Queer Pedagogy: Praxis Makes Im/Perfect[1]

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This article examines tensions between post-structuralist theories of subjectivity and essentialist constructions of identity in the context of a lesbian studies course co-taught by the authors. We describe the goals, organizing principles, content, and outcomes of this engagement in the production of "queer pedagogy" — a radical form of educative praxis implemented deliberately to interfere with, to intervene in, the production of "normalcy" in schooled subjects. We argue for an explicit "ethics of consumption" in relation to curricular inclusions of marginalized subjects and subjugated knowledges. We conclude with a critical analysis of the way that, despite our explicit interventions, all of our discourses, all of our actions in this course were permeated with the continuous and inescapable backdrop of white heterosexual dominance, such that: (a) any subordinated identity always remained marginal and (b) "lesbian identity" in this institutions context was always fixed and stable, even in a course that explicitly critiqued, challenged, and deconstructed a monolithic "lesbian identity."

Cet article porte sur la tension qui existe entre les théories de la subjectivité et les constructions essentialistes de l'identité dans le contexte d'un cours sur le lesbianisme donné par les auteures. Ces dernières décrivent les buts, les principes organisateurs, le contenu et les résultats de leur démarche en vue de créer ce qu'elles désignent sous le nom de "*queer pedagogy*"-une forme radicale de la praxis éducative implantée délibérément pour contrecarrer le concept de "normalité" dans les matières enseignées. Les auteures prônent une "éthique de la consommation" explicite pour ce qui a trait à l'inclusion des matières marginalisées et des connaissances subordonnées. Elles concluent avec une analyse critique de la façon dont tous leurs discours et toutes leurs actions au sein du cours, en dépit de leurs interventions explicites, avaient pour toile de fond inévitable la prééminence de l'hétérosexualité des Blancs si bien que : a) toute identité subordonnée est toujours demeurée marginale, et b) l'"identité lesbienne" dans ce contexte était toujours fixe et stable, et ce, même dans un cours qui critiquait et mettait explicitement en question une "identité lesbienne" monolithique.

INTRODUCTION

After all, she is this Inappropriate/d Other who moves about with always at least two/four gestures: that of affirming "I am like you" while pointing insistently to the difference; and that of reminding "I am different" while unsettling every definition of otherness arrived at. (Trinh, 1986)

This article examines tensions between post-structuralist theories of subjectivity and the political/pragmatic necessity of essentialist constructions of identity, not

from the standpoint of their *theoretical* resolution — which is, at least in principle possible (see, for example, Fuss, 1989) — but from the standpoint of their insistent irresolvability in the context of pedagogical practice.

We have resisted writing this article for a long time now, knowing from past experience that to speak publicly about the possibilities and the dangers created by being "out" as "queer"[2] educators is a speech act of either unconscionable arrogance or profound masochism! Invariably, speaking "as a lesbian" one is the discursive "outsider" — firmly entrenched in a marginal essentialized identity that, ironically, we have to participate in by naming our difference — like having to dig one's own ontological grave. Lesbianism — how might it matter that this is a "difference that dares to speak its name"? Who are we to suggest that the "subaltern" might speak after all (see Spivak, 1988)? Talking about the "being" of "being queer" is fraught with dangers — risks particularized as a function of location, both cultural and geo-political.

For a highly privileged few, the risks are primarily aesthetic, rather than corporeal or economic in nature. Current intellectual fashions in North American scholarship, for example, dictate an emphasis on the performative function of sexual affinities (see Butler, 1990; Escoffier, 1990). Carnival, transgression, and parody are in, and "essentialist" appeals to an unproblematized or coherent "identity" are out. In these sites, the greatest danger one faces as a speaker consists in a charge of essentialism, or perhaps of race- or class-ism.[3]

In the various "fields" of education, however — whether discursive or embodied — heterosexism and homophobia are rife (Friend, 1993; Khayatt, 1992; Sedgwick, 1991). And this is despite the fact that, in Canada, to cite but one example, (a) sexual orientation is a named ground for human rights protection federally, and in many cases, provincially, (b) many school boards have endorsed policies opposing discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation, and (c) many locals have specifically included sexual orientation in the employment equity clauses of teachers' contracts. Consider, for example, letters published in the newsmagazine of the British Columbia Teachers' Federation (BCTF), *Teacher,* after the publication of two articles (one written by the Gay and Lesbian Educators of B.C. and another written by a gay teacher) addressing homophobia and the specific needs of lesbian/gay students and teachers (see *Teacher,* 1991, 3[7] and 4[1 and 4]). Authors of five of the seven letters angrily criticized at length the BCTF's editorial judgement in publishing what are construed as "articles which condone homosexuality." In these letters, teachers write, for instance: "How can one say that the fear of gays and lesbians is irrational when it is common knowledge that the AIDS epidemic we all must guard against was introduced to society by homosexuals?"; "Homophobia is defined as an unnatural fear of homosexuality. In reality, there is nothing more natural than to oppose unnatural and harmful practices"; "I reject and am appalled by a group such as this trying to legitimize their lifestyle to our young people, a lifestyle a majority

of society rejects as unnatural. I am also upset that the BCTF sees fit to give them this platform." The two supportive letters were very short and were written by a retired teacher and an anonymous contributor. Not one supportive letter was published written by a working teacher with a name. The only editorial comments accompanying these letters suggested the importance of including "varied perspectives on this topic." What was extraordinary and disheartening was that the majority of these letters contained statements directly contravening the BCTF's own explicit policy commitments on sexual orientation as an explicit basis both for human rights protection and for proactive interventions at every level of the public school system.

In the university faculties of education where we work, talk about "being queer" is a gross violation — a discursive im/possibility which we have elsewhere (Bryson & de Castell, 1993b) referred to as constituting (paraphrasing Brossard, 1988) an "unten<ur>able discursive posture" — punished by daily acts of heterosexism, long-term social exclusion, personal and professional marginalization, and constant "reminders" (read threats) about upcoming tenure and performance reviews and the need to do "work" (i.e., getting published in academic journals) that is "relevant" (i.e., to white, middle-class heterosexuals). In the classrooms where we teach future educators, "coming out" in response to direct student questioning has prompted reactions of anger, verbal abuse, and distinctly punitive student evaluations of competence. In our neighbourhoods, being identified as "queer" has resulted in abuses ranging from verbal assault to bashing of such ferocity as to result in long-term physical disability. The list goes on. . . .

What difference does it make — being "queer" in the classroom? What would that mean, anyway — *being* queer? How does it matter — with whom, or how, we re/construct sexual and affectional relations? How could it have come to pass that, paradoxically, while current liberal/critical speaking about pedagogical matters (e.g., Aronowitz & Giroux, 1991; Burbules & Rice, 1991; Weiler, 1988) echoes loudly the intertextualized words of queers — Foucault (1980b, 1982), Butler (1990), Fuss (1989), Lorde (1984), Barthes (1977), Rubin (1975, 1981, 1984), Rich (1979), de Lauretis (1987), Moraga and Anzaldua (1983), Wittig (1980), and others — a heavy cloak of willful silence continues to shroud sexualities as important sites for the production and reification of *difference* both in the textually constructed subjects of educational discourses and in the actual embodied subjects who in/habit the contexts of institutional schooling? Many influential and widely cited authors in post-critical pedagogical discourses today are queer — yet few are "coming out" as queer, are "speaking *as* one," and almost no one is talking about the impact of sexual difference on pedagogical processes in relation to *their own* sexual identity. Isn't this a difference that makes a difference? It is, then, with a large measure of reluctance and hesitation that we directly address, "speaking as one," the thorny issues of queer identity politics and pedagogical practices. The sheer invisibility, in practice, of "flesh and blood"

speaking/acting lesbian or gay subjects, coupled with the extraordinary acts of textual objectification and appropriation that hit us squarely between the I/eye/s every time we encounter what passes as postmodern pedagogy have made it impossible, finally, not to speak "out."

This article, then, addresses the issue of problematized sexual identities and liberatory pedagogy from within the specific context of an undergraduate "lesbian studies" course (WMST 666[4]) we co-taught in 1991 at a major urban Canadian university. We envision this course as an instance of something here referred to as "queer pedagogy" — a teaching against-the-grain, or, in this particular case, an amalgam of "performative acts" (Butler, 1990) enfleshing a radical form of what we envisioned to be potentially liberatory enactments of "gender treachery" (Bryson, de Castell, & Haig-Brown, 1993) with/in the always already (Derrida, 1978) heterosexually coded spaces of academic women's studies programs.

In a period in which uncertainty and ambivalence are the order of the day concerning the ostensibly liberatory projects of modernism's critical white knights (such as Habermas), we envision praxis — typically conceptualized as reflexive, re-constitutive action — as a necessary corrective to the often overly abstract, aesthetically self-indulgent, politically ambivalent, and obtusely textualized forms of postmodern theorizing (see Lazarus, 1991). Reflexive oppositional action undertaken within key sites for the production of oppression does not seem optional so long as anti-Semitism, racism, homophobia, sexism, classism, and the other forms of hegemonic violence continue to proliferate within educational (and other) contexts. In this article, we focus on our own attempts to design and co-teach a lesbian studies course; to forge a kind of "queer praxis." This kind of transformative work represents an embodied application of *feminist post-structural* theories of subjectivity (Ellsworth, 1990; Luke, 1992) within which we attempt to engage simultaneously with issues of sexuality, identity, difference, agency, voice, and pedagogy.[5]

QUEER PEDAGOGY IN/DEED . . .

Our reflections on subjectivity and pedagogy were brought to a head by our contradictory and sometimes agonizing and disorienting experiences in co-teaching WMST 666 — a Special Topics course[6] entitled "Lesbian Subjects Matter: Feminism/s from the Margins?" Theoretical tensions between postmodern discourses of deconstruction and post-colonial, post-feminist discourses of agency created the conceptual terrain within which we situated WMST 666. The potentially contradictory subject positioning these tensions engender is neatly summed up by Rosi Braidotti (1987), who points out: "In order to announce the death of the subject one must first have gained the right to speak as one" (p. 237). Guided by Braidotti's articulation of the paradoxical consequences of a postmodern identity politics, we chose to focus on two major questions in constructing the course.

First, we asked whether the claiming of cultural representation and voice necessarily entails the inevitability of essentialism. Deliberate representations of sexual difference — for instance, lesbian sexuality — play a key and effective role in an oppressed group's struggles for voice, visibility, and empowerment. Yet, this culture-building strategy often creates a semblance of coherent subject/matter where there are actually multiple subjectivities, contradictions, and dislocations, and a fragmentation of identities.

Second, we questioned whether a politics of identity — especially an identity constructed "on the margins" — could be a viable strategy, either theoretically or politically. Specifically in relation to mainstream feminist theorizing, the relationship between lesbian and feminist theory/praxis is unclear, and often represents a stormy and unsatisfactory union for both parties. While it seems fair to say that during the eighties the greatest impetus for transformative growth in feminist theorizing has been work "at the margins" — by women of colour in particular — occupying a place "at the margins" has been as much a site for entrenching boundaries and limiting possibilities as a site for contesting these positionings (Chung, Kim, & Lemeshewsky, 1987; Culley & Portuges, 1985; hooks, 1984; Omosupe, 1991).

Since we intended to interrogate not only the contents but also the forms by means of which to represent "identity," we deliberately made use of (invited to our classes and/or arranged for equipment and instruction in the uses of) a wide range of resources in WMST 666 (both products and producers in radio, video, photography, desk-top publishing, and so on), hoping thereby to expand and to reconstruct the typically limited opportunities for both access to and production of radical representations of lesbian identities and cultures. By "radical" we mean to imply that a primary aim of the course was to enter "eyes and arms open" into the perilous arena constituted by various projects of queer identity politics (see Escoffier, 1985a, 1985b; Fuss, 1989; Omosupe, 1991; Phelan, 1989).

Pedagogically speaking, we structured WMST 666 as follows. The course was constructed around a series of "texts" and presentations by lesbian subjects: people actively engaged in community-based lesbian-identified cultural constructions — lesbians doing photography, theatre, law, AIDS work, music and video production. and so on. We chose a wide range of presenters and readings, so as to engage students with the ways in which the sliding signifier "lesbian" would be differently constructed as a function of age, ethnicity, race, class, body size, and other key axes that could/do function as sites for "systems of domination," as bell hooks (1990) describes the interlocking forces of oppression. Having been provided with access to, and instruction in video production, photography, desk-top publishing, and the like, students were asked to do a project during WMST 666 — either individually or collaboratively — exploring some aspect of lesbian identity/representation and making use of any appropriate technology.

Three lesbian artists — known as the Kiss & Tell Collective — for example, came and performed a reading of/about their widely distributed photo-montage

entitled "Drawing the Line" (Kiss & Tell Collective, 1991). In this interactive exhibit, viewers are invited to move around a room where photographs of "lesbian sex" are affixed to write-on surfaces. Under the viewer's gaze, the montage of photographs becomes a surface to be textured with a melange of lines and comments depicting reactions, perceived limits exceeded or unattained, likes, dislikes and so on. Only female viewers are permitted access to the walls as write-on texts; male viewers' comments and demarcations are confined to a book placed on a table nearby. To date this exhibit has toured Canada, the United States, and Australia, and has invariably generated much debate about representation, race, sexualities, and identity. In WMST 666, the artists read a piece, written in three parts, describing their work and the contradictions therein — "what makes a photograph 'lesbian'?" "Why aren't there any lesbians of colour in these photographs?" "What about lesbians who like to have sexual relations with men?" "What about the sexual activities depicted? These are models — are we/they *really* having sex?" and the like.

As a strategy for engaging students with the theoretical perspectives provided by a postmodern, deconstructionist perspective on lesbian-identified cultures and histories, we created an activity that came to be referred to as "The Lesbian Dating Game," an intentional parody of the "Lesbians through the Ages" approach typifying introductory women's studies curricula. During the first week, students picked out of a hat slips of paper on which were printed two names of "historically noteworthy (for some) North American (mostly) lesbians" — for instance, "Jane Rule and Pat Califia," "Lee Lynch and Gertrude Stein," "Gloria Anzaldua and Cherrie Moraga," "Bessie Smith and Ma Rainey," "Sappho and Artemis Oakgrove." Students then created a presentation focusing on a transhistorical "date" between the two persons. This activity had a dual purpose: first, it required participants to seek out standardly "overlooked" information about our own histories as a group, just to learn something about people of whom we knew the name but little else. Second, in thinking about what the two would discuss, fight about, be attracted to, or enjoy doing together, students had the opportunity to consider all the many socially and historically contingent details that go into the construction of an "identity," thus exploring "identity" as a function of "community."

Similarly, to materialize the constructed and artifactual nature of lesbian culture, history, and identity itself as discursively produced, we created "Lesbian Jeopardy," a pseudo-positivistic, overtly ironic game of "Facts We Know about Lesbians." Students created Jeopardy questions throughout the course, which were amalgamated to make the first version of Lesbian Jeopardy — played against an outside team of "experts" from Vancouver's lesbian community during the final class as our alternative to a final exam.

We decided, as instructors, never to define "lesbian" or "sexual orientation" and not to consider material presented as "lesbian" in opposition to heterosexual-

ly identified material. We talked a lot, in the first weeks of class, about the ways in which difference functions in the construction of identities, and about the need to theorize difference, particularly in relation to agency or political projects. We said that, in the class, there could be "no consumers and no voyeurs" and therefore, in articulating possibilities for dialogue, each of us would have to develop a clear "ethics of consumption" and a "reflexive gaze." We talked about the importance of our articulated and unexamined purposes for participating in the course, particularly in relation to self-identity. That is, we explained, heterosexually identified students would have to consider aspects of privilege and authority, as they would function and circulate differently in a lesbian-identified space.

White participants, similarly, would have to deal with the often unnamed assumption of compulsory whiteness in articulations of purportedly universal themes of lesbian history, culture, and praxis. We encouraged students to do their class projects collaboratively, and in that process to focus on the functioning of differences in their ability, or lack thereof, to work together productively and equitably.

DIS/COVERING OUT/COMES

Students in WMST 666 included 13 white women and 2 women of colour. Students identified a range of class backgrounds and, initially, chose either to remain silent about their sexual identification or to present themselves as "out lesbians." We quickly found that only the students whose lives were constructed within oppression, with or without the added contradiction of privilege afforded by, say, white skin—that is, a straight-identified woman of colour, and the bisexually- and lesbian-identified women, both of colour and white—could effectively engage in the work we had prescribed for our course. The white heterosexually-identified students (many of whom were majors in women's studies) came to visit us, as instructors, during office hours, to talk about their difficulties participating effectively in class, but didn't voice their frustrations during class time. We found that white students who identified as heterosexual made, for example, lifeless presentations "about lesbians" that bore painful testimony to their inability to imagine an encounter between, say, Audre Lorde and Mary Daly, or between k.d. lang and Ferron. In their journals, white straight-identified women did not make use of textual or in-class discussions of identity to reflect on the constructedness of their own identities, but chose, rather, to consume or reject the material on the basis of abstract arguments and "critical" rationality. Lesbians and lesbianism, in this form, became commodified texts or artifacts to be recklessly appropriated for purposes entirely "academic"; these students thus disregarded our earlier appeals for an *ethic* of consumption. Students with no direct experience of heterosexism as violence, either material or

symbolic, asked questions of or made requests to the class that betrayed their privilege and that failed to meet the needs of lesbians in the class in relation to issues of safety or the right to privacy. With dismay we gradually realized that, somehow, in selectively focusing on lesbianism as a site for the construction of difference/s, we had created an us/them structure that effectively made working together across difference/s a seemingly unreachable goal, although this had been our explicit original intention.

After a gruelling first month of classes during which a large group of mostly silent students "passed" as lesbian, students who considered themselves to be "out lesbians" and we instructors — feeling that a great deal of deception was taking place at the expense of the safety of the lesbian students — suggested that students who identified as "heterosexual" would probably be better able to contribute to the discussions/collaborative projects if they positioned their in-class comments/work by referring to their own experiences and dealing explicitly with their privilege and power-over. Needless to say, the next month was spent negotiating the tricky terrain of authority and experience, but the result was that: two heterosexually-identified women began to take responsibility for their "speaking" in the class; the bisexually-identified women formed a tight affinity group and organized a series of pot-luck suppers and contacts outside of class; and the lesbian-identified women created a powerful affinity group that met regularly, outside WMST 666, for discussions, planning, strategizing, and a lot of dancing. There was a fairly strong coalition between the bisexually-identified and lesbian-identified students — especially in dealing with issues of racism and anti-Semitism.

By the end of the course, all but one heterosexually-identified student chose to complete standard essays, created individually and produced on word processors in print form. These students dealt with the topics of identity and difference by means of a critique of the heterosexism of institutional knowledges, such as other women's studies courses. The one heterosexually-identified student — a woman of colour — who did not choose the traditional "final essay" form, dealt explicitly with issues of her own sexual orientation/identity in the construction of, and commentary about, a collage (replete with hundreds of same-yet-different paper-doll cut-outs) depicting representations of "self-improvement" for women portrayed in popular culture — particularly magazine advertisements and television images. This student conducted extensive and thoughtful dialogues with students in the class whose identities differed from her own in one or more respects. Two white bisexually-identified students created an extraordinary video about two bisexual room/mates doing the dishes and chatting — in the nude. The dish-washing episodes served as a kind of contradictory representation of an ostensibly simple process which can become ridiculously complicated and rule-bound if engaged in by following a set of externally-defined rules. The women's conversations dealt with many of the ambiguities, ironies, and impossibilities of

a so-called "bisexual lifestyle." A lesbian of colour worked with other lesbians — both white and of colour — in order to create a series of photographs dealing with representation, racism, and essentialism in the construction of lesbian identity. She also created a lesbian safe-sex poster using a desk-top publishing program. The poster invoked a simulation of a regular box of latex gloves, except that, among uses for the gloves, one finds: gardening, first aid, and fisting. In the photograph for the gloves advertisement, we see two women, one white and one of colour, locked in an embrace that appears to blur the boundaries between them. A white working-class lesbian created a sophisticated 45-minute video dealing ironically with the topics of sexual identity, racism, classism, and lesbian theorizing. She worked collaboratively with others inside and outside WMST 666 — lesbians and gay men, both white and of colour.

For many participants in WMST 666, then, access to alternative media of representation provided the means for (a) reconstructing the division of labour in classroom tasks traditionally assigned to, and completed by, individual students, (b) restructuring power relations between participants in educational contexts, who typically occupy very unevenly positioned discursive roles in relation to power, and (c) transforming received knowledges, texts, and images through ironic acts of mis/representation, mimicry, collage, montage, and re/degendering.

What we saw in much of the work were examples of the kinds of "politically articulate" uses of technologies of cultural production characteristic of post-modernism — specifically, postmodernist practices of "recycling," which salvage icons, images, and artifacts resurrected from within their original socio-historical context and re-inserted into another context, within which this "detritus" takes on a new, significantly greater cultural value. It is postmodernism's characteristic montage of previously unconnected events, its unprecedented and often unlikely juxtapositions of what, in its original context, might conversely have been at best commonplace, ordinary, seemingly without value, which we see instantiated in these pedagogic tactics. In this — postmodern — "transvaluation of values," videos, photographs, posters, and paper dolls became capable of articulating sophisticated and complex theory, while formal essays and conventional book reviews were relegated to the margins. . . . Inversion indeed!

It is of course interesting to observe that students usually given the space, voice, and liberty to speak and to be heard ended up in this course reverting to tepid, formulaic, disengaged essays, while students "of difference" took permission to play with form, genre, substance, and personal/political purposes, and produced what was undeniably outstanding, innovative, and, above all, engaged work. These outcomes bear out familiar pedagogic wisdom about acceptance of student identities and abilities being conducive to achievement; at the same time, and most uncomfortably for us, given our original intents, the outcomes seemed also to bear out the heterosexual women's "reverse discrimination" arguments.

But a good deal more interesting to us was the question of what lay behind this surface appearance, which was that from the time of the initial "discovery" of what we then saw as "deception" — the heterosexual "cross-dressing" attempted in the course, every ounce of our emotional, intellectual, and social energies were consumed by the problem of accommodating the white heterosexual women's discomfort (a problem perhaps familiar to women's studies instructors who have had straight male students in their classes). And this happened, it must be noted, despite our repeated insistence that this was not something we wanted to do, that this was not something we would do, and despite lesbian students' protestations that, as one put it when the term was half through, "Straight women have had all of their lives to deal with their homophobia and their privilege. I now have six weeks to learn everything about my life."

By the end there was in fact really only one student who steadfastly refused to engage at all with these questions, and it seems to us most important to stress this. As a white, middle-class heterosexual woman fully invested in the natural-ness and unquestionability of heterosexism, her refusal throughout the course was, we would argue, a refusal *of identity*. In an almost — to us — surreal act of externalization, she offered as her principal impediment to success in this course nothing at all to do with conflicts or confusions about the constructedness of identity, whether theoretical or embodied. In explaining late and incomplete work, she said nothing about the problematics of "inwardness" (although she criticized us as instructors for a "lack of trust" and "safety" in the class, for a "power imbalance," and for "unwanted and unfounded suspicion and judge-ment"). Instead, she subordinated all of this to the indissolubly physical impedi-ment of a sore, swollen, and discoloured toe — far, indeed, from the ontology, ethics, and politics of identity. This, it seems now to us, was because "identity" is so often not something freely chosen or "naturally" emergent, but created in reaction, in defense, by difference, and by opposition (hooks, 1990; Mercer, 1991).

This student also showed us the disproportionate power of one. For as long as (only) one student "held the line" in the representation of hegemonic (non-)identity, all our discourses, all our actions, were permeated, were threaded through with the continuous and inescapable subtext of white heterosexual dominance, the backdrop against which everything else in these institutions happens. (And how unlike this is the "invisibility" of one lesbian or gay man in these same settings, and, correlatively, the scarcely imaginable anxiety and hostility unleashed when "more than one are gathered together.") What this taught us is that lesbianism, although it could of course be any other subordi-nated identity, is always marginal, even in a lesbian studies course, and that lesbian identity is always fixed and stable, even in a course that explicitly critiques, challenges, deconstructs "lesbian identity."

JUST WHEN YOU THOUGHT IT MIGHT BE SAFE TO COME OUT IN THE CLASSROOM: QUEER PRAXIS MAKES IM/PERFECT . . .

It was useful, in conceptualizing this de/constructive work on gender, sexual identities, and pedagogy, to return to one of the original sites for the production of a distinction between sex and gender — a distinction of both historical and political import that circulated, for a time, within feminist writings and conversations as a source of optimism with its refusal of biological determinism and, hence, its affirmation of the plausibility of agency by means of direct cultural intervention within sites of cultural re/production. According to Donna Haraway (1987), the first textual use of the signifying construct "sex/gender system" was by Gayle Rubin (1975), in a landmark paper entitled "The Traffic in Women: Notes on the Political Economy of Sex." In relation to issues of pedagogical practice, this distinction has typically been used to justify arguments about both (a) the liberatory aspects of lesbian sexuality for women in general, and (b) more specifically, the equation of women's studies with lesbian studies. Early models of lesbian studies and related practices (e.g., Cruickshank, 1982) tended, for example, overwhelmingly to situate lesbianism within feminism; that is to say, to argue, for example, that the ethical axioms of feminism ought, necessarily, to inform the practices of lesbian sexuality (as in the ubiquitous "Feminism is the theory and lesbianism the practice"). The conceptual and practical slippages between gender and sexuality proved greater than could be accommodated by these early attempts to theorize lesbianism within feminism. Critiques, particularly by women of colour (hooks, 1984; Moraga & Anzaldua, 1983) and by lesbian practitioners of sadomasochism (see review in Phelan, 1989), created a significant rupture in the giddy post-Stonewall days of lesbian community. And so the question of how to theorize, say, a truly *queer* pedagogy became, once more, entirely problematic.

In more recent work, a further distinction has been made that has proven to be of enormous significance to the development, in the fields of lesbian and gay studies, of theoretical models capable of more adequately informing the conceptualization and implementation of radical practices — that is to say, a distinction between sex/gender and sexuality (e.g., Rubin, 1984; Sedgwick, 1990). As Sedgwick (1990) argued: "The study of sexuality is not coextensive with the study of gender; correspondingly, antihomophobic inquiry is not coextensive with feminist inquiry" (p. 27).

Rubin's (1975, 1984) sex/gender/sexuality distinctions have been made within a historically, materially, and socially contingent context characterized by a kind of radical, oppositional theorizing (see Sawicki, 1991). Gayle Rubin is, among other things, a self-proclaimed lesbian sadomasochist (Rubin, 1981, 1984, 1991), and the author of several now-classic essays on the topic of "radical sex practices" and their significance for theories and politics of sexual difference. In Rubin's words:

In addition to sexual hierarchies of class, race, gender, and ethnicity, there is a hierarchy based on sexual behavior. . . . It is time that radicals and progressives, feminists and leftists, recognize this hierarchy for the oppressive structure that it is instead of reproducing it within their own ideologies (1984, p. 226)

In creating and implementing WMST 666, we attempted to reflect on what it might mean to take Rubin's challenge seriously in re-thinking, or *queer<y>ing*, normatively sanctioned pedagogies — to insist on the "right to speak as one," to make pedagogical spaces where the hitherto unsayable could be uttered, where so-called deviant images could be represented, and where conscious efforts could be made to re-think forms of subjectivity and relations within the oppressive confines of the always-already heterosexualized classroom. How to accomplish some of this while, concurrently, resisting the incredible pressures to instantiate and reify essentialized representations of queer sexuality — marginal subject positions that function like fixed locations on the outer perimeter of normalcy, ironically, as Foucault (1978, 1980a) and others (Butler, 1990; hooks, 1984) have argued, fortifying and stabilizing dominant subjectivities and knowledges?

We have argued elsewhere (Bryson & de Castell, in press) that it is principally within postmodernist accounts of pedagogy (see, for example, Britzman, 1991; Ellsworth, 1989; Hoodfar, 1992; Lather, 1991; Leach, 1992; Weiler, 1988) that one encounters talk of opportunities for "agency among the oppressed," located in ironic, "*enfant terrible,*" or "bad attitude" models for the reconsideration of received notions of "identity." In these accounts, "being any gender is a drag," and carnival and a dis/continuous shifting among and between identities is the order of the day. The problem is construed as the need to dissolve the impasse created by conceptual dualisms, such as male/female gender models, natural/artificial ontological systems, and essentialist/constructionist intellectual frameworks for thinking about sexual identity (see especially Fuss, 1989; Phelan, 1989; Sedgwick, 1990). The goal is to discover how to conceptualize/materialize new and "politically articulate" (Penley & Ross, 1991) relations with/in classroom discourses and relations, by reflecting critically on, and making fundamental changes in, conceptualizations about both the discursive categories of, for example, "gender," "lesbian," and "difference," and actual lived practices and social relations circulating in pedagogical practices, and relations between and within subjects.

Postmodernist discourses (see Barthes, 1977; Baudrillard, 1983; Bordo, 1990; Derrida, 1978; Fraser, 1989) displace the fixed subjects of both modernist and critical theorizing; that is, both the notions of (a) the individual (e.g., "lesbian") as constituting a unified subject whose true or essential "nature" can be determined under the penetrating gaze of science, and (b) bodies of knowledge, such as "lesbian studies," as constituting coherent subject matters, with clear epistemological boundaries, appropriate methodologies, truth conditions, and so forth. One of postmodernism's main contributions to theories of "difference" has been

the deconstruction of the kinds of essentialist theorizing about sites of oppression in traditional and critical theorizing, such as in essentialist accounts of sexual identity in terms of, say, "lesbian-feminism" or "lesbian sexuality," as fundamentally raced, classed, and probably politically unproductive in an ongoing struggle for equity, voice, and empowerment (Escoffier, 1985a, 1985b; Fuss, 1989).

In educational discourses, postmodernist theorizing (Lather, 1990) has cast doubt on latter-day critical theorists' monolithic claims of being able to identify the ideological underpinnings of oppressive pedagogies and, from a safe distance, therefore, to restructure educational environments so as to realize the goals of their "liberatory" or "emancipatory" projects. Ellsworth (1989) paints a complex portrait of her practices as a white middle-class woman and professor engaged with a diverse group of students developing an anti-racist course. She describes her experience of the contradictions inherent in actively engaging with liberatory pedagogy as follows:

Our classroom was the site of dispersing, shifting, and contradictory contexts of knowing that coalesced differently in different moments of student/professor speech, action, and emotion. This situation meant that individuals and affinity groups constantly had to change strategies and priorities of resistance against oppressive ways of knowing and being known. The antagonist became power itself as it was deployed within our classroom — oppressive ways of knowing and oppressive knowledges. (p. 322)

We have attempted in this article to determine the relevance of postmodernist theorizing about difference and pedagogy, such as the terrain of contradictions traversed by Ellsworth, for re-visioning and re-forming praxis in a lesbian studies classroom. In this project of queer identity, our (that is, we instructors') embodied existences within a set of overlapping, yet incoherent, communities created a set of material conditions and practices that informed our interlocking experiences of discrimination, privilege, sexuality, and gender, in a particular way. We found that we could not, however, represent ourselves "as lesbian" within institutional contexts (such as our respective faculties of education) without instantiating profoundly unproductive essentialist notions of fixed, stable, and marginal "lesbian identities."

LESBIAN IDENTITY? MEMORY/COUNTER-MEMORY

Some days, the only aspect of my so-called "lesbian identity" that seems even remotely interesting is that I am prepared to die for the way I like to fuck. Now that's a cause! The other day, my partner and I were walking from the supermarket to the video store. A man approached us, pointed, and shouted "Dykes!" in a voice that was incredibly angry and hostile. So strange, to be framed like that; poured into an identity that is, at one and the same time, self-identical and also sufficient cause for verbal abuse, intimidation, bashing, and much, much, worse. I wanted to shout out, "No! I am not that. I am not your 'dyke'!

I am not that name." Identity as ascribed, rather than assumed, or chosen. Is it ever any different? Ontological straight-jacket or revolutionary battle-cry? "Dyke" certainly seems preferable to the terribly prim "lesbian," or the clinical "homosexual." My c.v. states that I do lesbian studies, but . . . I do not envision myself "as a lesbian." I remember practicing the word over and over again in the mirror—trying to say it with pride and confidence during my obligatory "coming out" phase. During this brief period, I truly thought I had "found myself"—that I had discovered, at long last, a "place called home" within an unproblematically assumed community loosely based on "lesbian-feminist" identity politics. Needless to say, there were many aspects of this new "identity" to which I could not simply conform—particularly, injunctions to downplay sexual pleasure and to embrace the ideals of egalitarian sisterhood. Similarly, highly charged relationships with women of colour have confronted me over and over again with "the unbearable whiteness of (my) lesbian being" and an acute sense of my own complicity in re/producing racism through an unproblematized taking-up of a so-called "lesbian" identity. Yet, can we afford to say, "I am not that name"? How to problematize heterosexuality without invoking an Other? Sometimes, this is (and has proven to be) a question of life and death. . . .

So how can we talk about issues that may be specifically of concern to lesbians without claiming "the" authoritative voice of experience—without claiming a unique capacity to speak *as* lesbians? Our own capacity to speak is entirely a set of effects of contradictory and overlapping discursive/material positions—white-skin privilege, middle-class roots, able-body-ness, faculty positions, and so on.

   Students are likewise placed in contradictory speaking positions in relation to "experience" and "oppression." Students, however, probably have even more dire need than white faculty for opportunities both to "speak as lesbians" and to passionately engage with lesbian content within the profoundly heterosexist, homophobic, racist, and sexist context that is enacted in the everyday relations and practices of "the academy," whether at our own universities or elsewhere.

FROM "QUEER THEORY" TO "QUEER PEDAGOGY": LOCATING THE UNSPEAKABLE IN A PEDAGOGY OF THE REPRESSED

Clearly, the distance from queer theory to queer pedagogy is great. It is interesting to note that in the first lesbian and gay studies reader published to date (Abelove, Barale, & Halperin, 1993), there is, among 666 pages and 42 chapters spanning a wide range of intellectual domains, *not a single entry* that deals explicitly with the educational implications or applications of these new discourses. And so the question remains—what could be made "queer" about pedagogy? Queer pedagogy could refer here to education as carried out *by* lesbian and gay educators, to curricula and environments designed *for* gay and lesbian students, to education for everyone *about* queers, or to something altogether different. Queer pedagogy could refer to *the deliberate production of queer relations and to the production of subjectivities as deviant performance*—that

is to say, to a kind of postmodern carnivalesque pedagogy of the underworld, as agitation <*implemented deliberately to interfere with, to intervene in the production of so-called normalcy in schooled subjects*>. Reading the *Concise Oxford English Dictionary* one dis/covers:

Queer: adjective — sexual deviate, homosexual
Pedagogy: from pedagogue, paid — boy and ago — lead, orig.: the slave who escorted children to school.

And hence one version of a *queer* pedagogy — the stereotypical image of the pederast fondling boys on the way to school, or the gay teacher, fired for "indecent exposure" or "inappropriate touching." But what of another reading? What of the active form of the word "queer" — its agentive form? Reading a little further, the same dictionary includes:

Queer: verb — to spoil, put out of order, to put into an embarrassing or disadvantageous situation.

It seems that a worthwhile avenue for the elucidation of a queer praxis might be to consider the value of an actively *queerying* pedagogy — of queering its technics and scribbling graffiti over its texts, of colouring outside of the lines so as to deliberately take the wrong route on the way to school — going in an altogether different direction than that specified by a monologic destination. This seems a promising approach indeed for refashioning pedagogy in the face of the myriad institutionally sanctioned "diversity management" (Mohanty, 1990) programs that, today, threaten to crowd out and silence most opportunities for radical emancipatory praxis (de Castell & Bryson, 1992).

As we learned in WMST 666, praxis makes im/perfect; that is to say, an eclectic mélange of the wonderful, the awful, and the in-between. And perhaps, in pedagogical matters, im/perfect outcomes are necessarily the norm. Just as "safe sex" has been discredited, there may, in/deed, as Ellsworth (1990), Hoodfar (1992), Razak (1993), and others have argued, be no such thing as a "safe pedagogy." But what about the notion of a "safer" pedagogy? It seems imperative to explore and to articulate a set of pedagogical practices that might offer greater opportunities than those currently available to both students and teachers "of difference" for the construction of, and participation in, democratic, engaging, pleasurable, interesting, generative, and non-violent learning environments. This gargantuan task is nothing less than intimidating. After all, determining where to begin keeps many of us from ever getting started.

After teaching WMST 666, it seemed clear to us that one of the most invariably accessible, urgent, and relatively unexamined areas of so-called progressive classroom practice lies in the function, risk, and purpose of "dialogue across differences," and hence of encouraging students of difference to exercise their

"voices" (see especially Burbules & Rice, 1991; and the critique by Leach, 1992). At this juncture, it appears to us that little or no educational value lies in getting minority students to recount their experiences of "difference," to listen to their fellow students' or instructors' "unassimilated difference" (Ellsworth, 1990), or to engage in verbal arm-wrestling about issues of authenticity or authority. The difficulties and perils, for example, of "speaking as" are, as Linda Alcoff (1991) cogently argued, no less significant than the challenges posed by "speaking for," "to," or "about." As Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (1990) reminds us:

The question "Who should speak?" is less crucial than "Who will listen?" . . . When the card carrying listeners, the hegemonic people, the dominant people, talk about listening to someone "speaking as" . . . when they want to hear an Indian, a Third World woman speaking as a Third World woman, they cover over the fact of the ignorance that they are allowed to possess. (pp. 59-60)

And so one might do well to consider the possibilities for re-tooling pedagogical practices offered by the notion of an "ethics of consumption and of production" in relation to one's engagements with classroom discourses. Questions about who ought to speak, and about what/to whom, or as what category of speaker, do not seem, finally, as significant as questions about to what end and, most critically, at what cost. In WMST 666, women who identified unproblematically as white heterosexuals seemed completely stymied when asked, by both instructors and other students, for the basis of their participation in a lesbian studies course. Their responses, about being "interested in the topic," or wanting to "know more about lesbians," seemed symptomatic of a sense of automatic entitlement, of an identity that is constructed in a parasitic relation of unquestioned privilege vis à vis Others — others' lives, stories, words, and traces represented thus as objects of consumption assimilated for purposes of self-advancement and little more. This kind of "border crossing" seems to have much more in common with a colonizing kind of "intellectual tourism" and its attendant strategies of massive cultural appropriation and devastation than with any kind of reflexive and tentative journey into the unknown and unexamined "differences and oppressors within" (Anzaldua, 1987; Lugones, 1987; Pratt, 1984).

One might be forgiven for not knowing this, given the current proliferation of discourses about "difference," whether sexual or otherwise, discourses which make it seem as if at long last we might be permitted to begin *seriously* to grapple with "what difference it makes" to our theorizing within and outside of feminism, about identity, about epistemology and ethics, about politics and praxis. . . . So it might seem given the growing popularity and increasing availability of courses dedicated to black studies, to chicana/o studies, post-colonialism, and, not least, gay/lesbian studies (Escoffier, 1990; Mohr, 1989; Saslow, 1991) all currently flourishing in the academy. . . . It might seem as if we could

at last accommodate both our urgent desires and demands for a "home" in these institutions (Bryson & de Castell, 1993a) without having to abandon our desires and demands as students, as scholars determined that we should not have *always* to subordinate our intellectual inquiries to our political and emotional needs just to be here, to speak with a chance of being heard, with the hopes of someday even being listened to. Or so, as we said, it might seem. . . .

But here, we find, is how it is: although lesbians now are occasionally permitted to speak in the academy, we can only speak *about* but we cannot speak *as* lesbians, except insofar as we are prepared, in such speaking, to make of ourselves not lesbian subjects, but lesbian objects, objects of study, of interrogation, of confession, of consumption. Nor can we speak *to* lesbians, except as we are prepared to place them in jeopardy, to open and dissect a subjectivity created for and by the dominant other. Queer pedagogy it is indeed, that, after all, in trying to make a difference we seem only able to entrench essentialist boundaries which continue both to define and to divide us.

POSTSCRIPT

The most common educational prescription for dealing with the problems we have taken up here is, typically, some kind of pluralistic exhortation for "dialogue across differences" (e.g., Aronowitz & Giroux, 1991; Burbules & Rice, 1991; Kaplan, 1992). The expected discursive move for us in concluding this piece, then, would be to affirm dialogue and boundary-crossing, affinity and coalition, and the like. But this, we find, despite the obligation to prescribe solutions, to outline a "better way," to say what we learned and how to do it better "next time," we cannot in honesty do. For it is by now our strong conviction that such discourses are at worst motivated by careerism, vacuous and disingenuous, and at best premature. All that remains available to us, then, by way of conclusion, is to issue a challenge: let those who still believe "queer pedagogy" to be possible tell it like it is, or, at least, how it might be. . . . We leave the last words to an inspired creator of undoubtedly im/perfect queer praxis, the late Michel Foucault (1980b):

I have a dream of an intellectual who destroys evidences and universalities, who locates and points out the inertias and constraints of the present, the weak points, the openings, the lines of stress, who constantly displaces himself [sic] not knowing exactly where he'll be or what he'll think tomorrow because he is too attentive to the present; who in the places he passes through contributes to the posing of the question of whether the revolution is worth the trouble, and which (I mean which revolution and which trouble), it being understood that only those who are prepared to risk their lives to reply can do so. (p. 14)

NOTES

[1] Authors' names are listed alphabetically. An abbreviated version of this paper was presented at a meeting of the American Educational Research Association, in San Francisco, April 1991. We are indebted to the two reviewers of this article for their helpful criticisms and suggestions.

[2] We invoke the adjective/noun "queer" in the particularizing sense in which it has been used to signify non-canonical, polyphonic, transgressive, contradictory, and problematic codings (de Lauretis, 1991) — not in its totalizing sense, as in "Queer Nation." In Case's (1991) words:

> *The queer, unlike the rather polite categories of gay and lesbian* [italics added], revels in the discourse of the loathsome, the outcast, the idiomatically-proscribed position of same-sex desire. Unlike petitions for civil rights, queer revels constitute a kind of activism that attacks the dominant notion of the natural. The queer is the taboo-breaker, the monstrous, the uncanny. Like the Phantom of the Opera, the queer dwells underground, below the operatic overtones of the dominant; frightening to look at, desiring, as it plays its own organ, producing its own music. (p. 3)

[3] We are not implying here that charges of racism or classism are innocuous, but that in *academic* discourses, these critiques are, so often, formulaic and rarely result in (or even intend) significant transformations to subsequent work.

[4] We use a fictitious course number to protect students' right to confidentiality.

[5] It is important to acknowledge from the outset the particular limitations framing this account. First and foremost, we make no claim to present an inclusive, valid, or comprehensive "story" about teaching WMST 666. A priori, we had no intention of writing about this course, and had specifically decided ahead of time *not* to transform our "students" into our "subjects" by presenting ourselves as some kind of Janus-like teacher-ethnographers eager to peek voyeuristically into their journals for juicy anecdotes, to furiously scribble down in-class dialogues for future publication purposes, and the like. And so we did not interview students concerning their experiences in this course. Nor did we keep a running set of comprehensive field notes. Rather, we have chosen after the fact to write about our experience attempting to construct and to implement a queer pedagogy because, finally, we could not *not* do so, and, relatedly, because we had found no one else who had (see Mohr, 1989).

[6] Special Topics course: the locution of choice for papering over, or burying, queer content in university/women's studies programs, transcripts, and syllabi.

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