not necessarily nonmonogamous.

Related to the notion of nonmonogamy is the suggestion that bisexuals are promiscuous "sex maniacs." Again, while some bisexuals may sleep around, so too do some heterosexuals and homosexuals. Nonetheless, it appears that bisexuals have been scapegoated as sex fiends. America's only national bisexual magazine, Anything That Moves parodies this stereotype, implying, of course, that bisexuals will fuck "anything that moves." Juliet expresses her sentiments about this stereotype:

> People think that all we do is have sex; yet there are these people who aren't even with anybody who still identify as bisexual. And then there's the whole thing of how can you call yourself bisexual if you're living with a man, how can you call yourself bisexual if you're living with woman, but it's not what you're doing at the time but more how you feel. (Juliet)

In terms of safe sex practices, labels such as heterosexual, lesbian, or gay hide the fact that many people who identify monosexually, and who are encouraged to identify this way because these are the "acceptable" or "understood" ways to identify, are in fact behaviorally bisexual.

People who have monosexual identities will feel less inclined to reveal their bisexual pasts, and generally they will not be questioned about their behavior because the assumption is that lesbians only sleep with women. As lesbians who have been or are presently behaviorally bisexual, Naomi, Barbara, and Gerri demonstrate that sexual self-identification does not always reflect sexual behavior. Safer sex practices are affected by this denial of hybridity and the continued sense that a hybrid identity is wrong or inappropriate.

Hybrids Experiencing Heterosexual Privilege

Ever since the politicization of women's rights during the 1970s, there has been some tension between lesbians and straight women. Lesbians were and continue to face two kinds of oppression; patriarchy and heterosexual privilege. Cheshire Calhoun says of the feminist movement of the 1970s: "It was neither the time nor the place for lesbians to entertain the possibility that heterosexuality might itself be a political system and that heterosexual women and men, as a consolidated and powerful class, might have strong interests in maintaining a system of heterosexual privileges" (Calhoun 561). She relates this specifically to a system of male privilege suggesting that heterosexual women have an interest in maintaining a system of male privilege to maintain their own heterosexual privilege. Oriani discusses her privilege as a bisexual woman involved with a man:

> I have had heterosexual privilege in my relationship with my male partner 'cause we can walk around and we can get housing and there's all sorts of things like that. I think bisexual people often are too defensive when people call them on having heterosexual privilege. I know too many people who say, "no, I don't have any, I'm just as oppressed as you." It's often very individual. (Oriani)

This testimony provides a strong argument for the recognition of diversity of bisexual women's experiences of heterosexual privilege. Lesbians who are not out also experience heterosexual privilege, and while bisexuals may have some heterosexual experiences that provide a ruse, lesbians can just as easily stay in the closet and find ways of looking straight.

Internalized Biphobia

The pressure to fit into mutually exclusive categories is so strong that even women who have recognized sexual hybridity in themselves have expressed frustration or

disappointment when they see others displaying bisexuality. Dorothy, who is bisexual herself, expresses her thoughts on bisexuality in others:

> I guess I've found myself thinking frustrating thoughts about other people's bisexuality. Doesn't that sound crazy? Especially in my new women identified space, just off the cuff I thought why do they need to include men in their life? I've never admitted that to anybody 'cause it doesn't make sense. (Dorothy)

The results of pressures on bisexuals coming from both sides, added to internalized homophobia, can lead to internalized biphobia, as Chris relates:

> For the first while, when I was first involved with him, it was so closeted, it was a familiar place from when I was first coming out, I wasn't with anyone, but I was terrified that anyone would know. When I was in high school, being attracted to women and no one better find out. It's such a weird place because I felt like I've been with women so long that that feels just normal, so being with a guy feels like this deviant thing. It's odd cause it's the normal expected thing. So for the first while that I was with him, I didn't tell anybody expect for my good friend. It just didn't feel right to be so closed about it. I was just scared. (Chris)

Like internalized monoracism whereby mixed individuals wish to be monoracial, internalized biphobia is the result of the pressures hybrids feel to fit into a mononormatively defined binary oppositional category.

Genderism

It is important to briefly address genderism as a form of discrimination that affects not only "gendered" hybrids, i.e., transgendered people, but that also keeps many of the other gender-related forms of discrimination in place. Gender is a dual category system in which certain human traits are assigned to each of the two biological sexes (Baker 257). Biological sex is related to gender in that those who are seen as biologically male are encouraged to be masculine, identify as men, and desire women. When biological

sex, gender behavior, gender identification, and sexual orientation do not correspond, there is a challenge to gender normativity, heteronormativity, and mononormativity.

Dallas Denny and Jamison Green describe four different groups that deviate from the normative correlations of gender: intersexuals, transgenderists, transvestites, and transsexuals. Intersexuality is characterized by ambiguous genitalia such as a micropenis or an enlarged clitoris. Many intersexual infants are surgically altered to conform to a particular sex, sometimes without their parent's knowledge or consent. A transgenderist is someone who identifies with both the male and female roles or identities, sometimes modifying their bodies with hormones or plastic surgery. A transvestite, sometimes called a cross-dresser, is an individual who sometimes wears the clothing of the opposite sex. Finally, transsexual people feel that their gender identity is opposite of their biological sex, usually stemming from a long standing desire to live as the opposite sex (Denny and Green 86-7). It is these individuals who feel the effects of genderism most directly.

Jill Nagle defines genderism as, "the notion that it is right and natural to divide people into two and only two mutually exclusive biological sexes (male and female), and the systemic oppression of those who are perceived to challenge that idea" (Nagle 306). She argues that women, homosexuals, and bisexuals are also deeply affected by genderism because, "sexism, heterosexism, and monosexism all depend conceptually on genderism" (Nagle 306). She implores us to envision a non-genderist society in which:

> the terms "women" and "men" are used loosely, if at all. Thus, some "women" have penises, some "men" wombs and/or vulvas; some people have genitals of both sexes. Although most people are identifiable by their bodies as what we now call male and female, gender presentation is treated with a much more relaxed, playful attitude. (Nagle 309)

This vision of a non-genderist society presents one of the greatest challenges to mononormativity because, as Nagle suggests, if you eliminate genderism, there is no basis for any of the other gender-related oppressions.

Conclusion: Parallels Between Race, Ethnic, Sex and Gender-Related Oppressions

Parallels can be made between various forms of discrimination and stereotypes that specifically affect hybrids in terms of race, ethnicity, culture, sexuality, and gender. The fear of losing community is shared by bisexual, multiracial, multiethnic, and multicultural women as they struggle to maintain their place in the lesbian and women of colour communities. Both bisexuals and mixed individuals are seen as diluting the saliency of the groups to which we belong. Racial and sexual hybrids are also seen as having white/light or heterosexual privilege because of partial membership in an oppressor group. Mixed women are eroticized and exoticized by monoracial groups, while bisexual women are seen as over-sexed by monosexual groups. Hybrids are therefore caught between not being enough like those in a privileged group and not enough like those in a marginalized group; not completely "one of them" and not completely "one of us."

As homosexual people and people of colour experience and internalize homophobia and racism respectively, they create boundaries around themselves that do not include people who are hybrid. Hence, hybrids are often viewed with suspicion and hostility for the challenge we pose to the us/them dichotomy. Biphobia and colourism are

parallel in that both forms of discrimination are perpetuated by internalized homophobia and racism. As Brenda Blasingame puts it:

> One of the key ways that heterosexism has been internalized is in the monosexual paradigm: either you are gay or you are straight. Within this paradigm bisexuality cannot exist. Biphobia is one of the ways that the queer community has acted out internalized heterosexism/homophobia. (Blasingame 48)

Just as bisexuals are seen as not being "homosexual enough" to some gays and lesbians, some people are not seen as "black enough." Blasingame is convinced that "part of the internalization of racism in the black community is the belief that some people are not 'black enough' " (Blasingame 49). She concludes, "when a system that oppresses us now has us fighting over which ones of us are 'truly' queer, we must begin to ask ourselves why we are fighting each other and not the system" (Blasingame 50).

Indeed, perhaps it is more effective to fight systems of oppression rather than to argue over who has ownership of oppression. Hybrids are caught in the cross fire of white racism, internalized racism, heterosexual homophobia, and internalized homophobia. As we work to end these oppressions in our society, we have simplified the fight into home turf and enemy territory. The home and the enemy factions alike do not know what to make of hybrids. It is no wonder that hybrids are feared, mistrusted, and told we do not belong. As a hybrid positioned in the middle of the "war zone," I propose that it might make more sense to stop building the trenches, and instead focus on getting rid of the weapons systems.

CONCLUSION

> We die containing a richness of lovers and tribes, tastes we have swallowed, bodies we have plunged into and swum up as if rivers of wisdom, characters we have climbed into as if trees, fears we have hidden in as if caves. I wish for all of this to be marked on my body when I am dead. I believe in such cartography—to be marked by nature, not just to label ourselves on a map like the names of rich men and women on buildings. We are communal histories, communal books. We are not owned or monogamous in our taste or experience. All I desired was to walk upon such an earth that had no maps. (Ondaatje 261)

Hybrid Embodiment

Where does this discourse on hybridity lead? What insights can those of us with hybrid identities share? What contributions does theorizing about hybridity offer to the project of eradicating racism, homophobia, and other forms of discrimination? When Michael Ondaatje writes about a world with no maps, he alludes to the way we draw our maps: with boundaries and labels. He proposes a new cartography of the body, a new way of mapping ourselves. As hybrids, we contribute to this new cartography by encouraging others to think differently about identity. In this thesis, I have discussed how concepts of hybridity have evolved from negative notions of impurity in the nineteenth century to a positive identity today. I have illustrated the limitations of mononormative binary oppositional identity labels, particularly when hybridity is recognized and validated. I have also argued that hybrids face unique difficulties with regards to identity and community formation, in addition to experiencing unique forms of oppression and discrimination.

Hybrids embody the queer, postcolonial, and postmodern theories that deconstruct, fragment, and challenge mononormativity and binary systems of categorization. Meena says, "I think it's the actual existence of people who are mixed

that is going to make people think. It's people affirming themselves as mixed and saying, 'this is who I am' " (Meena). Minal Hajratwala explores hybrid embodiment in the poem "Twenty Years After I Grew into Your Lives":

> I tell you who I am
> or rather, you discover
> secrets hidden in mislabeled boxes,
> papers published in other worlds…
>
> And it is my body, after all,
> that is the site of your confusion—
> sexual, bisexual, feminist
> but still brown-skinned, black-haired
> red-blooded (Hajratwala 143)

Hybridity may present a world view that, at its heart, challenges assumptions about the mutual exclusivity of categories. Minh-Ha believes that in a complex postcolonial reality it is, "vital to assume one's radical 'impurity' and to recognize the necessity of speaking from a hybrid place, hence of saying at least two, three things at a time" (Minh-ha Framer 140). This sentiment is echoed by Laura Perez:

> To be an out bisexual in a monosexually-defined society is to embrace the complexities of the middle ground and this, in my mind, goes hand in hand with multiculturalism. Breaking down dualistic assumptions and appreciating the many facets of all our lives can only bring us closer to the freedom we seek. (Perez 112)

The idea of embracing the borderland, supported by scholars such Gloria Anzaldua and Wendy Lee-Lampshire, provides a space for multiracial, multiethnic, multicultural, and bisexual individuals to become intelligible and visible. In This Bridge Called my Back, Mirtha Quintanales, a fair-skinned Latina woman, discusses the irony of being rejected by women of colour in the United States because she has fair skin (Quintanales 156); she is unintelligible. In the bisexual women's anthology Plural Desires, Margaret Christakos

explains how she is viewed with suspicion by some lesbians because she lives with a man and their infant son (Acharya 125); she is unintelligible. These individuals may have insights into strategies for coalition building, for they are both and neither. They are many and none. It is their stories and their poetry that make them intelligible.

Coalitional Politics

Theorizing about hybridity reveals the limitations of separate spaces, and the necessity of forming coalitions based on political positionality in addition to identity categories. Activists and scholars such as Angela Davis and June Jordan propose strategies that place an emphasis on political commonalities and warn against conceiving of identity categories as automatic grounds for connection. In the 1970s and 80s, Angela Davis was seen as too much of a Black nationalist by some white feminists, and her involvement with feminism was a threat to some of the Black male leaders she worked with. Ultimately, Davis rejected all "identity politics" that made categories like race, gender, or sexual orientation the basis for political organizing (Miles 65). Similarly, in an interview in Fireweed, June Jordon stressed that:

> ...on a public level, it seems to me that coalitional politics is the only route to positive change...people get confused about coalition[s] and they become afraid of coalition politics...because they think that it means that they're going to have to submerge their own identities or sacrifice their specific history or culture. (Christakos 30)

My vision of a hybrid space is one in which coalition building can take place that celebrates specific identities, histories, and cultures rather than submerging them. Gloria Anzaldua calls her vision El Mundo Zurdo (the left-handed world):

> We are the queer groups, the people that don't belong anywhere, not in the dominant world nor completely within our own respective cultures. Combined we cover so many oppressions. But the overwhelming oppression is the collective fact that we do not fit, and because we do not fit we are a threat. Not all of us have the same oppressions, but we empathize and identify with each other's oppressions. We do not have the same ideology, nor do we derive similar solutions. Some of us are leftists, some of us are practitioners of magic. Some of us are both. (Anzaldua 209)

Anzaldua's Mundo Zurdo finds resonance with Homi Bhabha's notion of the "Third Space" (Bhabha 36). Oriani describes her vision of coalitional space:

> Most people I hang out with tend to be women and/or queer and definitely political. *I find that organizing, having coalitions around shared politics as opposed to shared identity works better, or is more meaningful and is more likely to work and be productive.* Although I find that people with whom I share politics tend to have particular identities, I mean there are no straight white men in the group, there are people of colour, there are women… (Oriani, my emphasis)

Judith Butler suggests that this emphasis on political positionality provides a radical critique of identity: "If identities were no longer fixed as the premises of a political syllogism, and politics no longer understood as a set of practices derived from the alleged interest that belong to a set of ready-made subjects, a new configuration of politics would surely emerge from the ruins of the old" (Butler Gender Trouble 149). Newness emerges from the old, and what results are coalitions of people who are concerned about social change and committed to making parallels between various forms of oppression, rather than competing for the top place on the hierarchy of oppression.

What hybridity teaches us about coalition-building is that through the blurring of the boundaries between "us" and "them," we start to think about the things that fundamentally unite us as human beings. We can start to think in terms of a common commitment to ending oppression; we may begin to see the world in its sheer complexity; we are forced to stop and think about the kinds of dichotomies that prevent us from

coming together to eradicate injustice and suffering. Hybrids can be seen as providing a kind of bridge between the white and black communities or the gay and straight communities. For instance, Hélène Cixous suggests that bisexuals are bridges (qtd. in Hemmings 52). Chris agrees, "I think people with hybrid identities of various kinds have a lot to offer, because so often they are the bridge between different groups and they can understand both sides; almost being a mediator...so it's really good for society to have people who are embracing that in themselves" (Chris). Perhaps hybrids, who blur boundaries, can bring us closer to a vision of a society which celebrates diversity, spontaneously hybridizing and sharing. Racial, ethnic, cultural, and sexual identities would be treated more playfully than they are now, so that they become meaningful in so far as we give them the meanings we choose.

Telling our Stories

> There are stories told by lovers. Sometimes they are instructional. Sometimes the stories are not told with the mouth, but with the whole body, arcing across skin, shooting history into veins. Stories set into motion the moment they spill, stories that cannot be turned back and started over. They can be told and told again, but with each telling an older rhythm reasserts itself and there is never any taking the story back. (Lai 160)

Narrative is a metaphor for bisexual and multicultural existence because it is largely through narrative that hybrid identities become intelligible. There are no clearly defined behaviors or characteristics that are obviously bisexual, mixed, or hybrid, and the best way to understand hybridity is by hearing and telling our stories. In the anthology of works and poetry by bisexual women Plural Desires, the storytelling impulse recurs throughout. Cyndy Head writes, "How did I come to identify as bi? Let me tell you a

story…" (Acharya 150). Tracy Fehr tells a story and then writes, "This story speaks to me of my own journey: as bisexual, as Metis, as a recovering alcoholic, as an adult child of an alcoholic and as a survivor of childhood abuse" (Acharya 128-9). Again, the importance of the story is reiterated by Margaret Christakos: "A few weeks ago I realized I had not learned to write fiction because I had never intended to tell the story" (Acharya 120). And finally, Steph Rendino concludes her piece with: "So that, my dear nameless teenager, is my story. I know it's a little rambly, but I had a lot to say" (Acharya 133-4). In Vice Versa, Marjorie Garber writes:

> Bisexuality…is not an "identity" (or a figure or a trope) but a narrative, a story. Yet the practical necessities of politics require making bisexuality into an "identity," at the same time that bisexuality itself, or bisexualities themselves, put in question the viability of a "politics of identity" at all. (Garber 87)

In addition to deconstructing a politics of identity, this approach to bisexual theorizing is concerned about making bisexual stories and experiences visible. Many hybrids are great storytellers; we have to be, for often we are not intelligible until we tell our stories. The challenge that identity is an automatic ground of connection is based on the premise that we cannot really know where someone stands until they start to share their stories.

Indeed, many hybrid women writers are telling their stories at last. Or, alternately, they have always been telling their stories, it's just that now, they are finally being heard. Authors such as Shani Mootoo, Larissa Lai, Bharati Mukherjee, Amy Tan, and Erika Lopez are all making their mark on the literary scene in North America. Shani Mootoo is an Indo-Trinidadian-Canadian lesbian artist who has written a book of short stories entitled, Out on Main Street, and a magic realism inspired first novel, Cereus Blooms at Night. In a short story entitled "Sushila's Bhakti," she writes:

> For ten years she had been floating rootlessly in the Canadian landscape, not properly Trinidadian (she could not sing one calypso, or shake down her hips with abandon when one was sung—the diligence of being a goodBrahmingirl), not Indian except in skin colour (now, curries and too many spices gave her frightful cramps, and the runs, and in her family a sari had always been a costume), certainly not White and hardly Canadian either. Except in the sense that Canada was a country full of rootless and floating people. (Mootoo 60)

The theme of rootlessness and displacement is also explored by Larissa Lai, a Vancouver-based Chinese-American hybrid, in the following dialogue in her novel, When Fox is a Thousand:

> "Don't you wonder about where you came from, who your…people were?
> "…I don't know. I really don't think about it…" She paused. "Things move and change a lot from generation to generation. I am no less who I am for where I've ended up." (Lai 96-97)

In this example, the negotiation of multiple identities, rootlessness, and displacement as contemporary experiences in North America is emphasized by the idea that there is a dramatic change from one generation to the next. Another example of a writer whose protagonist comes to terms with her hybridity is in Bharati Mukherjee's most recent novel Leave It to Me:

> I hadn't [yet] sat under Madame K's Mariposa Mystic, a wooden doll bought on sale at a Taxco boutique, and meditated on genetic mysteries. The mariposa is a butterfly woman with horns and wings in dramatic reds, blues and greens, with big-nippled breasts and larva legs and feet. She hangs on the wall of Madame K's "office," a bug evolving into deity, a deity dissolving into bug. I see myself in the mariposa doll. (Mukherjee 52)

The narrator, Devi, is the daughter of a California hippie and a mysterious "Indian National," and the novel is about her search for her biological parents and the negotiation of her genetic and cultural heritage. Another example of hybridity in contemporary North American literature is Erika Lopez' novel Flaming Iguanas, which features a protagonist by the name of Tomato Rodriguez—a half Puerto Rican Quaker bisexual hybrid—who

goes on a road trip across the United States. When one of the characters she meets on her journey asks her if she is straight or gay she says she thinks she is both. She then recalls, "I just couldn't keep my hands off myself, so I masturbated all winter until I met a nice boy in the spring I could practice lesbian sex with" (Lopez 220). In her novel The Hundred Secret Senses, Amy Tan also writes about a hybrid woman named Olivia who is the daughter of a Chinese father and white American mother growing up in San Francisco. As an adult, Olivia goes on a journey of discovery to China, and again the author explores issues of hybridity and belonging.

These women writers have used the medium of the novel to tell the stories of hybrid women in North America. Incorporating elements of autobiography and magic realism into their stories, they are pioneers of a growing body of work that is committed to telling stories that have not yet been heard. In her essay "Anti-Venom for the Soul," Laura Antoniou writes:

> Where could there be a place to talk about the challenges and rewards of not-being-het? I could pour it out into a novel maybe, but every time I try it comes out raw and rough, as though I was discovering a new form of storytelling. I need to wrestle with the language, almost physically wring meaning from the worlds one at a time, stopping to define and redefine at every step…it's a story that has to be told. (Antoniou 121)

These stories which have to be told demonstrate that identity has everything to do with the ways in which someone has chosen to negotiate lived experience and multiple cultures. There is no formula for determining identity or access to community, whether it be sexuality, race, ethnicity, or culture. I argue that identity must be determined *retrospectively*, through the telling of stories. It is also through the telling of stories that we begin to understand the identities and experiences of other people. Minrose Gwin

proposes that through stories we can also shift positionality and inhabit other narrative spaces. She writes,

> As part of the reading process of "space travel," I am thinking about how the real and imagined spaces and borders of identity are themselves not only permeable but also mobile and how their mobility has implications for the ways in which we continually construct ourselves as we produce the narratives of our own lives. (Gwin 871)

Anzaldua agrees: "The ability of 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" (Anzaldua 66). This is the power of the story, to transform, to take the teller and the listener places they have never before journeyed and have never before imagined. Therein lies the radical transformative political potential of stories, not only for hybrid women and men, but for us all.

Who are we *really*?

As a hybrid woman, I have felt an affinity with others who do not fit neatly into socially constructed and accepted categories. The stories of fifteen young Canadian women in Halifax and Vancouver, in addition to the many voices of theorists and poets across North America, illustrate that living as a hybrid at the end of the twentieth century in North America can be difficult and painful, but it can also be a source of richness and joy. Many women have talked about their frustrations, fears, and feelings of not belonging, and I have often found an articulation of my own feelings of displacement in their stories. Many of the women who spoke to me about their experiences of hybridity also expressed a sense of pride and greater appreciation of difference through their hybridity. For example, Isis says:

> The thing that I really like about being bisexual—other than the sexual part of it (laughter)—is that I think I have and a lot of bisexual people have an increased sense of tolerance to hybridity in that sense, and understand the intricacies of it and how it works. I like it. I think it's a good thing to be. I would rather be bisexual than straight or gay, not just because it's who I am but because I'm more accepting of people and I don't assume anything. (Isis)

Overall, these fifteen women expressed ideas, insights, and experiences of plurality that move beyond commonly understood cultural and sexual boundaries.

Although there are an increasing number of people who are claiming positive hybrid identities, the negative associations of hybridity originating in the nineteenth century still leads to a general mistrust of hybrids. This influence, combined with pervasive racism and homophobia, means that hybrids are still the target of discrimination. Those of us who recognize hybridity in ourselves and others, and who celebrate self-defined or transformative hybridity are feared and disliked for the blurring effect we have on simplified, singular, dichotomous categories. Or we are told that we do not really exist. It seems that no matter what we say about who we are, the standard responses are: "but what are you *really*?" "but who do you desire *really*: men or women?" "but where are you from *really*?" or "but who are you *really*?" Without a challenge to both mononormativity and binary oppositional categories, variations on these questions will continue to plague us. If three of your grandparents are white and one is black, are you multiethnic, or just mainly white? Are you hybrid or not? Or partially hybrid? If you are bisexual but mainly desire and love women, are you sort of hybrid, or mostly lesbian?

As we have seen, hybrids struggle to find communities that will accept us for who we are and might become. Some of us suffer similar discriminations and oppressions that other marginalized groups face in addition to unique forms of discrimination that effect hybrids in particular. Besides feelings of displacement, there are real legal, economic, and health implications that result from not recognizing or validating hybridity. Our institutions, laws, and services are defined mononormatively and hybrids continue to be defined out of existence. Consequently, hybrids feel the psychological effects of not belonging, of not *being*. It is my hope that hybridity will soon be widely seen as an imaginable and acceptable possibility and that hybrid identities will be respected alongside mononormative ones. It is time to move hybridity out from postcolonial and bisexual theorizing and on to the streets, creating a society where storytelling, continuums, fluidity, fragmentation, syncretism, and border-crossing are valued and celebrated.

EPILOGUE

> I must work fast, faster than Scheherazade, if I am to end up meaning—yes, meaning—something. I admit it: above all things, I fear absurdity. And there are so many stories to tell, too many, such an excess of intertwined lives events miracles places rumors, so dense a commingling of the improbable and the mundane! (Rushdie Midnight's Children 9)

Magic Realism as a Hybrid Genre

The hybridization of different and sometimes disparate identities, cultures, and sexualities finds a parallel in the coming together of fantasy and realism which results in the literary genre of magic realism. Magic realism, also known as magical realism or marvelous realism, has been recognized internationally as a literary genre in the last half of the twentieth century. In combining contradictory literary conventions, something new hybrid genre has been created. Authors such as Salman Rushdie, Gabriel Garcia Marquez, Tom Robbins, John Nichols, Isabel Allende, Alejo Carpentier, and Laura Esquivel have provided readers with magical treatments of particular social and political realities. For example, in Like Water for Chocolate, Laura Esquivel describes the birth of the protagonist, Tita, foreshadowing the pain and suffering she will face in her lifetime:

> Tita was literally washed into this world on a great tide of tears that spilled over the edge of the table and flooded across the kitchen floor. That afternoon, when the uproar had subsided and the water had been dried up by the sun, Nacha swept up the residue the tears had left on the red stone floor. There was enough salt to fill a ten-pound sack—it was used for cooking and lasted a long time. (Esquivel 6)

In the hybrid world of magic realism, anything can happen. The impossible becomes possible, the supernatural becomes natural, the unreal becomes real, and the bizarre becomes normal.

Consequently, magic realism is a genre that is particularly appropriate for talking about hybridity. Lois Zamora and Wendy Faris suggest that:

> ...magical realism is a mode suited to exploring—and transgressing—boundaries, whether the boundaries are ontological, political, geographical, or generic. Magical realism often facilitates the fusion, or coexistence, of possible worlds, spaces, systems that would be irreconcilable in other modes of fiction. (Zamora 5-6)

Just as hybridity suggests that there are multiple ways of describing and experiencing the world, the concordance of fantasy and realism challenges the notion that these two genres are mutually exclusive and makes transparent the fallacy of the so-called "objective" or historical account. Although magically real accounts are presented as reality, multiple and apparently conflicting realities may exist at the same time. When discussing the magical realism and hybridization that occurs in Salman Rushdie's The Satanic Verses, Rawdon Wilson suggests, "this hybridism occurs within the folding of worlds when one, bearing its own distinct laws, erupts into the other" (Wilson qtd. in Zamora 225). Amaryll Chanady calls this eruption "antimony," or the contradiction between two or more laws or authorities (Chanady 29). The reader must reconcile the existence of two conflicting logical codes and suspend judgment on what is rational or irrational.

Marta Gallo describes a widely accepted definition of magic realism which centers around the importance of the attitude towards reality. She says that magic realism:

> ...does not rely, as does surrealism, on dreamlike motifs, it does not distort reality, nor does it create imaginary worlds, like the authors of fantasy or science fiction do...magic realism is, above all, an attitude towards reality...in magic realism the writer faces reality and attempts to decipher it, and attempts to discover the mystery in things, in life, in human actions. (qtd. in Weisgerber 124, my translation)

Magic realism does not only function aesthetically, it also functions ideologically. According to Zamora and Faris, "In magical realist texts, ontological disruption serves the purpose of political and cultural disruption: magic is often given as a cultural corrective, requiring readers to scrutinize accepted realistic conventions of causality, materiality, motivation" (Zamora 3). They conclude:

> Magical realist texts are subversive: their in-betweenness, their all-at-onceness encourages resistance to monologic political and cultural structures, a feature that has made the mode particularly useful to writers in postcolonial cultures and, increasingly, to women. (Zamora 6)

It is no coincidence, then, that hybrid women are finding their voices through magic realist texts. Shani Mootoo, Laura Esquivel, and Isabel Allende are among some of the women who have been called writers of "magical feminism." Patricia Hart defines magical feminism as "magical realism used in a femino-centric novel, or short story or to make an authentic observation about the behavior and condition of women in the sociohistoric conditions depicted in the novel or short story" (Hart 174). It is the subversive, transformative potential of magic realism that makes it such a compelling literary genre for those who celebrate diversity, who work for a more just society, and who conceive of hybridity as enriching. Let us write our magical subversive verses.

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