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IS THERE A MALE VICTIM?: DISCURSIVE SUBJECTION
IN REPRESENTATIONS OF FEMALE-ON-MALE
CHILDHOOD SEXUAL ABUSE

A Thesis
Presented to the
Faculty of
California State University,
San Bernardino

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts
in
English Composition

by
James Ireland Ducat
December 2008


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ABSTRACT

I intend to investigate established theoretical and embodied accounts of identities excluded within Western heteronormative society in order to seek out how those embodiments and theories may parallel what I contend is another impossible subject position -- the child male victim of adult female sexual violence. The first chapter lays out the *mise-en-scène* of underlying assumptions of the study and how those assumptions help carve the discursive space I seek.

In the second chapter I examine how Judith Butler and Gloria Anzaldúa have elucidated and embodied the excluded possibilities inherent in compulsory heterosexuality and along the way ask: to what extent do those theoretical positions help illuminate the subject position, subjectivity and subjection of "male victim of female sexual violence?" I will explore how these examples may mark out a space, even if that body is constructed by its absence, or by what is not said about it.

This brings up uncomfortable questions: Are not there bodies that cannot, by definition, be queer? What right do those bodies have to attempt to appropriate queer? How can this body (male victim of female) even exist? In light of

the first two questions, I purposefully stop short of any claim to queer the body in question. I contend that it is the reasonableness of the last question that provides the impetus for the project -- the impossibility of the body calls for the search.

The third chapter examines to what extent one film, Louis Malle's *Murmur of the Heart*, represents the exigencies of compulsory heterosexuality.

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CHAPTER ONE

IS THERE A MALE VICTIM?

The Invisible Man

In early 2008, I presented an abbreviated version of this paper at a conference panel entitled "Trauma and Performance." In the paper I briefly suggest that the sex act between mother and son in Louis Malle's film *Murmur of the Heart* demonstrates that heterosexual society's need for boys to become men -- by performing the heterosexual act of coitus -- outweighs the traumatic abuse of power that the act represents.

The moderator asked me how I knew there was trauma; in other words, how did I know that the boy in the film was traumatized? What if he did not experience the event as trauma? Indeed, the film implies that that the boy is released from problems that have plagued him throughout the film by the event.¹ My difficulty in answering the question pointed out the exact issue that lies at the root of the phenomenon I had set out to investigate. The moderator, in my view, interpreted my assertion as a simple endorsement of the primary prohibition of incest.

Gender studies has pushed to understand how social construction of certain physical acts as, variously, foolish, deviant, and/or dangerous controls the erotic. This led many, including me, to question whether all sexual practices are always (already) controlled by discursively produced norms, and therefore to question those norms, which include the primary prohibition of incest. The moderator's question falls in this general area of concern, but also enacts the production of one of the norms I seek to investigate - the dissonance between prohibition of sex between adults and children and the *older woman ushering a young boy into sexuality* fantasy that recurs in Western cinema and reinforces the view of the moderator.

There are several questions at play here. One concerns the notion of sex as an exercise of power; specific sexual practices may be enacted consensually or non-consensually. Sex, in this scenario, is only one possible means by which a person may wield power. Does consent not nullify that exercise of power?

The first question leads, necessarily, to others: can consent (like human rights) be subverted by social construction? Could a person in a lower position of power dismiss or deny his/her access to consent via Foucaultian

self-regulation? How might such scenarios render the subversion of consent invisible?

Identity Formation

Much of the early theoretical work of gender studies and other post-structural/postmodern identity studies cataloged the ways in which discourse produces, normalizes, controls, and enforces available identity categories. This work started with feminism's search for women missing (literally) in/from the canon and expanded to the search for what it means to be different. Philosophers, critics and radical thinkers have outlined ways in which heteronormative society produces the cultural, sexual, and social categories it seeks to inscribe.

This work was necessarily disembodied; it radically reconsidered identity categories - by examining what identities are available, to whom they are available, under what conditions they come into being, and what material conditions are produced as a consequence. The study had to exclude, almost by intent, the specific experiences of specific bodies.

Some theorists (identified as queer) recognized this disjuncture between identity categories and the experiences

of the bodies that are said to occupy them. Although referring primarily to race, Teresa de Lauretis notes that, "A gay Chicano writer cannot identify with the white middle class gay community of the Castro...[and a] Chicana lesbian might well choose to make her community with Native American women rather than with lesbians period" ("Introduction" ix). Consequently, it seems likely that the "category mistakes" (Butler, "Imitation" 309) that de Lauretis asserts would apply not only to those bodies constructed in subordinate identities, but also to ostensibly charmed or favored bodies. In other words, it might be just as likely that the identity category of white heterosexual man or woman may fail to account for the experience of a specific man or woman constructed into that category.

This possibility, however, is fraught with difficulty. This theoretical dismantling of the idea of stable identity categories appears to erase difference - after all, if identity is constructed, is not everyone the same underneath? The fact that category mistakes may occur in superordinate identity categories is troublesome, especially if these mistakes can be said to be an iteration of queer. People do not have the power in and of themselves

to change material conditions, and certain identities are constituted with lesser social value. In fact, as de Lauretis demonstrates in a quotation from Audre Lorde's *Zami* (about two lesbians of different race), differences in material conditions are experiences that may well override identity: "Muriel seemed to believe we were...all equal in our outsiderhood...It was wishful thinking based on little fact; the ways in which it was true languished in the shadow of those many ways in which it would always be false" (qtd in de Lauretis, "Introduction" x). This scenario -- in which the experiences of bodies that might, through the eyes of a heteronormative culture, seem the same but actually diverge -- presents a conundrum with political consequences. Some theorists/activists have chosen to address this problem by setting queer aside and reclaiming identity categories for necessary political purposes. It almost seems that a balkanization of identity categories must occur to effect change.

Further, as Judith Butler notes, "That any consolidation of identity requires some set of differentiations and exclusions seems clear...If the rendering visible of lesbian/gay identity now presupposes a set of exclusions, then perhaps part of what is necessarily

excluded is *the future uses of the sign*" ("Imitation" 311). The consolidation she considers has as its goal the radical re-appropriation of the category. This political goal may indeed provide a site for the survival of specific bodies constructed into those categories, but it also tends to perpetuate differences and solidify the (apparent) need to choose identity categories. As Foucault demonstrates, these categories are already sustained by church, state, legal, educational and other insidiously immovable systems.

Importantly, these practical moves -- away from stable identity, then toward claimed identity -- did not provide, could not provide for anybody that might not fit exactly into a category or that might cross, straddle, or exist between categories, unless that body could/would claim a single identity. However, theoretically at least, it seems queer theory could do those things.

De Lauretis ends her piece with a hopeful question: could queer theory "construct another discursive horizon, another way of living the racial and the sexual?"

("Introduction" xi). while it may or may not be able to counteract the violent homophobia that plagues Western culture, if queer theory can continue to provide a way to embody the myriad ways compulsory heterosexuality fails to

bring voice to the experiences of all the bodies that do not fit, radical change may yet occur.

Male Masculinity

In this section and the next I examine two discursive productions related to identity: normative "male masculinity" and its exigencies; and the "victim of sexual violence," especially "male victim." I will argue that production of the former sets up a structure in which the latter only exists as a nonconsensual act between gendered males.

David Halperin, following Michel Foucault, asserts that "the individuating function of sexuality, its role in generating sexual identities" ("Is" 420) is a product of the nineteenth century. In the sexual practices of free Greek males, there was a "more generalized ethos of penetration and domination...structured by the presence or absence of ...the phallus" (421). Further, the protocols for how this penetration/domination equation overrode (indicated) gender are present as well. The concern of Greek society was "the male desire to be penetrated by males, for such a desire represent[ed] a voluntary abandonment of the culturally constructed masculine

identity in favor of the culturally constructed feminine one" (422). According to Halperin, domination is masculine and can be performed solely by the penetrator. Males who are dominated are consequently not masculine.

Halperin demonstrates the same discursive production in Jack Abbott's society (juvenile detention and prison); "the division of the society into superordinate and subordinate groups" (425) falls along constructed gender lines, and the only available identification for subordinate is (male) femininity. Male masculinity is the sole province of the superordinate group.

Tomás Almaguer extends this understanding of the production of male masculinity/femininity to the Mexican/Latin American sexual system. Using examples of male homosexual practices in Nicaragua, Mexico, and the U.S., Almaguer notes how gender-associated masculine and feminine roles trump fixed sexual identity. Penetration is active and masculine, while "[t]he stigma conferred to the passive role is fundamentally inscribed in gender-coded terms" ("Chicano" 258). The implication is clear: male femininity produces a "passive agent [who] is an abject, degraded being" (259). Put another way, if the male is not masculine (read "penetrating"), his existence as a male is

in question. In terms of "object choice," masculinity is a moving target.

Gendered Norms

The fear of our desires keeps them suspect and indiscriminately powerful, for to suppress any truth is to give it strength beyond endurance. The fear that we cannot grow beyond whatever distortions we may find within ourselves keeps us docile and loyal and obedient, externally defined, and leads us to accept many facets of our oppression as women.

- Audre Lorde, "The Uses of the Erotic"

Gender coding within heteronormativity limits available subject positions for everyone. De Lauretis concludes, after a consideration of the function of castration in identity formation, "[h]aving nothing to lose, in other words, women cannot desire; having no phallic capital to invest or speculate on, as men do, women cannot be investors in the marketplace of desire but are instead commodities that circulate in it" ("Lure" 217). Compulsory heterosexuality does not/cannot produce a female

who is not a commodity, that is, the subject "active woman" (in the sexual sense) cannot exist.

Further, de Lauretis, demonstrating that the "most common" "object/sign of lesbian desire...in modern Western cultures...is some form of what is coded as masculinity"

(243), writes that this is because

not only is masculinity associated with sexual activity and desire, imaged in the erect penis and its symbolic or ritual representation in the phallus; but...in a cultural tradition pervasively homophobic, masculinity alone carries a strong connotation of sexual desire for the female body.

(243)

This passage, while it asserts grounds for lesbian desire, inscribes the normative grounds by which masculine (read "real") males are produced. It connotes males' desire for the female body and suggests that access to the female body must be (or have been) desired. Since activity codes masculinity, a sort of reverse logic works to re-figure all activity as having come from the male, whether it does or not.

Butler puts the interconnectedness of gender coding and excluded sexual possibilities this way, "both gender

presentation and sexual practices may corollate such that it appears that the former 'expresses' the latter, and yet both are jointly constituted by the very sexual possibilities that they exclude" ("Imitation" 315). This should be as true for the male coded as masculine as it is true for the masculine female coded masculine and/or feminine coded male; that is, the excluded sexual possibilities should form the subject position. In the body I seek, the disjuncture occurs at the very point that the excluded sexual possibility forms the abject subject position (victim of female sexual abuse) from male coded masculine.

The imperative of male masculinity may be most forcefully expressed in normative heterosexual relations. One of the necessary elements in the construction of a male masculinity is its dependence on its binary opposite "not male/masculine." Heterocentricity requires this function of women and enforces it through compulsory heterosexuality, a term first used by Adrienne Rich.

The Sexual Victim

Adrienne Rich's "Compulsory Heterosexuality" forms the base of what critics understand about the effects of

normative heterosexuality on those constructed under it. In one section of this important work, Rich looks at research by Kathleen Barry in order to examine the set of conditions through which sexual violence flourishes. Rich lays out the complicit role heteronormativity plays in the conditioning of the female victim of sexual slavery, and of the male procurer who manipulates her with friendship and love: "The ideology of heterosexual romance, beamed at her from childhood out of fairy tales, television, films, advertising, popular songs, wedding pageantry, is a tool ready to the procurer's hand and on which he does not hesitate to use" (Rich 237)" A bit of deconstructive work uncovers the corollary effect of that same normative indoctrination on males. If this ideology, beamed to both males and females alike, establishes the conditions by which gendered females can be subjected to sexual violence (become victims), then it must simultaneously produce the non-condition in the male, which is not "victimizer," but rather "not victim." Society imbues the normative male with the impossibility of victimhood as powerfully as it imbues the gendered female with the possibility of victimhood.

Among other examples, Rich catalogs (and elaborates) Kathleen Gough's "characteristics of male power" (qtd in

"Compulsory" 233) and many of the characteristics associate to physical dominance: there is the power "to confine," "to cramp," and "to command" (233). At least one of the characteristics specifically denotes penetration: "to force [male sexuality] upon them" (233). Compulsory heterosexuality equates male/masculine with dominance/penetration.

The final characteristic elaborated by Rich is the "'Great Silence' regarding women and particularly lesbian existence" (233). This erasure, which Rich challenges, represents the implied impossibility -- within heterocentricity -- of gendered females to perform sexual acts without a gendered male. Since two females alone would be unable (ostensibly) to penetrate or be penetrated, sex cannot exist. In a sexual interaction between a gendered male and female, then, compulsory heterosexuality provides one possible subject position for the male, masculine/dominant.

One of the assertions incorrectly attributed to Rich was that she equated penetrative sex with rape. She disavows the connection in the Afterward to "Compulsory...," but the relative ease with which penetration connects to sexual violence may be productive in understanding how

sexual violence is constructed. To what extent does sexual violence rely upon an act of penetration -- threatened or actual?

In the same way that lesbian sexual interaction can be said not to exist due to the lack of penetration, the absence of the threat (act) of penetration in a nonconsensual sexual act with a male initiated by a female indicates that there can be no victim in the same way that there was no sex in the former. The idea of a woman raping a man is incoherent within heteronormative gender coding.

The construction of masculinity/femininity, as outlined by Rich, Halperin, and Almaguer, suggests that domination *occurs via penetration*. More importantly, domination -- and its byproduct, masculinity -- cannot be produced without penetration.

Rich aptly observes, with regard to the sexual oppression of women by men, that "[n]ever is it asked whether, under the conditions of male supremacy, the notion of 'consent' has any meaning" (235). Similarly, male supremacy forecloses the possibility of an act of violence (or sexuality) with a female agent in exactly the same manner. Rephrasing just slightly, never is it (can it be) asked whether, under the conditions of male supremacy, the

notion of consent (given by male child to an adult woman) has (can have) any meaning.

The Myth of Affirmative Consent

Consent is a trope in Western democracy. In the trope, individuals freely give or withhold consent, and consent is difficult to subvert and durable. As Jonathan Brody Kramnick suggests, the absence of consent in "modern democracy or sexuality...would be an injustice or a crime, a violation of deeply held ideas of political rights and personal autonomy" (453). If we examine those expectations of rights and autonomy, though, something very different emerges. Kramnick notes that "[b]oth present a root paradox: consent dwells in the mind, and can only be inferred in practice; it is at once elemental to legitimacy and autonomy and beguilingly inaccessible" (453). The social theory that underpins modern democracy addresses this inaccessibility explicitly, though; consent is generally assumed rather than obtained, and silence indicates its presence. For seventeenth century theorist John Locke, a concept as basic as "political legitimacy" rests on the "notion of unspoken and implied consent"

(456). Citizens do not, then, affirm their consent to be governed. The trope appears to be a myth.

Locke writes that "every Man, that hath any Possession, or Enjoyment, of any part of the Dominions of any Government, doth thereby give his *tacit Consent*, and is as far forth obliged to Obedience to the laws of that government" (qtd in Kramnick 456). If one lives in a democratic society, then, one consents to its laws. This foundational principle of democracy -- that silence equals consent -- moves almost seamlessly from the civic to the sexual.

Carole Pateman, in *The Sexual Contract*, argues extensively that the "patriarchal right extends throughout civil society" (4) and thus imbues sexual contracts (such as, but not limited to, marriage) with the same qualities that the social contracts of Locke, Hobbes, and Rousseau do. So individuals consent to sexual relations in exactly the same way -- implicitly. Conversation analyses of rape trials demonstrate that, in fact, women must signal non-consent forcefully or the courts may consider them deficient in their refusal of sex (Kitzinger and Frith, Ehrlich). Looking at sexual abuse cases, discourse analyst Clare MacMartin notes that "the implausibility of a

complaint of sexual abuse is tied to a different aspect of a child's capacity to give consent - not to sexual abuse, but to ongoing and repeated social contact with a familiar, or even familial, accused" (14). Again and again, from the civic to the sexual, courts, contracts, and individuals presume consent; beyond that, importantly, individuals in lower positions of power -- the citizen in the face of the state, women in relation to men, and children with adults - - must perform an extraordinary refusal of consent for it to register with society as such.

Even if we set aside the discursively produced legal notion that children cannot consent, and presume for a moment that they could, consent pre-exists as a condition of civil and sexual life in a democracy. Individuals may withdraw consent, still a differential in socially constructed power (male to female, adult to child) allows the dominant person to reduce or eliminate a subordinate's access to that withdrawal. Children with adults, like all individuals in subordinate positions of power, have limited access to withdrawal of consent, if they have any access.

The Male Victim of Sexual Violence

When I was a child
I caught a fleeting glimpse,
Out of the corner of my eye.
I turned to look but it was gone.
I cannot put my finger on it now,
The child is grown, the dream is gone.

- Roger Waters, *Comfortably Numb*

Rich lays out power differentials as a material condition of life as a woman: "[co]ercion and compulsion are among the conditions in which women have learned to recognize our strength" (228) and suggests that "women are all, in different ways and to different degrees...victims" (237) of female sexual slavery. As I have previously stated, heteronormativity easily inscribes "female victim" -- Rich addresses her call to action against the ease with which it is deployed. There need not be any adjective placed ahead of female victim to know that "victimizer" equals male.

In that foreword, written three years after "Compulsory Heterosexuality," Rich states about her article that "there is nothing about such a critique [of the institution of heterosexuality] that requires us to think

of ourselves as...totally powerless" (228) and that the article was written to "encourage heterosexual feminists to examine heterosexuality...and to change it" (227). According to Rich, power is absent but available to women; the presence of available power for women simultaneously inscribes its available absence for men. The deconstructive twists to find this absence outline its invisibility.

The male victim of sexual violence is produced only when a male victimizes another male, relying upon the heteronormative power of penetration to provide the mechanism by which the nonconsensual receptive male is constructed as a victim. All male victims are subsequently coded "gay." However, the question has to be asked: can there be coercion without a gendered male victimizer?

In this rigid construction of male/masculine female/feminine, nonconsensual female sexual violence seems impossible and is certainly invisible. Male victim exists only when a male dominates (penetrates) another male. Only in being dominated (penetrated) and thus identified with the feminine does the male become a victim. In Rich's notes for "Compulsory Heterosexuality," in which the author offers an extensive bibliography of texts on incest, none

of the titles acknowledges anything but male on female incest. Male victim does not exist.

In order for a male victim of female sexual violence to exist within the construct of a heteronormative society, a passively constructed male would have to exist simultaneously with the production of an active (read "penetrating") gendered female. This "impossible" manifestation of male femininity (and its consequent, male victim of female sexual violence) within heteronormative construction may be instructive for understanding its necessary absence.

The incoherence/absence of the construction "male victim of female sexual violence" does not indicate its actual absence. If anything, the erasure calls into question the disruptive power of such an event. I am left with only with a question: if there exists "a political imperative to use the necessary errors or category mistakes" of "'gay' and 'lesbian'" (Butler 309), does the category mistake of male victim engender a similar imperative?

CHAPTER TWO

OUTLINING THE INVISIBLE

Butler, Anzaldúa, and the Abject Being

Judith Butler's work has considered the theoretical limits of gender, sex, and the material body. In it, Butler uses the idea of "performativity" to denote the discursive nature of gender (and sex) that exists through repetition and reiteration of norms and that, in spite of the materiality of the body, connotes gender and sex as a performance, albeit one whose roles are always already constrained. Butler asserts "that identity is performatively constituted by the very 'expressions' that are said to be its results" (qtd in Jagose 84). Further, she suggests that social construction, far from offering an ability to choose subjectivity, might better be understood in inextricable relation to the "natural," which also must be refigured away from that which "is 'before' intelligibility, in need of the mark, if not the mar, of the social to signify, to be known, to acquire value" (*Bodies* 4-5). Butler states "it would be a mistake to associate 'constructivism' with 'the freedom of a subject to form her/his sexuality as s/he pleases'" (*Psychic* 94).

Discussing representations of gender in another piece, Butler writes that "[t]he 'being' of the subject is no more self-identical than the 'being' of any gender; in fact, coherent gender, achieved through an apparent repetition of the same, produces as its *effect* the illusion of a prior and volitional subject" ("Imitation" 314). Butler tempers this (nearly essentialist) view of construction with the idea that "[t]he denial of the *priority* of the subject, however, is not the denial of the subject (315); still, the subject in question is heavily constrained within the demands of a heteronormative culture.

This frame of reference for the discursive production of identity (sexuality and gender) serves as a significant premise of my project: understanding "the recasting of the matter of bodies as the effect of the dynamic of power" (*Bodies* 2). In other words, bodies cannot choose *not* to be influenced by a heteronormative culture.

Butler also asserts that "'[s]ex' not only functions as a norm, but is part of the regulatory practice that *produces* the bodies it governs" (1). She writes that the "exclusionary matrix" of this normative practice

requires the simultaneous production of...those who are not yet 'subjects,' but who form the

constitutive outside of the domain of the subject. ...[And t]his zone of uninhabitability ... will constitute that site of dreaded identification. In this sense, then, the subject is constituted through the force of exclusion and abjection (3).

Some subjects are formed, then, by exclusion; that exclusion depends, at least in part, upon the "the abiding repudiation of some sexual possibilities" (Butler, *Psychic* 94). The abject being is relegated to the "'unlivable' and 'uninhabitable' zones of social life which are nevertheless densely populated by those who do not enjoy the status of the subject, but whose living under the sign of the 'unlivable' is required to circumscribe the domain of the subject" (*Bodies* 3).

It seems reasonable to ask if these exclusions include the "primary prohibitions" of adult/child sex and incest; if they do, does it matter within compulsory heterosexuality whether the body in question is "subject" (agent) or "subject to" (victim)? In other words, from this perspective, are not both the perpetrator and the victim of an act of sexual violence constituted as Butlerian abject beings?

If the "subject to" position, which might be called "subjection," can be construed as abject, its relation to the source of subjection (culture) is significant. This passage from Butler's *The Psychic Life of Power* examines how power and identity work within the subject:

We are used to thinking of power as what presses on the subject from the outside, as what subordinates, sets underneath, and relegates to a lower order. This is surely a fair description of what power does. But if, following Foucault, we understand power as *forming* the subject as well, as providing the very condition of its existence and the trajectory of its desire, then power is not simply what we oppose but also, in a strong sense, what we depend on for our existence and what we harbor and preserve in the beings we are.

(2)

This sort of psychic attachment to the power that oppresses accounts for both the agency that can relieve the oppression and the always already state of the regulation that forbids it. There exists a duality of sorts, a subject whose agency is in question, whose subjectivity exists and does not. As Butler notes, "[t]he form this power takes is

relentlessly marked by a figure of turning, a turning back upon oneself or even a turning on oneself. This figure operates as part of the explanation of how a subject is produced, and so there is no subject, strictly speaking, that makes this turn" (3). The non-volitional, turning subject, never glimpsing itself, whose gender and sexuality are performatively constituted in the "mime ... already underway" (Butler, "Imitation" 314), is the absent figure, the male victim.

Gloria Anzaldúa's hybrid work *Borderlands/ La Frontera: The New Mestiza* refigures the idea of Borderlands and how the inhabitants of Borderlands are viewed and view themselves. This cross of theory and experience lays out the topography of specific bodies (or even more specifically, Anzaldúa's body) existing in the liminal space of the Mexico/U.S. border. As she describes (embodies) her specific erased, subordinated existence, she (paradoxically) delineates a subjectivity that extends beyond her. This body, her body -- simultaneously between and *within* normatively exclusive subject positions -- has important implications for other bodies whose self (subjectivity) does not cohere with Western cultural heteronormativity. This "borderlands" correlates to

Butler's abject being. Anzaldúa's transgression offers the possibility of existing with and disavowing the abject, as Anzaldúa locates herself within the dissonance.

Anzaldúa distinguishes "borderlands" and "Borderlands." The proper noun (Borderlands) indicates the area of northeast Mexico, ceded to the U.S. in 1848 in the Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo, in which Anzaldúa's *mestiza* consciousness takes root. The common noun (borderlands) indicates the psychological, spiritual, and sexual borderlands that "are not particular to the Southwest" (*Borderlands* 19). As Anzaldúa asserts, "[a] borderland is a vague and undetermined place created by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary" and those who live there are "in short, those who cross over, pass over, or go through the confines of the 'normal.'" These "prohibited and forbidden ... inhabitants" are not simply those who are illegal, they are "the squint-eyed, the perverse, the queer, the troublesome" (25). More than just a place, a borderlands is a social construction; here, identity is formed less by who people are than by who they are not (heterosexual, European, white, etc).

As Anzaldúa theorizes Chicana identity, she explicitly leaves room for other interpretations of borderlands.

Anzaldúa brings into relief the duality between allegiance to and rejection of multiple subject positions. The Foucaultian subject is formed from without and via the self-regulatory practice that is an effect of the social construction; Anzaldúa's subject also stakes out a peculiar reflexive site -- a moment of recognition and dislocation of self. The importance of this Butlerian turn is that Anzaldúa chooses to remain in that state of dislocation, and to explore the inability to reconcile the image and the necessary lack of totality of the "I."

The moment Anzaldúa "claims" any sign, she simultaneously produces that which "remains permanently concealed by the very linguistic act that offers up the promise of a transparent revelation" (Butler, "Imitation" 309). That act of concealment multiplies and overlaps categories of ethnicity, sexuality, and gender. According to Anzaldúa,

The ambivalence from the clash of voices results in mental and emotional states of perplexity ... [c]radled in one culture, sandwiched between two cultures, straddling all three cultures and their value systems, *la mestiza* undergoes a struggle of flesh, a struggle of borders, an inner war. The

coming together of two self-consistent but
habitually incompatible frames of reference
causes *un choque*, a cultural collision.

(*Borderlands* 100)

Anzaldua's cultural *choque* denotes the crash of "habitually incompatible" cultural constructions on (in between) proximate physical spaces and lands, yet she deploys phrases that suggest that, in the same *choque*, identity categories scrape against each other as well (e.g., "clash of voices," "mental and emotional perplexity").

Male victim may not experience the physical, cultural aspect of this *choque*. I contend, however, that a male victim occupies a similarly impossible space. Anzaldua's subject is not a "simple". In this multiple otherness, the body in question both exists within the frame and without, however it is constructed. Similarly, if metaphorically, the ostensibly charmed male butts up against the "habitually incompatible frame of reference," the abject being "male victim." The subject is within and without simultaneously. "The struggle is inner ... our psyches resemble the bordertowns and are populated by the same people" (109). Anzaldua's concept of the problems of identity categories, then, might be said to consist of the

friction, the marks left by the places where the constructed "cubbyholes stuffed respectively with intellect, race, class, vocation, [and] gender" ("To(o)" 267) scrape past one another. Can we break apart normative heterosexuality's cubbyholes, exclusions, and erasures?

Within compulsory heterosexuality, incest and adult/child sexuality are among the primary prohibitions, the excluded sexual possibilities. Butler makes this point about the conditions under which child sexual abuse occurs:

[O]ne reason why debates about the reality of sexual abuse of children tend to mistake the character of the exploitation [is this; i]t is not simply that a sexuality is unilaterally imposed by the adult, nor that a sexuality is unilaterally fantasized by the child, but that the child's love, a love that is necessary for its existence, is exploited and a passionate attachment abused. (Butler, *Psychic* 7-8)

Whether or not Butler refers specifically to female on male sexual abuse, but she certainly acknowledges the abusive nature of any such adult/child interaction. As I have previously shown, sexual abuse is only coherent in the form of male (predator) on female (prey). Compulsory

heterosexuality can produce the active male subject position, but not an active female; and it can produce the subject position of female victim, but the male victim, due to the absence of the coded active female, can be produced only by a male agent. In a case of a female-to-male incestuous or adult/child sex act with an active (predator) female, the dissonance created by the conflicting norms of gender coding and primary prohibitions would be drowned out by the sound of the march to heterosexuality that recasts the act as having been desired by the victim.

The male victim of female sexuality is abject in heteronormative culture. Absent or excluded or incoherent, the experience has no voice. To get any sense of the experience, we must look to other voices speaking about other abject experiences. Kathleen Barry, writing about female sexual slavery, suggests that "[u]ntil we name the practice, give conceptual definition to it, illustrate its life over time and in space, those who are its most obvious victims will also not be able to name it or define their experience" (qtd in Rich 236). Butler also reminds us what it means to be invisible: "[t]o be prohibited explicitly is to occupy a discursive site from which something like a reverse-discourse can be articulated; to be implicitly

prohibited is not even to qualify as an object of prohibition ... It is one thing to be erased from discourse, and yet another to be present within discourse as an abiding falsehood" (Butler, "Imitation" 312).

Compulsory heterosexuality constructs possible identities and codes for gender and sexuality and simultaneously erases, excludes, renders impossible (throws off the possibility of) others. Butler has shown that these identity categories and codes are so pervasive as to provide the conditions under which a subject can be formed. When the gender coding of masculine male -- as "not victim," as the only code for active sexuality active, and as the code for supremacy that contains within it the illegitimacy of disavowing that supremacy -- clashes/coexists with the sexual impossibility of the subject position "male victim of female sexual abuse," mutually exclusive subjects are formed; a body that exists across, between, but contained in neither identities is inscribed.

Anzaldúa may provide "male victim" with an analog to disavow and simultaneously exist within/across the dissonance of abjection and normative heterosexuality.

CHAPTER THREE

DISCURSIVE SUBJECTION IN REPRESENTATIONS OF
FEMALE-ON-MALE CHILDHOOD SEXUAL ABUSE

In films like *All That Jazz* (1979), *Murmur of the Heart* (1971), *Summer of '42* (1971), *Harold and Maude* (1971), and *Tea and Sympathy* (1956), sexual acts between adult woman and minor boys "are seen as healthy gateways to manhood" (Gartner N. Pag.). Discussing his film *Murmur of the Heart*, Louis Malle said, "Maybe it's better to make a film about making love with your mother than dreaming about it all your life" (DeBruge 38). Heteronormative society, reflected in these films, routinely constructs the act of a woman having sex with a boy, even incest, as a rite of passage.

Critical reaction to these films has reinforced the normative value of these representations. Critics from *The New York Times*, *The London Daily Telegraph*, and others have described *Murmur of the Heart* as "delicate" (Kakutani B1) and "poignant" (Monahan 12). Posts at online communities like "The Internet Movie Database" and "NetFlix" participate in the discursively constructed notion that these portrayals are simply coming-of-age stories.

Compulsory Heterosexuality in
Murmur of the Heart

That director Louis Malle's 1971 film *Murmur of the Heart* was (and continues to be) popular and well-received is not in question. The film is generally considered to be a powerful coming-of-age story. It received an Academy Award nomination for best original screenplay and was nominated for the Palme d'Or at the Cannes Film Festival.

If the film represents a coming-of-age, then examining the etymology and usage of "coming-of age" may be productive for the discussion of normative practices. I suggest that the denotation and connotation of the term "coming-of-age" demonstrate its normative qualities.

The term "coming-of-age" denotes the age at which a child legally becomes responsible for his or her actions. The usage of the term out of that literal context creates something different: a new moment or process that it presumes to describe; the usage then imposes that moment onto speculative subjects. It relies upon the denotation to infer that in order to fall within the laws of the culture, everyone *must* "come of age." This is not simple aging, however; this is a cultural (un)marking. Speculative subjects arrive at a point at which they must perform a

ritual set of behaviors, the enactment of which unmarks them and allows them acceptance into the normative culture. Failure to do so must result in the formation of a Butlerian abject being, relegated to that "'unlivable' and 'uninhabitable' zones of social life" (*Bodies* 3). Indeed, as I will suggest, the film demonstrates the demarcation of these livable and unlivable zones and the force that compulsory heterosexuality must exert on speculative subjects to adhere to the norm. Coming-of-age, then, is simply one part of the "work... which the whole of society pursues on each individual through innumerable mechanisms of discipline" (Foucault "Discipline" 1643). And in this film, coming-of-age is represented as the successful completion of the heterosexual act of coitus.

The stakes are high. Achieving heterosexuality serves the normative societal function to "transform the sexual conduct of couples into a concerted economic and political behavior" (Foucault "History" 1653) and this imperative is clear in the upper middle-class family portrayed in the film. The church, school, family structure, and all the various "mechanisms of discipline" will be brought to bear.

In this film, Laurent, the 14-year-old protagonist, does not appear to struggle with who he is; he is

intellectual, sensitive, clumsy, and likes jazz music. Still something is not right. These traits stand in contrast to those of his brothers, who have been expelled from school, drink and carouse and generally perform the part of healthy young male heterosexual. In the absence of the qualities of maleness that his brothers possess, the film asserts a deficiency present in Laurent. He is not adhering to the norm; he must have a problem. His brothers, his father, his school friends, a representative of the church and others attack the problem in a series of events that train him in the norms of male heterosexuality. Ultimately, though, Laurent's failure to successfully perform the heterosexual act of coitus that will constitute him as a male heterosexual requires an intervention by his mother, who rescues Laurent's faltering heterosexuality by sleeping with him. The necessity of the performance of the part of heterosexuality is so important that the mother is willing to violate the taboo of incest to get her son to adhere to the norm.

I will look at a few specific scenes from the film that demonstrate Butler's notion of performativity. The film offers several examples of the "set of acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeal over time to

produce the appearance of...a natural sort of being" (qtd in Jagose 84. That the performances -- and the cultural narratives they invoke (of gender, of sex, of deviance) -- appear so naturally within the film underscores their normative power. The representation of these acts echo societal expectations, which in turn reinforces the representation, and the circle of discursive production is complete.

Early in the film, Laurent's brothers enter his room. The middle brother Marc, dressed in full drag -- hat, heels, necklace and all -- starts to coo mockingly at Laurent. As the brothers close in on Laurent, they undress him and comment that he is "pink and sweet good to eat" (*Murmur*). In a deconstructive way, the blur of the line of gender represented by Marc in drag is an enforcement of that line, while Marc's taunt of Laurent stands in for the derision of the object of imitation -- their mother.

Later in the scene, the boys notice that Laurent has an erection. One could wonder if Laurent's erection means he is attracted to the image of a man in drag, but the boys redirect the homo-erotic display into a comparison of penis size. With this act the brothers are performing a "ritual reiterated under and through constraint, under and through

the force of prohibition" (Butler *Bodies* 95) which in effect reconstitutes the heterosexuality of the scene. Indeed, when the housekeeper enters the room at the end of the scene, the older boys continue their performance, at one point pushing her over and imitating a sexual assault; older woman, for her part, simply laughs. She knows that this performance is intended to produce healthy heterosexuality, which exists peaceful along a continuum with rape, but not with homosexuality. Eve Kosofsky's Sedgwick's radically disrupted homosocial continuum (2433) is in full force here, as the boys' performances cross the ritual (constructed) boundaries of heterosexual/homosexual and normal/deviant in order to show those boundaries and to indicate exactly what is prescribed and what is prohibited.

Representation of the performance of actual homosexual in *Murmur of the Heart* serves only to demonstrate the "threat of ostracism" (Butler 95) present in it. When Laurent is called from class to attend mandatory confession, the boys yell at him to "watch his butt" (*Murmur*) with the priest. In confession, the priest follows the dictum that Foucault outlined: "sex must not be named imprudently, but its aspects, its correlations, and its effects must be pursued down to their slenderest

ramifications" ("History" 1649). He asks Laurent to be very specific about his thoughts and actions, and despite (or because of) the fact that Laurent confesses to masturbating many times, including twice with his brother Marc, the focus remains on the (implied) perversions of the priest. Laurent's behaviors do not yet constitute a performance outside of Butler's domain of the subject.

The priest then stops the confession to talk to Laurent "as a friend, not a confessor" (*Murmur*) and proceeds to warn him of the danger of behaving outside the norm. The priest earnestly tells Laurent that "we are all weak" and that "for those who vow chastity, it's a struggle, believe me" as he touches the boy's shoulder. By the time he cautions Laurent to "think of your future wife" and to "watch out" not to "form habits that" will be "impossible to break" (*Murmur*), we see an example of Foucault's panopticon. The priest has internalized the prohibition against homosexuality. He is now the confessor and his confession is a cautionary one -- do not turn out like me. The priest is speaking as an abject being. He is demonstrating the constitutive outside of the domain of the subject in order to delineate that domain for the young Laurent.

Back in the classroom, one of the boys in the class draws and passes around a particularly graphic note, in which the priest -- misshapen, dressed in collar and cross but nude from the waist down -- fiendishly holds a naked woman by the hair. The equation homosexual equals deviant is complete. The priest is the picture of Foucault's invented homosexual who is "a type of life, a life form, and a morphology, with an indiscreet anatomy and possibly a mysterious physiology" ("History" 1663). That the priest barely reacts to the drawing is another iteration of self-regulation; he recognizes his own "species" (1663).

The culturally normative view of lesbians is also presented in a scene in which two 16 year-old girlfriends are dancing together. Laurent's friend Hubert announces, in a classic proclamation of the heterosexual imperative, that the girls are lesbians. Laurent later asserts the same thing to his mother -- ostensibly because his advances toward one of the girls were rebuffed -- the audience is cued that Laurent has made some progress toward conformity to the patriarchy. He has acquired homophobia.

Still, the boy is not a man. Despite the "proximities" and "insistent observation[,]" the "exchange of discourses, through questions that exhorted admissions, and confidences

that went beyond the questions that were asked" (Foucault "History" 1663), Laurent is angry, frustrated and mean. The film appears to trace the source of Laurent's dismay to a particular moment in the film. Early in the film, Laurent's older brothers drunkenly break into the room where he is in the middle of having sex with a prostitute they have paid for. This concept of the male virgin being constituted into a man by a prostitute is a familiar performance of the introduction to heterosexuality, and it is reverentially portrayed, until the boys barge in and literally pull Laurent off the woman. In a quick cut to the next day, the brothers apologize -- something they will not do throughout the rest of the film, even after other more criminal behavior, such as the theft and sale of family heirlooms or forgery of a priceless work of art. In their behavior with Laurent and the prostitute, the brothers realize that they have a sense that they have interfered with the necessary production of a norm; their interference represents a rupture of the "highly rigid regulatory frame" (Butler qtd. in Jagose 84) that is required for Laurent to come of age.

A remarkable scene at the end of the movie represents what is at stake if Laurent does not come of age and make it to normative heterosexuality. While wearing his mother's

bathrobe, Laurent carefully lays out selected pieces of his mother's clothing on the bed: bra, panties, garter, stockings, dress, and pearls. He dresses in her clothing and in the bathroom mirror, while he applies mascara and makeup, he recites words he overheard his mother and her lover exchange. He repeats them again and again. He seems at ease in this performance, but the absence of his concern is the concern. It is "the departure from the norm, the anomaly...that haunt[s] the school, the court, the asylum or the prison" (Foucault "Discipline" 1641) and it is this that should haunt Laurent, as it haunts the priest. If he repeats this behavior, he becomes the pervert, and constitutes himself as deviant.

Finally, though, Laurent's mother and he go to a Bastille Day celebration. She gets drunk and he escorts her home. She unceremoniously kisses him, then again and again and the scene ends. The absence of the representation of the performance of the sex act is the iteration of its presence, and it asserts the normativity of the performance; it does not even need to be shown. As Foucault observes: "There is no binary division to be made between what one says and what one does not say; we must try to determine the different ways of not saying such things, how

those who can and those who cannot speak of them are distributed, which type of discourse is authorized, or which form of discretion is required in either case" ("History" 1654).

At the beginning of the next scene, the "ways of not saying things" (1654), the distribution of authorized discourses, along with the forms of discretion are outlined to Laurent by his mother. She tells him that they will remember this as a "beautiful and solemn moment that will never happen again" (*Murmur*). There is no need for it to happen again; the performance of the sexual act has constituted his identity as heterosexual. The mother can indeed remember the event "without remorse, tenderly" (*Murmur*); the continuity of the systems of power "make it possible to...legitimize disciplinary power, which thus avoids any element of excess or abuse it may entail" (Foucault "Discipline" 1643). The mother's actions, however abusive, are disciplinary and excused by the exigency of the norm.

The results of the performance become readily apparent. Laurent gets out of the bed, his mother still asleep, and goes off down the hall as the bells ring 4 AM. He knocks on the door of one of the young girls in the same

hotel, and when she opens the door, grabs her and starts to fondle her. When she protests, he simply asks where her friend's room is. The rituals that his brothers performed for him are now available to Laurent. He has internalized the system. He is normal.

When Laurent makes his way back to the room he shares with his mother, his father and brothers are there, eating breakfast. His father seems angry with him; his father has been angry with him the whole film. The father sternly asks Laurent where he has been; Laurent's crumpled clothes and tousled hair tell where he has been. Without a word from Laurent, one by one the entire family breaks into laughter. Everything is all right now that everyone knows Laurent is unmarked; he has come of age.

Malle's statement that "it's better to make a film about making love with your mother than dreaming about it all your life" (DeBruge 38) bears repeating. It should be shocking, however, in its heteronormative context, it is quaint, almost funny. That Malle could confess such a "perversion" attests to the power of the norm of heterosexuality to privilege those who are constituted as its subject. Malle can lay claim to such a position at least in part because of the representation of the

heterosexual norm in the film. He is one of "those who can...speak" (Foucault "History" 1654), and the force of that subjectivity is not easily shaken loose, even by a stated desire to have sex with his mother. That desire simply restates the Freudian norm that it, in turn, supports.

Murmur of the Heart represents the exigent enforcement of the heterosexual norm; the successful performance of heterosexual sex outweighs the taboo of incest. Foucault suggests that "the type of power...brought to bear on the body and sex...had neither the form of law, nor the effects of the taboo" and that "it did not set up a barrier; it provided places of maximum saturation" (1665); if this is true, then Louis Malle's *Murmur of the Heart* is one of those areas of saturation.

Other Perspectives

Critics at the time of the release and since have hailed *Murmur of the Heart*; critical response to the film appears to validate the normative value of the representations in the film and within European and American culture. Critics of the film, when they consider the representation of the act of incest (which many do not), find various ways to interpret the act in socially

acceptable terms. I believe this refiguring occurs, in part, as critics attempt to reconcile the cognitive dissonance between the culturally constructed primary prohibition of incest and the positive representation of Laurent at the end of the film. Additionally, though, critics' reinterpretation enacts the impossibility of the subject position "male victim of female sexual abuse."⁴ Critics do not question the mother's deployment of power over her child; in some cases, authors cite it (in the form of love or caring) as the motive for the act.

Mary Hamer, in her book *Incest: A New Perspective*, suggests that incest enacts an abuse of power not unlike that which occurs in hierarchical structures such as education and religion. She also maintains "scepticism about the use of incest as a bugbear" (53), and suggests that the persistent notion that incest may not always be wrong leads her to question "what is causing the breakdown in love" (3).

While much of Hamer's point of view is consistent with my premise, her consideration of *Murmur of the Heart* falls short in several aspects. First, of the six works she considers, *Murmur of the Heart* alone represents female-on-male incest. Unfortunately, Hamer also offers only *Murmur*

of the *Heart* as an example of a work that successfully defuses the negative aspects associated with incest. She suggests that the movie offers "no place for trauma, or for catastrophic transgression" (52). I contend that the abject being "male victim of female sexual abuse" cannot cohere with catastrophe; if the "subject" does not exist, there is no locus for pain. Finally, Hamer recites the heteronormative line when she suggests that the mother "continues to see her job in terms of protecting the life that is in her son" so that his "wish both for closeness and independence" will not become "a predatory force when it is systematically and repeatedly thwarted, as in the figure of the celibate priest" (53). This version reinforces compulsory heterosexuality's demands that the mother intervene so that Laurent can become a ratified subject.

If Hamer sets out to radically reconsider abuse as an exercise of control and power, here she misses an important opportunity to extend that understanding to include boys. She does not fail to perceive abuse in all contexts; Hamer has no trouble demonstrating the exercise of power present in other, more conventional representations, such as Nabokov's *Lolita*. She claims that "[f]ar from being a story

of love ... *Lolita* tells of a mounting violence" (143) and that although *Lolita* dies in childbirth, "[i]t is as a child she died to herself much earlier" (149). Hamer only struggles to see past the norm of male victimizer/female victim, past the oedipal scenario.

In addition to simply failing to perceive any boy as a victim (or any mother as a victimizer), Hamer may have been influenced by what Philippe Carrard calls the *redondance*³ in the film; Carrard extends Susan Suleiman's view of *redondance* to suggest that Malle creates an "acceptable" incest by controlling aspects of the cultural narratives presented in the film in order to allow only one reading.

Carrard suggests that Malle deploys, among other things, time and location (the act of incest takes place at a spa far from the home on Bastille Day) to control available points of view. By creating an irresistible overwhelming atmosphere of *carnaval*, Malle can reasonably suspend the prohibition of incest.

Carrard marvels at the "almost perfect consensus" that the film "is a masterpiece of taste and sensitivity" (693), and challenges that view without addressing it directly. He suggests that male dominant orthodoxy haunts the film, and that the heteronormative fantasy of older woman-younger boy

sex clouds the likelihood of trauma represented in the film. Carrard does not make any claim about the existence (or lack) of trauma in the film; he focuses on the availability of cultural constructions that makes a "positive" incest plausible.

In an overview of Malle's early films, Hugo Frey dismisses concern for the act of incest in *Murmur of the Heart* by suggesting that the "episode" is simply "ironic" (32), a claim he neither substantiates nor for which I can find much evidence. Many critics gloss the incest in this way; this acknowledges -- through silence -- that further investigation presents a larger problem than the critic cares to undertake.

Perhaps the most telling account of how *Murmur of the Heart* represents compulsory heterosexuality's fantasies comes from a brief interview with Oscar-nominated American film director Wes Anderson. Anderson speaks the cultural narrative that others only suggest:

The stuff between him and the mother feels more kind of romantic almost -- but also taboo and scary in a way, which makes it even more seductive ... You know it's not traumatic -- it

ends up being an expression of how close they are, and how connected they are. (Monahan 12)

To Anderson, sex is "stuff," and the boy that Anderson envisions possesses the independence and strength to understand that -- the boy is just an extension of Anderson. Anderson's fantasy, like Malle's, represents the desire of a man looking backward at childhood, not that of the child in the experience. Anderson's words, like Malle's, have validity because they come from a subject previously constituted outside the domain of the abject. Unfortunately, no one has yet spoken adequately, or so loudly, to the abject being's disjuncture between reality and fantasy.

One theorist disembodies the notion of child abuse so completely that his revisionist assertions almost nullify the concept of abuse. James Kincaid's *Erotic Innocence* asserts that the myth of childhood innocence has infiltrated cultural narratives surrounding child abuse. Loosely following Foucault's assertions about sexuality, Kincaid suggests that a contemporaneous "fabrication of the modern child" (52) essentialized childhood as a "biological category" (53). Imbued with a variety of conflicting qualities, this new entity's negative sexuality -- the

innocent absence of sexuality that invokes sexuality by its absence -- continues to both allure and repel adults. According to Kincaid, this duality of allure and recoil has given rise to narratives of abuse. He deploys the presumption that narratives are, by nature, contingent reconstructions that should not be mistaken for truth.

I doubt that Kincaid intends to trivialize all narratives of abuse, yet he caricatures many of those narratives: narratives of false/recovered/implanted memory; of false accusation; of childhood sexual innocence; including the backlash and counterbacklash. His tone throughout the piece conveys his derision. For example, Kincaid inserts a Gilbert and Sullivan chorus to mock Alan Dershowitz's *The Abuse Excuse* (270); in another passage, he refers to a therapist and patient as Tweedledee and Tweedledum. Mocking the subject of his exploration detracts from the serious intent of his project.

Kincaid asserts that "we [have] eroticiz[ed]...empty innocence" (17) and that this somehow implicates children in the deployment of power over them that the eroticization creates, whether children possess actual innocence or not. He fails to consider that the ready availability of consent (the persistent difficulty of withholding consent) -- along

with exercises of power present in the enactment of abuse - provide the opportunity for abuse more than imagined innocence ever could.

Kincaid ultimately suffers most, though, from a lack of consistency. When it suits his purpose, narratives seem to emerge from a conveyor belt of cultural production; agency is hidden and suspect. Some are "myths-on-wheels that, despite the backlash and vigorous refutation, keep rolling along" (81), others "are simply there, plain and simple" (4). When it suits Kincaid differently, individuals deploy and control cultural narratives; in fact, Kincaid suggests that we "try our hand at a new story-telling" (280) in order to create a new world, in which abuse ostensibly ceases to exist because we no longer tell stories about it. He does not account for how narratives of actual abuse might figure onto this positive outlook. In my view, agency exists somewhere in the middle ground; it deploys more nimbly than a monolith yet resists isolated attempts at change.

Agency

The theoretical and embodied existence of available identities (subject positions) presents a paradox of

agency. Who possesses the agency to radically redistribute control of available identities sifted by race, by gender, by sexual object choice, or by adherence to a norm? The discursive production of norms occurs in such a way that it appears "natural" to most; to others, charmed bodies sinisterly (or at least unconsciously) control the production. Still others note that agency moves within in a movable blend of societal production and individual performance. Whether norms can change quickly or remain relatively constant, the production of those norms is reflected, recreated, and reinforced in the performances of individual within and without identity.

Judith Butler, by reconsidering the body, offers a guide:

None of us can truly answer to the demand to "get over yourself!" The demand to overcome radically the constitutive restraints by which cultural viability is achieved would be its own form of violence. But when that very viability is itself the consequence of a repudiation, a subordination, or an exploitative relation, the negotiation becomes increasingly complex... Doubtlessly crucial is the ability to wield the

signs of subordinated identity in a public domain that constitutes its own homophobic and racist hegemonies through the erasure or domestication of culturally or politically constituted identities. ... [However,] every insistence on identity must at some point lead to a taking stock of the constitutive exclusions that reconsolidate hegemonic power differentials, exclusions that each articulation was forced to make in order to proceed. (*Bodies* 118)

The attempt to bring abject beings into a livable zone requires a reflexive, modulated claim to identity that periodically asks those constructed in that identity to work against its necessarily limiting scope. For bodies constructed at once within, in between, and outside various identity positions, the question may simply be: how do I know who I am?

NOTES

¹ W. Holmes and G. Slap's "Sexual Abuse of Boys: Definition, Prevalence, Correlates, Sequelae, and Management" (*JAMA* 280 [1998]: 1855-1862) offers statistical information about the effects of sexual abuse on boys.

² David Halperin's analogy between food choice and sexual object choice suggests that prohibiting certain practices does not make sense. It may further be interpreted to reinforce the legitimacy of the notion of "child as sexual object choice". His observation is apropos and lacks only a consideration of consent; vegetarians would argue that meat-eating is wrong precisely because it lacks consent.

³ Literally translated, *redondance* means 'redundancy;' Carrard uses it to mean a "surplus of information that compensates for loss due to other points of view and assures the preservation of the message" (695).

⁴ Some of the authors disclaim their position with regard to child abuse: Hamer admits she has no "personal experience of incest or sexual abuse" (2); and Kincaid writes that "this talk of 'stories' does not mean that I regard child molesting as unreal" (3). The authors may be

responding proactively to expected normative emotional response to their theoretical positions; but I suggest that these disclaimers may also represent one of the practical limits of theory: it lacks force when it does not reflect the specific experiences of specific bodies.

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