University of Alberta

The (Ir)Relevance of Lesbian Identity within Contemporary Theorizing: A Poststructural Critique of Lesbian Feminist and Queer Theory

by

Melissa Leigh Casey

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Education

in

Theoretical, Cultural, and International Studies in Education

Educational Policy Studies

Abstract

Lesbian identity has become germane to contemporary theorizing on sexuality. Since the early 1990's, queer theory and critique have served to reveal the limitations and challenges of earlier lesbian feminist theory. However, queer theory has also encountered challenges, leaving theorizing on sexuality, and in particular women's sexuality, in contemporary contexts, complicated and unclear.

This textual theoretical study will include a comparative analysis of relevant literature in the fields of lesbian feminist and queer theory. An attempt will be made to map the emergence of lesbian and queer by examining the competing ideological models of structuralism and poststructuralism, which circulated alongside these discourses of (anti)identity theory, having profound influence. Through a poststructuralist critique situated within feminist discourse, the theoretical analyses will be applied through a phenomenological application of personal experiences in relation to the identity of lesbian and queer, in order to attempt to reveal the writer's current location on theorizing sexuality.

Acknowledgements

What was originally intended to be a relatively straightforward project turned out to be much more than I had ever anticipated and was certainly not achieved on my own. First, I would like to thank my supervisor, Dr. Jerrold Kachur, for the discussions that always sent me away thinking of new ideas, for your consistent support, and for reassuring me that I would only know that I had truly reached the end once the thesis had "mastered" me. How right you were!

I would also like to give my heartfelt thanks to the members of my committee, Dr. Brenda Spencer and Dr. Brenda Cameron. It was a great privilege to have you as part of this journey and I thank you for your wisdom and encouragement.

To my parents, my sister, my brother-in-law, and nieces, I thank you for your unwavering support and for your patience over these last few years.

Above all, I thank my partner, Mel. You have been my number one cheerleader, my listener, and my inspiration to keep going when it felt hopeless. Your ability to get me rolling when words refused to come into my mind is a skill that made this thesis possible. For that reason and others too numerous to list here, I dedicate all of this work to you.

Table of Contents

Chapter One: Introduction

Over the past few summers, at University of Alberta's Camp fYrefly summer camp for lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans-identified, two-spirited, intersexed, queer, questioning, and allied youth (LGBT2SIQQA), I have conducted a workshop titled *Identity and Intersectionality*. The focus of the session has been on analyzing the complexity of our identities or "recognisability" within society as well as within ourselves. Being a graduate student who has done a fair amount of research in poststructural feminist and sexuality studies, I was well aware of the theoretical complexities I was bringing to the table in talking about identity as an intersectional construction; especially with a group of youth for whom fluidity, slippage, and "not being boxed in," were vitally important to their existence. However, while this workshop was theoretically informed, it was not intended as a theoretical lesson. Instead, this was one of those moments where we talk about what makes us (un)recognizable and how those experiences relate to the ways in which we fit within the world.

During one of the breaks I found myself talking about identity with two of the campers who were curious to ask more questions about my own story and how I identified. I shared with them that while I am not rigid in my rules, that most often I choose to identify as a lesbian and rarely identify as queer. My reasoning, I explained, was based on what I saw as limiting challenges of the discourse of queer and that queer as a political stance was not achieving what it was originally intended to do; that queer, in my opinion, risked becoming an umbrella category that includes all non-heterosexuals, risking the unintended effect of reinforcing a strict binary relationship between heterosexuality and non-heterosexuality. After I explained my opinions and thoughts, I asked them what they were thinking. Without any significant delay, they both responded that they thought my ideas were interesting, but that they definitely identified as queer, not gay or lesbian, as they felt the named identities were too restricting for them. While to me queer is arguably a similarly challenged identity, they did not see it that way. This very short interaction has resulted in much further musing on the tension that has

evolved between, and amongst, queer and lesbian, as well as the limitations of both.

What struck me as most interesting about this conversation was how our respective generational discourses of sexuality and gender identity were so vastly different. Maybe youth today are far savvier than I was when I was their age? Or maybe they have been lead astray and risk falling into a trap of non-identity that may have consequences in their futures? I also recognize that these thoughts are likely compounded by my predilection towards feminism and my perception of myself as a lesbian.

My own coming out process was not based on a particular sexual experience or person of infatuation, but was instead a very introspective process of really thinking about what my sexuality was all about. The exact moment of entering into the thinking process was quite benign, actually. Hanging out one evening at a local gay and lesbian nightclub, a gay friend asked me if I would ever want to be with another woman. My answer? "Maybe." I have no idea why this was my response, all I knew was that the answer was not no. That small five-letter word, lead to a great deal of reflection on how I viewed myself, what lesbian meant to me, and how I might fit that identity.

At that time, I do not think it would have been possible to eloquently articulate exactly how I felt about lesbian as an identity, but I think I could offer that to me it meant non-heterosexual, different-than-normal, interested in women as a woman, authentic, comfortable, and just felt *right*. Beyond figuring out the basics for myself, came identifying with others that felt similarly, developing into the lesbian community, and trying to understand how my identity fit within that larger group. Being part of a larger group came with a sense of collective identity and in the right locations, such as pride parades, nightclubs, and local hangouts, a form of collective resistance to the (hetero)norms. I also found that performing in ways that are counter-to-the-norm carries with it a form of subversive pleasure, which, in an odd way, served to justify and explain having always felt curiously different while growing up. Lesbian was a named identity that answered many previously unanswered questions and concerns – it was *who* I was.

At the time of my own coming out as a lesbian in the mid-1990's, the concept of queer was not something that had filtered through to me in any substantial way. I knew the chants, "we're here, we're queer, get used to it" ("Queer Nation," 1990) and encountered the term more and more frequently. However, without theoretical exposure to queer ideas and/or not having been located in a city where queer politics were emerging to any great degree within the community, I simply saw queer as an umbrella term to smooth out the lumpiness of the non-heterosexual community, almost a shorthand designation. I saw myself as queer only insofar as I belonged to that lumpy group, but not beyond that point. I was part of a queer community, but I did not see myself as queer.

After I started studying feminist theory and various areas of sexuality studies, I began to encounter queer more frequently and developed an understanding for what it was supposed to stand for. With this knowledge I could understand the excitement associated with queer, but by this point I strongly and proudly identified as lesbian, and queer did not feel quite right somehow. As I continued to study, I began to stumble upon readings and ideas that suggested the theoretical limitations in my identity of lesbian. Primarily concerning was the challenge of the white woman speaking for women marginalized in other ways, as well as the position of privilege as a white woman within a paradigm of study that claimed to speak for all lesbians (Alimahomed, 2010; Seidman, 1993). I was certainly not comfortable with the potentially negative consequences those critiques posed.

For these and numbers of other reasons, many leapt over to queer based on the desire to distance oneself from the homogenizing practices and queer promised to resolve these challenges (Warner, 1993). However, my introduction to queer theory was also congruent with new critiques of queer theory, which also seemed to be similarly riddled with challenges. These experiences suggested that there was no right or best answer based on the theory and critiques, but I was comfortable with lesbian and felt it fit better than queer.

In a pragmatic context, queer does not bother me. I would not be upset if referred to as queer and in some contexts I may even use queer to gain recognition amongst a group (e.g. especially when dealing with youth). However, theoretically I am troubled with its use. As will be revealed later in this thesis, queer theory has been wildly misappropriated and misused, rendering it a weak representation of what it was originally intended to be (Epstein, 1994). Its popularization has devastated the transgressive potential that it proposed to have and its political capacity has been diminished (Halperin, 1995). Queer theory, as a cutting-edge movement has already departed, and much literature on "post-queer" is easily locatable (Eng, Halberstam, & Munoz, 2005; Love, 2011; Ruffolo, 2009). As a result, I am left with a distinct discomfort of queer theory and its related use within academia; however, I am similarly troubled with some of the critiques and limitations that have also been written about lesbian theory and feminist theory. This leaves me in a theoretical limbo that I am continuing to try to sort out and which I propose to muddle through as I pursue this project.

While I cannot locate my (possibly outdated) identity within current literature or discussions, I refuse to accept my theoretical erasure or invisibility. Yet, I cannot knowingly situate myself in outdated modes of theorizing that inculcate me in the project of homogenization and/or speaking from a position of privilege as part of a neo-colonial discourse on sexuality studies. I find myself riddled with questions of trying to figure out what is next or even, "what is now."

However, as will be found, the more important inquiry begins to shift towards *why* it is that this question is initially so central to the project and begs the critique of *what it is* that I seem to be holding onto. As concepts of structured identity wane and poststructural theories of strategic recognisability become more relevant, the significance of "what now" is diminished. Instead, what may need to be asked is, *for whom and for what purpose*? This perspective debases the settled-ness of identity in favour of a multiplicity of flows, veins, connections, fragments, and dispersions, which exceed any notion of a named identity (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987).

This thesis aims to answer these questions and the narratives throughout situate the ways in which my own experiences will inform my research, as well as focus the critical lens through which I will approach this deconstructive theoretical analysis.

Purpose of research

The problem this study will explore is the tension that appears to exist surrounding the theoretical identity of lesbian and the identity of queer within the contexts of lesbian theory, cultural feminist theory, sex-radical theory, poststructural feminist theory, and queer theory. An attempt here will be made to map the emergence of these identities by examining the competing ideological models of structuralism and poststructuralism, where each respectively had direct and profound influences on the identity of lesbian and the identity of queer. As is evident in the generational differences that exist between cultural feminism and queer theory, as well as lesbian and queer, so too are the ideological premises that were evolving alongside each of these theoretical bodies of work.

The following questions will guide the theoretical analysis and will be used as the basis for reflection upon the findings in the final section of this thesis:

1. Is "lesbian" as an identity or theoretical discourse any longer relevant within current, contemporary theorizing on sexuality?

2. If the identity of lesbian within theoretical discourse is passé, how does one approach theorizing on sexuality of a woman or defined group of women who identify as lesbian, and how can theorizing continue to develop in light of the critiques while also avoiding the same pitfalls? If lesbian identity has become theoretically insignificant, what are the ramifications or consequences with its disappearance?

3. In light of all of the misuse and misappropriation of queer theory and alongside the rapidly growing discourse on "post-queer" theorizing, what is next? Is there space for a post-queer lesbian?

Methodology

Given the focus on theoretical conceptions of identity and related meaning, the method employed in this textual theoretical thesis will be a thorough

and detailed review of existing texts (Clingan, 2008). To do this kind of historical and theoretical research, all of the data that will be analyzed will come from existing texts, as well as primary and secondary materials found in scholarly journals.

Through a comparative analysis of relevant literature in the fields of feminist and lesbian theory, as well as queer theory, I will explore tensions that exist between theoretical identities of lesbian and queer. The analysis of these texts will be grounded in both a structuralist and/or poststructuralist ideological framework, as appropriate (Hodgson & Standish, 2009). The methodology through which I will conduct the discourse analysis and interpret the data found in the texts will include a poststructuralist critique that has been situated within feminist discourse. The results of this analysis will be applied through a phenomenological application in order to further explore the questions and concerns introduced in the narrative opening this chapter (Kilbourn, 2006; Crowley & Rasmussen, 2010). As this thesis is primarily concerned with the theoretical and poststructural bases from which lesbian and queer theory are evolving and colliding, the method and methodologies proposed are best suited to achieve the goals of the study.

Significance of the Research

The perspective offered in this study is useful as there is limited existing work that attempts to address the theoretical relevance of lesbian in light of post-queer discourse. The identity of lesbian within current theoretical texts is becoming more difficult to locate due to the critiques of existing second-wave lesbian feminist theory coupled with the rampant uptake of queer and post-queer theory across multiple disciplines within the academy. The theoretical collisions between the two discursive realms of thought are making it unclear as to how to approach thinking about lesbian (or even if one should be thinking about lesbian) in contemporary texts (Halperin, 2003). Furthering textual-theoretical scholarship in this field will offer other scholars, as well as consumers of queer and lesbian theory, alternative perspectives and considerations regarding (anti)identity,

particularly in context with how ideas seem to shift from the academy to lived experience (or vice versa).

Limitations and Delimitations

There is a specific need to be aware of the globalizing and localizing tendencies of theoretical languages (Warner, 1993). When entering into discussions and theorization around lesbian identity, I feel a distinct responsibility to tread very carefully around meaning(s), so as to avoid making totalizing statements or assumptions of singular, unified experiences for groups of lesbians. Gloria Anzaldúa (2009) talks about how white, middle-class feminist writers often do not identify their privileged positions, creating theoretical ideas and statements that functionally exclude non-white women and/or women who do not share those same privileges. This is typically and unintentionally true of my own writing. Here, however, I will purposefully ground my interpretations, voice, and analysis in my whiteness, my middle-class-ness, and my Western-ness. I also acknowledge that I identify as a lesbian and a feminist, and that I am able-bodied, non-religious, formally educated, primarily English-speaking, and am located in a developed and privileged North American nation. These elements represent limitations in my own analysis and critical examination of existing theories, but also establish the perspective from which I write (Garber, 2001).

The lens through which I attempt to understand lesbian identity is informed by the discourses and discursive formations of sexuality, race, class, gender, location, and lived experiences that I am constituted by and within (Namaste, 1994). For Michel Foucault (1990a; 1990b), sexuality within our historically and geographically specific context has been socially constructed and shaped by and within complex discourses of power and knowledge. Power and knowledge come together to form discourse(s) and individuals become "object-effects" of power (Foucault, 1990). Foucault (2002) writes:

> (w)e must question those ready-made syntheses, those groupings that we
> normally accept before any examination, those links whose validity is
> recognized from the outset; we must oust those forms and obscure forces
> by which we usually link the discourse of one man with that of another;

they must be driven out from the darkness in which they reign. And
instead of according them unqualified, spontaneous value, we must accept,
in the name of methodological rigour, that, in the first instance, they
concern only a population of dispersed events. (p. 24)

My awareness of my own sexual identity, as established within my historically
specific and contextually relevant discursive formation(s), must not be taken as
that which is representative of all of those that may happen to share this particular
identity label. Instead, these assumed linkages need to be examined
deconstructively.

I know that my interpretations and ideas are skewed due to my
positionality; however, I also accept that I cannot remove myself from this
vantage, as I am discursively formed into my own lived experiences (Foucault,
2002). Instead I propose to move forward having fully acknowledged these
limitations that will undoubtedly be located in my work. I will speak as a white,
middle-class lesbian, writing at the intersections of my lived experiences. While I
may speak here from within a particular identity, I, "recognize the contingency
and limitations of that identity, and the implications of *to* whom and *for* whom
one speaks" (Riggs, 2010, p. 356). I remain accountable for my biases and
assumptions, and I will also avoid suggesting that my ideas are applicable outside
my own perspectives. It is for this reason that I have chosen to answer these
research questions through a self-reflection on my own narrative. It is with this
tentativeness and proposed sensitivity that I engage in this research.

The delimiting factors for this project are primarily in the selection of
literature for analysis. As the breadth and scope of both lesbian feminist theory
and queer theory are vast, it was necessary to narrow the focus to particular sets of
work with an intended purpose in mind. While acknowledging the goals of this
research, I have chosen to focus on key theoretical texts and theorists that are
most commonly recognized within their respective fields as those who contributed
to the founding of their ideology or paradigm. The rationale for selection of
specific theorists or texts will be grounded throughout the chapters as necessary.

Definition of Terms and Clarifications

The complexity of language as it relates to this project requires several important clarifications with respect to the ways in which particular words or culturally constructed notions will be used. In addition, there are also a number of obscure words or historical events that may require further explanation or definition:

Lesbian. Within the context of this project, when attempting to understand the identity of lesbian, I am not referring to the medicalization, pathologization, or marginalization of a woman who holds desire for another woman. Nor am I pursuing an understanding of lesbian as an enacted and lived experience. Instead, I am interested in the grounding of lesbian identity in existing theory. Otherwise stated, it is not the identity of "a" lesbian I am interested in, but instead the theoretical "identity of" lesbian and that which constitutes its meaning.

Identity. Within the context of this project, reference to identity refers to theoretical moments in which one is recognizable or intelligible under a named reference or identity (Rose, 2003). Within a structural context, concepts of identity are easily locatable and theorized; however, the recognition of sameness within identity begins to fall apart within the poststructural realm of difference and specificity, leading to a poststructural project of identity evasion or "anti-identity" (Gallop, 1992; Lurie, Cvetkovich, Gallop, Modleski, & Spillers, 2001).

Sex/Gender Distinction. Throughout the course of this project there will be numerous references to females, women, males, and men, and it is necessary to differentiate how these relate to sex (female/male) and gender (women/men). Sex is most often considered to be the "natural" biological sex differences between bodies (i.e. presence of a vagina or penis) by which the body can be "sexed" as either female or male (Williams & Stein, 2002). Alternatively, gender refers to the social roles, cultural meanings, and "naturalized" personality characteristics associated with the sex differences (i.e. femininity and masculinity) that are often unquestioned and heavily socially normalized (Williams & Stein, 2002). As part of this project, concepts of both sex and gender will be necessarily deconstructed through a poststructural analysis of their structured existence.

Heteronormativity. A term that refers to the examination of the mainstream privilege as it relates to cultural, legal, and institutional practices that maintain, "normative assumptions that there are two and only two genders, that gender reflects biological sex, and that only sexual attraction between these 'opposite' genders is natural or acceptable" (Schilt & Westbrook, 2009, p. 441). Heteronormativity exists in a binary relationship with "non-normativity," which represents those positions, identities, and acts that are counter to the mainstream and outside the realm of normative privileges.

Intersectionality. A concept that emerged from the writings of women of color during the 1970s that revealed the limitations of theorizing on gender as the universal collective for feminism. Intersectionality attempts to recognize the complexity of identity and calls on scholars to not only acknowledge the effects of race and class on women's experiences, but also that the feminist efforts by women of color are simultaneously embedded along with resistance efforts against racism and class-based struggles (Samuels & Ross-Sheriff, 2008).

Sex wars. A largely textual-intellectual argument between cultural feminists and sex-positive (pro-sex) feminists in the late 1970s and early 1980s that covered lesbian sexuality, the vilification of pornography, the positive valuation of women's innate qualities, the expression of sexual desire, and sexual freedom.

ACT UP (AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power). A United States based political movement that started in 1987 which was focused on dealing with the AIDS epidemic. The primary goals of ACT UP were to lobby governmental and medical organizations for improved healthcare policies for those suffering with HIV, as well as to challenge the cultural misconceptions about those with AIDS, especially amongst gay males (Halchi, 1999).

Queer Nation. A politically charged grassroots movement that emerged in several major urban centres in the United States in the early 1990s. The focus of the movement was on radically challenging the terms of gay and lesbian visibility politics through a "queering" of conventional perspectives on sexuality and

identity, along with the provocative use of queer – a term that has had historically negative connotations (Gray, 2009; Rand, 2004).

Overview of Thesis Organization

The upcoming chapter will introduce structuralism as an ideological framework through which the identity of lesbian was theorized, particularly within North American academies, as well as second wave feminism (Jeffreys, 1994). Ferdinand de Saussure's (1959) structuralist theory of language and system of signification will be examined in detail in order to be able to analyze the ideological premises upon which many social theoretical identities of lesbian have been formed and constructed (Guess, 1995). As a theoretical partner to Chapter Two, the third section shifts to poststructural thought, marking the overlapping transition between much of lesbian theory and queer theory. The examination of poststructuralism as an ideological shift that advanced as a response to the limitations of structuralist thought, is reflective of the ways in which queer theory arose as a critique against the limitations of Gay and Lesbian Studies, as well as the essentializing practices of existing lesbian feminist theory (Miller, 1998; Seidman, 1993; Warner, 1993).

Chapter Four will explore the ways in which the identity of lesbian has evolved within feminist theory by examining a number of key moments and critiques that emerged within the latter years of second wave feminism (Epstein, 1994). There will be a particular focus on theorists and literature that came out of the lesbian feminist sex wars, as well as the uptake of writings by lesbians, feminists of color, as well as other women that were fed up with being spoken for by white feminists (Alcoff, 1988). While it is certainly acknowledged that theorizing on lesbian identity has pre-existed this specific historical timeframe of the sex wars forward, the significance in the selection of literature published in this period is in the nature of the critiques that came from it, along with its alignment with the shift towards poststructuralism and branching into queer theory (Namaste, 1994). Beyond this point, theorizing on lesbian as a specific category begins to wane, making the shift towards poststructural thought integral in understanding where more current thinking may be located.

The fifth chapter will mark the origins of queer by first reviewing the utilization of queer as a political strategy of resistance towards social norms and heteronormative oppressions, and then mapping its materialization within the academy as a new form of theorizing. As political movements, Queer Nation and the ACT UP project were instrumental in the United States in the popularization of queer as both a transgressive anti-identity and as a form of resistance towards labelled identity categories (Halchi, 1999; Rand, 2004). Existing in an arguably dialectical relationship with these politically motivated demonstrations was the introduction of queer as a critical-theoretical discourse (Warner, 1993). Queer theory suggested the potential for an anti-institutional, non-universalizing, non-humanist discourse and came with the hope of spurring new ways of thinking about sexuality in minimally oppressive ways (de Lauretis, 1991).

Moving towards interpretation of existing theory and literature as it relates to this project, Chapter Six will examine the many critiques and challenges of queer theory that have surfaced since its introduction in the early 1990's, as well as its theoretical collisions with lesbian feminist theory. There will be a particular focus on the ways in which queer theory has been misused, misunderstood, and misappropriated within the academy, as well as a review of the critiques and responses by the same theorists that contributed to its beginnings (Epstein, 1994). Also necessary is an analysis of the implications and consequences of queer theory, including the effects of queer as an umbrella identity category over the larger LGBTQ community, the negative-valuing of lesbian identity, and the neutralization of the significance of difference. Concluding this chapter will also be a brief introduction to post-queer theory, indicating more current locations in the literature.

The final chapter will revert back to the beginning, offering a discussion and reflection of the above narrative, and will attempt to apply the theories and approaches established in the upcoming chapters. I will also take the opportunity to reflect on the questions posed above, as well as any further thoughts that reveal themselves throughout course of this project.

Chapter Two: Overview of Structuralism

As a theoretical discourse today, structuralism is heavily critiqued for its limitations and non- or misrecognition of the effects of power and complexity on lesbians and in particular the category of women (Calhoun, 1994). Many present day discussions have moved beyond the shortfalls of structuralism and on to poststructural dimensions, which allow for a thorough critique and examination of the multidimensional aspects of identity. However, structuralism has made an impact on our thinking about history and this quest to "undo" or "unlearn" in an era of "post" requires a thorough understanding of the discourse(s) of thought from which it has abdicated (Jameson, 1972). For example, queer theory evolved out of the many critiques of cultural feminist theory; although, in order to really understand the transgressive potential of and motivation behind queer, one must have a base from which to build the historical-theoretical foundations of queer theory.

Structuralist Background

Structuralism includes an expansive system of academic thought that proposes ways of thinking about our existence within predetermined structures (Hall, 1997). Structuralist analysis bore its focus on the notion of overarching universal rules, laws, or elementary structures that we exist within, and within which we are constituted (Hall, 1997). The non-concrete nature of the ideology morphed the commonly conceived idea of structure as a physical form into a cognitive model assembled upon a perceived reality (Glazer, 1994). Structuralism marked a form of analysis that examined and prioritized a shared system of signification over a private experience (Quigley, 2009).

As a project of the positivist perspective that evolved in France and rose to its peak in the 1950's and 1960's, structuralists were keenly interested in abolishing or transcending the idea of a sovereign rational subject (Olssen, 2003). Rather, they proposed an objective and rational methodology for analysing non-individualistic perceptions of reality, culture and social structure (Hall, 1997; Olssen, 2003). With this broad view approach, "there is a marked tendency amongst structuralist writers to prioritize the structure over the parts, or the pre-

existence of the whole over the parts" (Olssen, 2003, p. 193). Rejecting the idea of individual humanist consciousness and the notion of wilful choice, structuralist thought instead examined the ways in which language and structures generate meaning (Olssen, 2003). The significance of the structuralist approach in the context of this project lies in the development of meaning as a shared system, which is necessary to examine with respect to the understanding(s) that exist (or have existed) surrounding the identities of lesbian and queer.

To analyze the ways in which meaning is constructed, the structuralist first begins with an examination of the beings (or units) and the rules that govern them, followed by an attempt to describe the mechanistic ways of knowing (Olssen, 2003). The units of analysis are the surface phenomena occurring, while the rules are the ways that units can be put together. The structure, then, is the using of the units according to the rules (Culler, 2002). Take, for example, the process of sex identification of newborn babies. The units (or surface phenomena) in the identification process would be the penis and the vagina. The rules that govern sexual identity would include that the presence of a penis would commonly sex the infant as a male, whereas a vagina (or arguably, the lack of penis) would sex the child as female. Assuming that the sex of the infant has not already been pre-determined by uterine ultrasound, when a newborn emerges from the womb the infant can (most often) immediately be sexed based on visual examination of the genitalia. Structurally speaking, the mechanism used in the process of sex identification of an infant is determined according to the rules and units that make up the structure of sexual identity.

Further consider the structured state of sex identification by considering the importance of the frequently asked question of new parents..."Is it a boy or a girl?" The obvious rule operating within that question is that the infant must fit within one of only two structured and acceptable categories. This may create anxiety or discontent in instances where the rules and units collide. In situations of genital ambiguity there may be efforts to determine which sex is most likely to fit the rules according to the units being presented. In fact, the existence of a state of genital ambiguity is in itself a marker of the structured context of sex

identification – the infant is male, female, or is ambiguous and "needs to be determined." This approach to sex identification does not factor ambiguity or "other" sexes, but is instead most concerned that the units are used according to the rules prescribed by the existing structures.

These structures and ways of knowing are enforced and reinforced by the language we use. For example, the language of "male versus female" or "boy versus girl" precedes the emergence of the infant into the world and provides the structure by which we conceptualize sex identification. As established, it is understood that the infant with a penis is called male and the one with a vagina is called female, and from these identifying words we have an understanding of what male and female mean. The significant point of note here is that there is no privileged connection between language and the lived reality of male or female, instead, this reality of sexual identification is constructed through language (Saussure, 1959; Williams & Stein, 2002). As will be thoroughly examined later in this chapter, language has been a major focus of structuralist analysis in the creation of meaning and knowledge.

Structuralist Theorizing: Points of Emergence

Structuralism evolved from a number of distinct points of view, such as Jacques Lacan's use of psychoanalysis, Roland Barthes focus on semiotics and literary critique, Louis Althusser's expansion on Marxist ideology, Charles Sanders Peirce's theory of signs and pragmaticism, Ferdinand de Saussure's semiotic analysis of linguistics, and Claude Lévi-Strauss's examinations of kinship and marriage systems (Chandler, 2002; Hall, 1997). While it is Saussure that is found to be most commonly linked to structural linguistics, Lévi-Strauss's work also heavily influenced the field of semiotics and he has set up some of the framework through which the focus on language and meaning has evolved.

Claude Lévi-Strauss. Trained as a philosopher, Lévi-Strauss refuted the consciousness of philosophical teachers prior to his time and instead was looking for a new philosophy (Clarke, 1978). Lévi-Strauss's desire was, "to find a new basis on which man could grasp the meaning of his individual existence in the context of an apparently irrational and ruptural history" (Clarke, 1978, p. 410).

Lévi-Strauss was looking for explanations between the surface phenomena and rules of structuralism, and how those related to the universal principles of the human mind (Clarke, 1978).

Lévi-Strauss is thought of as the founder of the school of thought of structuralism with his work in structural anthropology (Clarke, 1978; Glazer, 1994). Through his anthropological studies on various tribal groups in South America, Lévi-Strauss contributed extensively to the development of the relationship between anthropology and linguistics by viewing cultures as systems of communication (Clarke, 1978; Lévi-Strauss, 1962). Based on the study of kinship systems, systems of classification, and analysis of myths, Lévi-Strauss examined fundamental rules and structural properties that were manifest in the societies he studied (Pettit, 1977). He observed that members within the tribal groups followed sets of rules consciously and/or unconsciously through the systems of reciprocity and opposition in the language being used.

Lévi-Strauss (1962) found that structures exist in an aggregate form that he terms the "unconscious," where social facts and structures exist without conscious interpretation or justification as a system of symbols (Glazer, 1994). His theory of unconsciousness asserts that while society exists both in the individual members and in the relations between individuals, that the relations are founded in the unconscious and not in some transcendent entity (Clarke, 1978; Lévi-Strauss, 1962). In Lévi-Strauss's *Structural Anthropology* (1963), an account of the effectiveness of symbols used by a tribal group is described in which he illustrates the function of the unconscious as that which engages the structures within which we exist. Lévi-Strauss (1963) states:

> (t)he unconscious...is always empty or, more accurately, it is as alien to mental images as is the stomach to the foods which pass through it. As the organ of a specific function, the unconscious merely imposes structural laws upon inarticulated elements which originate elsewhere--impulses, emotions, representations, and memories. We might say that the preconscious (primarily referring to our memories) is the individual lexicon where each of us accumulates the vocabulary of his personal

history, but that this vocabulary becomes significant, for us and for others, only to the extent that the unconscious structures it according to its laws and thus transforms it into language. (p. 203)

He theorized that structural laws were the same for everyone and existed prior to experience, in the unconscious, and that the amassed vocabulary, language, and symbols used within the tribal group were only as important as the structures that ruled its use (Clarke, 1978). For example, our preconscious awareness of sex identification may accrue based upon a consciously understood link between the presence of a penis on a male body and vagina on a female body. We may come to understand this symbolic link through mediums such as lessons from parents or pictures in textbooks; however, Lévi-Strauss would argue that the existence of these symbols is established according to the unconscious structures and laws within which sex identification exists.

As key to the ideology of structuralism as a broader category of thought, Lévi-Strauss was not concerned about physical structures as they relate to ways of knowing. Instead he examined the ways in which concrete representations were made manifest by cognitive models of perceived and lived reality (Glazer, 1994). For Lévi-Strauss, society does not exist based upon its own conditions of existence, but instead, "the conditions of existence of society itself take the form of psychological *a prioris*" (Clarke, 1978, p. 420). He argued that our ways of knowing came from non-physical, unconscious entities that formed the starting point of sociology, far before the concept of society.

A significant influence and source of legitimization for Lévi-Strauss's work came from Ferdinand de Saussure's work in the realm of structural linguistics (Clarke, 1978). For both Lévi-Strauss and Saussure, culture and language are composed of sets of obscured rules that govern the behaviour of its members and executioners. However, while these hidden rules are commonly and collectively understood by members of society, they are not necessarily accessible to articulation or explanation (Murphy, 2009). The common goal held by both theorists was to discover those rules.

Ferdinand de Saussure. Known as the founder of structural linguistics, Saussure developed a structuralist analysis of language as a signifying (structured) system, and whose influence can still be seen today in the fields of philosophy, linguistics, literary theory, feminist theory, and other areas of the social sciences (Olssen, 2003). At the highest level of analysis and a point from which to embark upon understanding his work, Saussure argued that language was much more than the utterances that are spoken and heard. Language, in terms of an auditory event, does not itself have significance, but rather it is the meanings attributed to the audible sounds that work together to create collective understanding (Olssen, 2003).

Saussure was interested in language, not as a system of communication, but instead as a semiotic system of signified signs that determine linkages between thought and sound (Chandler, 2002). Through the study of culture and language, his primary focus was to uncover the rules within what he theorized as a system of signs and a process of signification that created linguistic meaning in society (Chandler, 2002). Instead of trying to determine how meaning comes to be, Saussure instead examined the structures within language that made meanings possible.

The principles upon which structural linguistics rest are best introduced through Saussure's (1959) key text, *Course in General Linguistics*, which was published posthumously in 1919 by his students and then translated into English in 1959. In it he states, "language is a system of interdependent terms in which the value of any one element depends on the simultaneous coexistence of all the others" (Saussure, 1959, p. 114). The terms and elements are in fact a system of signs that establish identity through a functional process of defining differences and oppositions, often binary oppositions, from one another (Chandler, 2002). Otherwise stated, language establishes meaning according to what it is, but more importantly, what it is not.

Saussure's (1959) concept of the relational identity of signs is at the heart of structural linguistics. From the premise that any system of signs is a signifying system, language is a system of signs that signifies information and knowledge in

a manner in which words and meanings are "always already" understood and accepted (Saussure, 1959). To illustrate this rather abstract idea, the process of sex identification can again be considered. The word "female" in itself has no specific meaning on its own, but paired with a collection of signals or (what will be later understood as) signifiers that differentiate male from female, make up a system of signs that are somehow mutually understood, creating the meaning associated with female. It is through these relationships between signs that meaning and understanding exist prior to the utterance, and it is this underlying system that enables those utterances to exist that Saussure (1959) is most interested in.

Langue and parole. The underlying system of signs, or as Saussure referred to as *langue*, constituted the abstract systematic principles, rules, and conventions of language that exist *a priori* to the individual users (Chandler, 2002). *Langue* does not have meaning in itself per se, but instead represents a whole system of language and precedes utterances as a system of organization and ordering that makes speech possible. Saussure differentiated the concept of *langue* from the pragmatic use of language by introducing the concept of *parole*. As the external manifestation of *langue*, *parole* is the individual unit within the system of signs, the activity of speaking while using the structure and rules of *langue* (Hall, 1997). The defamatory use of the word "fag" within junior and senior high school hallways is a good example. A bully targeting a victimized peer and calling him a faggot (instance of *parole*) carries weight and shame upon the basis of an understood and perceived negative meaning of the word as established by *langue*. The word faggot does not in itself have any contained value. However, the slurred use of the word to negatively target an individual conjures repugnant associations of hurtfulness, exclusion, and violence that exist prior to the utterance of the word. It is not the word itself that has the potential to cause harm, but instead the meaning and intention contained within the system of signs that represent the word faggot in this instance. Alternatively, the use of faggot as a term of reclamation amidst the energy of a LGBTQ pride festival exists in a very different and clearly more positive context. Language as a system exists within particular social relations and those social relations form specific paroles (Saussure, 1959).

This being said, the social contexts and uses of language are not of major interest within the realm of structural linguistics. Instead, structural linguistics is more interested in the *langue* rather than *parole* as, "what matters most are the underlying structures and rules of a semiotic system as a whole rather than specific performances or practices which are merely instances of its use" (Chandler, 2002, p. 12). It is these underlying structures and rules that are of particular interest within the context of this project as they relate to the identities of lesbian and queer within the realm of structuralism.

   System of signification. One of the most significant areas of influence within structural linguistics was Saussure's introduction of the *system of signification*. Made up of the *signifier* (*significant or* sound image), and the *signified* (*signifié* or concept), these elements conjoin to make up the *sign* (the whole). The signifier (the sound image) is not just the sound that our ears hear, but is instead, "the psychological imprint of the sound, the sensory impression that it makes on our senses" (Saussure, 1959, p.66). The signified component is the abstract element of a word or the concept it triggers. As Saussure (1959) described in *Course in General Linguistics*, the signified concept of tree may involve an abstract understanding of an organic entity that consists of a trunk, branches, and leaves, whereas the signifier or sound image that comes to mind is the word "tree." These elements exist simultaneously and conjoin to create the meaning of any word, the sign. While meanings can vary, only those meanings that are structurally agreed upon (those that follow the rules in the concept and sound image) within a particular language will remain within the system of signification.

   To better demonstrate the complexity of Saussure's system of signification, the simple word "cut" will be examined. In the context of a hair salon, the signifier, the psychological imprint we experience when we see the word written or hear it spoken, would be a *hair*cut. The signified concept that is conjured is that one's hair will be trimmed, that scissors may be used, and the sign that arises from this process is that one will have cut their hair. Alternatively, within the context of a hospital emergency room the signifier of cut may become

something that requires stitches and represents an injury; whereas, on a movie set the director yelling, "cut" would indicate the signified interruption of the filming of a scene. In all instances, there is a combination of a particular signifier and a particular signified concept, working together to create a particular sign, allowing the word cut to be contextually understood. These concurrent combinations and signs within the system of signification for the word cut are occurring under a set of universal rules, social relations, and structures (Chandler, 2002).

   Arbitrary nature of the sign. For Saussure (1959), a key characteristic of the universal rules and structures overarching the sign is that the relationship between the signifier and the signified is arbitrary. There is no natural or necessarily logical relation between the two elements; they simply exist in an arbitrary relationship together that exist as an *a priori* conception to the sign (Saussure, 1959). The existence of different languages easily illustrates this concept. For example, take the English word *lesbian*, *lesbienne* in French, or 女同志 in Chinese Mandarin. From a structuralist perspective, all three could (in theory) share the same signified concept, whereas the signifiers differ based on the difference in the sound image that exists in the varying languages. The relationships between the signified concepts and the signifiers in this example are quite arbitrary. As in the example of the English language, there is no exclusive internal connexion between the signified concept of a homosexual woman and the sequence of sounds or mental images that make up the anglicized sound of lez-bee-ann (Radford & Radford, 2005).

   The use of a particular signifier also occurs in part due to differentiation of the sign. As Saussure (1959) states, "(t)he important thing in the word is not the sound alone but the phonic differences that make it possible to distinguish this word from all others, for differences carry signification" (p. 118). The signifying quality of langue is dependent upon not only what the signifier is, but also what it is not – its "negative value." For example, a lesbian is understood as an identity that is signified by same-sex attraction between women; however, it is also understood in relation to what it is not – a heterosexual woman. Otherwise stated, "(t)he marking of difference within language is fundamental to the production of

meaning...language consists of signifiers, but in order to produce meaning, the signifiers have to be organized into 'a system of differences'. It is the differences between signifiers which signify" (Hall, 1997, p. 32). The arbitrariness and differentiation of the sign are correlative qualities that work together in the creation of meaning.

Of particular importance in understanding the complexity of the arbitrary relationship between the signifier and the signified, is that the signifying quality of langue is largely dependent upon the selected use of a particular signifier from a range of all other signifiers (Saussure, 1959). The principle of arbitrariness does not allow for accidental or random connections within the process of signification. Instead, there are underlying rules and structures that validate the relationships between signifier and signified (Klages et al., 2001). As Saussure (1959) would argue, as in the above example, the existence of similar signified meanings of a word (lesbian) in multiple languages illustrates the existence of fixed rules that establish consistency in meaning even through translation. Saussure (1959) argued that the specificity in the selection of signifier in the process of signification established the fixed nature of signifying relationships and was key to the arbitrary, yet non-random nature of the sign.

Immutability and continuity. Saussure (1959) refers to the unchangeable relationship between the signifier and signified as immutability, meaning the signifier is fixed to the signified concept it represents and cannot be changed. For example, within a structuralist context, the concept of a male lesbian may seem impossible, as the signified meaning of the word conjures *female* same-sex attraction. It is this notion of immutability which becomes most interesting to the structuralist perspective as, "language furnishes the best proof that a law accepted by a community is a thing that is tolerated and not a rule to which all freely consent" (Saussure, 1959, p. 71). The notion of immutability situates language within structure and not in the individual, as the will of the individual cannot change the system of signs.

Anticipating the critique of immutability with respect to the existence of change, Saussure (1959) challenged that while in theory it is logical to suggest

change within language, that, "speakers are largely unconscious of the laws of language; and if they are unaware of them, how can they modify them" (p. 72). He points to the complexity surrounding the learning of language and how the intermeshing of generations maintains the relative stability of the system of signs over time (Saussure, 1959). He also described how the practice of the "handing down" of language facilitates the fixed, unconscious nature of the structural system of signification. For example, a parent teaching a child its mother tongue or even an adult learning a new language will engage in that learning process with an element of blind trust in understanding the meaning of particular sound combinations as they relate to an image or concepts.

Ultimately, Saussure placed his confidence of immutability in the principle of continuity. This principle proposes that as language is constantly being used and influenced by everyone, it makes, "language least amenable to initiative. It blends with the life of society, and…inert by nature…a prime conservative force" (Saussure, 1959, p. 74). He also notes that the multiplicity of signs engaged in language make change an overwhelming project due to the over-complexity and expansiveness of linguistics. Of particular importance, Saussure (1959) points to the arbitrary nature of the sign and language as key to immutability, as arbitrary language does not give a reasonable basis upon which discussion can be based. This said it is important to note that Saussure does not see language as static and unchanging, but instead that the subject is not the catalyst for its change.

The structuralist relationship between genitalia, sex identification, and the identity of transgendered, are good examples of immutability. As established, structurally speaking, having a vagina and being understood as female, or having a penis and understood as male, is entirely arbitrary, yet innately engrained within the system of signs over time. The correlation between the vagina and female is dependent upon both the positive properties of the signifier of female, but also its differentiation from the male (with penis). The immutability of this relationship between the vagina and femaleness is well illustrated when one with a vagina becomes a man. The subject who transitions from female (with vagina) to a man

(with or without vagina) results in a complicated sign when the units and rules of signification no longer mesh. This does not mean that the structuralist perspective disavows changes in sex identity. However, instead of a mutable shift in the signified meaning between genitalia and sex identification, the changes in identity are accommodated through a completely different system of signs such as *transgendered* or *trans-identified*. The structuralist approach to the langue surrounding transgender identity exists within a distinct system of signification that fits within the established rules, units, and structure of sexual identity. This example also very well illustrates some of the fundamental differences between the fixedness of the identity of woman and lesbian, and the fluidity and mutability of the identity of queer as will be discussed in the following chapters.

The concept immutability, while difficult to understand when reflecting on changing conditions of language and meaning over spans of time, becomes a somewhat more logical notion within the context of the way that Saussure conducted his analyses. Saussure's study of language occurred in a synchronic "snapshot" fashion, where the system of signification was examined within specific fixed points in time, not acknowledging history, future, or accounting for the perspective of the speaker (Chambers, 2002). Alternatively, a diachronic analysis would occur over a span of time, which Saussure resisted due to perceived influences on, and events occurring around, language. Saussure (1959) states, "the synchronic viewpoint predominates, for it is the true and only reality to the community of speakers…if (the linguist) takes the diachronic perspective, he no longer observes language but rather a series of events that modify it" (p. 90). As a formalist, Saussure was seeking a more scientific approach to language and the synchronic approach allowed for greater control of variables (Olssen, 2003). To clarify, Saussure does not suggest that language exists in a synchronic state, but instead that the linguistic analysis must occur in this fashion to allow for an "accurate" account. As a semiotic process, language is a social occurrence that is subject to social forces. As language occurs within a social context and amongst a community of speakers, the principle of continuity (immutability) and the principle of change (mutability) are coupled and exist concurrently with one

another. Over time, these principles have the potential to shift the relationships between the signifier and the signified (Saussure, 1959).

As will be discussed in the following section, while Saussure's theory of the system of signification, his insistence on the arbitrary nature of the sign, and the principle of continuity and immutability are necessary to understand with respect to developing the concepts of identity and related meaning(s), there are a number of distinct and sizable critiques to consider.

Critiques of Structural Linguistics

Structuralism as an ideology swept across the North American academy in the 1950s and 1960s, having profound influence over numerous disciplines within the humanities and social sciences (Lizardo, 2010). Part of its popularity, however, was made up of a substantial volume of critique towards some of the key tenets theorized by those most prominent within the field, as was seen in the evolution of poststructuralism. At the summative level, and possibly a point of irony, it seems as if the majority of critiques surrounding the semiological theories are situated within the structural instability of structuralism.

One of the key challenges found within structural analysis included a rejection of phenomenology, or the humanist subjective consciousness (Pettit, 1977). Lévi-Strauss's non-phenomenological approach to studying tribal groups, kinship systems, myths, and systems of classification drove him to attempt to discover the common properties of the "general" human being, those which could be found and expressed in every society (Clarke, 1981). He theorized that human knowledge was not to be based on subjective experience, but instead must have some form of objective foundation. For Lévi-Strauss, "knowledge of humanity (was) possible not because...of some empathic or intuitive participation in the consciousness of others, but because the universality of human nature expressed in the generic unconscious" (Clarke, 1981, p. 32). His quest for "truths" about humanity resulted in a refusal to examine the particulars of the individual or even a particular society, and instead he developed reductionist and deterministic theories that attempted to accommodate universals (Pettit, 1977). Not only was the possibility of universality heavily critiqued, but the quest for a generic

unconscious was in a way, preposterous when examined within the growing discourse of complexity in identity. The generic unconscious represented a type of neo-colonial, white subjectivity that grossly neglected the intersectional considerations of race, class, and gender.

Another concern was the manner in which structuralism was obsessed with duality, where the individual "only becomes conscious of the other in an oppositional binary form" (Pettit, p. 75). The challenge with this approach is that there is an underlying assumption of only two opposing entities, limiting the potential for multiplicity. This tactic also dismisses the impact of power that inevitably exists in a dualistic relationship and risks oppressing those in a subordinated position. This shortcoming is clearly seen when structural arguments begin to waver against the complexities of diversity in race, gender, and class, and seems to crumble in its own justifications (Weber, 1976). Critique towards simple binary oppositions certainly became clear in analyses of Saussure's work, which will be discussed in greater detail below.

Critiques of Saussure's work. Saussure's work had profound impact not only on the ideological foundations of structuralism, but also the feminist and lesbian theory that was surging during the timeframe of popularity of structuralism within the academy (Jeffreys, 1994). There are four main critiques of Saussure's contributions that must be more thoroughly examined with respect to the relation of structural linguistics to the identity of lesbian and queer: (1) the limitations of the arbitrary nature of the sign and binarism, (2) the insufficiency of his synchronic approach, (3) the problematic of essentialization, and (4) the complete non-acknowledgement of the impacts of power on relationships, language, and structures. Saussure's work has been heavily critiqued due to its limitations, inadequacies, and lack of acknowledgement of diversity, as well as the effects and mechanisms of power acting upon language – all key markers of the *poststructural* dismantling of structuralism and structural linguistics (Alcoff, 1988; Olssen, 2003; Weber 1976).

The necessity of an arbitrary relationship between the signifier and signified established a focus on difference, or negative value, with respect to the

existence of particular signifiers (in relation to other signifiers) within a system (Saussure, 1959). Negative value results in defining the meaning of a signifier not on what *it is*, but instead on how it differs from other signifiers, and specifically because *it is not any other* signifier in the system. To illustrate, we recognize the color green in part due to its greenness, but also based on our knowledge that green is not blue, red, yellow or purple.

Of concern within feminist analyses, are the consequences of negative value on women as an oppressed group, and in particular, lesbian women (Alcoff, 1988). For example, the parole "lesbian" has meaning that is based on difference within a binary relationship. This means that the signifier of lesbian is based not only on a particular signified concept, but also because the lesbian is understood as *not heterosexual*. We understand the meaning based on what it is not. This nuanced difference is in fact quite powerful, as the lesbian as a non-heterosexual is signified as the "other" to the dominant referent (the heterosexual), which linguistically situates her in a subordinated "othered" position (Alcoff, 1988). Here the signification process reinforces the restricting binary relationships found between man/woman, lesbian/non-lesbian, fix-ed-ness/fluidity, which retains specific power relations of dominance and oppression.

The second significant critique of Saussure's structural linguistics is that the synchronic form of analysis fails to capture the actual uses and potentials within language. By creating theoretical boundaries of a closed, synchronic system, the meaning to be discovered across and between boundaries is lost. Further, the synchronic approach avoids historicity and positionality, ignoring diversity and complexity within meaning (Weber, 1976). As he clarified, Saussure (1959) was not suggesting that language itself was synchronic and instead defended that it was solely linguistic analysis that must occur in this fashion. However, the analysis of a system of signification without the context of the past or future creates a form of examination that is redundant by the time it is uttered as it is no longer relevant to the current (Saussure, 1959). Alternatively, a diachronic approach, while potentially implausible within the context of Saussure's theory of analysis, would account for multiplicity of time and

perspectives as, "(t)he interpretive nature of language can never produce a final moment of absolute truth" (Radford & Radford, 2005, p. 67).

The risk of synchronic analysis in a pragmatic context would lie in signified meaning being interpreted as a constant (Olssen, 2003). For example, imagine a governmental policy developed with its aim to protect the rights of a particular group of people. Written within a structural discourse, this policy would be scribed in accordance with a particular system of representation for this group according to the ascribed meaning within a particular timeframe of the writing of the policy. The challenge is that the policy or law likely does not account for diverse or changing meanings. This structural snapshot approach to developing policy creates a scenario in which the needs and interests of those represented remains historically and spatially fixed under the particular signifiers at play at that time. This results in a type of cementing of meaning within law, potentially discounting the complexities of changing political perspectives and interests, time, and geographical location (Olssen, 2003). Policies taken up into practice have the potential to negatively impact those who they are intended to represent, creating vulnerabilities as policy is often developed in subjective, powerful arenas that may not effect in the objective interest of a diverse group. The system of signification as a fixed, synchronic system of elements and rules is limiting and can result in repressive tendencies (Olssen, 2003).

Related to the challenges of synchronicity, the third critique of structural linguistics is that the system of signification creates an essentializing problematic for oppressed groups. The signifying system develops meaning, as outlined, based on particular, yet arbitrary, relationships between the signifier and signified. However, the signifier and signified meaning that occur are based on the homogenizing tendencies of a structured system of recognition, value, and difference, creating a depoliticizing logic of the sign (Olssen, 2003).

The challenge was that Saussure's rules and codes around language did not address how signs refer to the world of things, people, or events outside of language (Radford & Radford, 2005). This means, for example, that while Saussure's system of signification may link the sign of lesbian with a particular

synchronically defined signifier and signified representation, it does not address or acknowledge what lesbian may mean to others or what lesbian means to the individual that "comes out" as lesbian. Take, for example, the essentializing tendencies that make up the signified lesbian, including lesbian as woman, female, and same-sex desiring. The assumptive properties of the universalizing approach completely dismiss the complexities experienced by lesbians within different cultures, gender identities, physical spaces, races, classes, abilities, and geographic locations (Radford & Radford, 2005). The universality found in Saussure's approach rests on the assumption that those who take up the identity of lesbian share experiences that will adequately establish the basis for one signified meaning (Radford & Radford, 2005).

Further to this example, and as will be discussed in greater depth in the fourth chapter, the essentialized concept of woman within second wave feminism serves as one of the greatest critiques of the discourses at play during that time (Alcoff, 1988). As was found in cultural feminism there was a, "tendency to offer an essentialist response to misogyny and sexism through adopting a homogenous, unproblematized, and ahistorical conception of woman" (Alcoff, 1988, p. 413). Women united as one, it was thought, was the answer to overcoming oppressions between the binary relationship of *men and women*. However, by attempting to speak for *all women*, the homogenizing effects of cultural feminism serve to erase the diversity and perspectives of *a woman*, challenging autonomy, voice, and power (Alcoff, 1988). The effect of cultural feminism's structural discourse was the reproduction of dominant assumptions about women and women's lives, failing to recognize diversity, and also creating artificial constructs about what "normal" is for women (Alcoff, 1988; Echols, 1983).

It was this critique in particular that spurred black feminists and feminists of color to begin challenging the essentialized composites of woman, as was seen in the shift away from cultural feminism towards more poststructural discourses of feminism. Poststructural feminists would argue that cultural feminists, "duplicate misogynistic strategies when they try to define women, characterize women, or speak for women" (Alcoff, 1988, p. 407). While the motivation for

cultural feminism was to unify women in efforts to resist oppression, the unintended effects were felt by many that felt excluded and/or misrepresented (Taylor & Rupp, 1993). Critics, in particular non-white lesbians, argued that these universalizing signified meanings of woman did not represent the realities or interests of all women and primarily represented those least subject to (multiple) oppressions (Eisenstein, 2000; hooks, 1989). In order to resist oppressions, it was argued that the signifier of women must be de-essentialized and deconstructed in all aspects in order to overcome oppressions (Alcoff, 1988).

The fourth and final critique of structural linguistics rests with the unaccounted-for impacts of power on relationships, language, and structures (Olssen, 2003). By de-centering the subject from language and shifting to the realm of the unconscious, Saussure theorized that in a way language "spoke the subject." However, he failed to account for the roles of power in the ways in which language would speak for particular, privileged subjects (Hall, 1997). Returning to the earlier example of sex identification, a newborn infant that has a vagina will be determined to be female if considered through the lens of Saussure's structural discourse. This signifying process situates the naming of identity of the newborn in structure and not the individual. The structural relationship between having a vagina and being female bears no question. However, there is no further exploration of the existence and impact of power within or over that structured knowledge. Who or what decides (and who inherits) that there is a direct correlation between having a vagina and being female? And how is that idea maintained despite the acknowledgement that not all humans who have a vagina identify as female? While the structure seems exist as an *a priori*, unquestioned fixture, without deconstructing the structure itself, it is impossible to recognize the conditions upon which those understandings come to be (Hall, 1997).

Further to the critique of the role of power, Saussure's principle of arbitrariness would support that identities of knowledge arise from, and are made possible by, differential relations between terms that have no identities of their own apart from those relations. However, what seems to be missing from

Saussure's analysis is an examination of the power over those relations. This role of power and the production of knowledge is what becomes necessary and will be discussed in much greater depth within the poststructural analysis in the following chapter.

Summary

It is possible that the current day significance of structuralism may remain more in the effects and critiques it has given rise to as compared to its success in establishing itself as a positive system of thought. However, despite its limitations, structuralism has had an impact on our way of thinking over (at least) the last six decades (Jameson, 1972). Saussure's structuralist theory of language and system of signification have established the ideological premises upon which many social theoretical identities of lesbian were formed, and as will be reviewed in an upcoming chapter, this has been particularly prevalent in North American academia and second wave feminism (Echols, 1984). Structuralist ideology has also provided the foundation upon which many poststructural theorists launched from and as seen in both structuralist and poststructuralist discourse, the removal of meaning-making from the lips of a sovereign rational subject remains a common point of departure (Weber, 1976).

Chapter Three: Overview of Poststructuralism

Overlapping amongst many disciplines and veering from the structural movement, poststructural analysis saw its rise in the academy during the 1960s into the 1980s (Olssen, 2003). Many pivotal players in the poststructural schools of thought often progressed from their own earlier works in structuralism, shifting their ideas and thinking towards the building of this new ideological form of thought. The contributors to poststructuralism have included influential theorists such as Jacques Derrida and his introduction of the concept of "deconstruction" through his work on semiotics and literary analysis, or Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's metaphysical approach to developing a "philosophy of difference" (Best, 2003; Lawlor, 2001). Another would include Roland Barthes's work in semiotics through his concept of metalanguage, as well as his process of reading "textuality" to find plurality in literary meaning (Hale, 2006). Of direct significance to this project, though, would be Michel Foucault's (1980; 1983; 1988; 1990a; 1990b) work on power, genealogy of knowledge, and discourse, as well as Judith Butler's (1993; 1997; 2006) work on gender, performativity, and queer theory. While many poststructural theorists have had significant impact on the identities of lesbian and queer, the magnitude of influence Foucault and Butler have had in feminism, lesbian studies, and queer theory has been profound (Olssen, 2003). The significance of Foucault's work will be described below as an introduction to poststructural theorizing and Butler's works will be thoroughly examined in Chapter Five, which will focus on the history and theory of queer.

Poststructuralism: A Definition

Attempting to offer a solid definition of poststructuralism is largely an ideological impossibility upon the bases of what poststructuralism serves to do. Therefore, there is no attempt here to define, but instead to offer a set of understandings and positions that work together to make up what will be referred to in the context of this project, as poststructuralism. In the broadest sense, poststructuralism is a response and reaction to structuralism that focuses on the mechanisms and impacts of power and knowledge through the process of interrogation (Miller, 1998). Poststructural analysis should be thought of as a

critical counter-ideology that, "refers to a manner of interpreting selves and the social which breaks with traditional epistemologies" (Namaste, 1994, p. 221). As a critical revision of structuralism and theorized structures of knowledge, poststructuralism serves to disrupt and deconstruct many of the assumptive principles previously critiqued within structuralist ideology (Miller, 1998).

Fluidity and plurality are quintessential elements of poststructural discourse and analysis, and the project of poststructuralism is to evade any form of fixed meaning (Mackenzie, 2001). Poststructuralism, including many poststructural theorists, also staunchly resists categorization and labels, couching words in fluid terms, and satisfying claims of identity when made unidentifiable (Radford & Radford, 2005). Take, for example, the analysis of tradition. What is referred to here as tradition may represent forms of knowledge, language, rituals, relationships, or even social conduct. Poststructural analysis of tradition is not concerned with how a tradition comes to be or how one comes to know or recognize said tradition. Instead, the poststructuralist is most interested in how that tradition came to be in one specific moment in relation to the discourses, power, and knowledge circulating around it at that time (Miller, 1998). There is less interest in the tradition itself and more of a focus on what conditions made the tradition possible within the specific context it is being performed within.

There is also a resistance towards explaining the existence of tradition within a society as a facet of *a priori* knowledge (Miller, 1998). The making and circulation of meaning within tradition is thought not to exist within the unconscious, but instead circulates in varying forms of power and knowledge around, within, and over the subject's interpretation of meaning, constantly morphing (Miller, 1998). By refuting the concept that the subject has an essential, authentic, or natural core, and by focusing on the local and particular, poststructuralism lifts meaning out of the rational subject and instead explores the peripheries and boundaries the category of "subject" delimits (Miller, 1998). Human subjective experiences are constantly being (re)constructed by social discourse and cultural practices, and the, "experience of our very subjectivity is a construct mediated by and/or grounded on a social discourse beyond individual

control" (Alcoff, p. 416). Poststructuralism views discourse as an interdependent system of historically specific and standpoint-specific sets of conditions that act on the subject (Mackenzie, 2001; Miller, 1998). Therefore, this suggests that the while tradition remains in the realm of the unconscious, the unconscious is subject to the effects of power, knowledge, and discourse in the shaping and performance of that tradition.

Another key to poststructural analysis is the movement away from interpreting meaning across categories and space – a common element of structuralism that risks universalizing and essentializing effects (Olssen, 2003). Whereas Saussure's structuralism was confident that the principles by which language is organized can be fully determined and described, post-structuralism calls into question all such assumptions and suggests that such conclusions are always fragile and open to subversion (Radford & Radford, 2005). The poststructural ideological approach examines the historically specific instances of perceived (or received) tradition acting on the subject, exploring not only the nexus, but also the periphery and boundaries the tradition exists within (Martin, 1998). Key to this avenue includes thorough scrutinizing and critique of the mechanisms of power and knowledge circulating and operating within and upon the tradition, as well as the subject, in order to deconstruct the assumptive formation of meaning (Martin, 1998). This approach disrupts universalized fixity and creates opportunity for plurality in meaning.

Employing a poststructural lens, the earlier example of the structuralist approach to sex identification of newborn infants can again be examined and compared. Instead of using the structuralist "rules" that the presence of a penis sexes the infant as a male and the vagina as female, the poststructuralist approach would critique and deconstruct the discourse(s) of power that are forming these rules. While Saussure's (1959) system of signification suggests an arbitrary relationship between the signifiers and signified meanings of sex identity, poststructuralist analysis refutes any sense of arbitrariness and challenges the essentializing tendencies of the structural form of sex identification. Otherwise stated:

> (p)ost-structuralism repudiates the notion that there are enduring truths
> that can be invoked with certainty in the process of signification. All truths
> are fully contextual and…(t)hese propositions cannot be considered true or
> false. They can only come to "make sense" in the context of other
> propositions and signs. (Radford & Radford, 2005, p. 69)

The social constructions and discourses shaping the processes by which we match body parts to specifically named identities, including traditions of culture, language, and social norms, are poststructurally revealed and critiqued.

It is not suggested that the categories of male and female cannot exist within the context of poststructuralism, but instead that the rules and constraints on the limited categories of identity must be disrupted and examined (Butler, 2006). Poststructurally speaking, the premise of linking one form of genitalia to one sexual identity, or even to assume that there are only two acknowledged types of "acceptable" genitals or sexes, are contrived structural formations that essentialize and limit the possible plurality of sexual identity. The poststructural approach to sex identification, or concepts of identity generally, would have categories of identity that become broader, more flexible, and less definitive (Butler, 2006).

Poststructural analysis and deconstructive approaches to theoretical identity formation have had significant influence within the LGBTQ community, particularly amongst generations, as well as across racial, gender, social, and geographic boundaries (Seidman, 2001). Not only has it deconstructed some of the essentialized concepts of "woman" and "lesbian" from the white, educated, middle/upper class female lesbian of the second wave, but it also launched the creation/evolution of queer as a theoretical approach, as well as the project of queered identity evasion (Seidman, 2001). Foucault's (1990a; 1990b) use of power and discourse, as they relate to knowledge and genealogy, have grounded the ideological analyses through which the identity of queer, as well as the changing identity of lesbian, have continued to evolve over the last several decades.

Foucault: Discourse, Discursive Formations, and Deconstruction

While there are undoubtedly numbers of theorists who have contributed to poststructuralist ideology, Foucault's work has had, and continues to have, incredible influence on research conducted across disciplines, and specifically in realms of poststructural theorizing by feminist, gender, sexuality, and queer theorists (Dreyfus & Rabinow, 1983). It has been argued that as a gay man, Foucault's sexual minority status situated him as one that many other sexual minority members identified with, making him a powerful figure within the lesbian, gay, transgender, and feminist communities during the height of his work, as well as following his death in 1984 (Spargo, 1999).

Implicit in the evaluation of Foucault's ideological foundations of poststructuralism are requisite and relevant understandings of discourse, discursive formations, and deconstruction. Following here will be an attempt to explain these complex ideas through theoretical definitions and accessible examples.

Discourse. Discourse analysis first evolved as a textual analysis, bridging with structural linguistics and semiotics, and examining the social conditions of language that many structuralists ignored (McHoul & Grace, 2003). It is an immaterial entity, but is, "a *material condition* (or set of conditions) which enables and constrains the socially productive 'imagination'" (McHoul & Grace, 2003, p. 34). Discourse is a system of representation and an analysis of social knowledge examining the rules, practices, and limits (in language) that produce and define the objects of our knowledge (Hall, 2003; McHoul & Grace, 2003).

Taking this abstract idea and attempting to put it in simpler terms, discourse is thought to be, "a group of statements which provide a language for talking about...a particular topic at a particular historical moment" (Hall, 2004, p. 346). For example, sex and gender are represented by words and statements such as man, woman, male, female, boy, girl, masculine, feminine, aggressive, passive, dominant, submissive, and on. Through the discourse and system of representation that surrounds these words, we are able to understand the concepts of sex and gender to which they refer. This said, discourse must be understood as

much more than just a linguistic concept or a summary of related meanings. As Foucault (2002) stated, "discourses are composed of signs; but what they do is more than use these signs to designate things. It is this *more* that renders them irreducible to the language (langue) and to speech. It is this 'more' that we must reveal and describe" (p. 54).

Take the scenario of sex identification in a poststructural context as another example. The discourse of sex identification could be described as the system of representation and the means by which the language of sex identity allows a society the ability to have knowledge and communicate about sex identity. Or said another way, through what means and mechanisms does one *come to know*? The discourse analysis would examine the types of controls and disciplinary regimes operating on and around sex identification, from government, to religion, to morals, to language, to tradition, and on (Foucault, 1991). More than just knowing the words or the signified representations of male or female, discourse analysis examines the realm through which that knowledge is produced in very specific conditions, subverting the concept of the arbitrary relationships in Saussure's system of signification to the analysis of power and knowledge operating around meanings (Foucault, 1991).

Discourse embodies the historically specific relations between bodies of knowledge and the social (Bevir, 1999). It is the "why?" in the process of critical knowledge production that repeats into philosophical infinity – more so a repetitive question of "*but*, why?" The examination of the conditions begins to draw possible linkages between the two, developing a critique of why and how the knowledge or meaning within a precise moment came to be and/or was taken up by the social (Bevir, 1999). This type of dialectical, interstitial space of knowledge production gives way to analysis of specific instances and multiplicity of perspectives, according to the conditions, resisting fixity and static or universal definitions of meaning (Bevir, 1999).

Discursive analysis also examines the mechanisms of power, controls, and disciplinary practices circulating within and around discourse (Bevir, 1999; McHoul & Grace, 2003). The poststructural approach necessitates the analysis of

these elements and their effects on (or production of) knowledge and meaning in order to critique the universalizing tendencies of previous structuralist claims (Bevir, 1999). To locate the power and controls, the analysis critically examines the institutions and institutional disciplinary practices that ensure its regulation. By institution, discourse is referring to not just physical institutions such as schools, prisons, or religion, but also non-physical institutions such as language, capital, and the practice of social norming (Bevir, 1999). Discourse appears as a result of both internal and external controls, within knowledge and the social, and has the capacity for both positive and negative effects (Bevir, 1999).

      Discursive formations. In order to examine discourse as it exists within large bodies of knowledge and the principles by which elements can be put together to create coherent meanings, Foucault introduced the concept of discursive formations (Foucault, 2002; Radford & Radford, 2005). In the simplest of explanations, discursive formations could be considered as the relationships or regularities found between discourses or groupings of knowledge (McHoul & Grace, 2003). However, this description is also flawed, as the criteria by which groupings may logically be made, including references to a common object amongst discourses, similarity between discourses or the grammar governing their use, or according to their apparent themes, are faulty within the poststructural context (Foucault, 2002). The assumptive tendencies within these criteria do not hold critique according to the complexities of historical relevancy, geographic space, generation, or differentiated experiences of race, class, or gender (Foucault, 2002). Instead, discursive formations are grouped based upon the differential relations of discourses through a system of dispersion. Where regularities in dispersion of discourses exist, there is a discursive formation (Foucault, 2002).

      Discursive formations are tangible and have material effects. To illustrate this complex concept, Foucault (1990a) critiqued the cultural production of sex in *History of Sexuality* and in particular, he examined the categories of sexual orientation and the methods by which sexuality became an object of knowledge. Foucault (1990a) argued that sexuality should not be viewed as a constructed

(structuralist) category of knowledge that evolved as a form of regulating or repressive sexual practices (Spargo, 1999). Instead, he attested, that by examining the relationships between sex, sexuality, power, and knowledge within institutions, that sexuality should be seen as that which has been constructed by historically-specific social practices and institutions (Foucault, 1990a).

Foucault (1990a) found that the discourses of sexuality were not repressed, but hyper-intensified as modicums of power within society. And it was this power that was used to differentiate tangible categories of sexual identity that were deemed acceptable (monogamous heterosexual relationships) from unacceptable sexual behaviours (sexual deviants and homosexuals) (Foucault, 1990a). For example, the differentiation of tangible categories of sexuality resulted in the classification of the named identity of homosexual, which was positioned as a subservient category of identity to the heterosexual bourgeoisie (Foucault, 1990a). The significance of Foucault's analysis was that it revealed that the identity of homosexual did not exist prior to its purposeful creation, which shows us that, "social identities are effects of the ways in which knowledge is organized. [Foucault] observes the politically ambiguous characters of the discursive formation of 'the homosexual'" (Namaste, 1994, p. 221). Foucault was attempting to examine the cause of "but, why"? Based upon a system of dispersion of the discourses of sex, this type of discursive formation exists to control and operate power over sexuality and sexual expression (Foucault, 1990a).

Deconstruction. The method by which discourses and discursive formations are recognized is through the critical deconstruction of discourse and formation of discourse, provoking questions about boundaries and limits of concepts (Phillips, n.d.). It could also be considered a counter reading of historical and social conditions of knowledge, creating capacity for social critique and disrupting fixed stabilities thought to be found in more structural contexts (McHoul & Grace, 2003). As such, deconstruction forms the basis through which one can attempt to answer the previously posed poststructural philosophical question of "but, why"? The discursive formations begin to appear by disrupting

the structure and critically examining, allowing for more complex analyses and "unfixing" structural stabilities (Foucault, 2002).

Jacques Derrida (1988), the theorist who is often linked to the creation of the concept of deconstruction, stated that while the word deconstruction connotes, "the undoing, decomposing, and desedimenting of structures...it [is] not a negative operation. Rather than destroying, it [is] also necessary to understand how an 'ensemble' [is] constituted and to reconstruct it to this end" (p. 3). Deconstruction is not intended to only be the dismantling of one structure in order to restructure or resituate another, but is instead the continual exposing and opening up of institutions to their own "otherness," pushing boundaries and establishing the conditions upon which change is possible (Phillips, n.d.).

The exercise of poststructural analysis is to use the discursive formation as a legitimate object of inquiry and to deconstruct the relations to examine how they simultaneously exist as both the condition and the effect of all interpretation (Namaste, 1994; Radford & Radford, 2005). As will be seen below in Foucault's form of analysis of discourse and discursive formations, he used a deconstructive approach[1] to attempt to describe historical forms through discursive practices (Dreyfus & Rabinow, 1983).

Foucault: Poststructural Theorizing

While Michel Foucault is frequently linked to the origins of poststructuralism, in the early stages of his work he was clearly influenced by structuralism. As was seen in *The Birth of the Clinic* (1973), *The Order of Things* (1971) and *Archaeology of Knowledge* (2002), his primary focus was on the exploration of the philosophy of systems and structures as they related to the human sciences (Dreyfus & Rabinow, 1983; Olssen, 2003). While initially some attempted to label him a structuralist, Foucault defended that he would not be contained or defined by the structural boundaries and limitations he viewed within the ideology (Bevir, 1999; Olssen, 2003). On the heels of structuralism, one of the greatest points of significance of his work lies in its emergence as a new form of

---

[1] It is necessary to acknowledge that Foucault's use of "deconstruction" differed from Derrida's, in that they had diverging philosophical approaches in their attempts to account for the advent of writing and reason (Cutrofello, 2005).

ideological thinking at a time where criticisms towards structuralism were beginning to proliferate (Dreyfus & Rabinow, 1983).

At the time in which he was writing, Foucault's approach to theorizing was innovative, combining archaeological examination along with hermeneutic theory of interpretation (Dreyfus & Rabinow, 1983). Through these means, he was able to begin to analyze the conditions upon which the objects and subjects of structuralism were being formed, characterizing the emergence of poststructuralism (Dreyfus & Rabinow, 1983). Sharing the fundamental goal of transcending the idea of the sovereign rational subject, Foucault went beyond the theory of the subject structured in the unconscious and examined other mechanisms that held significance (Foucault, 1995). For example, in *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault (1995) examines the modern penal system and forms of torturous punishment, interpreting both the role of power over punishment, as well as the role of power in the threat of punishment. One of his key subjects of analysis in this text is the use of a specific prison design as a model to demonstrate the means by which individuals are supervised and surveilled in the everyday context. Comprised of the construction of a single surveillance tower amidst a large ring of prison cells, Bentham's Panopticon prison schematic was designed such that the prisoners would exist in a constant state of (or threat of) surveillance (Foucault, 1995). The guards' watchtower would be positioned so that it had unobstructed site lines into the cells of each individual prisoner, but the prisoners' opportunity to see if someone was actually in the tower watching was obscured. The design was premised upon the hypothesis that if prisoners knew they were being watched, or under the threat of being seen, that the prisoners would control their behaviour through forms of self monitoring and reformation in fear of being caught and punished (Foucault, 1995). This prison schematic was a very useful example of how control was moved outside the realm of physical (including force and restraints) into the realm of self-imposed control, making the role of power more productive (Foucault, 1980).

Interpreting Bentham's surveillance model outside the context of the prison, Foucault (1995) theorized that various forms of social surveillance (i.e.

laws, social correctness, normalized standards, religious beliefs, etc.) serve the same function as the watchtower. These perceived forms of surveillance create the constant threat of being monitored, resulting in the "policing" of the self according to appropriate social standards. This combined with the threat of punishment (including physical, social, economic, legal, etc.) works together in a combination of control and coercion over the body to perform in particular and acceptable ways (Foucault, 1995). Foucault's examination of the operation of power within *Discipline and Punish* and the process of self-regulation marked a distinctly poststructural bent from his earlier, more structurally-focused works. As will be described below, this critical exegetic method of analysis stemmed from his strong critiques of several of structuralism's shortcomings.

Foucault's critique of structuralist thought. Foucault had three key critiques of structuralist thought, including the troubling emergence of universals or essentialized ideas, the ignorance of historical specificity, as well as his view of the system of signification as inadequate and needing to move towards discourse and discursive form of analysis (Bevir, 1999; Dreyfus & Rabinow, 1983; Olssen, 2003).

Universals. While structuralism posed a system of universal rules that underpinned all history and allowed subjects to emerge in unconscious surface appearances, Foucault rejected this fundamental notion as his first and primary critique of the ideology (Olssen, 2003). By opposing the prioritization of pre-existing structures over the parts and instead examining the systematic networks of relations and the power circulating around and through them, he sought to unveil and explain the parts in their particulars (Olssen, 2003). In Foucault's approach there was, "no representation of structure or whole as *integrative* of the entire social formation, or as constraining the system of differences" (Olssen, 2003, p. 193). His methodology moved beyond the limitations of the essentializing tendencies of structuralist universalities and began to look for historical specificity and the lived experiences at the micro-level. This would suggest, for example, that the category of "woman" could not be considered as one category of sameness. That while there may be some shared similarities

between women, the networks of relations and power circulating around all women differ based on the particulars at the micro-level, resulting in multiple meanings and no one universal (de Lauretis, 2007). This approach constitutes the essence of *pluralism*. Regularities found within one culture, Foucault argued, could not be the same in all cultures or across spans of history and instead needed to be looked at as examinations of specific times and geographic locations (Olssen, 2003).

Lack of historical specificity. As his second key critique, Foucault argued that the lack of historical specificity in most structuralist ideology was due to the practice of privileging synchrony over diachrony in analysis (Olssen, 2003). His challenge was based on the idea that the structuralist synchronic approach developed analysis based upon only snapshots of time, resulting in the collapsing of meaning into generalities that did not account for the past or future (Olssen, 2003). Devoid of historical specificity, Foucault argued that structural regularities and rules were not the same in all historical periods and cultures, and that synchronic analysis fails to theorize the relations between social processes and material forms (Olssen, 2003; Radford & Radford, 2005). For example, the discourse of "woman" for an educated, white, urban female working as the president of a wealthy company in 2012 has a different set of material and social conditions to be analyzed compared to a rural, uneducated, ethnic minority female living in China during the era of Mao Zedong. Foucault attempted to pay attention to, "subjugated or marginal knowledges, especially those who have been disqualified, taken less seriously or deemed inadequate by official histories" (McHoul & Grace, 2003, p. 15). Instead, his approach was to view knowledge and discourse as constrained and effected by power and history, placing analysis again at the level of micro (Olssen, 2003).

System of signification is inadequate. Finally, Foucault was concerned with the structuralist principles by which elements were organized together to produce coherent and meaningful patterns (Olssen, 2003). He criticized the system of signification as inadequate and saw a need to analyze the conditions upon which the objects and subjects of structuralism were being formed through

linguistic analysis (McHoul & Grace, 2003). Whereas Saussure's system of signification prioritized the unconscious and arbitrary relationships between signifier and signified meaning, Foucault (2002) argued that the relationships between these elements needed to be considered within their own pre-discursive contexts. The arbitrary relationships, he argued, did not exist in a vacuum outside of the effects of power. For example, in the process of sex identification, structuralist ideology would assert that the arbitrary relationship between the presence of a penis and being sexed as male is adequate in assessing meaning. However, the poststructuralist would not view the relationship as arbitrary and instead would deconstruct the historical, geographical, and cultural knowledge that links the significance between a penis and the sex of male. For Foucault, he was more interested in locating the effects of power *on* the signification process and turned to the historical conditions and discursive relations that made differentiated subjects possible (McHoul & Grace, 2003). Over time he began to view the subject as a system of multiple knowledges, which gave way to the notion of the subject as a product of power/knowledge and an *effect* of power (Bevir, 1999).

Genealogy. While the archaeological approach was opening the boundaries of structuralist ideology to accommodate multiplicity through historical specificity and non-universalizing claims, the methodology was still not adequately evolved for Foucault (Dreyfus & Rabinow, 1983). He knew from studying discourses that existed within specific historic periods that the knowledge in that moment and context was describable (1990a). However, there was a correlated inability to account for those aspects which condition, limit, and institutionalize the discursive formations that give way to knowledge (Dreyfus & Rabinow, 1983). Foucault (1990a; 1995) then began to look towards a methodology that would be able to explain the cause and effects of transition from one way of thinking to another. Borrowing from Friedrich Nietzsche's work in *On the Genealogy of Morals* (1989), Foucault (1990a, 1995) introduced the concept of a *genealogy* of knowledge. This approach was to be more concerned with

power and history, and in particular, the historical constitution of knowledge (Olssen, 2003).

At the highest level, genealogy is best described as a method of analysis that concentrates on the relations of power, knowledge, and the body in modern society (Dreyfus & Rabinow, 1983). It is a largely random, non-linear, discontinuous, branching path of deconstructive analysis that examines the multiple and varied discourses that lead to historically specific points of understanding (Dreyfus & Rabinow, 1983). The intent of genealogy is to reveal the conditions by which the observable or knowable becomes possible (Dreyfus & Rabinow, 1983). For example, in *The History of Sexuality* (1990a), Foucault attempted to depict the relationships between knowledge of sexuality with the power structures of modern society. He examined the emergence of the homosexual in discourse as a product of the category of sexually perverse, meaning those who were scientifically diagnosed as aberrant and immoral. Of particular interest to Foucault (1990a) was that the classification of homosexual was not diminished or hidden, but instead heightened and clearly defined. Foucault's (1990a) genealogical approach to examining perverse forms sex and sexuality found that the:

> machinery of power that focused on this whole alien strain did not aim to suppress it, but rather to give it an analytical, visible, and permanent reality: it was implanted in bodies, slipped in beneath modes of conduct, made into a principle of classification and intelligibility, established as a raison d'etre and a natural order of disorder. (p. 44)

The category of homosexual did not appear as a "naturally" understood category that then became reviled, but instead was created as a category of revulsion that was subsequently sustained by mechanisms and operations of power that maintained its appearance as "natural" (1990a).

The genealogist as observer attempts to maintain distance from cultural beliefs and deep philosophical meaning, so as to be able to recognize the surface practices as products of power (Mills, 2003). The genealogical perspective can be self-reflexive in its shifting of the analytical gaze and the mining of the conditions

in which individuals live to understand the causal means of their existence (Mills, 2003). By revealing what's behind the mask of knowledge and truth, genealogists will often find that there is something completely different going on (Dreyfus & Rabinow, 1983). They will reveal, "the secret that [things] have no essence or that their essence was fabricated as a piecemeal fashion from alien forms" (Foucault, 1984, p. 78). As in the above example, there is no natural essence of homosexuality, but through the practice of categorization based upon sets of conditions affected and effected by power, it exists naturally (1990a).

Of particular significance to genealogy is that there is no belief in the origin or truth from which current day discourse has evolved (Foucault, 1990a; Grosz, 1994). This is because truths are seen to be contingent and genealogical analysis deconstructs the role of power in constructing truths that become naturalized in our understandings and knowledge (Dreyfus & Rabinow, 1983). Foucault searches for (what are known as) truths within the discontinuities of how we came to know, the ruptures, the shifts, and the mutations of the traditional historical narrative (Foucault, 1984). Foucault argues that perceived truths or universals evolve, "as the result of the contingent emergence of imposed interpretations" (Dreyfus & Rabinow, 1983, p. 108). Therefore, the intent is not to attempt to reveal and trace truths back to their origins, but instead to describe the "history of the present" – the collection of events and interpretations that make the present possible (Mills, 2003; Olssen, 2003). It is genealogy that records the history of these interpretations (Foucault, 1990a; Olssen, 2003).

It is specifically this notion of genealogy that is critical to this project - that the concept of knowing *how* one knows is clearly articulated and understood with respect to ones identity. As a result, this idea will be thoroughly examined in the upcoming chapters on the identity lesbian and the identity of queer.

Power and the subject. In the three volumes on *History of Sexuality* (1988, 1990a, 1990b)*,* Foucault specifically explores the domain of sexuality, and more specifically how humans come to recognize themselves as subjects of sexuality. It is not the sex or sexuality per se that Foucault is primarily interested in, but instead the means through which discourse, discursive formations, and

power are able to produce sexuality/ies on the neutral surfaces of the body (1990a; 1990b). His analysis of the formation of subjects is very useful as it gives rise to a lens through which the subject has been thoroughly examined by many poststructural feminist, lesbian and queer theorists (Namaste, 1994).

Operating within the discourse of power, subjects are not autonomous or independently empowered to act and create within the social world, but instead are subjects that are embedded within a complex network of social relations and historically-specific moments (Namaste, 1994). As a genealogical project, "the subject is not something prior to politics or social structures, but is precisely constituted in and through specific sociopolitical arrangements" (Namaste, 1994, p. 221). The appearance of the (non)identity of queer, as will be seen in Chapter Five, is an exceptionally good example of a modern day category of anti-identity that came about based upon sets of very particular sociopolitical and highly poststructural circumstances. While the theory behind the anti-identity intends to remain fluid and evasive, queer as a named identity has begun to create queer subjects through the networks of social relations within which they exist (Namaste, 1994). That means that laying claim to queer does not in itself make the human subject queer, but instead is constituted within the specific sociopolitical arrangements of the discourse(s) of queer.

Foucault was particularly interested in examining the discursive and power relations circulating around the formation(s) of particular subjects (McHoul & Grace, 2003; Dreyfus & Rabinow, 1983). It was not the power itself that was of primary interest, but instead his intent to "create a history of the different modes by which...human beings are made subjects" (Rabinow, 1984, p. 7). Through his works, Foucault (1983) has examined three modes of objectification that he theorizes transforms humans into subjects: scientific classification, dividing practices, and finally, subjectification (Gutting, 1989).

Scientific classification. The first mode of objectification is that of scientific classification, where the objectivising of the subject is a product of the mechanisms through which we have come to understand ourselves scientifically (Foucault, 1983). The classification of mental health disorders in the Diagnostic

and Statistical Manual (DSM) is a good example of a mode of inquiry objectivising the lesbian subject through scientific classification. Within the geographic context of primarily the United States of America and Canada, and in one particular span in the history of the DSM, homosexuals (including lesbian women) were classified as having mental disorders on the basis of their sexual orientation, giving rise to a highly prescribed scientific classification of the subject (Meyer, 2003). The political quest to declassify homosexuality from the DSM resulted in its removal from the manual in 1973, giving rise to a new classification in which the lesbian was then objectivised as *not* having a mental disorder (Phelan, 1989). An examination of the historical conditions and discursive formations surrounding both the writing-in and the subsequent excision of homosexuality from the DSM reveals the relations of power and discourses at play in these two moments of identity formation.

Dividing practices. Through the use of historical interrogation, the second mode of objectification that Foucault (1983) studied was the existence of dividing practices, such as the divisions between sick and healthy, the mad and sane, or the criminals and good citizens. In this mode the subject is objectivised through the method of dividing internally or externally from others (Foucault, 1983). The process results in a scenario where the subject is categorized, distributed, and/or manipulated through division of the subject as an individual or as separated from other groups (Foucault, 1983). An obvious example here would be the dividing practices found in the identities of "straight" versus "gay," where the subject is objectivised in an oppositional binary relationship with respect to sexual orientation. The discourse(s) of power on dividing practices serves as a mode of manipulation of the subject, maintaining the divide and also granting differentiated cultural values to those on either side of the division (Foucault, 1983).

Subjectification. The third and final mode of objectification, termed subjectification, is distinct from the first two in that it is an active process of self-formation as subject (Rabinow, 1984; Rose, 2003). The subject is being shaped by work *of-the-self*, *on-the-self*, and the process of subjectification occurs in the,

"formation of procedures by which the subject is led to observe himself, analyze himself, interpret himself, and recognize himself as a domain of possible knowledge" (Florence, 1998, p. 461). Subjectification represents a very Foucauldian way of thinking and the concept of coming out of the closet works well here. Coming out into a sexual identity other than heterosexual requires an analysis, interpretation, and recognition of self within the domain of sexual orientation. The approach to this form of subjectification does not suggest that the recognition of desire for members of the same sex or gender is inherently self-identified as gay or lesbian, but instead this recognition is related to, and product of, the social institutions and historical conditions in which the self as a homosexual is subjected (Belouin, 2010). This would suggest that social and historical elements such as gender identity, class, religion, laws, policies, spatial location, and historical standpoint would all work to serve in the process of subjectification (Florence, 1988).

These three modes of objectification represent the primary themes of his work and represent a significant shift in thinking about the subject within poststructuralism (Foucault, 1983). Through these modes, Foucault examined possibilities of how the subject is produced by both internal and external elements of power; where, "external controls preclude certain identities...[and] (i)nternal controls provide technologies of the self by which individuals can construct themselves in accord with the ruling configuration of power/knowledge" (Bevir, 1999, p. 349). By clustering power around the subject, Foucault's approach has, "formed the paradoxically destabilizing foundation for much...work on the status of the human subject" (Spargo, 1999, p. 8). The next level of analysis of the subject is to examine the mechanisms of power within these controls, circulating over and within discursive formations, and situating the subject within complex power relations (Foucault, 1983).

Power and bio-power. For Foucault (1990a), power is neither tangible, nor something that one can possess, and it also cannot simply be characterized as a relationship between domination and resistance. Instead, power is everywhere and comes from everywhere (Foucault, 1990a). Based on the assumptions that it

is permanent, repetitious, inert, and self-reproducing, "[power] is simply the over-all effect that emerges from all these mobilities, the concatenation that rests on each of them and seeks in turn to arrest their movement...it is the name that one attributes to a complex strategical situation in a particular society" (Foucault, 1990a, p. 93). It comes from everywhere, existing within expansive and interconnected systems situated in all realms, and is always-already present in the relations amongst individuals and parts of a particular society (Foucault, 1980, 1990a; Halperin, 1995).

As Foucault (1983) theorized in the three modes of objectification of subject formation, it is power that operates within the valuation of empirical sciences, the process by which dividing practices occur, and the establishment of social institutions and historical conditions that give rise to the recognition of self as subject. Power, "applies itself to immediate everyday life which categorizes the individual, marks him by his own individuality, attaches him to his own identity, imposes a law of truth on him which he must recognize and which others have to recognize in him" (Foucault, 1983, p. 212). However, it must be stressed that power does not form the subject, but instead that the existence of the individual subject is an *effect* of power (Foucault, 1983).

The subject as an effect of power gives way to another dimension of Foucault's concept of modern power, termed "bio-power" (Foucault, 1990a). Bio-power emerged as a form of power over life, where, "sciences and techniques of discipline emerged with the aim of increasing the health, longevity, and productivity of the population" (Bevir, 1999, p. 351). As a technology of power over the body, bio-power was theorized to include a number of diverse techniques for achieving subjugation of the body, as well as a means of controlling entire populations through continuous regulatory and disciplinary mechanisms (Foucault, 1990a). These techniques would include practices such as medicalization of bodies, projects of wellness or safety, as well as other modes of control as will be described below.

Bio-power's link to sexuality was made when Foucault identified the importance of sex as a political issue (Dreyfus & Rabinow, 1983). Sex was seen

to be a key concept in the development of capitalism and the modern nation state, where bodies were necessary for incorporation into the means of production (Foucault, 1990a). Alongside the rise of the bourgeoisie in the 17th century, there was a need for disciplined bodies to contribute to growth and the correlated need for population in order to ensure economic progress (Dreyfus & Rabinow, 1983). As Foucault (1990a) states, "through the political economy of population there was formed a whole grid of observations regarding sex. There emerged the analysis of the modes of sexual conduct, their determinations and their effects, at the boundary line of the biological and economic domains" (p. 26). Bio-power, as a form of power over productive life, was thought to produce productive bodies through technologies of power applied to the discipline and regulation of the body in the quest of economic growth (Foucault, 1990a).

Further contributing, the use of population demographics in the 18th century served as a means of regulating the population, making sex a key concern and object of public concern (Dreyfus & Rabinow, 1983). From this era, Foucault (1990a) analyzed four discourses on sexuality in which power and knowledge combined in specific ways to form technologies of bio-power over the body. The first was the hysterization or medicalization of women's bodies, which was justified as the means by which women owed the health of their bodies to their families, children, and society (Foucault, 1990a). Practices of bio-power included the shift of women's bodies becoming the objects of medical concern, as seen, for example, in the medicalization of childbirth or the introduction of antidepressant medications for women to resolve sadness and depression. The second was the pedagogization of children's sex to ward off the evils of childhood onanism, which was intended to silence the discourse of sexuality amongst children and maintain them in a state of controlled innocence (Foucault, 1990a). The forms of bio-power in this realm were illustrated, for example, in anti-masturbation campaigns or religious teachings on sexuality.

The third discourse was the socialization of sexual behaviour for the conjugal marital couple who had responsibilities to "appropriately" control the means by which sex was used for procreative purposes (Foucault, 1990a). This

form reinforces the larger social insistence towards monogamy, traditional ideals (for some) of marriage before sex, or, within the Canadian context, could be seen in child tax benefits or legal privileges ascribed only to those that are married. The fourth discourse was the psychiatrization of perverse pleasures, which came in the forms of non-normative sexual expressions and behaviours which in turn became pathologized (Dreyfus & Rabinow, 1983). This fourth point, is of course, most relevant within the context of this thesis as the classification of lesbian as a non-normative served as a form of bio-power over the lesbian body, creating the deviant body.

The deployment of sexuality as a discourse of power through these four realms gives rise to disciplinary and regulatory practices circulating as forms of power over life, "[where] the mechanisms of power are addressed to the body, to life, to what causes it to proliferate, to what reinforces the species, its stamina, its ability to dominate, or its capacity for being used" (Foucault, 1990a, p. 147). These forms of bio-power and their relation to economic productivity regulate through a complex combination of social normalizing controls and institutional apparatuses such as the medical field or the judicial system, working in concert to discipline the body and regulate the population (Dreyfus & Rabinow, 1983; Foucault, 1990a). As was seen in the inclusion of homosexuality in the DSM, the emergence of the identity of homosexuality in discourse was a product of bio-power aiming to discipline and regulate the non-normative, non-procreative (therefore non-productive) body.

A final point on Foucault's theorizing on power is to establish that relationships of power are not inherently negative. While there is often an ominous and oppressive air that is correlated with discussions on power, counteraction and resistance can also take place within the relationships of power (Dreyfus & Rabinow, 1983). Foucault (1990a) viewed power in a dialectical relationship with resistance and theorized that power comes from below as well as above. He theorized that power and resistance exist necessarily together in the same realm, not separately. Therefore, power need not necessarily be constituted as always negative or oppressive, but instead that power has the capacity to be

positive in its potential to produce action (Halperin, 1995). The role of power and potential for active resistance will become evident in the upcoming chapter on the identity of queer.

Summary

Before transitioning to examinations of lesbian and queer theorizing, it is necessary to ground the significance of these last two chapters. Poststructuralism and structuralism are the two ideological paradigms in which the majority of the theorizing on the identity of lesbian and queer has taken place over the last forty-plus years (Alcoff, 1988; Colebrook, 2009; Dreyfus & Rabinow, 1983; Martindale, 1995). Structuralist thought was focused on dismantling or moving beyond the idea of a sovereign rational subject (Olssen, 2003). Instead there were objective and rational methodologies proposed for analysing structured systems, examining non-individualistic perceptions of social culture, rejecting the idea of individual humanist consciousness, and developing meaning as a shared system in identity formation (Olssen, 2003). The complications with structuralist ideology, though, have been heavily critiqued due to notions of essentialism, rejection of phenomenology, limitations of duality, and non-acknowledgement of the impacts of power on social beings and relationships (Phelan, 1994). In the quest to move beyond these challenges, poststructural thought evolved as an ideological paradigm shift that proposed to be highly resistant to the concept of universals, critical of the unconscious acceptance of traditions, promoting fluidity and plurality, and aware of mechanisms and effects of power (Olssen, 2003).

Within the context of this project, the significance of these two ideological realms lies in the aligned shifts in theoretical thinking that progresses from structuralism to poststructuralism, and lesbian feminist theory to queer theory. As will be made evident, lesbian feminist identity was heavily influenced by structuralist thought and the critiques against it are grounded in poststructural discourse (Alcoff, 1988). Queer theory, on the other hand, came about as a project of poststructural discourse and in response to the limiting consequences of more structural notions of traditional Gay and Lesbian Studies (Warner, 1993). In the following two chapters, the existing literature and theorizing on the identity of

lesbian and queer will be grounded in the relevant ideological foundations as have been established here.

Chapter Four: Theoretical Contributions to the Identity of Lesbian

As already established, at one point in history within North America, the etiology of homosexuality has historically been thought of as a psychological disorder and given the classification of mental illness. Post early 1970's though, the focus shifted away from etiology based on sexual orientation, towards concepts of identity (Epstein, 1994). Notions of identity had become increasingly salient during this timeframe and the study was shifting towards how social actors were forging sexual identity, as compared to notions of psychiatric labelling and deviance (Epstein, 1994; Ponse, 1978).

Lesbian Identity

Lesbian identity has been thought to have formed based on a number of factors, including desire or sexual attraction to women, adoption of the label of lesbian as a political statement, associations with communities of women who also identified as lesbian, and also attributed to masculinity in women (who could be nothing other than lesbian as they were not feminine enough to be heterosexual) (Ponse, 1978). There is no singular origin of establishment of lesbian as an identity, but instead a diverse collection of instances over a broad scope. Within the context of this thesis, though, the focus is primarily on ideas coming from the 1970s forward and geographically situated in areas of North America and Western Europe. Most prominent within this timeframe and in this region, lesbian identity also came about through the notion of essence, "an immutable, transituational quality of the self...pervading non-sexual aspects of the self as well" (Ponse, 1978, p. 178). It has been thought to embody all of oneself, whole life, whole essence, and everything about oneself, giving rise to conceptualizations of lesbian identity far beyond desire and attractions to a larger realm of "women who love/value women" (Ponse, 1978).

It is necessary to clarify the use of "lesbian" and "feminist" in this chapter. While undoubtedly there is a clear differentiation between them, the political collaboration between the two paradigms within second wave feminism resulted in a frequent occurrence of interchangeability in texts and discussions (Calhoun, 1994). At times, feminists have been feared simply due to the threat that feminist

challenges present to the heteronormative mainstream (Calhoun, 1994). In light of this, feminists have in some instances been labelled as man-haters or lesbians, as proper heterosexual women were thought not be to feminist (Calhoun, 1994). There have also been struggles within the feminist movement to differentiate between feminists and lesbians. Betty Friedan (1998), for example, cautioned about the menacing risk associated with the conflation of lesbianism with feminism as a detriment to the equal rights movement that had spurred the second wave feminist focus on equality (Calhoun, 1994). She called it the "Lavender Menace." As a feminist seeking equality with men, Friedan (1998) wanted to promote the separation of equality-based feminists from more radical camps of "lesbian" feminists.

In response to Friedan's (1998) admonishment of the Lavender Menace, cultural feminists moved away from notions of equality and spurred the notion of the "woman-identified-woman" as one of the first lesbian-feminist arguments (Calhoun, 1994). In fear of being excluded from the larger feminist project, lesbian feminists began to assert that women-identified-women and lesbianism were the penultimate feminist embodiments (Calhoun, 1994). This was thought to be productive since lesbians love women and also because lesbians were not likely to have sex with men (their oppressors), which made them model resisters of patriarchal controls (Calhoun, 1994). Through instances such as this, lesbian became an applied issue of feminism, and in this way lesbianism and feminism became synonymous references within the context of much of the literature from that time (Calhoun, 1994; Raymond, 1989).

Theorizing on the identity of lesbian has produced an expansive volume of literature honed over a number of decades and situated in multiple feminist perspectives and ideological premises. The focus of this study will first include key theorists and theoretical perspectives primarily situated in the second wave of feminism in areas of North America, a timeframe of theorizing that was ideologically aligned with structuralism and structuralist linguistics. Starting first with an analysis of Adrienne Rich's *Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence* (1980), the focus will then shift towards discussions and writing that

occurred within the "sex wars," an academic face-off between cultural feminists versus sex-positive feminists who established expansive volumes of work specifically written about concepts of the identity of lesbian as it related to second wave separatist feminism (Echols, 1984). While the content and substance within the wars has arguably limited relevance to more contemporary theories, the goal to be achieved in this study necessitates a thorough understanding of the theoretical concepts and critiques of the structuralist foundations of lesbian identity in order to contextualize the departures and shifts to a more critical, deconstructive, poststructural analysis. From there, the analysis will focus on the work of several key contemporary lesbian theorists and collectives.

Many of these concepts emerged in a timeframe in which the second wave of feminism was cresting, the third wave was just beginning to pick up momentum, Gay and Lesbian Studies programs were appearing in North American universities, and the related ideological premises of poststructuralism were beginning to emerge (Warner, 1993). It was also an era following the American civil rights movement and in Canada, the 1982 passing of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, which raised critical attention to issues of race and culture in academic writing, as well as in the related communities (hooks, 1989; Anzaldúa, 1987). Lesbian feminism and/or lesbian theory has become necessarily complicated beyond these significant historical events as theorists begin to explore the "problematic of difference" as well as examine and critique the intersections of race, class, gender, and sexuality with respect to the conflictual nature of how those intersectionalities cross and layer within and on the individual (Phelan, 1994; Spelman, 1988). Knowing this, it is necessary to first analyze the structural critiques of lesbian feminism that lead to its current, complicated existence.

Adrienne Rich. Adrienne Rich's (1980) best known publication, entitled *Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence*, was focused on drawing connections between the naturalized compulsory nature of heterosexuality in existing feminist literature and the overall neglectful absence of lesbian existence in feminist scholarship. Through the study of a number of feminist-identified

works, Rich (1980) attempted to expose the trend for the presumed innateness and "compulsory" nature of heterosexuality in the writing. For example, one text Rich (1980) analyzed had been written as a "feminist experts' advice guide for women" and included advice on marital sex, maternity, and child care. However, she found the voice and discussion in this text, as in the other texts she studied, while supposedly written for "women," was clearly written only for heterosexual women. Rich (1980) states, "in none of these books, which concern themselves with mothering, sex roles, relationships and societal prescriptions for women, is compulsory heterosexuality ever examined as an institution powerfully affecting all these; or the idea of 'preference' or 'innate orientation' even indirectly questioned" (p. 633). She argued that much of the feminist theory she had reviewed was written in such a way that the voice of the woman or women speaking was read as particularly heterosexual and that the literature incorrectly presumed heterosexuality to be the sexual preference of most women (Rich, 1980). This, she cautioned, risked naturalizing "woman" as heterosexual and the consequence of this naturalization, of course, inadvertently suggested that lesbian is *less* of a woman (Martindale, 1995; Rich, 1980).

According to Rich (1980), lesbian identity and lesbianism, within the identity of woman, were simply tolerated or banalized as an "alternative lifestyle," whether it was seen as a choice or possibly as a refusal and hatred towards men (Phelan, 1994). She was highly critical not only of the ways in which lesbians were hidden and disguised as heterosexual in feminist theory, but also the obvious lack of inclusion of the readable lesbian voice within much of what was generally known as feminist literature. Rich (1980) defended that the lack of recognition and exclusion of lesbian existence as a source of knowledge and power in the larger feminist project in operation at that time, was a missed opportunity in the collective effort of all women, straight and lesbian, in overcoming the oppression of men. It was necessary, she argued, for lesbian identity to become visible in order to establish a place for lesbianism within feminism and to de-naturalize heterosexuality.

Rich (1980) challenges that feminist scholars and theorists had not yet taken up the project of critiquing the societal forces of heterosexuality that, "wrench women's emotional and erotic energies away from themselves and other women and from woman-identified values" (p. 637). The politics and practice of heterosexuality, Rich (1980) argued, was an impediment to the project of feminism. In effort to de-naturalize heterosexuality, she insisted that heterosexuality be instead thought of as a political institution, naturalizing itself through acts such as biological reproduction and normalizing itself through repetition (Cole and Cate, 2008; Rich, 1980). Heterosexuality, Rich (1980) theorized, was imbued with power, repressing and oppressing according to the needs and desires of those within the political institution. For example, these forces act to imbalance and maintain power of men over women through overt and subversive actions, such as rape, violence, prostitution, denial of sexuality, and control (MacKinnon, 2002; Rich, 1980). Complicit in this heteronormative domination, Rich (1980) argued, male power is also manifested and maintained over women through institutions such as marriage, unpaid domestic labour, economics and child-rearing, culminating in a, "pervasive cluster of forces, ranging from physical brutality to control of consciousness" (p. 640). Many of these perceived inevitabilities of women's lives, such as getting married and having babies, illustrate the ways in which women, even feminists, unconsciously reproduced the notions of compulsory heterosexuality and the correlated oppressions (Cole & Cate, 2008).

It is important to clarify that women were not theorized as powerless, though. In fact, Rich (1980) saw great power within women and centred her primary focus on this fact. While part of Rich's (1980) critique was focused on the multi-faceted forms of male domination over women, what she was specifically interested in unveiling was the, "enormous potential counterforce [that was] having to be restrained [by men]" (p. 640). Instead of focusing on men's "power-over" women, she flipped the issue upside-down and looked for the power and potential that already exists within women and women's experiences (Rich, 1980). By uncovering what she knew was already there, she attempted to

destabilize the power imbalance between men and women, and drew awareness to the non-necessity of heterosexual existence. Through this approach, Rich (1980) sought to unify lesbianism and feminism, as she saw lesbianism as the solution to the problems of female heterosexuality.

Of particular significance, is that for Rich (1980), notions of lesbian and lesbianism were not exclusively related to women who shared same sex erotic desire. Her conception of lesbian was driven by feminist politics to become inclusive to the larger category of women. She proposed that lesbian should include everyone, from those that had erotic desires for women, to those that identified politically or socially with other women, to those that strictly did not want to be linked to men (Rich, 1980). As a result, Rich (1980) introduced two significant concepts, "to avoid the heteronormative, historical, and clinical associations with the term 'lesbian'" (Cole & Cate, 2008, p. 281). These were *lesbian existence* and the *lesbian continuum.*

Lesbian existence. This first concept was intended to acknowledge both the historical facts of existence of lesbians, as well as suggest the continued creation of meaning for the current lived experiences of lesbians (Rich, 1980). For Rich (1980) it was important to look for all the ways in which lesbian existence had presented itself, no matter how obscured or hidden the history may have been. For example, she acknowledged the difficulty in acquiring historical records or recorded stories of lesbian women due to the fact that many documents had been destroyed by those that wished to eradicate lesbian existence (Rich, 1980). Rendering the lesbian invisible, she argued, was one of the means in which the rights to physical, mental and economic access to women by men has been maintained, privileging women's heterosexual relationships to men (Rich, 1980). As such, Rich (1980) states that the threat of lesbian existence, "comprises both the breaking of a taboo and the rejection of a compulsory way of life, (and is also)...a direct or indirect attack on male right of access to women" (p. 649). The acknowledgement of lesbian existence, in itself, would be a radical step.

Rich (1980) also pushed that it was important for lesbian existence to differentiate from gay male existence, and that lesbian existence should not

simply be perceived as the female version of male homosexuality. The unintended effect of aligning lesbian identity with the general gay community was that it separated the experience of being a lesbian from the experience of being a woman (Rich, 1980). Rich (1980) viewed "lesbians as women" to be primary over lesbians as part of a larger category of homosexuals, as it was concerned that the latter would result in the erasure of lesbians' innate womanliness and a complete dismissal of the differentiating factors of economic and cultural privilege that exist between (gay) men and (lesbian) women. Rich (1980) emphatically argued that the lesbian experience, like motherhood, "was a profoundly female experience" (p. 650). As such, lesbian and the category of woman were (and must remain) highly intertwined.

Lesbian continuum. The second concept Rich (1980) proposed was the lesbian continuum, which referred to a broad range of woman-identified experiences that included not only erotic relationships, but also female friendships, mother/daughter bonds, and comradeship. She argued that envisioning all women along a lesbian continuum, as compared to the binary and polarizing relationships between heterosexual and homosexual women, would allow for the experiences of women to become primary and prioritized (Rich, 1980). While not all lesbians on Rich's continuum would share erotic desires for other women, all lesbians on the continuum would be united as women who resisted oppressions of men and patriarchal controls, uniting feminist strength (Cole & Cate, 2008).

In the interests of politics and resistance, heterosexual feminists were being urged to strategically place themselves somewhere along the lesbian continuum in order to challenge the limitations and effects of prescriptive heterosexuality (Cole & Cate, 2008; Rich, 1980). Rich (1980) argued that women needed to come up with their own erotics of *pleasure*, as the typical focus on genital-centred sexuality is a male-prescribed act. Alternatively, woman/woman-focused relationships would create opportunities for joy, sensuality, intensity, courage, and community – shared pleasures that could exist only amongst women (Rich, 1980). Not only would this result in a heightening of women's

gratifications, but also in defining pleasures outside of the oppressive limitations of (hetero)sexual intercourse (Rich, 1980).

Rich's call to other feminists to occupy the lesbian continuum was being heard amidst the ideological work of 1970s feminist culture, where sex and sexuality were hot topics of discussion and debate. Not surprisingly, the response to her call was very positive and numbers of lesbian feminist groups emerged along the continuum (Stein, 1997; Taylor & Rupp, 1993). For some, the significance of her work is that she "transformed the image of lesbians from sexual outlaws to respectable citizens...[and her] chief stroke of brilliance in this rhetorical take-over was to make lesbianism natural, womanly, and feminist" (Martindale, 1995, p. 75). Her work was voraciously taken up as that which had capacity to be seen as an act of resistance towards patriarchy and heteronormative institutions, unifying the innate strengths of women in the quest.

Reflecting on Rich. *Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence* (Rich, 1980), with its seemingly radical concepts and poetic writing, evolved into a kind of manifesto that represented many lesbian feminists within the academy at that time. Rich's work also echoed the growing cultural feminist movement of the 1970s and 1980s; however, the timing of its emergence was also situated at what would later be marked as the ending stages of second wave feminism and the beginnings of third wave feminism (Alcoff, 1988). Rich's writing and calls to action for women were the exact types of statements and ideas that were to become targets of criticism by groups of feminists that were tired of the limitations of the second wave.

For example, Rich's description of the lesbian continuum, as one that was based solely on woman-identified experiences, has been critiqued in the way it essentializes the concept of woman by adopting a homogenous cultural understanding of what woman is supposed to mean (Cole & Cate, 2008). This limitation, it has been argued, carries oppressive potential for those that do not share the same definition of woman (Cole & Cate, 2008). It also recreates an unintentional reinforcement of the gender binary and heteronormative constructs of sexuality, through the essentialized woman. The risk for lesbian identity is in

the potential of becoming mired within the confines of sex and gender, limiting the identity of lesbian to those contained within a culturally-specific, singular meaning of woman and/or female (Cole & Cate, 2008). This critique of the essentialized woman began to spur feminist examinations of the many unique circumstances of women in various locations, impressing the importance of differentiating voices situated in different locations (Dhairyam, 1994; Stein, 2007). While the idea of a universal feminist voice was not unique to only Rich, this approach of speaking for women as a global category of sameness was beginning to reveal and uncloak its own cultural specificity and privilege (Dhairyam, 1994.

Another challenge detected in Rich's work was the non-acknowledgement of diversity (Alcoff, 1988). For Rich (1980), the category of woman was sufficiently unifying on its own. There was found to be a complete dismissal of the complexities of culture, race, class, ability, or gender variance as they relate to identity (Alcoff, 1988). Further complicating was that there was neither an accounting for how different groups of women may be included or excluded from Rich's notions of the lesbian continuum and outward existence, nor contemplation of the effects women may experience based on this inclusion or exclusion (Alcoff, 1988; Rich, 2004; Taylor & Rupp, 1993). Rich's claims, while radically feasible for some middle-class, educated, privileged, (and mostly white) women within the safe confines of academia in some institutions in North America and Europe, do not represent the radical underpinnings of those in other circumstances (Dhairyam, 1994; hooks, 1989). The oppressive potential of the exclusionary mechanisms revealed in Rich's work, risks the erasure of the lived experiences of those who are most-often disproportionately under-represented, and dismisses the indisputable power imbalances that exist between and amongst women (hooks, 1989). However influential and significant Rich's work has been, her mode of theorizing in this piece is exemplary of why many feminists, lesbians, and women of color began to struggle with the essentializing problematic(s) that were evolving from many works of feminist literature in the academy at that time (Alcoff, 1988). As will be discussed later in this chapter, the focus of this

particular critique of lack of diversity serves as the basis upon which much of the poststructural feminist discourse has launched from.

The popularity of *Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence* resulted in frequent republication within the years following its initial press, both in academic journals as well as in small-scale feminist newspapers and pamphlets (Cole & Cate, 2008). Rich (2004) shares that she no longer approves the inclusion of this piece in any anthologies or college readers as she is now acutely aware of the disconnect between, "the speculative intellectual searching [of this essay] and the need for absolutes in the politics of lesbian feminism" (p. 9). She defends that this piece was never written with the purpose that it inevitably had and now shares many of the same critiques that have evolved since it was written (Rich, 2004). However, while flawed in analysis when examined over thirty years after its original publication, Rich's work has been a major academic catalyst in the development of lesbian theory and identity, which also happens to be situated within the ideological paradigm of structuralism.

Structuralist influences. Rich's concept of the woman-identified-woman situated on the lesbian continuum is an excellent example of a way in which Saussure's system of signification was taken up as a political project. While Saussure (1959) would argue that the active process of re-signification as a lesbian would not be plausible within his methodology, Rich's (1980) approach was in the politicizing of the arbitrary relationships between signifiers and signified representations. Rich's (1980) introduction of the lesbian continuum and her insistence on lesbian existence were, in a way, types of attempts towards purposely re-signifying the signified concept of lesbian, as well as woman. Moving away from signified concepts of (heterosexual) women oppressed by patriarchy, Rich (1980) was instead campaigning for woman as an identity that is grounded in its *womanliness,* as well as its political motivation to resist patriarchal oppressions. At the same time, her insistence towards the recognizable lesbian existence was a push for the re-signification of the medicalized sexual deviant towards an identity of lesbian built as one focused on meaningful relationships amongst women (Rich, 1980). It was through this re-framing of women's

signification, she thought, that progress could be achieved. These claims for the reformation of identity of woman and lesbian, grounds Rich (1980) as feminist who was speaking from the camp of radical cultural feminism, urging separatism, and battling within feminist debates of the sex wars (Alcoff, 1988; Echols, 1984).

Sex Wars: Cultural Feminists versus the Pro-Sex Feminists

Occurring primarily in North America in the late 1970s and 1980s, the sex wars were largely a textual-intellectual argument about lesbian sexuality between cultural feminists and sex-positive (pro-sex) feminists. Cultural feminism had its political incarnation in the anti-pornography movement and was staunchly set against pornography or any related depictions of women in sexually (or other) submissive relationships that were perceived to be based upon patriarchal sexual relations steeped in male power (Echols, 1984, Martindale, 1995). Veering from liberal feminist ideals of equality, cultural feminism sought to maintain (instead of eradicate) gender differences, by positively valuing the essential qualities of women apart from men (Alcoff, 1988; Echols, 1984). On the other side of the fence, the pro-sex or sex-positive movement evolved as a response to anti-pornography feminism and argued that sexual freedom was paramount in the freedom of women (Martindale, 1995). Pro-sex feminists argued that cultural feminism's strict rules of (in)appropriateness of women's sexuality served to oppress women's sexual expression in many of the same ways it was attempting to defend against (Rubin, 1984).

The origin of what is thought to have ignited the sex wars can be traced back to a series of intense exchanges that took place at a 1982 conference on sexuality, hosted at Barnard College in New York City (Martindale, 1995). At the conference, cultural feminists demonstrated against the inclusion of pro-sex feminists, arguing that the theories and ideas of sex-positive lesbians were anti-feminist and therefore should be excluded (Martindale, 1995). While the sex-positive feminists did eventually attend the conference, the atmosphere remained very tense and discussions highly critical. The actual war launched after the conference, through a series of books, scholarly articles, and academic critiques that were published by theorists on either side of the battle, serving as

argumentative dialogue focused on pushing the validity and importance of their respective stances of feminism and lesbian theory (Martindale, 1995).

Cultural Feminists. On one side of the battlefield, with pornography targeted as the source of many evils, anti-pornography cultural feminists such as Andrea Dworkin and Catherine MacKinnon vehemently argued that pornography was a major tool of control used by men to subjugate women, and fought for its legal eradication (MacKinnon & Dworkin, 1988). For example, Dworkin's (1981) radical publication entitled, *Pornography: Men Possessing Women*, was focused on drawing direct correlations between men's use of pornography and instances of violence against women. Her study shares multiple disturbing accounts of female sexual assault and she couples these tragedies with extremely bold (and possibly leaping) statements regarding men's innate capacity to violate women. For Dworkin (1981), men's predisposition as violators was based on their allegiance to pornography and prostitution, coupled with their rapacious aggression and loyalty to violence. While her work has been interpreted by many as extreme and in many cases agitating, the fundamental ideas she wrote about were representative of and championed throughout the cultural feminist movement.

Following the radical basis established in the anti-pornography movement, the next step was an urging by cultural feminists for women to forgo sexual relationships with men (Taylor & Rupp, 1993). MacKinnon (1996; 1997) thought that sexual relationships between men and women could not occur without consequences of oppression, making (hetero)sexuality a catalyst of gender inequality. Heterosexuality, therefore, was seen as a form of power embodied by the socially constructed identities of male and female, institutionalizing male sexual dominance and female sexual submission (MacKinnon, 1996). Heterosexuality was seen as, "a metaphor for male rapaciousness and female victimization...(and) for women heterosexuality is neither fully chosen nor truly pleasurable" (Echols, 1984, p. 60). It was argued that women's role in heterosexual acts could not be considered consensual due to her victimization as one that is oppressed by the person she consents to have sex with (Echols, 1984). Through the reproduction of this relationship within sexual expression, it was

argued that women engaging in heterosexual acts were complicit in the maintenance of their own oppression (Dworkin, 1981; MacKinnon, 1996; McKinnon, 1997). As a result, cultural feminists focused on defining the differences between men and women, and advocated separation from their oppressors (Taylor & Rupp, 1993).

The ideological premise of sexual separatism pushed for the recognition and celebration of the innate values of women and lesbian identity as a means of overcoming oppression, as well as a drive for separation and individuation from patriarchal oppressions (Alcoff, 1988). Separatists claimed that women engaging in heterosexual relationships were impeding the movement. As Rita Mae Brown (1976) states, "straight women are confused by men, don't put women first. They betray lesbians and in its deepest form, they betray their own selves. You can't build a strong movement if your sisters are out there fucking with the oppressor" (p. 114). The means by which the impingement on the demand for male access to women was to be achieved, as seen in Rich's (1980) concept lesbian continuum, had to be a rejection of heterosexuality and an embracement of the notion of a woman-identified women – a politically motivated form of lesbian identity (Alcoff, 1988; Taylor & Rupp, 1993).

Within cultural feminism, lesbianism as a political movement was prioritized over lesbianism as a lifestyle (Raymond, 1989). It was argued that the lesbian lifestyle overemphasized sex and desire, foregoing the greater connection to the life of a woman (Raymond, 1989). Focused on the positive valuing of women's feminine characteristics, cultural feminists felt that sexuality was about woman-centred egalitarian relationships, intimacy, and politically-correct sex, and that romantic love was authentically female (Taylor & Rupp, 1993). To be a political lesbian feminist meant engaging in an alternative type of sexuality rooted in the lesbian imagination and did not mirror types of heterosexual acts women were thought to normally submit to, including penetrative sex or sadomasochism (Alcoff, 1988; Echols, 1984). In fact, cultural feminists were also strongly critical of desire-based sexuality between women if the sexual acts were perceived to mimic the oppressive capacities of heterosexuality. MacKinnon (2002) states:

> the ideological forms through which dominance and submission are
> eroticized, (are) variously socially coded as heterosexuality's male/female,
> lesbian culture's butch/femme, and sadomasochism's top/bottom. To
> speak in role terms, the one who pleasures in the illusion of freedom and
> security within the reality of danger is the 'girl' the one who pleasures in
> the reality of freedom and security within the illusion of danger is the
> 'boy.' (p. 37)

To avoid danger and to attain freedom and security, these types of erotic roles and sexual relationships were problematized as those to be strictly abstained from. Instead, the valuation of an "authentically female" romantic love was promoted (Echolls, 1984).

The locating of authentic femaleness or the female essence was the primary project for cultural feminism (Alcoff, 1988). Cultural feminists maintained that feminism as a political project was the answer to all oppressions, including gender, race, and class based oppressions (Echols, 1984). As a project of re-appropriation of women from masculinity and male oppressors, cultural feminists had the sole focus of (re)creating healthy, nurturing, woman-focused environments free of men's values and demands (Alcoff, 1988; Echols, 1984).

Lesbian Sex Radicals. In opposition to cultural feminist standpoints, pro-sex or sex-positive feminists had the primary goal of liberation of women's sexuality (Raymond, 1989). As a response to what was seen as sexually repressive claims being made by anti-pornography cultural feminists, sex-positive feminists generally opposed all obscenity laws and resisted all measures that restricted sexual expression and/or freedoms of women (Nestle, 1984; Raymond, 1989). Sex-positive feminists were committed to the reformation of sexual morality laws by pushing an agenda of uncensored female desire and genital pleasure as paramount to freedom from women's oppression (Ferguson et al., 1984). Pro-sex theorists viewed the confinement and regulation of acceptable sexual expression and desire for women, and in particular lesbian women, as chronic hangovers from the grossly repressive Victorian social movements of the late nineteenth century focused on vices and morality (Martindale, 1995; Rubin, 1984). By

privileging genital pleasures and erotic desire with very few boundaries or limitations, pro-sex feminists urged unrestricted sexual expression, including everything from sado-masochism, to erotica, and above all sexual freedom (Echols, 1984; Ferguson et al., 1984; Martindale, 1995).

The critique of the cultural feminist anti-pornography stance was based primarily on a resistance towards censorship of sexual desire (Echols, 1984). Many pro-sex theorists argued that the claims made by anti-pornography feminists were extreme and drew excessive, inaccurate correlations between pornography, sexual assault, and violence against women (Echols, 1984; Nestle, 1984; Rubin, 1984). For example, much of Dworkin's work was critiqued as purposefully inflammatory, her style as sensationalizing, and she had a notable tendency to form grand sweeping generalizations based on single accounts and anecdotes (Assiter & Carol, 1993). While opposed to anti-pornography feminists, it should be clarified that sex-positive perspectives did not always mean pro-pornography, but instead a resistance towards the imposed censorship and control of women's pleasure and desire (Rubin, 1984). Sex-positive feminists challenged the cultural feminist notion that, "the sexually expressive woman is always seen as the victim of male propaganda and male violence...(and that) pornography – the image of women enjoying sex – is seen as the purveyor of this message" (Assiter & Carol, 1993, p. 16). If pleasure is to be found in pornography, women should not be denied, as the mechanism of denial carries the same oppressive potential.

The sex-positive feminist paradigm was focused on allowing women to reclaim control over their own sexuality and asserting their rights to engage in whatever sexual acts give pleasure and satisfaction (Ferguson et al., 1984). For example, in 1984, Gayle Rubin wrote *Thinking Sex: Notes for a Radical Theory of the Politics of Sexuality*, which is considered to be one of the major cornerstone publications of the pro-sex movement and also offers inklings of queer ways of thinking. In this essay, Rubin (1984) calls for a radical theory of sexuality that creates space for pleasure and desire while simultaneously refusing erotic injustice and sexual oppression. She argues that the sexual repression of cultural feminism, especially towards lesbian sadomasochists and butch dykes, upholds a

system of negative valuation towards sexual expressions that affect everyone (Rubin, 1984). She states:

> the anti-[sadomasochism] discourse developed in the women's movement could easily become a vehicle for a moral witch hunt....The ultimate result of such a moral panic would be the legalized violation of a community of harmless perverts. It is dubious that such a sexual witch hunt would make any appreciable contribution towards reducing violence against women. (p. 288)

Instead, Rubin (1984) was pushing for the notion of erotic desire coupled with mutually consenting partners, regardless of the act performed or the number of persons involved, was paramount to liberating sexual relationships and exchanges (Echols, 1984). While the concept of mutual consent was critiqued by some cultural feminists as a misnomer on the basis that woman as a victim of patriarchal oppressions cannot freely consent outside of her victimized position, sex-positive feminists argued that women's right to make that choice was of greater importance (Gallop, 1997; Rubin, 1984).

Alice Echols (1984), one of the most prominent critics of cultural feminism, calls for an embracement of sexual liberation alongside women's liberation and to refuse the subordination of women's sexuality to politics. She states:

> (i)n order to develop a truly transformative sexual politics we must once again resist the familiarity of sexual repression and the platitudes about male and female sexuality. But we must also break with the radical [cultural] feminist tradition which encourages us to subordinate sexuality to politics in an effort to make our sexuality conform to our political ideology, treating our sexuality as an ugly blemish which with vigilance and time might be overcome...(W)e need to develop a feminist understanding of sexuality which is not predicated upon denial and repression, but which acknowledges the complexities and ambiguities of sexuality....Rather than foreclose on sexuality we should identify what

conditions will best afford women sexual autonomy, safety, and pleasure, and work towards their realization. (Echols, 1984, p. 66)

Whether engaging in opposite-sex or same-sex sexual acts, by empowering women to control their own sexuality, it was theorized that women would have the potential to liberate from the historically repressive sexual system of values and morals (Rubin, 1984). Ultimately, by creating space within feminism for pleasure-based sexuality, sex positive theorists argued that sexual oppression of women overall would diminish (Rubin, 1984).

Critique of the Sex Wars. The sex wars met no finale, but instead slowly fizzled and splintered off as the debates were met with critiques that no longer supported some of the radical underpinnings that were situated on each side (Alcoff, 1988; Echols, 1984). The sex wars contained debates that were clearly emotionally charged, appeared to be antagonizing, and seemed to make broad-sweeping statements that sometimes needed further careful, specific, and substantiated analysis. Both Dworkin and MacKinnon in particular, however influential they have been within cultural feminism and feminism generally, have been heavily critiqued for their extreme stances. While Rubin (1984) has not met the same degree of backlash, she similarly engaged in provocative stances to engage attention and spur thinking beyond the norms. The debates within the wars had a strong polarizing effect with staunch and entitled extremes on either end, alienating many that were not comfortable taking sides (Stein, 2007). Within the sex wars, there was little space to situate in the middle.

Both cultural feminists and pro-sex feminists have been similarly critiqued, as Rich was, for treating historically developed notions of sex and gender as universals, essentializing the concept of woman (Alcoff, 1988; Martindale, 1995). In the attempt to spur unity amongst women, cultural feminists in particular forcibly adopted a homogenous, unproblematized, and ahistorical conception of women's essence, while concurrently misrecognizing or completely dismissing the complexity in identity (Alcoff, 1988). However, as was beginning to reveal itself through more contemporary theorists as will be seen in the following section, the simultaneity of oppressions experienced by many women

were beginning to be spoken, demonstrating a resistance towards these types of essentialist conclusions (Alcoff, 1988).

The essentializing problematic also extended to the conflation of feminism and lesbianism as one-in-the-same throughout the sex wars, as discussed earlier in this chapter (Rubin, 1984). Most of the lesbian feminist ideology theorized during this period was done so though the larger analysis of oppressions for women, with sexuality embedded within the discourse of feminism and the identity of lesbian being used as a political tool. The concern lies, as in the sex wars, where "lesbianism is mistakenly read as the quintessential form of feminist revolt" (Calhoun, 1994, p. 573). The co-opting of the identity of lesbian as a tool of feminist politics, in a manner, takes away from the distinctiveness of identity in favour of unifying and collapsing categories. Conversely, it must also be mentioned that it would be a mistake to assume that all lesbians are feminist. This is, of course, not true as lesbians can also hold patriarchal attitudes (hooks, 1989; Zimmerman, 1996).

A further critique was the assumption that all women had the same relation to compulsory heterosexuality, minimizing the specific relations that lesbian identity had to heterosexuality (Calhoun, 1994). The appraisal suggested that while feminism and lesbianism could in many instances remain relational, the totalizing discourse of feminist theory in relation to lesbian identity was urged to be avoided (Phelan, 1989). The development of a more overt lesbian theory was seen to be needed in order to move, "specifically lesbian love to the centre of its political stage" (Calhoun, 1994, p. 578). It would also be seen to be necessary to evolve and individuate from feminist theory, and to separate sexuality politics from gender politics, leaving feminism to operate as a theory of gender oppression and lesbianism as a sexual identity and practice (Martindale, 1995).

Despite the fact that some issues for lesbians may in some cases be subsumed under the category of woman, by lumping feminist and lesbian politics together, there is the risk that the very specific and daunting oppressions experienced by lesbians will be left unattended (Rubin, 1984). As Rubin (1984) states, "lesbians are also oppressed as queers and perverts, by the operation of

sexual, not gender, stratification" (p. 308). As a result, the interests of lesbians within the realm of identity politics may not be satisfied by feminist discourse. In some instances, the oppressions for lesbians are more similarly aligned with the larger homosexual and sexual minority community, shifting the resistance-based motivations for lesbians away from the specific goals of gender based feminism (Rubin, 1984). This multi-layered approach to identifying multiple oppressions, opened the door for more complex analyses of the diverse needs and interests of different groups of people. Theorizing after the sex wars ended, resulted in a growing demand for the need for speaking in more particular ways, while also avoiding the challenges of totalizing discourses within the concept of lesbian (Calhoun, 1994; Zimmerman, 1981).

Finally, as similar to the concern of "speaking for" an oppressed group, there was also a strong critique of the existence of dominant voices within the sex wars that were comprised of primarily white, academic feminists (Seidman, 1993). Universal feminist discourse espoused by white feminists resulted in a strong critique of the racisms found within white feminism, excluding the particular interests and needs of non-white women. In response, there was a quickly growing volume of scholarship by black feminists and also feminists from other (non-white) ethnic groups (Gallop, 1992; Seidman, 1993). This more contemporary approach of feminism geared the focus on the complexities of intersecting issues of race and class as they relate to gender and sexuality.

While the competing theories and ideas between cultural feminism and pro-sex feminism no longer resonate with the passion they did in their height of academic feminism, the sex wars were an important inclusion in the historical analyses of the development of feminism within North America, as well as the identity of lesbian (Taylor & Rupp, 1993). The wars were also occurring at a time of ideological transformation from structuralism to poststructuralism, as well as the feminist paradigm shift from the second to third wave. Much of the feminist discourse in the second wave spoke for women as a bonded sisterhood in a liberalist, equality-based resistance movement against patriarchy; whereas, third wave feminism would start to explore intersectionality, subjectivity, and diversity

of perspective through more deconstructive forms of analysis (Laird, 2007). However flawed the identity may have been, the flaws have served as the bases upon which much critique has been made since that time, as will be seen in the following section.

Intersectionality and difference

The 1980's saw a rapid dismantling of the traditional forms of academic feminism and a movement towards more interdisciplinary, culturally-focused studies (Gallop, 1992; Laird, 2007). This occurred due to the shift towards poststructural discourse and forms of analysis, including strong critiques by non-white feminists looking to smash concepts of universal essence-based identities that had evolved (Fuss, 1989). The focus on power, difference, and intersectionality necessitated a move away from concepts of unified lesbian identity as a category of knowing and instead towards an examination of the multiple textures in lesbian lives with a goal of identifying specificity (hooks, 1989; Phelan, 1994). The paradigms of race, class, gender, and sexuality, at minimum, became the common bases of deconstructive analysis (Laird, 2007).

The break from second wave feminism also occurred in part due to the shift of focus away from sex, towards gender and sexuality studies (Gallop, 1992; Laird, 2007). The natural "essence" of woman was dismissed and a prioritization of the dismantling of the social constructions of gender and sexuality became key in this shift (Butler, 2006). However, it should be noted, that very little of the theorizing from non-dominant groups examines gender or sexuality as the key components of their identity or oppression, which is indicative of the shift in ideological approaches (Phelan, 1994). Instead, categories of race and class were examined as they cut across gender and sexuality, with stronger networks of identity sometimes existing within race or class and never in fixed relations (Phelan, 1994).

Lesbians and feminists of color. Bell hooks (1989), African-American feminist and activist, was key in the development of intersectionality theory that was able to grapple with the woven textures of women's lives. While hooks (1989) does not specifically theorize on lesbian identity, her standpoint on

intersectionality theory was paramount to the next steps in complicating lesbian theory. Hooks (1989) does not dismiss the significance of patriarchy in her experience as a black woman, but she strictly wants to avoid it becoming the umbrella-cause under which she is placed. Instead the complications of race, class, and sexuality need to be added to patriarchy and mixed with a more nuanced recognition of the multiple tactics of domination at work in oppression. Hooks (1989) states:

> we want to begin as women seriously addressing ourselves, not solely in relation to men, but in relation to an entire structure of domination of which patriarchy is one part...not enough feminist work has focussed on documenting and sharing ways individuals confront differences constructively and successfully. (p. 25)

As an alternative form of theorizing, hooks (1989) advocates for smaller groupings of difference located at the local level, focused on a common cause according the culmination of oppressions operating in that moment.

In North America, one of the first points of resistance towards feminisms of privileged voices was grounded in the voices of black lesbian feminists, such as hooks, who argued that the political standpoints of lesbian feminism were premised upon the needs and interests of a white, middle-class bias, and did not represent or address the specific needs and interests of black women (Alimahomed, 2010; Seidman, 1993). Another example is Barbara Smith, a black feminist and lesbian who disputed that the intersectional oppressions she experienced as a black woman were sometimes more relevant to her relationships with black men instead of white lesbians (Seidman, 1993). For Smith, the assumption that the categories of lesbian or woman could adequately represent her interests and needs as a black woman in the face of race-based oppression, she argued, diminished the magnitude of her experience and emancipatory interests (Seidman, 1993). Smith clarified that, "being an African-American lesbian is not a minor variation on an essentially common lesbian experience; it is not a matter of adding race to gender oppression. Rather, race alters the meaning and social standpoint of being a lesbian" (as cited in Seidman, 1993, p. 119). For Smith, the

category of race cuts across sexuality and gender, creating multiple, complex conditions from which to theorize (Seidman, 1993).

Another good example exists with the Combahee River Collective, an eastern-US based socialist Collective of black lesbians and feminists in the 1970's whose purpose was to define and represent the particular needs of black lesbians and feminists in the struggle against racial, sexual, heterosexual, and class oppressions (Eisenstein, 2000; Phelan, 1994). Although the members of the Collective identified as both lesbians and feminists, the members of the Collective felt that their solidarity rested with progressive black men and that their development as lesbian women needed to be tied to the political positions of black people (Eisenstein, 2000). As stated in their manifesto:

> (t)his focusing upon our own oppression is embodied in the concept of identity politics. We believe that the most profound and potentially the most radical politics come directly out of our own identity, as opposed to working to end somebody else's oppression….We believe that sexual politics under patriarchy is as pervasive in black women's lives as are the politics of class and race. We also often find it difficult to separate race from class from sex oppression because in our lives they are most often experienced simultaneously. (Eisenstein, 2000, p. 264)

The interlocking oppressions coinciding together created the conditions of their lives, making it impossible, as they explained, to pick only one political perspective to speak from (Phelan, 1994; Eisenstein, 2000).

The Collective was also focused on consciousness raising amongst its members in order to develop intersectionality theory that could acknowledge the ways in which oppressive mechanisms had impact on their own identity politics (Eisenstein, 2000). This included an urging for narratives to be shared through the voices of the members of the Collective. The focus was on the development of an understanding of class relationships that account for the particular positionalities of black women, as well as the multilayered textures of black women's lives (Eisenstein, 2000). There was also a public calling-out against the racism found in the white feminist movement and the distinct exclusion of black feminist voices.

Members of the Collective retorted that their political contributions to feminism pushed further than the work of many white feminists due to their practice of consciousness raising, their examination of the political and cultural experiences of black feminists, and the commitment to dealing with the implications of race and class, as well as sex (Eisenstein, 2000). It was this approach to theorizing in deconstructive and intersectional ways that became characteristic of the changing methodologies in the shift from structuralism to poststructuralism.

Shift to poststructuralism. It must be noted that the above examples of intersectional theorizing are admittedly inadequate with respect to the many options available, as the volume of literature and diversity of oppressions are innumerable. The point here, though, is to introduce a number of key moments or individuals in historic lesbian feminist theory in order to demonstrate the ways in which the approaches to theorizing have shifted since that time, as well as the impact of the ideological transition to poststructuralism. The poststructuralist influence on the earlier ideas of lesbian identity has been profound and in many ways difficult to characterize in succinct terms. Concepts of specifically "lesbian theory" begin to dissipate as the task of poststructuralism is to avoid the seeking of essential truths (versus historical truths) and it begs an examination of the disruptions and intersectional oppressions at the level of the surface, creating analysis at the level of the specific (Phelan, 1994). Drawing deep connections across surfaces becomes an impossibility, making the concept of collective identity, or lesbian identity, a poststructurally evasive concept.

The project of specificity works at the level of the local and the particular (Phelan, 1994). Through continual complex articulation and layering of oppressions, the recognition of difference(s) converges on the level of the micro and abstains from realms of generalizations (Phelan, 1994). Specificity at the micro-level calls for a self-examination of one's location and relationship to the networks of power and meaning we exist within (Phelan, 1994). Instead of looking for the differences between, poststructural analysis delves into the effects of power on the structural boundaries and institutions that our differences exist within (Olssen, 2003). The advantage in the practice of examining the specific is

that it allows for small, incremental opportunities to resist and, "it enables us to intervene at particular points, rather than being swamped with despair at the magnitude of the task before us" (Phelan, 1994, p. 10). This form of critical analysis lends well to small-scale grassroots social movements, politically charged motivations, and creating opportunities to effect incremental changes, as will be examined in the following chapter on queer theory.

Summary

Lesbian identity names a set of inheritances from somewhat recent and further historical movements (Villarejo, 2003). Grounded primarily in structuralism, the notion of an identity of lesbian carries with it many of the same limitations of structuralist ideological perspectives as discussed in the previous chapter, and as critiqued above. These include essentialization, covering diverse perspectives with universal theories, censorship, and through the practice of primarily white, middle class women theorizing, it silences the voices of non-white women. The potential to move beyond these criticisms within the structural identity of a singularly named lesbian identity poses a substantial challenge and potential impossibility. A poststructural Foucauldian perspective would urge the examination of the discursive production of lesbian identity and the ways in which the subject is produced across multiple discourses, deconstructing the unity (Fuss, 1994; Halberstam, 1996). In light of the history and varied critiques, the relevance of lesbian identity in a contemporary context will be discussed in the concluding chapter of this thesis.

Chapter Five: Queer (Theory)

Following on the heels of the sex wars, the civil rights movement, and the gay liberation movement, queer politics and theory began to surface in Canada and the United States of America in the late 1980s and early 1990s as a response to the essentializing consequences of these movements (Warner, 1993). Within the context of queer, it is difficult to say whether the popularization of referring to oneself as "queer" preceded the academic uptake of queer theory or vice versa. It is highly plausible that they existed in a dialectical relationship, spurring the explosion of academic writing and theorizing alongside the rapid uptake of queer as an (anti)identity politic within various communities and individuals (Duggan, 1995). Regardless of its point of emergence, the fundamental basis of queer was intended to be political (Warner, 1993).

Queer in Public: ACT UP and Queer Nation

Some historical accounts of the emanation of queer "identity," point to the AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power (ACT UP) and Queer Nation as the visible social movements from which queer politics evolved (Halchi, 1999; Warner, 1993). Established in 1987, ACT UP was a United States-based, non-bureaucratic social movement that was focused on dealing with the alarming death rate associated with Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome (AIDS) amongst gay men (Halchi, 1999). The primary goals of ACT UP were to challenge the cultural misconceptions about AIDS and the related stigmatization of those infected with Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV), as well as lobby at the highest levels of medical institutions and government to effect changes in policy regarding treatment of those suffering (Halchi, 1999).

While AIDS was certainly not exclusive to homosexuals, the majority of the ACT UP activists were from the gay and lesbian communities, where pre-existing social networks and community-based political organizations were already established from the gay and lesbian rights movement (Halchi, 1999). It should also be acknowledged that many of the activists involved in the ACT UP

movement were largely situated within the middle class, educated, and were predominantly white (Halchi, 1999). While the cultural capital of particular members in these communities gave the movement a solid position from which they could mobilize and articulate their demands, the idea of it being a social movement of the privileged has complications (Halchi, 1999). Similar to the critiques of hooks (1989) towards feminism, the politics of the privileged do not necessarily match the needs of a more diverse spectrum of those that are oppressed. This challenge is similarly found in the critiques of queer theory, as will be discussed further in the following chapter.

With its focus on a health crisis that had a great deal of media coverage and attention in the late 1980s and early 1990s, the significance of ACT UP was in its visibility as a non-heterosexual movement within the mainstream public sphere (Highleyman, 2002). Refusing to stay within the boundaries of gay and lesbian communities, ACT UP was creating a strong voice within media and in public spaces, on topics that were typically contained within the (homosexual) bedroom, disrupting its own careful containment (Highleyman, 2002; Jeffreys, 2003).

Recognizing the significance of this spotlight, debates emerged from within the protests as to whether the opportunity for this public forum should be limited to solely HIV/AIDS activism (Rand, 2004). Some challenged that there was an opportunity in these forums to address the root issues, which were seen to be the social, economic, and political contexts surrounding the epidemic, particularly as they related to the oppressions of non-heterosexuals (Highleyman, 2002). As a result, a faction of the ACT UP movement broke off and began to focus their attention on the overarching mechanisms of oppressions that were causing the marginalization of gay and lesbian communities more generally, resulting in the emergence of Queer Nation (Rand, 2004).

An intentionally confrontational movement, Queer Nation's goal was to challenge the terms of gay and lesbian visibility politics, which was to be achieved by bringing together groups of people at the grassroots level who were collectively opposed to specific sets of oppressions (Gray, 2009; Rand, 2004).

The use of the term queer had multiple provocations; as a noun it was intended to shock and create discomfort through the use of a term that had historically negative connotations, and as a verb it was urging for non-conventional approaches or a "queering" of perspectives (Rand, 2004). Queer was not intended to denote gay, lesbian, bisexual, or straight, but instead was supposed to bring together groups who had experienced oppression(s) and who identified on the basis of their collective marginalization (Rand, 2004). The strength of queer was thought to be found in the collective voice that would speak out about *all* oppressions (Rand, 2004).

One of the first public acts of protest by Queer Nation was at the 1990 New York City gay and lesbian pride festival (Rand, 2004). Marching along with the ACT UP group in the pride parade, breakout members of Queer Nation handed out leaflets to parade spectators that contained a copy of their group's manifesto. Purposefully provocative, the double-sided leaflet had on one side a large title reading, *Queers Read This,* and on the opposite, *I Hate Straights* (Rand, 2004). An excerpt from the *Queers Read This* ("Queer Nation"*,* 1990) manifesto reads:

> How can I tell you. How can I convince you, brother, sister that your life is in danger. That everyday you wake up alive, relatively happy, and a functioning human being, you are committing a rebellious act. You as an alive and functioning queer are a revolutionary....I want there to be a moratorium on straight marriage, on babies, on public displays of affection among the opposite sex and media images that promote heterosexuality. Until I can enjoy the same freedom of movement and sexuality, as straights, their privilege must stop and it must be given over to me and my queer sisters and brothers....Straight people are your enemy. They are your enemy when they don't acknowledge your invisibility and continue to live in and contribute to a culture that kills you. (p. 1)

The purpose of the manifesto was to push for transformative political action and also to assert that a revolutionary stance could not simply be just a claim to a non-

normative sexuality. Instead, the call was for a commitment to act in particular, queer ways (Rand, 2004).

Over the following two years, the Queer Nation movement maintained its momentum through numbers of protests and initiatives aimed at disrupting the boundaries of social comfort (Rand, 2004). The provocations would include acts such as staging same-sex "kiss-ins" in busy shopping malls, wearing t-shirts bearing the slogan, "queer liberation, not assimilation, " and holding disruptive demonstrations with chants of "we're here, we're queer, get used to it" (Rand, 2004). Queer Nation was mimicking the privileges of normality in public spaces, with the intent of disrupting hegemonic assumptions of "normal" behaviours (Berlant & Freeman, 1993). While the Queer Nation movement existed for only a short time due to its inability to agree on a statement of purpose or organizational structure, it was a significant catalyst for the larger scale uptake of queer within anti-identity politics that began to appear within LGBTQ communities (Rand, 2004).

Queer as a Strategy

Queer professes transformative potential as a non-fixed gender and pluralistic sexual identity, and must not be mistaken as a term synonymous with lesbian or gay (Butler, 1996; Halperin, 1995; Seidman, 2001). The basic (yet incredibly complex) concept of queer is not concerned with sexual desires of the same sex, but instead on the basis of marginalized sexuality in relation to the norm of heterosexuality (Chambers & Carver, 2008). In its earliest incarnations, queer was intended to make available to lesbians and gays:

> a new kind of sexual identity, one characterized by its lack of a clear definitional content....(Homo)sexual identity can now be constituted not substantively but oppositionally, not by *what* it is but by *where* it is and *how* it operates. Those who knowingly occupy such a marginal location, who assume a de-essentialized identity that is purely positional in character, are properly speaking not gay but *queer.* (Halperin, 1995, p. 61)

However, as will be seen in the following chapter, the two are, in fact, often incorrectly conflated due to the ways in which queer theory has been taken up inappropriately and insufficiently interpreted.

The unity in queer comes not from shared identity, but instead a unified avoidance of disciplining and normalizing social forces – it is a project of identity evasion (Butler, 2004). Queer as a strategy calls for the abandonment or destabilization of identity as a ground for politics and instead urges the refocusing of the "politics of the personal" found in dominant gay and lesbian culture, to the politics of signification, deconstructing the binary relationship between homo-/hetero-sexuality that structures the social (Seidman, 1993). For example, the identity of lesbian, "leaves in place norms that sustain sexual hierarchies....(N)ormalizing discourses justify and bring into being a wide network of controls that regulate sexual behaviour. [Queer] aims to deflate the emancipatory narrative by exposing the exclusionary and disciplinary effects" (Seidman, 2001, p. 358). In comparison, queering the relationship between gender, sex, and sexual orientation, made it difficult to enact these codes and norms, evading the regulating practices of normalization (Butler, 2004; Seidman, 1993).

The queer project began with a direct link to sexuality, anti-homophobic resistance, and the disruption of straight privilege. However, throughout its own movement, the reference of queer expanded to include any person, regardless of sexual orientation, who goes through social reflections to identify the ways in which their stigmatizations are connected with gender, sexuality, family, political systems, race, class, ability, intimacy, health care, and cultural norms (Butler, 2004; Warner, 1993). As the concept of queer evolved it began to represent:

> fighting about these issues all the time, locally and piecemeal but always with consequences. It means being able, more or less articulately, to challenge the common understanding of what gender difference means, or what the state is for, or what 'health' entails, or what would define fairness, or what a good relation to the planet's environment would be. (Warner, 1993, p. xiii)

As an anti-institutional critique of normalizing practices, queer attempted to interrogate how categories of recognition emerge as projects of normalization, bankrupting the politics of identity and staging an argument against normativity (Michalik, 2001; Seidman, 2001).

The theory upon which many of these queer ideas have evolved started in various North American and Western European academic institutions starting in the early 1990s, as a complex connection of intellectual engagements that took up the examination of sex, gender, and sexual desire across the academy (Spargo, 1999). Queer theory was first grounded in feminist and sexuality studies, and most concerned with a critique of the liberal humanist rhetoric of assimilation and fixed identity categories that come with claims of authenticity and stability (Barnard, 1997; Duggan, 1995). For example, through the language of the sex wars, the naturalized concepts of "woman" and "lesbian" had become troublesome categories that needed to be examined and deconstructed within the context of their power formations and limitations (Guess, 1995). In time, queer theory quickly expanded its scope and became visible in a wide variety of academic disciplines, and it marked an important shift towards poststructural forms of feminism and social theorizing, as well as the development of a new way of talking about sexuality and power (Duggan, 1995; Spargo, 1999).

Queer Theory in the Academy

There were at least three significant motivators that shifted many academics, and in particular lesbian feminist academics, from second wave and structuralist forms of feminism, to the realm of poststructural queer theory. First, numbers of white, middle class lesbians, fed up with and exhausted by the debates surrounding the sex wars, fled to queer theory seeking a new theoretical location and a fresh conversation (Jeffreys, 2003; Phelan, 1994). For lesbian theorists, queer theory offered a way of, "basing politics in the personal without acceding to this pressure to clean up personal identity" (Warner, 1993, p. xxvii). Within queer, there was no need to claim a particular identity before being able to articulate personal politics (Fuss, 1989; Warner, 1993).

The necessity for a new approach of theorizing was also urged by the emergence of many diverse, marginalized voices critiquing their absence from the theoretical discourse of mainstream lesbian studies and feminism (Seidman, 1993; Warner, 1993). The essentializing tendencies of cultural feminism were no longer acceptable and queer theorizing proposed to move beyond these types of singular concerns. In queer theory, the multiplicity and plurality of perspectives at the level of the local were critical in the efforts to avoid subsuming marginalized voices within political efforts (Fuss, 1989). The theory of queer motivated a move from the solidarity of identity to the politics of difference, unpacking the complexities of identity that were wrapped up in the discourses of race, gender, class, location, and sexuality (Samuels, 1999; Seidman, 1993).

Finally, the third motivation in the shift towards queer theory was based on the strong critique towards the notion of a dominant gay and lesbian culture that had evolved through the gay and lesbian rights movement (Colebrook, 2009). This pre/dominance was thought to be in a position of privilege over other sexual minorities, establishing gradients of more and less acceptable forms of non-heterosexuality (Colebrook, 2009; Seidman, 1993). Queer theory proposed to eschew the totalizing effects of the categories of lesbian and gay, and proposed to represent all non-normative existences that are marginalized not only by heterosexuality, but also by the gay and lesbian mainstream (Colebrook, 2009; Seidman, 1993).

Queer theory was produced in a variety of ways, including queer readings of literary texts, critiquing normative institutions as an anti-institutional politic, and theorizing in queer ways (Spargo, 1999). Queer theorizing went far beyond the politics of sexuality and other oppressions, and became a queering of the world – a queer way of being, living in a queer environment, and operating in queer institutions (Warner, 1993). This theoretical approach was subsumed under the politics of queer and necessitated a critical deconstructive analysis of the normatives found in existing social theory (Seidman, 1993). There are several key theorists that are considered the pioneers of queer theory, including Teresa de Lauretis, Judith Butler, and Gloria Anzaldúa. All three will be examined with

respect to their contributions to the origins of queer theory as a field of study, as well as the impacts and contributions their work has on the field over the last 25 years.

Teresa de Lauretis. An academic and critical theorist, Teresa de Lauretis is often credited as one of the first to engage in queer theory, or more suitably, a queering of theories (Halperin, 2003). De Lauretis's use of queer within the academic context was undoubtedly provocative and intentionally disruptive towards existing theories and methods of theorizing. She urged a thorough exploration of the methods by which lesbian and gay sexualities could be (re)imagined as mechanisms of resistance to essentializing practices and cultural homogenization (Halperin, 2003). Queer theory was intended to avoid the distinctions associated with fixed identities and the liabilities of problematized ideologies, and moves into a deconstructive mode of thinking that aims to transgress and transcend constructed, institutional boundaries of humanist discourse (de Lauretis, 1991; Martindale, 1993). This reinvention, she thought, would create spaces for speaking and thinking about sexuality in new, less essentializing, and minimally oppressive ways (de Lauretis, 1991).

The prime catalyst for de Lauretis was a 1990 University of California, Santa Cruz academic conference focused on theorizing lesbian and gay sexualities, which she themed, *Queer Theory*. The motivation behind the theme was a call to members of lesbian and gay communities to, "confront (their) respective sexual histories and deconstruct (their) own constructed silences around sexuality and its interrelations with gender and race...(in order to) reinvent the terms of (their) sexualities, to construct another discursive horizon, another way of thinking the sexual" (de Lauretis, 2011, p. 257). De Lauretis (1991) wanted the conference to critically examine the existing discourses and practices of non-hetero-sexualities in relation to the intersectional experiences of gender, race, class, ethnic culture, generational existence, as well as geographical and socio-political locations. Above all, the work that was to be undertaken at the conference was intended to problematize the many discursive constructions and constructed silences that were emerging from the new(er) field of academic Gay

and Lesbian Studies, which shared many of the same essentializing critiques that came out of cultural feminism (de Lauretis, 1991).

De Lauretis (1991) was intent on dislodging the privilege of hegemonic, white, male, and middle-class models of analysis and conceptual frameworks, as well as the heterosexist underpinnings and assumptions commonly found in academic feminism and the growing fields of sexuality studies (Halperin, 2003). As a critical theorist attempting to demolish and expose boundaries, she wanted to both make theory *queer* and to *queer* theory, meaning she wanted to disrupt the heteronormative underpinnings of existing gay and lesbian theory, as well as to vitiate the process of theorizing about sexuality and desire (Halperin, 2003). The project of queer theory was to serve as a provocation to unsettle the growing complacency amongst Gay and Lesbian Studies and to counter the dominant discourses with alternative anti-constructions of the subject in culture (de Lauretis, 1991; Halperin, 2003). De Lauretis (1991) wanted a reinvention of the terms of our sexualities and another way of thinking sexual(ly) – a new discursive and queered purview.

Following the success of the conference, de Lauretis next edited a special 1991 edition of *differences, A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies*, titled *Queer Theory: Lesbian and Gay Sexualities*. This journal issue was comprised of a collection of queer works by various authors and marked one of the first specifically published theoretical works on the discourse of queer(ing) (Halperin, 2003).The purpose of this collection of essays, similar to the intentions of the conference, had three primary goals: to challenge the unquestioned homogenization of lived experiences amongst structurally categorized groups of people, to confront the absence of historical specificities in theory and language, and to insist upon further thought about the multiple ways in which race shapes sexual subjectivities (de Lauretis, 1991; Halperin, 2003). She states, "(t)he differences made by race in self-representation and identity...urge the reframing of the questions of queer theory from different perspectives, histories, experiences, and in different terms" (de Lauretis, 1991, p. 10). For de Lauretis (1991), queer theory held the potential for fluidity and served to debunk structural-ideological

stable sexes, genders, and sexualities; and also makes fundamental, not secondary, the contributory complexities of specificity, including race, class, and history of identity (Halperin, 2003; Jagose, 1996).

De Lauretis's conference theme and her approach towards the special edition of *differences* reflect why she is highly relevant in discussions of the history of queer theory within the (primarily North American and Western European) academic setting. She was bold and asserted her ideas amidst great contest and discomfort, especially due to the subversive use of "queer," that had historically had such negative connotations (de Lauretis, 1991). She was one of the first to articulate queered theory in blatant terms, situating her work alongside a small and select group of theorists who similarly contributed to the foundation of queer theory.

Judith Butler. While Judith Butler, a poststructuralist feminist philosopher, may not be named as the one who coined queer theory, her writing is often thought of as that which makes up some of the groundbreaking texts within the field (Colebrook, 2009). For Butler, the intent of queer theory was focused on suspending the question of identity and shifting the critique towards the precarious model of the self that had earlier become evident in realms of cultural studies, including cultural feminism and Gay and Lesbian Studies (Colebrook, 2009; Osborne & Segal, 1994).

For Butler (2006), the queer body was thought to be exemplar of anti-identity, as it was able to reveal the tension between the regulation of self as autonomous, while also being recognized as a subject that is a product of particular sets of performances (Colebrook, 2009). By this, she was suggesting that in order for one to be recognized within identity, they must perform within particular sets of repetitive norms that are recognizable as a particular style or mode of being (Colebrook, 2009; Jagose, 1996). She used gender as one of her key examples throughout her early work, as the gendered body was seen as comprised of sets of repetitive performances that maintain cultural recognition of either woman or man. It was in the queering of those norms that Butler (2006) argued had the potential to disrupt recognition, revealing the hegemonic principles

through which one is performing and being performed through prescriptive norms of gender, creating the poststructural politics of anti-identity.

Butler's earlier works were thought of as radical texts through their insistence towards revealing root issues, as well as rallying politics along the margins and spurring movements (Chambers & Carver, 2008; Tuhkanen, 2009). One of her most famous books, *Gender Trouble*, was first published in 1990 and is argued to be one of the most influential texts within the realm of queer theory. For Butler (2006), queer theory was neither concerned with who one desires, nor was it intended to pose as a (re)naming for the homogenized category of lesbian and gay (Osborne & Segal, 1994). Instead it was established as an argument against the specificity found in lesbian and gay identity with respect to gender, as well as the normative, acceptable constructs of desire that embodied the "proper" lesbian (Butler, 2006). Queer, as an anti-identity, evolved as an argument and form of resistance against specificity and normativity (Guess, 1995; Osborne & Segal, 1994).

As a critique of the compulsory heterosexuality found in much of the existing feminist literature at that time, *Gender Trouble* was a form of intervention for feminist theory, countering the limits and propriety of gender identity (Butler, 2006). Specifically, Butler (2006) argued that feminism structured within two fixed genders and in the paradigm of heterosexuality ultimately served to contribute to the privilege of compulsory heterosexuality in its oppressive forms, limiting the possibilities of choice, difference, and resistance that she perceived as plausible outside the strict binary relation of gender and sex. She states:

> if sexuality is culturally constructed within existing power relations, then the postulation of a normative sexuality that is 'before,' 'outside,' or 'beyond' power is a cultural impossibility and a politically impracticable dream, one that postpones the concrete and contemporary task of rethinking subversive possibilities for sexuality and identity within the terms of power itself. (Butler, 2006, p. 42)

The project of queer theory was intent on exposing the limitations of compulsory heterosexuality within feminist theory and subverting the notion of gendered identity beyond recognition.

Butler, (2006) critiqued the universalized notions of men (linked with masculinity) and women (linked with femininity) that exist within identity categories and politics, warning that these prescriptive genders risked reinforcing old and producing new forms of hierarchy and exclusion. She positioned both sex and gender as discursive productions or formations in urgent need of disruption and complication, and attempted to theoretically obliterate the essentialized links between sex (male/female), gender (masculinity/femininity), and normative (hetero)desires in the quest to undermine the power and authority of heteropatriarchy. Butler's (2006) queer theoretical goal was to, "open up the field of possibilities for gender without dictating which kinds of possibilities ought to be realized" (p. viii). The queering of gender was proposed to un/identify gender through the practice of constantly crossing, shifting, and (re)forming, making it difficult to anticipate or maintain any prescribed meaning (Jagose, 1996). It is important to note that Butler (2006) was not suggesting that gender did or should not exist, but instead that it should remain permanently unclear as to what gender means or is constituted by.

Performativity. Beyond the allure of her politically-charged, theoretical, and poststructural writing, the concept Butler (2006) developed that lent *Gender Trouble* to being recognized as a canonical text of queer theory, was the evolution of the theory of performativity. Performativity, for Butler (2009), is a collection of rituals such as words, acts, gestures and normative desires that produce the *effect* of an innate origin of gender on the surface of the body. Our identities, therefore, are not a production of an authentic internal gendered core, but instead are the dramatic effects of our performative acts. Butler (1993) further attempts to explain that:

> performativity must be understood not as a singular or deliberate 'act,' but rather, as the reiterative and citational practice by which discourse produces the effects that it names...the regulatory norms of sex work in a

performative fashion to constitute the materiality of bodies and, more specifically, to materialize the body's sex, to materialize sexual difference in the service of consolidation of the heterosexual imperative. (p. 2)

Here Butler (1993) is outlining that the performative acts of gender and sexuality are not intentionally performed by the subject, but instead are discursively produced for and by the subject, on the body, creating gender and sex according to hetero-patriarchal identity regimes.

The gendered self was theorized to be structured through the repetition of acts and regulatory norms that seek to approximate an origin(ality) (Butler, 2006). For example, typically acknowledged feminine attributes such as a soft voice, nurturing, or passive mannerisms, are types of performative acts that the identity of woman takes up as the depiction of "being" a woman. However, Butler (2006) argued that gender was not innate and held no internal truth; she states:

such acts, gestures, (and) enactments...are *performative* in the sense that the essence or identity that they otherwise purport to express are *fabrications* manufactured and sustained through corporeal signs and other discursive means. That the gendered body is performative suggests that it has no ontological status apart from the various acts which constitute its reality. (p. 185)

Gender was instead thought to be a complicated set of obligatory norms that achieved the effect of "natural" gender through repetition and discourse (Butler, 2006). As such, the feminine woman or masculine man become contingent categories of identity that are vulnerable to queer disruption.

Discontinuity. The provisional nature of identity was further revealed through Butler's (2006) notion of discontinuity in performativity. Discontinuity was found in depictions of non-normative fabrications of gender or through recognition of the gaps or breaks in discursive realities. For example, in the instances of butch women or drag queens, the bases of the origin(s) of gendered identity are revealed to be contingent. The queer act in butch or drag is not in the clothing or mannerisms of the individual, but instead the discontinuity of their performative genders (Butler, 2006). The queering potential within the

performative lies in the, "arbitrary relation between such acts, in the possibility of a failure to repeat, a de-formity, or a parodic repetition that exposes the phantasmatic effect of abiding identity as a politically tenuous construction" (Butler, 2006, p. 192). It is not the intentional "putting on" of another gender by drag queens or tomboys that is queer, but instead the revelation of the contingent instability of categories of gender that they can so easily put on.

The significance of Butler's work on gender as it relates to sexuality and identity, is in the relationship that gender has *with* sexuality. Whereas the cultural feminist stance subscribed to the notion that heterosexual relationships maintain women in oppressive gendered roles, Butler (2006) argues that it is the discursive formations propping up essentialized gendered relations that underwrite heterosexual relations. By this she means that the discursive gender formations of male and female risk securing heterosexuality as that which is natural to gendered identities, situating non-normatives as "unnatural." The queering of gender, therefore, serves to disrupt normative heterosexual relations, subverting notions of naturalness through discontinuity (Butler, 2006).

The performative queer. For Butler, queer is not radically outside recognition, but is instead one which stakes claim to being recognized as human within the norms of speech and gender, while simultaneously perverting the normative matrix (Colebrook, 2009). It is this perverse, disruptive, and unsettling potential of queer that motivated its popularity both within academia, as well as sexual minority communities (Seidman, 1993; Warner, 1993). Butler (1996) argued that the effects of resisting and queerly deconstructing identity categories avoids their use as regulatory regimes that situate the subject in the normalizing categories of oppressive structures, eschewing the risks of re-colonization by the sign and also escaping association with the homophobic discourse and determination of the "I" under the sign of lesbian (Colebrook, 2009; Tuhkanen, 2009).

It is important to clarify that Butler (2006) was not necessarily suggesting that lesbian identity must lose its politic in favour of queer identity, but instead that the performativity of lesbian required queering. The queered lesbian would be

able to, "maintain and demand recognition for that which has...exceeded the bounds of cultural recognition. (T)he queer is that which both partakes in the norm…and destabilizes that norm…(by not taking) on the desires of the heterosexual matrix" (Colebrook, 2009, p. 15). The queered interruption of identity was not suggested to lead to the dissolution of heteronormative politics, but instead to (re)politicize the terms though which lesbian identity was articulated (Butler, 2006). As a "provisional" lesbian, Butler (1996) states, "(t)o claim that this is what I *am* is to suggest a provisional totalization of this 'I.' But if the I can so determine itself, then that which it excludes in order to make that determination remains constitutive of the determination itself" (p. 181). This means that while she may choose to specifically identify herself as a lesbian within some arenas, she will do so with the acute understanding that she would like to make it undeniably inconclusive as to precisely what that sign (of lesbian) signifies for her (Butler, 1996). This idea of identity evasion illustrates one of her most queerly theorized concepts.

The effect of this evasion was proposed to serve as a form of resistance to the oppressive regulatory effects of normative heterosexuality and homophobia (Butler, 1996). Where historically notions of lesbian and gay may have been designated as perverted, illegal, immoral, or unnatural, Butler (1996) urges that these, "sites of disruption, error, confusion, and trouble can be the very rallying points for a certain resistance to classification and to identity as such" (p. 182). Here she reasons that if one approaches (anti)identity politics as a provisional sign, fluid and unclear, there is less chance of being automatically subsumed in the regulatory regime. She wishes to consistently mess with the signified meaning of lesbian so as to not allow it to settle into one (or a set of) recognized meanings, and theorizes that through the, "avowing (of) the sign's strategic provisionality (rather than its strategic essentialism)…identity can become a site of contest and revision, indeed, take on a future set of significations that those of us who use it now may not be able to foresee" (Butler, 1996, p. 184). By blurring and confusing meaning, or "queering" anti-identity, instability would ensue, creating potential for agency to be found in not having a stable signifier (Butler, 1996).

By disclaiming her connection with the structural category of lesbian, Butler (1996; 2006) enacted a form of queering resistance against the patriarchal, homophobic oppression experienced by the political identity of the lesbian. This queering of sexual discourses and sites of identity, provided the underpinning of what many saw as the potential of queer theory, radically popularizing Butler's work (Osborne & Segal, 1994). She offered transgressive ideas and proposed subversive mechanisms of resistance that had allure for numbers of scholars, feminists, and sexual minority members that were fed up with the privileged, universalizing, and exclusionary discussions that had come out of cultural feminism, as well as Gay and Lesbian Studies (Butler, 1993; 1996; 1999; 2006). Her contributions to the field of queer theory and feminism undoubtedly served as a major catalyst for the vast volume of queer literature that has been written since that time.

Gloria Anzaldúa. There is an element of difficulty involved in introducing Anzaldúa. Providing a succinct list of identifiers to describe her is in a sense, counterintuitive to her theorizing. She could be introduced as a Chicana, a lesbian, a queer, a queer theorist, a feminist, a creative writer, or a Chicana cultural theorist, but this inventory is undoubtedly incomplete and the existing identifiers are insufficient as an assembled scroll (Anzaldúa & Moraga, 2002). Instead they must be compressed together and/or overlapping, creating the complex conditions of existence and experience from which she spoke (Anzaldúa, 1987).

Anzaldúa was one of the key voices in Chicana lesbian literature and cultural theory, which saw its primary emergence occurring in the 1970s and 1980s (Freedman, 2007; Garber, 2001). As she had not made sexuality and gender the locus of her theorizing, Anzaldúa's contributions are often passed over, or included as subtext, within a larger discussion of the various historical mappings of queer theory (Freedman, 2007). It seems that the uptake of Anzaldúa's work as queer was part of a reflective process in which eventually her writing and ideas were recognized as brilliantly queered within a comprehensive interconnectedness of multiplicitous, non-essentialized identity that goes far beyond sexuality and

gender (Anzaldúa, 1987). Anzaldúa was focused on examining the interconnectedness of race, gender, sexuality, and class, and the intersecting systems of subordination that position individuals on the margins of society (Alimahomed, 2010; Phelan, 1994). As will be examined further, Anzaldúa offered some of the most groundbreaking work on intersectionality theory and also contributed heavily to the theoretical moment of decentralized post-identity politics within queer theory (Tuhkanen, 2009).

   Borderlands, boundaries, and la mestiza. In 1987, Anzaldúa (1987) published *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*, a collection of poetry and essays that attempted to ponder poststructural forms of non-fixed identity through an analysis and reflection on the borderlands or boundaries that she as a "new mestiza," existed within. By borderlands, she was referring to the borderlands between cultures that she existed within – women in Chicano and Latin culture, Chicanos in "white American" culture, and as a lesbian in a heterosexual world (Anzaldúa, 1987). She examined how those borderlands interacted, clashed and meshed, simultaneously including and excluding her, and forcing her to shift across borders as she shifted cultural specificities (Anzaldúa, 1987). Writing with a narrative voice, Anzaldúa (2009) poetically offers:

   I am a wind-swayed bridge, a crossroads inhabited by whirlwinds. Gloria,

   the facilitator, Gloria, the mediator, straddling the walls between

   abysses...You say my name is ambivalence? Think of me as Shiva, a

   many-armed and -legged body with one foot on the brown soil, one on

   white, one in straight society, one in the gay world, the man's world, the

   women's...Who, me, confused? Ambivalent? Not so. Only your labels

   split me. (p. 45)

Here she critiques the homogenizing tendencies of specifically named identities that serve to exclude she who is named within her complex set of intersectional realities – la mestiza.

   Anzaldúa's (1987) reference to "new mestiza" in *Borderlands*, refers to one that is dislocated and drifting between spaces, both geographically and ideologically speaking. In attempting to describe la mestiza, one could suggest

that it is an ontological condition that exists at the points of interconnectedness and crossings of identity of the borderlands, with multitudes of racial, cultural, and ideological terms simultaneously contradicting and intertwined (Anzaldúa, 2007). La mestiza is the point of articulation or expression of these crossings and is the intersectional voice that can be heard, but not easily identified (Tuhkanen, 2009). Anzaldúa's concept of the new mestiza, "illuminates a view of multiple oppression as the site of a new consciousness, a consciousness with a heightened appreciation of ambiguity and multiplicity" (Phelan, 1994, p. 57). The development of la mestiza consciousness exists in the recognition of these intersections, borders, and spaces amongst the systems of interlocking oppressions and would serve to break down the subject-object duality that oppressed her personally and exponentially in her borderlands (Anzaldúa, 2007).

On a path to a new consciousness, Anzaldúa challenged that la mestiza will have to determine how to split herself to be situated on more than one border at once, resisting the lure of the dualistic opposition between borders (Anzaldúa, 2007). La mestiza is the lived outcome of the simultaneous and constantly morphing transfer of cultural and spiritual values of one group to another (Anzaldúa, 2007). As an integrated part of self, la mestiza constantly juggles and struggles along the borders of multiple competing sets of value systems, pulled in all directions and sometimes caught in what Anzaldúa terms "un choque," or a cultural collision (Anzaldúa, 2007). As she describes:

> (la mestiza) can't hold concepts or ideas in rigid boundaries...(she) constantly has to shift out of habitual formations; from convergent thinking, analytical reasoning that tends to use rationality to move toward a single goal (a Western mode), to divergent thinking, characterized by movement away from set patterns and goals and toward a more whole perspective, one that includes rather than excludes. The new mestiza copes by developing a tolerance for contradictions, a tolerance for ambiguity. (Anzaldúa, 2007, p. 388)

La mestiza exists in a dual state of not belonging to any one particular group and at the same time not able to separate herself from any one group (Phelan, 1994).

This notion of multiplicity in the ways in which borders can be crossed creates fluidity and ambiguity of those boundaries. It is this effect of non-specific identity, fluidity, and ambiguity that are la mestiza's key strengths and also the exceptionally queer aspect of Anzaldúa's work.

Anzaldúa (1987) argued that all marginalized peoples are kinds of mestizas who share a particular privileged consciousness of oppression(s) (Barnard, 1997). Both la mestiza and queer exist across all kinds of interconnected and intersecting borders, temporalities and cultures, and are similarly outcasts in each one, evading (and not able to claim) forms of fixed identity (Barnard, 1997; Tuhkanen, 2009). She states:

> (b)eing the supreme crossers of cultures, homosexuals have strong bonds with the queer white, Black, Asian, Native American, Latino, and with the queer in Italy, Australia and the rest of the planet. We come from all colors, all classes, all races, all time periods....The mestiza and the queer exist at this time and point on the evolutionary continuum for a purpose. We are a blending that proves that all blood is intricately woven together, and that we are spawned out of similar souls. (Anzaldúa, 1987, p. 84)

As a coalitional politic, Anzaldúa sees la mestiza and queer as a force and network that can band together to right the balance between those who are marginalized and oppressed, against the privileged patriarchal dominant (Anzaldúa, 2009). Anzaldúa envisions a collapse of the systems of categorization through the use of mestiza (Raiskin, 1994).

Similar to her existence as a mestiza at the border(lands), Anzaldúa is also thought to similarly traverse the boundaries of poststructuralist queer theory and lesbian feminist identity politics (Garber, 2001). It is not thought that she vacillates between two spaces, but instead that she rejects the situating of herself as one over one other and instead exists in both and/or neither and/or all (Garber, 2001). Anzaldúa (2007) states:

> as a mestiza I have no country, my homeland cast me out; yet all countries are mine because I am every woman's sister or potential lover. (As a lesbian I have no race, my own people disclaim me; but I am all races

because there is the queer of me in all races.) I am cultureless because, as a feminist, I challenge the collective cultural/religious male-derived beliefs of Indo-Hispanics and Anglos; yet I am cultured because I am participating in the creation of yet another culture, a new story to explain the world and our participation in it, a new value system with images and symbols that connect us to each other and to the planet. (p. 389)

She does not prioritize gender, race, class, or sexuality, but instead aims to draw out the interconnectedness of all types of oppressions and motivates a reconceptualization of feminism to a form that is multiplicitous and capable of battling all of them (Garber, 2001).

It is here that it is possible to see Anzaldúa traverse between queer theory and more structuralist forms of identity politics. She queers the new mestiza by calling for an embracement of all other border crossers, including queer; however, the identity politic emerges in the calling of a category of mestiza (Garber, 2001). The challenge for mestiza will be to avoid fixity or over-essentializing of what mestiza refers to. This said, while at times Anzaldúa may be found to use elements of the language of essentialism, she uses it in vastly different ways that have radically subversive potentials (Garber, 2001; Phelan, 1994).

Summary

De Lauretis, Butler, and Anzaldúa all made significant contributions towards the emergence of queer theory, impacting pre-existing understandings of lesbian identity and the related challenges with it. All three were situated in the ideological beginnings of poststructuralism, where queer theory as a field of critical inquiry embodied a poststructural language and its "emerging prominence...provided a language to deconstruct the category of... [the lesbian] subject and to articulate the dissenting voices in a postmodern direction" (Seidman, 1993, p. 117). They shared a common resistance towards the essentializing effects of the categories of gay and lesbian identity that were emerging from Gay and Lesbian Studies, had a purposeful desire to evade fixed notions of heteronormative identity, and were all focused on examining elements of the intersectional experiences of gender, race, class, culture, and/or location as

they related to (anti)identity politics. These similarities linked them theoretically together as three of the most significant female theorists on queer theory and poststructural feminism.

There were differences in approach, though. For example, for de Lauretis (1991) and Butler (2006), queer theory spurred primarily from critiques of compulsory heterosexuality and the complacency that had evolved in the growing field of Gay and Lesbian Studies and feminism. Further to this, Butler (2006) was also focused on suspending the question of gender identity as a response to cultural feminism and shifting the critique towards the precarious (and queer) model of the self. For both Butler and de Lauretis, their approaches were intentionally provocative and purposefully unsettling; however, as white, educated, middle class, Anglo-American feminists, they also spoke from positions of privilege, making their provocations seem extravagant to some (Anzaldúa, 2009;). Alternatively, Anzaldúa (1987; 2007) founded queer theory in a new form of consciousness, a form of consciousness that acknowledged the complexity, overlapping, and intersectionality of her own multiple oppressions as she crossed between borders. The queerness for Anzaldúa came not from revisioning genders or sexuality, but instead by drawing connections between mestiza's complexity and queer's flexibility.

All three theorists have been critiqued and even they themselves have since critiqued their earlier works (Anzaldúa, 2009; Butler, 1993; de Lauretis, 1994). Queer theory as a general discourse has also faced significant critiques since its introduction. An examination of the issues that have been posed regarding Butler, de Lauretis, and Anzaldúa's theories, along with queer theory as a general practice, and the lesbian feminist response to queer theory, will be discussed in the following chapter.

Chapter Six: Collisions Between Lesbian and Queer

Over the last twenty-plus years, queer theoretical scholarship has grown and dispersed rapidly throughout the academic world, making it a lucrative and attractive theory for many to take part in, as, "(f)or academics, being interested in queer theory is a way to mess up the desexualized spaces of the academy" (Warner, 1993, p. xxvi). These poststructurally alluring elements, though, are many of the same things that become the basis of its extensive critique and the voracious appetite for queer has also resulted in a paradox in that as its popularity and consumption in the mainstream grows, the subversiveness of queer and its critical-hypothetical knowledges become compromised through inappropriate use (Halperin, 2003; Samuels, 1999).

As a theoretically proposed poststructural anti-identity, queer was originally introduced as a concept for new forms of hypothetical knowledge (Halperin, 2003). In contrast to deliberately established theories, queer was instead a type of theoretical approach or a "queering" of theory that was intended to serve as a counter-argument or resistance towards stale, stagnated ideas and heteronormative forms of oppression (Halperin, 2003). Queer, "disturbs, disrupts, and centers...what is considered 'normal' in order to explore possibilities outside of patriarchal, hierarchical, and heteronormative discursive practices" (Ruffolo, 2009). The attractiveness of queer stemmed from premises of moving beyond boundaries of sexuality and gender, its resistance towards the gender binary, its notion of fluidity, and the transgressive potential it proposes as it attempts to de-center heteronormativity as a dominant referent (Namaste, 1994; Nigianni & Storr, 2009; Seidman, 2001).

Since its introduction, queer theory has been met with misinterpretations, misunderstandings, misuse, critique, and arguably, criticism. Interestingly, and as will be seen, some of the shortcomings and consequences of queer theory have been identified and critiqued by the same theorists that contributed to its development. Based on concerns with the ways in which queer theory has been appropriated and mis-used, all three of Butler (1993), de Lauretis (1994), and Anzaldúa (2009), have subsequently re-situated themselves with respect to their

theoretical and ideological stance(s) on the queering of theory. Their perspectives, along with a more thorough analysis of the theoretical collisions between lesbian feminists, cultural theorists, and queer theorists will be examined in order to better understand where ideas have since transitioned and how they relate to the project at hand.

Misuse/Misappropriation

Queer theory had originally endeavoured a "queering" of identity. However, as the popularity of queer saw a rapid uptake into the academy, as well as a named identity that individuals and communities elected to "put on," the intended effects of queer resulted in a dissipation of its own theoretical potentiality (Butler, 1993; de Lauretis, 1994). A number of queer theorists, who later refused the label of queer, critiqued that even though queer came about as an expansive, transgressive, inclusive term, that its (mis)use has had compromising and misleading effects (Anzaldúa, 2009, Butler, 1993, de Lauretis, 1994).

De Lauretis's Response to Misuse. De Lauretis, while thought of as one that coined the term and played an instrumental role in queer theory's amalgamation and growth, quickly grew uncomfortable with the direction that the discourse navigated (Jagose, 1996). Several years after the *Queer Theory* conference in California and the special edition of *differences*, de Lauretis was writing again with her voice as a feminist and as a lesbian (Jagose, 1996). She was attempting to distance herself from her earlier advocacy of the term, as she felt that it no longer represented the critical politic she had originally thought it would carry (Jagose, 1996; Hall, 2009). In an essay that was later in a later edition of *differences*, de Lauretis (1994) writes, "as for 'queer theory,' my insistent specification *lesbian* may well be taken as a taking of distance from what, since I proposed it as a working hypothesis for lesbian and gay studies...has quickly become a conceptually vacuous creature of the publishing industry" (p. 297). For de Lauretis (1994), the enchantment of queer theory had been lost to the popularization of its incendiary language.

The allure of queer within the mainstream and the academy represented an uptake of a theoretical discourse that was originally designed to resist and critique

those very same arenas (Jagose, 1996; Hall, 2009). Operating at the margins, de Lauretis (1994) argued that queer necessitated its continued marginality in order to maintain its critical non-normativeness. Queer theory spoken as an established theory imbues it with notions of acceptance and approval, "betray(ing) the very unsettledness that is queer theory's most provocative and useful innovation. There should be neither a fixed truth nor method to queer theory" (Hall, 2009, p. 33). As queer theory became more common within the academy, it has lost some of its subversive potential, much like, for example, the popularization of tattoos and body art in North American culture. Whereas at one time they may have been more commonly thought of as markers of being cutting edge, dangerous, or alternative, the mainstream popularization of the practice today makes them almost common-place.

Beyond the ways in which her theories were being used, de Lauretis (2011) has also been critical of the shortcomings of her own work. She now admits that part of her motivation was to enable theoretical and political practices surrounding non-normative sexualities. She had hoped that a critical dialogue amongst Gay and Lesbian Studies would emerge, leading to the discovery and mutually respective understandings of sexualities in their historical, material and discursive specificities (de Lauretis, 1997). However, she reflects that there was limited compatibility between the theoretical and political practices that she had hoped would align, and limited momentum was achieved due to queer theory not serving as a map for political action (de Lauretis, 2011).

Butler's Response to Misinterpretation. Butler (1993) has also had sizable concerns with the ways in which *Gender Trouble* has been interpreted and misused, both within the academy as well as its characterization as the canonical work of queer theory (Osborne & Segal, 1994). She has not since turned away from queer theory as de Lauretis has, but feels that some of the ways in which *Gender Trouble* has been taken up risk flawing the fundamental basis of the poststructural idea of queer, as well as what queer intends to achieve (Butler, 1993).

The original writing of *Gender Trouble* was, in fact, not intended as a queer text and instead was supposed to be a feminist response to the compulsory heterosexuality she critiqued in second wave feminist discourse, which was due, she claimed, to the reductive causal relationship found between gender and sexuality in cultural feminist politics (Osborne & Segal, 1994). The primary thesis of *Gender Trouble* was to subvert the cultural feminist view that heterosexuality was the cause of women's gendered oppression in favour of the queered view that it was normative constructions of gender that maintained hetero-dominant relationships (Butler, 2006). However, the unintended queer response to her thesis swung to the opposite pole, distancing itself as far as possible from the essentializing problematic of cultural feminism, and radically separating the analysis of sexuality from the analysis of gender.

In an interview conducted after *Gender Trouble* had been published, distributed, and widely consumed, Butler shared that she was concerned that there was a certain element of anti-feminism in queer theory due to this separation of gender from sexuality (Osborne & Segal, 1994). The dissociation of queer theory from feminism was not something she was left feeling comfortable with and, as a primarily feminist theorist, she was left to grapple with how her work was to be interpreted and in turn straddle between and amongst these diverging discourses (Osborne & Segal, 1994). However, Butler still maintains that the queer movement still has an important link to feminism and does not need to exist separately. Instead, future writing would be more cognisant in order to avoid this unintended consequence (Osborne & Segal, 1994).

Never meant for the stage. Beyond Butler's (1993) concern of anti-feminist sentiments, there were other varied interpretations of her work that did not always match the original intent. Several years after writing *Gender Trouble*, Butler (1993) wrote *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex,"* as a response to some of the confusion and criticism that stemmed from the mass consumption and misconstruing of the concept of performativity introduced in the first text. She was concerned with the ways in which "performativity" of gender

was not fully comprehended and/or was misunderstood, misguiding some of the key premises spurring queer theory and activism (Butler, 1993; 2004).

In the final chapter of *Gender Trouble*, Butler (2006) had illustrated her theoretical hypothesis of performativity by discussing the parodic cultural practices of drag, butch/femme identities, and cross-dressing. She argued that these performances were able to, "expose the illusion of gender identity as an intractable depth and inner substance" (Butler, 2006, p. 200). By this she meant that the existence of a drag queen performing and passing as a woman was able to expose the *illusion* of gender as the essence of only one sex, disrupting the essentialized link between sex and gender. Many readers were titillated by this discussion and drawn to the perceived subversive potential of drag and its use as a transgressive performance to decentre and destabilize fixed gender categories (Osborne & Segal, 1994). The consequence here was that through the use of these non-normative acts to transgress gendered norms, the concept of performativity had been incorrectly interpreted as a type of performance that one could elect to "put on" (Butler, 1993; 2004).

For Butler (1996), it is crucial to understand the nuanced, yet significant difference between *performance* and *performativity*. Performance suggests that one acts with volition and will, a humanist concept which is counter to the ideological premise of her work (Butler, 1996). Performativity, on the other hand, is not a show or act, but instead the repetition and ritualization of acts that achieve their naturalized effects in the context of a gendered body that is culturally and socially understood in particular ways (Butler, 1993; 1996). Butler (1996) argued that there was no identity behind the gender being expressed, but instead that gender was performatively constituted through the expressions and actions that make up the resultant gender expression. Woman-as-nurturer, for example, is a performatively constituted act that gains recognition through constant and repetitive forms that link nurturing to femininity to womanliness. This becomes particularly evident when a non-nurturing woman exposes the contingency of this act.

The challenge of thinking of performativity as a performance, is the incorrect assumption that one is able to make claims towards one's own self-directed action and identity (Butler, 2009). Butler (2009) states:

> by mistake, we sometimes announce that we are the sovereign ground of our action, but this is only because we fail to account for the ways in which we are in the process of being made. We do not know, for instance, what precisely the norms of gender want of us, and yet we found ourselves moved and oriented within its terms....If what 'I' want is only produced in relation to what is wanted from me, then the idea of 'my own' desire turns out to be something of a misnomer. I am, in my desire, negotiating what has been wanted of me. (p. xi)

Performativity does not presume the structuralist *a priori* subject evolving in endless repetition, but instead that the performativity of the subject is an effect of the complex and overlapping sets of social norms that weigh on the "somatic psyche" of the subject, eliciting particular performative acts in response to social and cultural obligations and desires (Butler, 2009). More simply stated, performative genders exist not only because of the hegemonic norms that we exist within, but also due to one's desire and perceived duty as a social being to perform in a particular acceptable and recognizable way.

Herein lies the crux of the problem that Butler was attempting to fix. The key misunderstanding of performativity is based on the misinterpretation of the self as sovereign, as one that has the potential to step *outside* of cultural and social obligations and desires in order to actively resist against hegemonic norms through the use of queer performances (Butler, 1993; 1996). Butler (2009) cautions that it is, "not possible to think of pursuing subversive strategies exclusively as a fully deliberate and intentional set of acts...none of us has the choice of creating ourselves ex nihilo. We are transformed and acted upon prior to any action we might take" (p. xii). As Butler has argued, it is not possible to exist external to the social, as one's recognition of self is constituted by the very mechanisms that are proposed to be resisted against. Instead, the potential in performativity is actually grounded in the *recognition* of disruptive moments

within the confinement of those spaces and is pushing for expansion of *thinking* about identity (Butler, 1993; Zavaletta, 2005).

The incorrect use of performativity is a good example of one of the many ways in which queer theory has been misinterpreted and used beyond its intent. While the popularity of queer and queer theory have been indicative of a strong desire for new ways of thinking beyond the limitations of what came out of second wave and cultural feminism, the theoretical ideas presented have not always been carefully interpreted (Zavaletta, 2005). Queer theory is communicated in a complex, yet appealing, poststructural language that has also encountered numbers of moments lost in translation. The complexity of the language and ideas of queer theory appear to sometimes result in a reduction of the theories into terms that are over-simplified and not fully understood; the consequence of this being the threat of homogenization of queer into a singular theory and masking its subversive potential.

In *Bodies that Matter* (1993), Butler discussed how queer must maintain itself to retain its purpose. Queer may become an affiliation, but not an identity, and can never fully describe those who lay claim to the (non)identity. As Butler (1993) states, queer, "will have to remain that which is...never fully owned, but always and only redeployed, twisted, queered from prior usage and in the direction of urgent and expanding political purposes" (p. 228). By this, she means that in order to maintain its transgressive potential, queer must remain in a fluid state, unfixed, and not locatable. As has been experienced in praxis, though, the identity of queer has been broadly taken up by many within the academy as well as within LGBTQ communities, complicating its potential to maintain its subversive origins.

The Umbrella Unfurled

Another challenge for queer was not only contained in its theoretical limitations and inappropriate use, but also its emergence in praxis. As previously discussed, concurrent with the rapidly growing popularity of Butler, de Lauretis, and Anzaldúa's work, was the Queer Nation movement calling out to "queers," proposing a revolutionary stance for transformative political action (Rand, 2004).

This coupled with the broad popularity of *Gender Trouble,* both inside and outside the academy, resulted in a greater trend of claiming queer for oneself (Butler, 1993; 1996; 2009). However, the challenges associated with appropriating queer sits in the capacity for the practice of self-naming to become domesticated, misappropriated, and apolitical (Butler, 1993; 2007).

The most obvious instance of queer's use as a singular theory is in its abstraction as the new "gay or lesbian," or "gay *and* lesbian" (Halperin, 1995). Within the larger public sphere, as queer moved beyond its initial project of provocation and became more comfortable, it was seen as a convenient shorthand to represent the otherwise lengthy list of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, asexual, trans-identified, two-spirited, intersexed, and on – an alphabet soup of sexual minorities that were seen to be adequately represented in the concise five letters spelling "queer" (Epstein, 1994; Samuels, 1999).Within the academy, queer theory had sprung up as anti-assimilationist stance towards the new field of Gay and Lesbian Studies, which was operating as a project of liberal equality and the privilege of rights (Epstein, 1994; Zita, 1994). However, in some respects it failed to deconstruct and instead became renamed as Queer Studies (Epstein, 1994). The critical, political, confrontational, anti-identity politics of queer never intended to become the new mainstream gay, as queerness was supposed to be a marker of one's distance from norms and conventions (Epstein, 1994; Halperin, 1995).

Queer as a Homogenizing Practice. The consequence of queer being used as an umbrella term for sexual minorities is that it has largely failed to meaningfully address the issues of homogenization and exclusion, which were critiqued by some of the earliest queer theorists (Garber, 2003). Queer theory has fallen under criticism that it has not managed to actually deal with issues of race and class, as it had purported to achieve, due to its misuse and primary conflation with non-normative sexualities (Dhairyam, 1994; Epstein, 1994). It has come to be reckoned with as a critical, subversive discourse, "but concomitantly [written with] a queer whiteness,...[that] domesticates race in its elaboration of sexual difference" (Dhairyam, 1994, p. 26). This white-washing effect pokes a hole in

the poststructural anti-assimilationist intentions of queer and begs the question as to whether queer can still be "queer" if it fails to effectively account for complexities and intersectionalities.

Anzaldúa (2009), for example, objected that she cannot simply leave her culture or race behind for the umbrella inclusivity of queer (sexuality). As a non-white woman who exists along and within the borders of multiple races and cultures, she argued that her relationships to race and culture are differentiating factors in her sexuality, not bonding elements. She critiqued that:

> (q)ueer is used as a false unifying umbrella which all 'queers' of all races ethnicities and classes are shoved under. At times we need this umbrella to solidify our ranks against outsiders. But even when we seek shelter under it we must not forget that it homogenizes, erases our differences.
>
> (Anzaldúa, 2009, p. 164)

While Anzaldúa (2009) did at times elect to refer to herself as queer instead of lesbian, she did so in attempt to more adequately represent her complexity and intersectionality, and not just her sexuality. However, at the same time she also accused white middle-class theorists of broadly co-opting the term queer within the academy and maintained strong concerns surrounding her inclusion within white queer theory that sought to unify and appropriate queers of color (Anzaldúa, 2009; Barnard, 1997; Garber, 2001). This collision between race, culture, sexuality, and homogenization, as discussed in the previous chapter, was what gave rise to her new mestiza, as la mestiza was able to avoid these consequences (Raiskin, 1994).

Queer theory has also been critiqued for its lack of focus on questions of class and capitalism, which are critical in the context of race and ethnicity (Quiroga, 2003). This avoidance of these complexities has resulted in the critique that queer theory has become a privileged theory that has been written and maintained largely within the context of the Anglo-American (Quiroga, 2003). If it is to be successfully taken up across geographic boarders as a non-imperialist project, the tactics would need to change and issues of class, as they relate to all other intersectional oppressions, would require examination (Quiroga, 2003).

The misappropriation and periodic insufficiency of queer, has resulted in instances of difference being *neutralized* and rendered as unimportant (Garber, 2001; Samuels, 1999). While theoretically queer was motivated to establish alliances along the peripheries amongst all the marginalized around the world, its misuse risks flattening the social, cultural, and material conditions of lived experiences, resulting in a neutralization of difference and re-essentialization of queer – the same occlusions it was intending to remedy (Penn, 1995; Samuels, 1999). Similarly, the embracing of queer as a term to identify or represent oneself can have the unintended consequence of neutralizing and homogenizing all queer affiliates under a fixed sign, erasing complexities of diversity (Samuels, 1999).

Part of the issue leading to its misapplication is the difficulty in understanding the nuanced meanings in queer theoretical writing. Cultural feminists have accused queer theorists, and theory as a written discourse, of being too obscure (Jeffreys, 2003). It was thought that in order for a revolutionary political theory to be successful, it must be clear, relatable, and intelligible (Jeffreys, 2003). The works of some queer theorists, especially Butler, are strongly criticized for jargon-filled, esoteric, inaccessible writing geared not towards a particular community for social change, but instead the male-dominated, ivory-towered academy (Jeffreys, 2003). As will be seen in the following section, there was a significant (and largely negative) response to queer theory by some lesbian cultural feminist theorists.

Negative Valuing and Erasure of Lesbian Identity

Some of the first to respond to the uptake of queer theory were primarily lesbian cultural feminists who were attempting to defend a theoretical discourse that they had so purposefully (and personally) developed only a decade prior to the emergence of queer theory (Jeffreys, 1994; 2003; Phelan, 1994). It was concerned that the popularization of queer theory was threatening the erasure of the identity of lesbian feminism, fundamentally eradicating the basis upon which the concept of lesbian identity had been formed (Goodloe, 2009).

The premise of Adrienne Rich's (1980) work in *Compulsory Heterosexuality* illustrates why the concern with lesbian invisibility was so

significant for cultural feminists (Guess, 1995; Rich, 1980). As discussed earlier, Rich (1979; 1980) had called upon all women to embrace a lesbian existence along a lesbian continuum, urging that the visibility of lesbian identity was politically capable of overcoming oppression and the perceived compulsory norms of heterosexuality. However, the conflicting approach of queer theory opposed this idea through its problematization of the notions of identity, gender, and sexuality, dismissing Rich's call to action in favour of anti-identity politics. The problem for lesbian feminists was that by not using "lesbian" as an identifier, it was seen to contribute to the erasure of lesbian identity, reinforcing compulsory heterosexuality (Guess, 1995; Rich, 1980). While Rich (1994; 2011) herself found limitations with *Compulsory Heterosexuality*, the popularization of her work as a type of manifesto, combined with the emotional responses that it drew, portrays why there was such a strong resistance by cultural feminists to leave these ideas behind.

Beyond the invisibility factor, there was also a strong defence towards lesbian feminists being thought of as staunch, literal, flat, uptight, frigid, and "anti-sex," while queer was conceived of as sexually open, fluid, free, and more satisfyingly sexual (Halperin, 2003; Jeffreys, 2003; Martin, 1994; Phelan, 1994). There were critiques by cultural feminists towards instances in which lesbians were painted as inferior to queer, where:

> antifoundationalist celebrations of queerness rely on their own projections of fixity, constraint, or subjection onto a fixed ground, often onto feminism or the female body, in relation to which queer sexualities become figural, performative, playful, and fun. In the process, the female body appears to become its own trap, and the operations of misogyny disappear from view. (Martin, 1994, p. 104)

The challenge with this approach is that the lesbian feminist becomes framed as one that brings upon herself her own set of problems due to her inflexibility and narrowness, inculcating women as integral to their own oppression instead of examining the broader mechanisms of oppression at play (Martin, 1994).

A further critique of queer theory by cultural feminists was that it was thought to be overshadowed by the politics and interests of gay males, making queer politics a specifically masculine position (Jeffreys, 1997). The concern was that the male voice would emerge from queer as representative of all under the umbrella, similar to the challenges experienced with the male voice found in the context of "gay" as a general term for all homosexuals, occluding lesbians (Wilton, 1995). The significant gains made within cultural feminism to differentiate lesbian identity from the realms of men and masculinity, were seen to be at risk of being lost to the tidal wave of queer popularity, submerging the voices and work "by-women-for-women" under an umbrella that included those that cultural feminists had worked so hard to detach themselves from (Jeffreys, 2003). It was ultimately feared that women's voices would not register clearly and that lesbians would only be visible in the ways in which they were able to assimilate under queer (Jeffreys, 1997; Wilton, 1995).

Cultural feminism also posed a strong countering towards the inclusion of "degenerative" sexual beings under the umbrella of queer (Grosz, 1995; Phelan, 1994; Jeffreys, 2003). It was argued that even though queer as a coalitional politics served to include anyone with an unusual sexuality or practice, that it, "could not be more different from that of lesbian feminism, a politics based upon woman-loving which seeks to topple the structures of male power, including a sexuality of violence and aggression" (Jeffreys, 2003, p. 37). Cultural feminists were concerned that the subsumption of degenerates under the umbrella of queer would not only threaten the natural womanliness of lesbian identity, but would also reinsert violence and power into the lives of lesbian women. The inclusion of sadomasochists, transsexuals, bisexuals, deviants, perverts, and transgressive sexual practices under the umbrella of queer was seen as a direct insult towards the theoretical and political stance of feminism and lesbian identity (Jeffreys, 2003).

The critique of queer and queer theory by cultural feminists has been extensive and it seems that the basis of many of the critiques are ironically missing the point of what queer was intending to do. However, it is also

acknowledged that the differences between lesbian feminism and queer theory are grounded in not only theoretical stances, but also in the major ideological shift from structuralism to poststructuralism. Cultural feminist theoretical premises were mired in structuralist ideology and the shift to queer not only marked a change in the way that theorizing on sexuality and identity was radically changing, but it also marked an overall larger paradigm shift in thinking, theoretically leaving cultural feminists in a different realm.

These theoretical and ideological shifts also mark generational differences between cultural feminists and queer theorists, which also play a role in the critiques. The popularity of queer has been most warmly embraced by younger theorists and communities who wish to outwardly resist institutionalized and reformist politics that are often associated with lesbian or gay (Epstein, 1994). This compared to more established (read: older) theorists, some of who have argued that the allure of queer eludes the lived reality and struggles of older lesbians, and that queer is not able to transcend any of the historical and political challenges that are critical to lesbian identity (Epstein, 1994; Phelan, 1994). The shift from lesbian to queer poses a worry that the specific needs and interests of lesbians and feminism will be swept up in the poststructural language of queer, unfurling its depoliticizing umbrella of unity as a new coalitional label that represents all (Butler, 1993; Phelan, 1994).

The risk of the umbrella identity has the furthest reaching set of concerns. While queer theory has proposed to offer slippage and fluidity within its theoretical discourse, pushing boundaries of normativity, it has also proposed to be able to traverse geographic borders (Garber, 2003; Nigianni & Storr, 2009). The most popular queer theoretical texts and works were written as "non-universalizing, theoretical universals," meaning that even though queer theory resisted essentializing practices, its theoretical premises suggested that it was beyond contexts of geographic limitations, universalizing the queering of theory globally (Garber, 2003). However, the circulation of Western-centric, privileged, queer theoretical discourse has been met with some contest.

The fluidity of identity and the resistance towards naming particular named identity, while seen as transgressive by some, can present significant challenges within global, non-Western contexts, especially where constructed identities are necessary in order to assure economic and cultural survival (Vanita, 2002). Queer as a global umbrella of theoretical discourse risks erasing the specific needs of groups that rely on more purposefully constructed identity politics (Nigianni & Storr, 2009). It is also significant to point out that there is a high degree of privilege associated with having a *choice* of identity reference and that most humans that are able to articulate that choice are those that have already obtained most of their civil rights and freedoms (Vanita, 2002). That choice in non-Western contexts may have crucial consequences for rights, freedom, and safety (Nigianni & Storr, 2009; Vanita, 2002). In addition, queer is not necessarily translatable in all languages, privileging this supposed global discourse of queer theory as a privilege of the English (and almost exclusively Western) world (Nigianni & Storr, 2009).

These consequences of, and objections to, queer theory do not suggest that queer as a theoretical discourse is entirely flawed. Queer theory has opened up the examination of the relationships between sex and gender, has allowed for expressions of non-normative genders and sexualities, has raised the critique of normalizing regimes, and has had significant impact on the ways in which transgendered and intersex studies have proliferated in the academy (Halperin, 2003). However, the key issue for the larger theoretical discourse of queer theory is undoubtedly the innumerable ways in which it has been misinterpreted, misused, and misappropriated, mainstreaming a theory and political stance that was always intended to remain at the periphery (Butler, 1993; de Lauretis, 1994; 2011). While queer appears to remain very popular within areas of the academy as well as in pragmatic contexts, queer theory as an intellectual pursuit is in some ways now outdated (Green, 2002; Love, 2011). Those theorists invested in the deeper meanings and potentials of queer, or queering of ideas, have dealt with the issue by moving on. It seems that we are now in an era of post-queer or possibly even post-post-queer.

Post-Queer Emergence

Queer theory has peaked and stunted itself through its own limitations, based on its primary focus on sexuality and heteronormativity (Ruffolo, 2009). The dyadic relationship between these two foci is now seen as unproductive and unfruitful, and the discourse of post-queer has moved beyond sexuality. It is no longer about whom one desires, nor is sexuality any longer perceived as the base upon with other modes of difference, such as race, class, and gender, cross and intersect (Eng, Halberstam, & Munoz, 2005). The base of sexuality has been de-based and while not suggesting it is beyond queer, post-queer can be described as a type of plateau between queer and some type of post or state (Ruffolo, 2009). The Deleuzian post in post-queer is:

> always in the state of becoming that is never fully detached from queer or attached to a completely inhabitable space that exists after queer. It is a rhizomatic plateau – a multiplicity of flows that produces creative connections amongst theatrical, material, institutional, social, cultural, political, and economic bodies. (Ruffolo, 2009, p. 8)

Rhizomatic refers to a complex theoretical network through with there is a multiplicity of flows, ceaseless connections, radical fragmentation, and dispersion, which exceeds any notion of queer as an identity (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987; Kemp, 2009). With the locus of marginalization not tied to sex, gender, or desire, post-queer raises a potentiality that is able to traverse barriers, boundaries, and borders that were previously critiqued in queer theory. Post-queer has disrupted the diyad, dismissed heteronormativity, and has the potential to touch everything and anything – by anyone (Love, 2011; Eng, Halberstam, & Munoz, 2005; Ruffolo, 2009).

As an alternative theoretical position, post-queer has become a very complex approach of analysis with its specific views of citizenship, globalization, diasporic studies, disability, sovereignty, nationalism, temporality, and terrorism (Love, 2011). Post-queer also holds concern with the restrictive scope of concerns within queer theory, which have been critiqued as insignificant and futile when compared to the magnitude and severity of contemporary post-queer issues such

as globalization, neoliberal capitalism, political economies, war, terrorism, racial-profiling, and apartheid (Eng, Halberstam, & Munoz, 2005; Green, 2002). Within post-queer discussions, it has been argued that queer needs to, "refocus its critical attentions on public debates about the meaning of democracy and freedom, citizenship and immigration, family and community, and the alien and the human in all their national and their global manifestations" (Eng, Halberstam, & Munoz, 2005, p. 2). As a result, the research focuses and frames of activism characterizing post-queer may include examinations of theories of race, diaspora and immigration, and the relationships between politics, governments, sovereignty, and death (Eng, Halberstam, & Munoz, 2005).

Of particular interest to the context of this thesis, a further focus of post-queer lies in its study of homonationalism. As has already been established, queer theory has been critiqued for its overemphasis on the concerns of white, gay males along with its failure to deal with the issues of race and class. Homonationalism, as a very post-queer concept, is a strong opposition to any instances of LGBTQ acts that depict white superiority or privilege, and that oppression cannot be separated from the battles against racism, anti-immigrant sentiments, or local and specific forms of oppression (Butler, 2011). In 2010, the Berlin Pride Committee selected and offered Judith Butler a Berlin Pride Civil Courage Award. Butler agreed to accept the award and travelled to Germany, but while at the Pride festival and after speaking with locals from various groups and organizations, she ultimately turned down the offer. Her refusal of the honor was in political resistance towards the homonationalist tendencies of the organizing committee and in particular their affiliation with organizations that engage in anti-immigrant discourse, which was in this instance directed at new immigrants from Northern Africa, Turkey and various Muslim-predominant countries (Zimmer, U., Heidingsfelder, M., & Adler, 2010). In an interview after she declined the award in *Online Magazin für Frauen*, an online German feminist magazine, Butler shared:

> although we can find homophobia in many places, including those of
> religious and racial minorities, we would be making a very serious error if

we tried to fight homophobia by propagating stereotypical and debasing constructions of other minorities. My view is that the struggle against homophobia must be linked with the struggle against racism, and that subjugated minorities have to find ways of working in coalition....(T)he queer movement has to be committed to social equality, and to pursuing freedom under conditions of social equality. This is very different from the new libertarianism that cares only for personal liberty, is dedicated to defending individualism, and often allies with police and state power, including new forms of nationalism, European purity, and militarism. (Zimmer, U., Heidingsfelder, M., & Adler, 2010)

Butler's anti-homonationalist, post-queer response well illustrates the post-queer refusal to contribute to larger discourses of oppression in a global context. It also demonstrates the direct post-queer relationship between theory and activism, which is found to be shifting away from the protective realm of queer theorists to broader theorizations by feminists, post-colonialists, and (dis)ability theorists. (Butler, 2011; Ruffolo, 2009; Zimmer, U., Heidingsfelder, M., & Adler, 2010). This move is forcing queer theory to give up its elitist claim over the discourse, dismantling the power-tower of queer theoretical intellectualism (Hall, 2009).

The post-queer project is largely fuelled by the desire to pull queer theory out of the clouds of utopian idealism in order to enact at the level of the local and particular, while being simultaneously mindful towards the geo-political frameworks that structure oppressions (Butler, 2011). While this may be arguable, as has been seen in the limited critiques of post-queer literature, post-queer does succeed in debasing issues, such as gender and sexuality, as the sole and primary issues of global queer concern (Ruffolo, 2009). While sexuality and gender are still a significant part of post-queer, they are necessary reduced along a horizontal, constantly shifting plane along with non-hierarchical issues of race, class, religion, transnationalism, migration, marginality, and on (Love, 2011).

Chapter Seven: Discussion

In this final section, I will take the opportunity to return to the narrative that started this project and will attempt to map the ways in which I came to understand my identity as lesbian within the context of lesbian feminist and queer theory. I will also explore the primary research question of this thesis, which was whether lesbian as an identity is germane to present-day theorizing, as well as attempt to consider possible next steps or ways in which theorizing as a lesbian, and on lesbian identity, can occur in more contemporary contexts. By positioning myself in relation to more current theoretical perspectives, such as post-queer, I will search to see where it may be possible to settle my theoretical anxieties. Further to the questions already posed in the opening chapter, and based on my experiences throughout this reflective process, I will conclude by offering additional thoughts and questions that have arisen throughout my reading and writing – a kind of meditation on my relation to lesbian and identity.

Returning to my experience with the Camp fYrefly campers in the first chapter, I want to now further reflect on that conversation with the campers regarding the use of lesbian or queer as our respective and preferred identities. Within the context of the theoretical perspectives and critiques presented in the last five chapters, if asked the same question again, would my answer differ? How do I (or should I) identify and what do I call myself? I admit that I would probably still answer the question in the same way – I identify as a lesbian. I would, though, clarify a distinction between what I see as my identity for living and the many theoretical ideas that complicate that statement. And I remain confident that I would still share many of the same critiques towards the limiting use of queer and may even have more challenges to add to the list.

This being said, and in large part due to the research that has comprised this project, I find that my interest in this question has shifted and I now find myself more compelled to explore what further is behind my ease of declaration and comfort with lesbian. I am acutely aware that the identity of lesbian is riddled with theoretical critiques that resonate at a similar magnitude as the negative potential of queer, but yet I remain more comfortable maintaining lesbian as my

own. Why? I think at this point I could suggest that I am likely caught up and stuck in the structuralist concept of lesbian essence. I earlier stated that lesbian was *who* I was, which suggests that in some ways I am caught up in my own sense of innate lesbian-ness. Through my own coming out process, I came to realize that I felt *like* a lesbian; therefore, I must be one. What feels like a lesbian, though? Am I to allow myself to be complicit in the universalizing limitations of some form of lesbian essence? Can I "allow" myself anyways? And how am I able to rationalize my theoretical position amongst all of the discomforts I experience with the critiques?

Reflection on Identity as a Structured Entity

Starting with a structuralist analysis of my own realization of my sexual identity (which I will argue was minimally related to any specific awareness of sexual desires), I can now acknowledge that my identity was, and likely still is, situated in a structured paradigm of sexual identity and not an internal state of being or feeling, as it seemed to me at the time. This does not suggest that the sensation of desire does not come from within, but instead that the conditions upon which I came to understand myself as lesbian were composed of a complex set of signs and conditions that I "fit in" and identified with (Ahmed, 2006). It is the interpretation or even the significance of that desire within the context of society as "same" sex or "opposite" sex that is important. My eventual ability to interpret that my desires led to a named identity was based upon how I fit into the complex system of signs of sexuality, where opposite sex (and unquestioned) attraction is heterosexual and same sex attraction is homosexual, or more specifically, not heterosexual (Alcoff, 1988). It was not my desire or attractions that made me a lesbian, but instead that my non-heterosexuality shifted my identity from normative to other-than.

I worry this may sound like a simplistic categorization exercise, as if it is a process that puts certain elements into a machine that spits out a label of lesbian at the other end. Of course, it is not so straightforward. I am, as we all are, a product of a heteronormative culture and am inculcated in the normative assumptions of a strict two-gender system and the naturalization of heterosexuality (Schilt &

Westbrook, 2009). Those structured realities are part of my understanding of the normative world and are, for example, how I am able to speak and understand the English language, or recognize red as the color red. Therefore, while my identity as lesbian did come in part from the fact that I desired women as a woman, more importantly it came from the awareness that I did not desire men and a recognition that I was not the same as heterosexual women. This realization created the conditions upon which I recognized myself as counter to heteronorms, situating my sexual identity as non-heterosexual. I may not have necessarily known what I was, but I knew what I was not.

Identity in Community. Looking back I can see that another contributing factor to the understanding of my identity was based on how my identity fit within a larger group, meaning how I fit within the lesbian community. My identity within a lesbian community also depicts the ways in which I perceived the identity of lesbian to have collectively agreed upon characteristics amongst a particular group. The community, for me, evolved on the basis of sameness to one another, in spite of differences – a universalized agreement that those that make up a recognized community of lesbians share a common desire for women and not men. I would never suggest that I knowingly or intentionally erased issues of race, class, gender, religious differences, education-level, or physical ability from my perception of community identity. However, I will admit that I saw lesbian identity based on sexual orientation, as one that we could all filter through and connect on, regardless of our differences. This illustrates, though, the essentializing problematic of structured identity formation (Phelan, 1994). By speaking as a lesbian, I also had a sense of speaking as part of a category of lesbians that all had similar states of being based on our sexual orientation. I gained my own recognition of self through reflective recognition of others (Ahmed, 2006).

My inclusion within the lesbian community also served as a very supportive and powerful form of resistance towards homophobia. For example, in settings such as LGBTQ Pride festivals, I have experienced a strong sense of collective strength and, not surprisingly, pride in seeing the sheer number of

people claiming public and visible space. Collective identity can also be very powerful in a community where public visibility can come with potentially negative consequences and risks. For example, I recall while standing in front of a gay and lesbian nightclub one night, a truckload of men drove by yelling: "dyke! Queer!" In that moment, I did not hear those words as solely intended for me – those insults were levelled at my lesbian-ness, making the problem *our* problem. The sense of power in collective resistance or retaliation towards these types of oppressive acts created a form of identity for me, grounded in likeness and recognition (Fuss, 1989).

      Recognizability. When referring to recognition, I am speaking about both recognition of self, as well as recognition by others. In order for me to realize my own identity, there must also be reciprocal recognition by others to make my identity knowledgeable to myself as well. One's recognition as a lesbian refers to the ways in which one performs within particular sets of repetitive, recognizable norms that are part of a particular style or mode of being (Colebrook, 2009; Jagose, 1996). By recognition, I do not refer to stereotypical physical indicators that some may assume in identity; instead this means that lesbian must be a recognizable *sign* through which we understand what lesbian means. In the context of Saussure's (1959) structural linguistics, the sign of lesbian is made up of a combination of the arbitrary relationship between the named identity or psychological impression of lesbian (signifier), and the signified concept of a female who desires another female. As established in the second chapter, when these two elements combine, Saussure (1959) theorized that they create the sign which represents the unconscious cultural understanding and meaning in language. Therefore, my reference to the named identity of lesbian is based upon my recognisability to not only myself, but also to others.

      Also, as has already been established as one of the critiques of the system of signification, while Saussure (1959) would argue that the arbitrary relationship between the signifier and signified meaning is based in the unconscious, the affiliation between the two is also a product of the negative value established in the structural mechanism of knowing. This means that I am recognizable as a

lesbian not only due to the fact that I am a female who desires females, but also because I am not heterosexual. The unintentional consequence of this is the maintenance of lesbian identity as "other than" heterosexual, reinforcing the privileging and restricting binary relationships within heteronormativity. The negative value system polarizes the ends, making the middle ground appear as if it is transitory space. I recall one particular experience when coming out to different friends and family members that illustrates this point well. As I encountered revealing my newfound identity, I was met with a whole gamut of responses from excitement, to disappointment, to "I already knew." One friend in particular, though, surprised me. She was on my list of "easy to tell" and I had anticipated that she would be happy for me, which is also why she was one of the first I shared with. I told her that I had come to the realization that I was either bisexual or lesbian, and in any case I had definitely figured out that I was not straight. Following a long pause, her response was that bisexuality was not worth the stress that it would put on my life since I *could* be straight and that "You're either lesbian or you're not." Having been very tentative and confused at that time, her divisive ideas surrounding sexual identity certainly sent me back into the thinking stage for a period of time. The way in which she had expressed her views of sexuality as either/or is representative of the binary relationships that are so heavily inculcated within heteronormative thinking, limiting capacity for expression outside of very particular constructs and maintaining heavy fixity on meaning. This would be, I suspect, one of the greatest points of resistance for the young queer campers, as it demonstrates both a demand to label, as well as an instance of the negative impacts of labelling one's sexuality in specifically defined terms.

Shift in Theoretical Perspective

As I write this, I cringe at the second wave feminist holdover that resonates through these early narratives of realizing my own identity. However, my experiences were also grounded in a historical timeframe in which second wave feminism was just waning, and poststructural feminism and queer theory were just starting to gather steam. This was also at a time before I had embarked

on any reading surrounding academic theorizing on feminist or queer theory, and there was limited discussion surrounding queer politics or ideas within my social realm. While I would like to think that I was highly evolved in my thinking at the time of my coming out, I am simultaneously struck by just how typical and predictable my story is. However, I also recognize that I am a continual product of the system within which I live, one that is subject to the institutions of structuration and mechanisms of control that surround me (Butler, 2006). I think a greater concern here would be if I somehow had believed I was above it all.

It is at this point of acknowledgement of the system, institutions, power, and control that I began to detach myself from structuralist notions and shifted into more poststructurally informed modes of thought. It is at this point that the discomfort began. From this point I move forward in comfortable critique of the roles and institutions of power surrounding the arbitrariness of any relationship, deconstructing the normative assumptions and structures we exist within. In this breath, I sound queer.

Impact of Butler. One of the first queer theorists I encountered was Judith Butler (1996) when I read *Imitation and Gender Insubordination* in one of my first Women's Studies classes. To me, her writing was lyrical, the transgressiveness of her ideas was exciting, and I was immediately drawn in. Butler has been integral to the complicating deconstructive approach of my more recent thinking surrounding sexuality and (anti)identity. Shortly after encountering her in my first class, I picked up a copy of *Gender Trouble* and was intrinsically drawn to her use of the queer(ed) body as a critique of normative constructs and the cultural formation of the "properly" gendered body (Butler, 2006). By proper, Butler (1993; 2006) was referring to the socially viable ways in which one performs and is performatively constituted according to normative rules, disciplines, and institutions. I can remember an instance where I was told that I was not a "proper lesbian." Shortly after coming out, when lamenting to a friend that I was finding myself unsuccessful in finding a girlfriend, she shared with me that the reason was that I was too "straight-looking" to be a lesbian and everyone thought I was heterosexual. I was both insulted and dumbfounded by

that, as I had not been making any effort to pass as heterosexual and on the inside I "felt like" a lesbian. Why that did not translate to the exterior, I am not sure, and hearing that I was being misinterpreted as heterosexual made me feel as if I had become invisible. Regardless, the point is that I was being told that in order to be a proper lesbian that I needed to perform in a particular way in order to be recognizable within my particular community. That the performative identity of lesbian, according to my friend's experience, was that of one who was non-feminine and clearly marked as non-heterosexual. As Butler (1997) states:

> [one] 'exists' not only by virtue of being recognized, but, in a prior sense, by being recognizable. The terms that facilitate recognition are themselves conventional, the effects and instruments of a social ritual that decide, often through exclusion and violence, the linguistic conditions of survivable subjects. (p. 5)

It is not surprising, then, that after my friend's assessment was made that I attempted to adjust my appearance to raise my social viability within the lesbian community. I cut my hair shorter, I gravitated towards clothing that I found to be more masculine, or less feminine, looking, and became much more aware of my body language. These elements and social rituals made me, I felt, more easily recognizable and less subject to exclusion from the lesbian community that I was situated within at that time. It is also important to clarify that I do not suggest that lesbian identity is necessarily masculinised – legions of lesbian femme politics address that very well. Instead it was my specific experience in that moment that I reflect on, as one that had lasting impact.

This idea of social inclusion within the lesbian community is interesting as it calls into question, what *is* lesbian? Outside of the universalizing and essentializing arguments of lesbian identity that have already been critiqued in previous chapters, of more interest was my insistence and diligence in ensuring that I would not be "mistaken" as heterosexual. While I have argued that I came to know myself through my recognition as a non-heterosexual, I also recognized myself by actively ensuring that I was not correlated to the category from which my identity branched in the first place. What role did I have (and do I play) in my

identity of lesbian? While Butler speaks of performative acts, I waver here in ensuring that I do not risk conveying that I was an active performer in the creation of my identity through such acts as short haircuts and heavy-rimmed eyeglasses. Poststructurally speaking, I do not think *that* is possible. As already established, my identity is not a performance of stereotypical lesbian acts, but instead a performatively constituted way of being. However, when sitting in that hair salon and asking the stylist to get out the clippers, was that a performance or a performatively constituted haircut? While I retain the idea that my volition of performance is irrelevant to my identity, this idea leads me to further question the limits of performativity versus performance, poking holes in the theory itself. While Butler argued that performance was a mechanism to reveal the performative constitution, it seems in this example that performance played a role in social recognition and viability within a particular identity. If one is performatively constituted as lesbian, but remains invisible, what happens to the notion of identity and recognizability? Of concern is the notion that power in identity shifts into the realm of recognition. Space for further research exists here in exploring a more Hegelian approach to linking desire with recognisability, as Butler (2004) has engaged in through her theorizing on gender, desire, sexuality, and identity.

One of the glaring aspects of my experience as an improper, unrecognizable lesbian is the way in which one becomes hemmed into particular ways of being and performing. It is also illustrative of the "boxed-in" nature of identity that the fYrefly campers were so desperate to avoid when they expressed their discomfort with the categories of gay and lesbian. However, while the campers may "choose" queer to evade fixed identities, the project of queer does not escape the structured system and structured context of categorical heteronormativity that we all exist within (Butler, 2006). To suggest that one has the capacity to exist beyond these structures is a theoretical impossibility and also has a certain arrogance and privilege associated with it, especially in light of post-queer critiques (Butler, 1993; Vanita, 2002).

One cannot live theoretically. In considering queer, I also believe that it is critically important to acknowledge the limitations as well as the marked disjuncture between queer theory and practice. There are times when intellectual discussions, theorists, and the literature strike chords and are taken up into the vernacular of a community or group that identify in some manner with the subject matter. Butler (2009), de Lauretis (1994; 2011), and Rich (2004) have all responded to the ways in which their theories have been inappropriately taken up into praxis due to the excitement of their work. For example, Rich (2004) commented on how *Compulsory Heterosexuality* was taken far beyond her intentions and states:

> (w)hen I began to hear that it was being claimed by some separatist lesbians as an argument against heterosexual intercourse altogether, I began to feel acutely and disturbingly the distance between speculative intellectual searching and the need for absolutes in the politics of lesbian feminism. (p. 9)

While Rich was not theorizing on queer, the rampant consumption of her theory is not dissimilar to the ways in which queer theory has been enjoyed. It is this disjuncture between intellectual theorizing and its capacity in practice that has been found to cause challenges, as has already been critiqued in the misuse and misappropriation of the term. As a politic or mode of thinking, queer holds incredible potential in its radical process of disruption; however, its use as a named identifier (even if not an identity) risks misinterpretation, rendering it useless with respect to its posed theoretical potential.

Fear in/of theory. Contemplating queer (theory) as a possible shift, the most significant concern of queer for me personally is the manner in which queer is used and seems to have become a large, yet nebulous, umbrella term that all non-normatives gather under. It is not the lumping or association of myself as a queer with other queers that is of concern, but instead the ways in which its use erases differences and necessary instances of specificity (Dhairyam, 1994). As noted in the previous chapter, Anzaldúa (2009) also critiqued this, challenging that while there is a place for queer, that the queer umbrella homogenizes all of

those under its shelter, dismissing the importance and complexity of race, class, and culture that intersect sexuality. I am inclined to agree that queer as a shorthand, as has been critiqued, is neither productive, nor effective, and risks complications far beyond its intentions and expectations. And this is my struggle. As a white, middleclass, educated, lesbian, and feminist, I fear unintentionally speaking for or homogenizing marginalized voices to such a degree that I am largely incapacitated with respect to any form of engaging queer theory in praxis. Compounding this, I also can no longer easily locate the theory or politics of white, middleclass lesbians within my geographic region and historical specificity, leaving me unsure of where to go next so as to not step inappropriately and risk (re)colonizing those with whom I am lumped under queer and/or lesbian.

Reflecting on the research completed, combined with my personal lived experiences, I would say that the most comfort I have found in queer theory is precisely in how uncomfortable Anzaldúa makes me. She was viscerally angry in her writing and was quite aggressive in describing the ways in which she was oppressed by the voices of white middle-class lesbians and feminists. But, she was right. She, along with many other women of color and women of non-North American or Western European origin, have been subsumed in the project of white feminism of the second wave. Anzaldúa's (1987) mestiza consciousness at the borderlands of her cultures, races, gender, sexuality, and class clash and mesh together, forcing her to re-position herself at her borders as she shifts amongst her intersectional specificities. In a sense I feel that my current grappling with theoretical identity leaves me at my own set of borderlands in which I simultaneously feel like I may belong and not belong, colliding at times and weaving at others. I am lesbian, queer, and gay, and while I see them as separate entities, they overlap and intersect with innumerable other aspects of my identity that have no clear boundary lines. So, I circulate, using them strategically in the contexts of genders, generation, feminist perspective, educational-focus, background, class, and geographic location. I occupy that which is most recognizable within the conditions in which I exist.

Theorizing On, Theorizing As a...Lesbian

In considering whether lesbian as an identity or theoretical discourse is any longer relevant within current, contemporary theorizing on sexuality, it becomes clear that this is not a question that offers a singular or simple answer. The first thought is that theorizing *on* sexuality is a framework that has been post-queerly debased, as established in a previous chapter, shortening the question to exclude the suggested focus of study. It also seems that lesbian as a category of identity within post-queer is largely absent, as well as counter-intuitive to the discourse of post-theory. However, it is an important nuance to note that it is not that lesbian identity has been left behind or erased, but instead it is the implausibility of lesbian as a kind of productive category that holds any semblance of signified meaning for useful analysis or critique. Therefore, there needs to be a clear distinction made between theorizing as *a* lesbian and theorizing *on* lesbian as a category.

Theorizing on lesbian risks re-spinning the cycle of universalized notions, essentialized commonalities, and the related colonizing potential, as has already been critiqued. Whereas theorizing as a lesbian could ground phenomenological experience and position in one's thoughts, analysis, interpretation, biases, discussion, and writing (Ahmed, 2008; Crowley & Rasmussen, 2010; Rich, 2007). As can be recalled from the second chapter, one of the critiques of the structuralist approach was the rejection of the phenomenological perspective, resulting in reductionist and deterministic theories that attempted to accommodate universals (Pettit, 1977). A queer phenomenological approach to a more contemporary lesbian theory would be one that allows for analysis and reflection on ones identity of lesbian in which heteronormativity does not always have to be the referent to which the lesbian is inferred from (as non-heterosexual). It would also de-base the basis of her lesbian-ness as one who is a woman attracted to women, and would also dismantle the association of lesbian identity based on identifying with others that are like oneself (Ahmed, 2006). As Ahmed (2006) states:

the sociality of lesbian desire is shaped by contact with the

heteronormative, even if this contact does not 'explain' such desire. We

could think of this 'contact zone' of lesbian desire not as a fantasy of

likeness,...but as opening up lines of connection between bodies that are

drawn to each other in the repetition of this tendency to deviate from the

straight line. Lesbian desires enact the 'coming out' story as a story of

'coming to,' of arriving near other bodies, as a contact that makes a story

and opens up other ways of facing the world. (p. 105)

This approach of finding other ways to face the world attempts to address the

pitfall of heteronormative duality by not limiting contexts of identity based on a

homogenized "other" (Segal, 2008). Phenomenological accounts move beyond

the morphological analysis of race and class to accommodate a range of

differences and complexities as relevant and necessary to the individual account,

creating identifications as opposed to identities (Ahmed, 2006; Salamon, 2009).

Theorizing Resistance

The distinction between theorizing on lesbian and theorizing as a lesbian is

also significant in the disjuncture between theory and the social. While lesbian as

an identity may be largely absent from contemporary theorizing, this does not

mean that it is insignificant to the lived experience. What does or does not exist

effectively in theory may have an entirely different affective reality. As Butler

(1993; 2004) has argued, identity is not just a theoretical moment; it is

constructed, maintained, as well as retained within the context of social

relationships. Whether in theory or lived experience, in order to be intelligible,

one must have some form of social viability associated with their identity. As

Butler (2004) states:

the 'I' that I am finds itself at once constituted by norms and dependent on

them but also endeavors to live them in ways that maintain critical and

transformative relation to them...the 'I' becomes, to a certain extent

unknowable, threatened with unviability, with becoming undone

altogether, when it no longer incorporates the norm in such a way that

makes this 'I' fully recognizable....I may feel that without some

recognisability I cannot live. But I may also feel that the terms by which I

am recognized are unlivable. This is the juncture from which critique

emerges, where critique is understood as an interrogation of the terms by which life is constrained in order to open up the possibility of different modes of living. (p. 3)

While the identity of lesbian may be complicated to such a degree that it is no longer theoretically advantageous, I would argue that one must remain recognizable in order to be viable both in theory and in the social. While Butler suggests that recognition opens doors to different modes of living, a particularly queered notion of resistance, I struggle with the idea that one has the capacity to resist modes of assimilation of "I." As has been established through the critiques of queer theory, and in particular the ways in which Butler's theory of performativity was misunderstood, we cannot simply throw off our current constructions of identity when we wish to distance ourselves from uncomfortable complications (Sinfield, 2004). Instead there must be recognition that we are affectively constructed by the consequences of our histories which must be acutely accounted for. The concept of queer volition in this context, while alluring, is potentially misleading as an act of resistance.

Resistance connotes agency, which is a concept that continues to trouble my own placement of self within theorizing, as well as within practice. I remain conflicted with whether there is any agency to be found in the queer project of identity evasion or whether it is even possible? The act of evasion or resistance as an "I" suggests intentionality, which begins to fold back on what has already been poststructurally established with respect to power, knowledge, and the performative. I am left questioning whether resistance is an intentional act or is it the interpretation of resistance as non-normative that is revealed. For example, as a small child I am told that I had a predisposition towards introducing myself to others as a boy. My tomboy-ish-ness aside, it seems that I "felt like" a boy at an age that pre-dated any cognisant act of intentionality to disrupt my gendered norms. Not surprisingly, my sharing of my boyhood with my confidant was quickly followed by the ensuing argument with whomever I had revealed my "true self" to, of my essential girlhood. The only intentional aspect in these relatively frequent interactions was in my resultant tearing off of my t-shirt,

jumping on my bike, and riding away with my training wheels precariously balancing me, yelling, "No, I AM a boy!" This example, I think, helps to illustrate *the contingency of intentionality*. While my insistence on my childhood gender recognition could be theorized as a queer performance, I argue that there was very little intentionality in my stance. The queerness in this example exists less as an act of resistance and more in the interpretation of said act as non-normative and it is these moments of interpretation that are of greatest interest. While most adults inarguably have greater mental capacity for engaging in acts of intentional resistance, I continue to question whether the interpretation of the resistance varies significantly from my experience as a child. Meaning, is it the resistance or the interpretation of the resistance that is key to this idea? My concern lies in that, in order to resist, there must be something or someone that is resisted. With agency and intentionality, there is the risk that resistance does less to resist and more to reveal that which is being resisted against, reinforcing the dialectical relationship between non-normativity and normativity.

Closing thoughts

As I reflect again on whether lesbian as an identity is any longer relevant within contemporary theorizing on sexuality, I find my answer leading towards no. Lesbian as an identity has become so thoroughly complicated and troubled within the scope of more contemporary feminist and poststructural thought that it seems that it is no longer theoretically viable. However, whether the identity of lesbian may or may not be theoretically relevant, it may be that it must remain as a category that can be used strategically, as necessary. I would also wager that the question itself verges on insignificance and datedness, and I would raise the stakes in speculating that Anzaldúa would say that my concern with understanding the current context of lesbian identity is irrelevant and annoying in its white, middle-class-ness. However, it does not erase the fact that it still troubles me. I suppose this means that what I need to be asking is *why* it is that this question is so important to me and what am I holding onto?

I think one of my key concerns is that as one that does identify as lesbian, I am left in a space in which my lived experience does not match my theoretical

stance (or vice versa). This means that as a lesbian, I have been theoretically erased and not yet re-drawn, and while I engage in many moments of theorizing queerly as a lesbian, I do not find my theoretical voice in the domains of lesbian feminist, queer, or post-queer theory. As one who has gone through the process of realizing my identity as lesbian through experience and theory, having my belief in that theory dissolve beneath me has left me unsettled. It may be that I am struggling to refill the theoretical chasm that the departures of lesbian feminist theory and queer theory have left behind for me. That may be the point, though; maybe it is entirely necessary to remain in a constant state of rhizomatic unsettledness (Kemp, 2009). As a lesbian theorizing, I must debase myself and my sexuality, *rhizomatically* (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987).

It could be that I am like a plant that has been trans/planted as greater and more popular theories of nutritive foundations have been realized. I have gained, grown, and been compromised by all locations, but am now left with neither a pot, nor soil, nor conditions that satisfy. And now, I must let my roots go out in all directions on a horizontal plane, allowing buds and shoots to move in multiple directions, connecting endlessly across a map that extends indefinitely (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987; Kemp, 2009). Instead of asking, so what, maybe I should be asking *for* what and for *whom*? And for what purpose and in whose interest? Maybe I could be a post-queer lesbian? Or maybe the point is that in order to splinter and traverse, that I need to move on from asking this question and searching for a theoretical location. And there again are those five letters that sent me spinning over fifteen years ago...maybe.

References

Ahmed, S. (2006). Queer phenomenology: Orientations, objects, others. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Alcoff, L. (1988). Cultural feminism versus post-structuralism: The identity crisis in feminist theory. *Signs* (13)3: 405-436.

Alimahomed, S. (2010). Thinking outside the rainbow: women of color redefining queer politics and identity. *Social Identities*, 16(2), 151-168.

Anzaldúa, G. (1987). *Borderlands-la frontera: The new mestiza*. San Francisco, CA: Aunt Lute Books.

Anzaldúa, G. (2007). La conciencia de la mestiza: Toward a new consciousness. In E. B. Freedman (Ed.), *The essential feminist reader* (pp. 385-390). New York, NY: Modern Library Press.

Anzaldúa, G. (2009). *The Gloria Anzaldúa reader*. A. L. Keating (Ed.). Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Anzaldúa, G. & Moraga, C. (Eds.). (2002). *This bridge called my back: Writings by radical women of color*. Berkeley, CA: Third Woman Press.

Assiter, A. & Carol, A. (1993). *Bad girls & dirty pictures: The challenge to reclaim feminism*. Boulder, CO: Pluto Press.

Barnard, I. (1997). Gloria Anzaldúa's queer mestisaje. *Melus* 22(1), 35-54.

Belouin, P. (2010, March 17). *Mixing social science and software design: An introduction to the genealogy of subjectification*. Retrieved from http://www.belouin.com/blog/2010/03/an-introduction-to-the-genealogy-of-subjectification/

Berlant, L. & E. Freeman (1993). Queer nationality. In M. Warner (Ed.), *Fear of a queer planet: Queer politics and social theory* (pp. 193-229). Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.

Best, S. (2003). *A beginner's guide to social theory*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Bevir, M. (1999). Foucault, power, and institutions. *Political Studies Association*, XLVII: 345-359.

Brown, R.M. (1976). *A plain brown rapper*. Oakland, CA: Diana Press.

Butler, J. (1993). *Bodies that matter: On the discursive limits of sex*. New York, NY: Routledge.

Butler, J. (1996). Imitation and gender insubordination. In D. Morton (Ed.), *The material queer* (pp. 180-192). Boulder, CO: Westview Press.

Butler, J. (1997). *Excitable speech: A politics of the performative*. New York, NY: Routledge.

Butler, J. (1999). Subjects of sex/gender/desire. In S. During (Ed.), *The Cultural Studies Reader* (pp. 340-353). New York, NY: Routledge.

Butler, J. (2004). *Undoing gender*. New York, NY: Routledge.

Butler, J. (2006). *Gender trouble* (3rd ed.). New York, NY: Routledge.

Butler, J. (2007). Wittig's material practice: Universalizing a minority point of view. *GLQ: A Journal of Gay and Lesbian Studies*, 13, 519-533.

Butler, J. (2009). Performativity, precarity and sexual politics. *AIBR: Revista de Antropologia Iberoamericana*, 4(3), i-xiii.

Butler, J. (2011). Remarks on "Queer Bonds". *In GLQ: A Journal of Gay and Lesbian Studies*, 17(2-3), 382-388.

Calhoun, C. (1994). Separating lesbian theory from feminist theory. *Ethics*, 104, 558-581.

Chambers, S.A.& Carver, T. (2008). *Judith Butler and political theory: Troubling politics*. New York, NY: Routledge.

Chandler, D. (2002). *Semiotics: The basics*. New York, NY: Routledge.

Clarke, S. (1978). The origins of Lévi-Strauss's structuralism. *Sociology*, 12, 405-439.

Clarke, S. (1981). *The foundations of structuralism: A critique of Lévi-Strauss and the structuralist movement*. Totowa, NJ: Barnes & Noble Books.

Clingan, J. (2008, October 27). *An understanding of textual/theoretical research*. Retrieved from http://www.prescott.edu/faculty_staff/faculty/ jclingan/ documents/ RMtextualessaygrad.pdf

Cole, C.L., & Cate, L.C. (2008). Compulsory gender and transgender existence: Adrienne Rich's queer possibility. *WSQ: Women's Studies Quarterly,* 36(4), 279-287.

Colebrook, C. (2009). On the very possibility of queer theory. In C. Nigianni & M. Storr (Eds.), *Deleuze and Queer Theory* (pp. 11-23). Edinburgh, Scotland: Edinburgh University Press.

Crowley, V. & Rasmussen, M.L. (2010). After dark in the antipodes: Pedagogy, place and queer phenomenology. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 23(1), 15-32.

Culler, J. (2002). *Structuralist poetics: Structuralism, linguistics, and the study of literature*. New York: NY: Routledge.

Cutrofello, A. (2005). Continental philosophy: A contemporary introduction. New York, NY: Routledge.

de Lauretis, T. (1991). Queer Theory: Lesbian and Gay Sexualities. *differences: A Journal of Feminist Critical Studies*, 3(2), iii-xviii.

de Lauretis, T. (1994). Habit Changes. *differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies,* 6(2-3), 296-313.

de Lauretis, T. (1997). Fem/les scramble. In D. Heller (Ed.), *Cross purposes: lesbians, feminists, and the limits of alliance* (pp.42-48). Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press.

de Lauretis, T. (2007). *Figures of resistance: Essays in feminist theory*. P. White (Ed.). Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press.

de Lauretis, T. (2011). Queer texts, bad habits, and the issue of a future. *GLQ: A Journal of Gay and Lesbian Studies*, 17(2-3), 243-263.

Deleuze, G. & Guattari, F. (1987). *A thousand plateaus: Capitalism and schizophrenia*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.

Derrida, J. (1988). Letter to a Japanese friend. In D. Wood & R. Bernasconi (Eds.), *Derrida & différance* (pp. 1-6). Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press.

Dhairyam, S. (1994). Racing the lesbian, dodging white critics. In L. Doan (Ed.), *The lesbian postmodern* (pp. 25-46). New York, NY: Columbia University Press.

Dreyfus, H.L. & Rabinow, P. (1983). Michel Foucault: Beyond structuralism and hermeneutics (2nd ed.). Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

Duggan, L. (1995). The discipline problem: Queer theory meets lesbian and gay history. *GLQ: A Journal of Gay and Lesbian Studies*, 2, 179-191.

Dworkin, A. (1981). *Pornography: Men possessing women*. London: The Women's Press.

Echols, A. (1983). The new feminism of yin and yang. In A. Snitow, C. Stansell, & S. Thompson (Eds.), *Powers of desire: The politics of sexuality* (pp. 439-459). New York, NY: Monthly Review Press.

Echols, A. (1984). The taming of the id: Feminist sexual politics 1968-83. In C.S. Vance (Ed.), *Pleasure and danger* (pp. 50-72). Boston, MA: Routledge & Kegan Paul.

Eisenstein, Z. (2000). Combahee River Collective Statement. In B. Smith (Ed*.) Home girls: A black feminist anthology* (pp. 264-274). New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.

Eng, D.L., Halberstam, J., & Munoz, J. E. (2005). What's queer about queer studies now? *Social Text*, 23 (3,4), 1-17.

Epstein, S. (1994). A queer encounter: Sociology and the study of sexuality. *Sociological Theory*, 12(2), 188-202.

Ferguson, A., Philipson, I., Diamond, I., Quinby, L., Vance, C., & Barr-Snitow, A. (1984). Forum: The feminist sexuality debates. *Signs*, 10(1), 106-135.

Florence, M. (1998). Foucault. In J.D. Faubion (Ed.), *Michel Foucault: Aesthetics, method, and epistemology* (pp. 459-463). London: Penguin Books.

Foucault, M. (1971). *The order of things: An archaeology of the human sciences*. New York, NY: Pantheon Books.

Foucault, M. (1973). *The birth of the clinic*. London: Tavistock Publications Limited.

Foucault, M. (1980). *Power/Knowledge: Selected interviews & other writings, 1972-1977*. C. Gordon, (Ed.). Toronto, ON: Random House.

Foucault, M. (1983). Afterword: The subject and power. In H.L. Dreyfus & R.

Rabinow (Eds.), *Michel Foucault: Beyond structuralism and hermeneutics*

(2nd ed.) (pp. 208-226). Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press

Foucault, M. (1984). Nietszche, genealogy, history. In P. Rabinow (Ed.), *The*

Foucault reader (pp. 76-100). New York, NY: Pantheon Books.

Foucault, M. (1988). *History of sexuality Volume 3: The care of the self*. New

York, NY: Vintage Books.

Foucault, M. (1990a). *History of sexuality Volume 1: An introduction*. New York,

NY: Vintage Books.

Foucault, M. (1990b). *History of sexuality Volume 2: The use of pleasure*.

New York, NY: Vintage Books.

Foucault, M. (1991). Politics and the study of discourse. In G. Burchell, C.

Gordon, & P. Miller (Eds.), *The Foucault effect: Studies in governmentality*

(pp. 53-72). Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

Foucault, M. (1995). *Discipline and punish: The birth of the prison*. New York,

NY: Vintage Books.

Foucault, M. (2002). *Archaeology of knowledge*. London: Routledge.

Freedman, E. B. (2007). *The essential feminist reader*. New York, NY: The

Modern Library.

Friedan, B. (1998). *It changed my life: Writings on the women's movement*.

Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Fuss, D. (1989). *Essentially speaking: Feminism, nature & difference*. New York,

NY: Routledge.

Fuss, D. (1994). Interior colonies: Frantz Fanon and the politics of identification.

Diacritics, 24 (2-3), 19-42.

Gallop, J. (1992). *Around 1981: Academic feminist literary theory*. New York, NY: Routledge.

Gallop, J. (1997). *Feminist accused of sexual harassment*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Garber, L. (2001). *Identity poetics: Race, class, and the lesbian-feminist roots of queer theory*. New York, NY: Columbia University Press.

Garber, L. (2003). One step global, two steps back? Race, gender, and queer studies. *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*, 10(1), 125-128.

Glazer, M. (1994, December 14). Structuralism. Retrieved from http://www.utpa.edu/faculty/mglazer/theory/structuralism.htm

Goodloe, A. (2009). *Lesbian-feminism and queer theory: Another "battle of the sexes"*. Retrieved from http://www.lesbian.org/amy/essays/lesfem-qtheory.html

Gray, M. (2009). Queer nation is dead/long live queer nation: The politics and poetics of social movement and media representation. *Critical Studies in Media Communication*, 26(3), 212-236.

Green, A. (2002). Gay but not queer: Toward a post-queer study of sexuality. *Theory and Society*, 31, 521-545.

Grosz, E. (1994). *Volatile bodies: Toward a corporeal feminism*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press.

Grosz, E. (1995). *Space, time and perversion: Essays on the politics of bodies*. New York, NY: Routledge.

Guess, C. (1995). Que(e)rying lesbian identity. *The Journal of the Midwest Modern Language Association*, 28(1), 19-37.

Gutting, G. (1989). The archaeology of knowledge. In G. Gutting (Ed.), *Michel Foucault's archaeology of scientific reason* (pp. 227-260). Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press.

Halberstam, J. (1996). Queering lesbian studies. In B. Zimmerman & T. McNaron (Eds.), *The new lesbian studies* (pp. 256-261). New York, NY: Feminist Press.

Halchi, A. (1999). AIDS, anger and activism: ACT UP as a social movement organization. In J. Freeman & V. Johnson (Eds.), *Waves of protest: Social movements since the sixties* (pp. 135-150). Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc.

Hale, D. (2006). *The novel: An anthology of criticism and theory 1900-2000*. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing.

Hall, D. (2009). *Reading sexualities: Hermeneutic theory and the future of queer studies*. New York, NY: Routledge.

Hall, S. (1997). The work of representation. In S. Hall (Ed.), *Representation: Cultural representations and signifying practices* (pp. 13-74). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Hall, S. (2003). Foucault: Power, Knowledge, and Discourse. In M. Wetherell, S. Taylor, & S. Yates (Eds.), *Discourse Theory and Practice* (pp. 72-82). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Hall, S. (2004). Foucault and Discourse. In C. Searle (Ed.), *Social Research Methods* (pp. 345-350). New York, NY: Routledge.

Halperin, D. (1995). *Saint Foucault: Towards a gay hagiography*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

Halperin, D. (2003). Normalization of queer theory. *Journal of Homosexuality*, 45, 339-343.

Highleyman, L. (2002). Radical queers or queer radicals? Queer activism and the global justice movement. In B. Shepard & R. Hayduk (Eds.), From *ACT UP to the WTO: Urban protest and community building in the era of globalization* (pp. 106-120). New York, NY: Verso.

Hodgson, N. & Standish, P. (2009). Uses and misuses of poststructuralism in educational research. *International Journal of Research & Method in Education,* 32(3), 309-326.

hooks, b. (1989). *Talking back: Thinking feminist, thinking black*. Boston, MA: South End Press.

Jagose, A. (1996). *Queer theory*. Melbourne, Australia: University of Melbourne Press.

Jameson, F. (1972). *Prison house of language: A critical account of structuralism and Russian formalism*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Jeffreys, S. (1994). The queer disappearance of lesbian sexuality in the academy. *Women's Studies International Forum*, 17(5), 459-472.

Jeffreys, S. (1997). The queer disappearance of lesbians. In B. Mintz & E. Rothblum (Eds.), *Lesbians in academia: Degrees of freedom* (pp. 267-278). New York, NY: Routledge.

Jeffreys, S. (2003). *Unpacking queer politics: A lesbian feminist perspective.* Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers.

Kemp, J. (2009). Schreber and the penetrated male. In, C. Nigianni & M. Storr (Eds.), *Deleuze and Queer Theory* (pp. 150-167). Edinburgh, Scotland: Edinburgh University Press.

Kilbourn, B. (2006). The qualitative doctoral dissertation. *Teachers College Record*, 108(4), 529-576.

Klages, M. (2001). Ferdinand de Saussure. Retrieved from http://www.webpages.uidaho.edu/~sflores/KlagesSaussure.html

Laird, H. (2007). What difference(s) did "she" make? Or my aunt, the dragon. *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature*, 26(1), 15-22.

Lawlor, L. (2011). Jacques Derrida. In *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. Retrieved from http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/derrida/

Lévi-Strauss, C.L. (1962). Social structure. In H.L. Moore & T. Sanders (Eds.) *Anthropology in theory: Issues in epistemology* (pp. 136-146). Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing.

Lévi-Strauss, C. (1963). *Structural anthropology* (Vol. 1). (C. Jacobson & B.G. Schoepf, Trans.). New York, NY: Basic Books, INC.

Lizardo, O. (2010). Beyond the antinomies of structure: Lévi-Strauss, Giddens, Bourdieu, and Sewell. *Theory and Society*, 39, 651-688.

Love, H. (2011). Queers _____ this. In J. Halley & A. Parker (Eds.) *After sex? On writing since queer theory* (pp. 180-191). Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Lurie, S., Cvetkovich, A., Gallop, J., Modleski, T., & Spillers, H. (2001). Restoring feminist politics to poststructuralist critique. *Feminist Studies*, 3, 679-707.

Mackenzie, I. (2001). Unravelling the knots: Post-structuralism and other 'post-isms'. *Journal of Political Ideologies*, 6(3), 331-345.

MacKinnon, C. (1996). Feminism, Marxism, method and the state: An agenda for theory. In S. Jackson & S. Scott (Eds.), *Feminism and sexuality* (pp. 182-190). New York, NY: Columbia University Press.

MacKinnon, C. (1997). *In harm's way: The pornography civil rights hearings*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

MacKinnon, C. (2002). Pleasure under patriarchy. In C. Williams & A. Stein (Eds.), *Sexuality and Gender* (pp. 33-43). Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers Ltd.

MacKinnon, C. & Dworkin, A. (1988). *Pornography and civil rights: A new day for women's equality*. Retrieved from http://www.nostatusquo.com/ACLU dworkin/other/ ordinance/ newday/TOC.htm

Martin, B. (1994). Sexualities without genders and other queer utopias. *Diacritics*, 24 (2/3), 104-121.

Martindale, K. (1993). Queer theory (book). *Educational Studies*, 24 (3), 264-271.

Martindale, K. (1995). What makes lesbianism thinkable? Theorizing lesbianism from Adrienne Rich to queer theory. In N. Mandell (Ed.), *Feminist issues: Race, class, and sexuality* (pp. 67-94). Scarborough, ON: Prentice Hall.

McHoul, A. & Grace, W. (2003). *A Foucault primer: Discourse, power and the subject*. New York, NY: New York University Press.

Meyer, I. (2003). Prejudice, social stress, and mental health in lesbian, gay, and bisexual populations: Conceptual issues and research evidence. *Psychological Bulletin*, 129(5), 674-697.

Michalik, R. (2001). The desire for philosophy: Interview with Judith Butler. *Lola Press*, 2. Retrieved from http://lolapress.org/elec2/artenglish/butl_e.htm

Miller, P. A. (1998). The classical roots of poststructuralism: Lacan, Derrida, and Foucault. *International Journal of the Classical Tradition*, 5(2), 204-225.

Mills, S. (2003). *Michel Foucault*. New York, NY: Routledge.

Murphy, M.D. (2009). Structuralism. Retrieved from http://anthropology.ua.edu/cultures/cultures.php?culture=Structuralism

Namaste, K. (1994). The politics of inside/out: Queer theory, poststructuralism, and a sociological approach to sexuality. *Sociological Theory*, 12(2), 220-231.

Nestle, J. (1984). The fem question. In C.S. Vance (Ed.), *Pleasure and danger* (pp. 232-241). Boston, MA: Routledge & Kegan Paul.

Nietszche, F. (1989). *On the genealogy of morals*. New York, NY: Vintage Books.

Nigianni, C. & Storr, M. (2009). Introduction. In, C. Nigianni & M. Storr (Eds.), *Deleuze and Queer Theory* (pp. 1-10). Edinburgh, Scotland: Edinburgh University Press.

Olssen, M. (2003). Structuralism, post-structuralism, neo-liberalism: Assessing Foucault's legacy. *Journal of Educational Policy*, 18(2), 189-202.

Osborne, P., & Segal, L. (1994) Gender as performance: An interview with Judith Butler. *Radical Philosophy*, 67(4), 32-39.

Penn, D. (1995). Queer: Theorizing politics and history. *Radical History Review*, 62, 24-42.

Pettit, P. (1977). *The concept of structuralism: A critical analysis*. Berkley, CA: University of California Press.

Phelan, S. (1989). *Identity politics: Lesbian feminism and the limits of community*. Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press.

Phelan, S. (1994). *Getting specific: Postmodern lesbian politics*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.

Phillips, J. (n.d.) Derrida and deconstruction. Retrieved from http://courses.nus.edu.sg/course/elljwp/deconstruction.htm

Ponse, B. (1978). *Identities in the social world: The social construction of self*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, Inc.

Queer Nation. (1990). Queers read this. Retrieved from http://www.qrd.org/qrd/misc/text/queers.read.this

Quigley, T. (2009, March 22). Structuralism and poststructuralism. Retrieved from http://homepage.newschool.edu/~quigleyt/vcs/structuralism.pdf

Quiroga, J. (2003). From republic to empire: The loss of gay studies. *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*, 10(1), 133-137.

Rabinow, P. (1984). Introduction. In P. Rabinow (Ed.), *The Foucault reader* (pp. 3-30). New York, NY: Pantheon Books.

Radford, G.P. & Radford, M.L. (2005). Structuralism, post-structuralism, and the library: de Saussure and Foucault. *Journal of Documentation*, 61(1), pp. 60-78.

Raiskin, J. (1994). Inverts and hybrids: Lesbian rewritings of sexual and racial identities. In L. Doan (Ed.), *The lesbian postmodern* (pp. 156-172). New York, NY: Columbia University Press.

Rand, E.J. (2004). A disunited nation and legacy of contradiction: Queer nation's construction of identity. *Journal of Communication Inquiry*, 28(4), 288-306.

Raymond, J.G. (1989). Putting the Politics back into Lesbianism. *Women's Studies International Forum,* 12(2), 149-156.

Rich, A. (1979). *On lies, secrets, and silences: Selected prose*. New York, NY: W.W. Norton & Company.

Rich, A. (1980). Compulsory heterosexuality and lesbian existence. *Signs* 5(4), 631-660.

Rich, A. (2004). Reflections on "Compulsory Heterosexuality". *Journal of Women's History*, 16(1), 9-11.

Rich, A. (2007). Notes toward a politics of location. In E. Freedman (Ed.), *The essential feminist reader* (pp. 367-384). New York, NY: Random House.

Riggs, D. W. (2010). On accountability: Towards a white middle-class queer 'post identity politics identity politics'. *Ethnicities*, 10(3), 344-357.

Rose, N. (2003). Identity, genealogy, history. In P. du Gay, J. Evans, & P. Redman (Eds.), *Identity, a reader* (pp. 313-326). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Rubin, G. (1984). Thinking sex: Notes for a radical theory of the politics of sexuality. In C.S. Vance (Ed.), *Pleasure and danger* (pp. 267-319). Boston, MA: Routledge & Kegan Paul.

Ruffolo, D. (2009). *Post-queer politics*. Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing Company.

Salamon, G. (2009). Justification and queer method, or leaving philosophy. Hypatia, 24 (1), 225-232.

Samuels, G. & Ross-Sheriff, F. (2008). Identity, oppression, and power: Feminisms and intersectionality theory. *Journal of Women and Social Work*, 23(5), 5-9.

Samuels, J. (1999). Dangerous liaisons: Queer subjectivity, liberalism, and race. *Cultural Studies*, 13(1), 91-109.

Saussure, F. (1959). *Course in general linguistics*. C. Bally, A. Sechehaye, & A. Reidlinger (Eds.). (W. Baskin, Trans.). New York, NY: Philosophical Library. (Original work published in 1915).

Saussure, F. (1983). *Course in general linguistics*. C. Bally, A. Sechehaye, & A. Reidlinger (Eds.). (R. Harris, Trans.). Peru, IL: Open court Publishing.

Schilt, K. & Westbrook, L. (2009). Doing gender, doing heteronormativity: "Gender normals," transgender people, and the social maintenance of heterosexuality. *Gender & Society*, 23, 440-464.

Segal, L. (2008). After Judith Butler: Identities, who needs them? *Subjectivity*, 25, 381-394.

Seidman, S. (1993). Identity and politics in a "postmodern" gay culture: Some historical and conceptual notes. In M. Warner (Ed.), *Fear of a queer planet: Queer politics and social theory* (pp. 105-142). Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.

Seidman, S. (2001). From identity to queer politics: Shifts in normative heterosexuality. *Citizenship Studies*, 5(3), 321-328.

Sinfield, A. (2004). *On sexuality and power*. New York, NY: Columbia University Press.

Spargo, T. (1999). *Foucault and Queer Theory*. New York, NY: Totem Books.

Spelman, E. V. (1988). *Inessential woman: Problems of exclusion in feminist thought*. Boston, MA: Beacon Press.

Stein, A. (2007). Sisters and queers: The decentering of lesbian feminism. In R. Lancaster & M. di Leonardo (Eds.), *The Gender/sexuality reader: Culture, history, political economy* (pp. 378-391). New York, NY: Routledge.

Taylor, V. & Rupp, L.J. (1993). Women's culture and lesbian feminist activism:
A reconsideration of cultural feminism. *Signs,* 19(1), 32-61.

Tuhkanen, M. (2009). Queer hybridity. In C. Nigianni & M. Storr (Eds.), *Deleuze and queer theory* (pp. 92-114). Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

Vanita, R. (2002). *Queering India: Same-sex love and eroticism in Indian culture and society*. New York, NY: Routledge.

Villarejo, A. (2003). Lesbian rule: Cultural criticism and the value of desire. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Warner, M. (1993). *Fear of a queer planet: Queer politics and social theory*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.

Weber, S. (1976). Saussure and the apparition of language: The critical perspective. *MLN*, 91(5), 913-938.

Williams, C. & Stein, A. (2002). *Sexuality and gender*. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers.

Wilton, T. (1995). *Lesbian studies: Setting an agenda*. London: Routledge.

Zavaleta, A.S. (2005). Judith Butler, undoing gender. *The Comparatist*, 29, 152-153.

Zimmer, U., Heidingsfelder, M., & Adler, S. (2010, September 7). AVIVA: Interview with Judith Butler. *Online Magazin für Frauen*. Retrieved from http://www.aviva-berlin.de/aviva/content_Interviews.php?id=1427323

Zimmerman, B. (1981). What has never been: An overview of lesbian feminist literary criticism. *Feminist Studies*, 7(3), 452-475.

Zimmerman, B. (1996). Placing lesbians. In B. Zimmerman & T. McNaron (Eds.), *The new lesbian studies: Into the twenty-first century* (pp. 269-275). New York, NY: The Feminist Press.

Zita, J. (1994). Gay and lesbian studies: Yet another unhappy marriage?. In L.

Garber (Ed.), *Tilting the tower: Lesbians teaching queer subjects* (pp. 252-

276). New York, NY: Routledge.