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A. Loudermilk

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Taking Her Name:
On Queer Male “Woman-Identification” and Feminist Theory

By A. Loudermilkⁱ

For several years I've wanted to return to a naive but earnest essay—about the position of the “woman-identified male” in feminism—that constituted my final project for a Women's Studies course called Philosophical Perspectives of Women. The year was 1989, and I was a sophomore English major, one of two males in the class. This essay, like that one, will bring together the personal and the theoretical, but now, in hindsight and with the horizon still shifting, feminist theory seems as fluid as “the personal,” as the daily lives from out of which theory speaks and to which theory speaks.

This essay challenges my original argument for “woman-identified male” as an identity category. I do not seek to disavow what anyone might claim or name as a lived experience, but to focus, instead, on my own act of claiming and the name I gave my experience. Reading over the original essay, I am surprised that I wasn't more blind-spotted or defensive. What strikes me as the essay's primary essentialism is my consistent deferral to what I perceived as the more authentic experience of the biological female as a culturally-constructed woman.

While everywhere I went, I was assumed to be female, “mistaken” for a woman.

I wasn't *trying* to pass as a woman but when I didn't pass it became an issue of not passing. I wore thrift shop clothes and junk-store jewelry and my long hair bunned, but underneath it all were boxer shorts. I didn't sprout a beard-hair until I was 24, but I never shaved my legs. I carried a satchel, but the compliment was always “I like your purse.” And acquaintances remember my flared pants as long skirts. I *did* draw a fine-line with my finery, my appearance-oriented gender-bending, not as transgender as others assumed. This was before the name “transgendered” emerged, anyway, when the “gay group” on campus was The Gay and Lesbian People's Union (versus today's all-inclusive title Gays, Lesbians, Bisexuals, Transgendered, & Friends). There were *androgynes*, but androgyny—in popular culture—registered as gender-bending not gender-blending. And I felt blurry.

I stopped going to the men's room. Several times as I washed my hands in a public men's room, an entering man gasped, exiting with a blushing “Sorry” only to re-enter, aggressively suspicious after seeing that he had indeed entered the *men's* room, the right room, in which I was clearly wrong. Female friends would say, “Come go with me,” but I was just as wrong (legally in this case) “going” in the women's room—even if I sat down to do it. Misidentified in one room, I as an atypically feminine “intruder” risked male violence. In the other room, mis-identified as a typically violent male intruder, I risked arrest. I was trapped, nervously bladdered, somewhere between the urinal cake and the tampon dispenser. Forever having to pee.

I was looking for a name, for myself or my experience. I considered “perceived woman.” Walking down a given street, I became adept at telling when strangers perceived me as female (normal response—no anxiety about difference) and when they perceived me as male (surprised or threatened reaction, pause of *what?*; realization-revulsion however minimal or polite; or sometimes that transgressing second look). This shifting in *being perceived* translated into a *shifting perception of myself*, shifting every time I was seen or talked to on the phone or read in poetry workshops. Well aware of violence against women, I nonetheless rated rape a possibility should I be assumed female, while bashing rated an inevitability should I be clocked as natively male; and should a rapist assume me female, surely realization of my maleness would incur bashing. This shifting risk as a “perceived woman” and “presumed fag” brought home to me the biding relationship between misogyny and homophobia, but the name “perceived-woman” expressed only resemblance to, not identification with, women.

This return-essay asks the questions: Was I so mistaken to name myself a woman-identified man? What is the “necessary trouble” (as Judith Butler puts it) involved in the construction of such a category? For answers, I will not return to the original essay as much as the term it constructs and the terms and theories that inform that construction: “Woman-identified male” from *woman-identified woman*, *woman-loving woman*, *womanist*, *woman-centered woman*, *gynocentrist*, *woman’s psyche*, *women’s sphere*, “*reading like a woman*,” *feminine writing*, and *lesbian*. Before the theory, however, I want to address the time period of the original essay, how I came to be open to such theory and to claim an identity that is not transsexual yet is based on what I perceived as my identification with women. With this temporal and personal context established, and with the help of ever-evolving feminist theory, the title’s ambiguous implication that a “woman-identified male” is both honoring and appropriating the name of “woman” is taken to task as the category of woman is exploded and “necessary trouble”—this *ongoing negotiation of identity*—suggests itself as the only acceptable essence.

The Importance Of Being (_____)—or: Naming Identity In The 1980’s

By the end of the 1980s, I was just beginning to name myself: psychologically, culturally, spiritually, theoretically. I was, like many young people, in search of a reason: *why I was*. I wanted a reason with a name: *who I was*. Derogatory names and a related threat of violence had me turned against myself by age 14, and state-required county counseling allowed me my first opportunity to find a name for myself with the Minnesota Multi-Phasic Personality Inventory test. I diligently answered the long series of true/false questions, filling in every oval perfectly. How disappointed I was when my counselor patted me on the knee with apology: “The results came back ‘inconclusive’.”

I told her I was hoping for *manic depressive* or something like that.
“Sounds to me,” she said sadly, “like you’re just lonely.”

Lonely in my consciousness preceded the words *outsider* and *individual*, both informed by the counterculture of a nearby university town. Many of my weekends were spent there, where norm-defying punk (cast as a masculine) and new wave (cast as feminine) subcultures were shuffled into the same basement band scene. My teen years witnessed a site of possibility for gender, sexual orientation, class, and race that the conservatism of my all-white hometown occluded. The underground may have been dominated by males, too, but masculinity was not their domain exclusively anymore than femininity was a female domain. Morrissey—the Noel Coward of 80s counterculture—worked a fey claim to celibacy while he crooned the queerest lyrics of the decade. Yet he and gender-bent male icons like Boy George or Pete Burns hardly sparked my identity-fire like Laurie Anderson, Joan Armatrading, Kate Bush, Wendy O. Williams, Grace Jones. It mattered that I identified with these women, not that these women were themselves “woman-identified.”¹

A separately occurring countercultural movement that influenced my identification with women was New Ageism. Combining the occult, Eastern mysticism, and North American commercialism, the New Age movement offered reasons for why I was homosexual, why I was a feminine male, reasons supposedly dimensions beyond patriarchal Christian. “Society tells you, you are a crime against nature, a sin against God,” explains one new age icon who happens to be homosexual, but New Age logic [I am from God = God is within me = I am God] affords him this response: “And then you get to the point when you recognize that you *are* God and *there is nothing wrong with you*.” Talk about empowerment². Unfortunately, New Age metaphysical explanations relating gender and sexual orientation to the soul taint spirituality with homophobia and an elevated gender binary. The classic New Age explanation for homosexuality is derived

from Edgar Cayce's explanation of *karma* in which he uses the example of a French court gossipmonger who, because he cruelly exposed homosexuals, reincarnated as a homosexual himself. But homosexuality can't always be a form of punishment. Shirley MacLaine in *Out on a Limb* (1983) offers this possible and pathologizing reason for homosexuality: "Maybe a soul makes a rocky transition from a female to a male body..., and there's leftover emotional residue and attraction from the previous incarnation" (199). As for why I was born a sissy, Louise P. Hauck suggests that my soul "might have been afraid of the female aspects of self" and chose "a 'macho' father who, in pushing his son to prove his maleness, actually serves as a catalyst for the feminine self, turning the boy away from insensitivity" (48). Distinct from popular culture's androgyny, the New Age spin on the gender binary as yin energy (intuitive, receiving, accepting) and yang energy (powerful, thrusting, active) exalts androgyny as the perfectly desireless state of balance required for a soul to transcend the earthly plane. In our earthbound bodies, though, the soul (like humankind) is split into two gendered "sides" seemingly irreconcilable (MacLaine, *Dancing in the Light*, 269, 350-351, 368.). Down to our "chakras," a system of energy points up and down the body requiring "alignment" for spiritual health, we are divided into masculine (the three higher points on the body relate to the earth plane) and feminine (three lower relate to spirit) (MacLaine, *Going Within*, 185-197).

In its ethereal essentialism, New Age thought allowed me to think of myself as having a disproportionately feminine soul, *a woman's soul*, if not a female body, a theory rooted in Karl Heinrich Ulrich's (1825-1895) description of himself as "a woman's soul trapped in a man's body"; offered by Mae West as an appeal to NYC police to curb beatings of homosexuals ("You're hitting a woman," she told them); and expressed in many transsexual autobiographies of the latter twentieth century³. I never considered myself transsexual, but this perception of my femaleness as a transhistorical energy allowed me to feel a "right" to identify with "woman," to claim the heritage of "woman's struggle," as I must have been female in the *majority* of my past lives to make for such a rocky and residue'd transition to this male body. New Age androgyny as a transcendent state, compared to patriarchy's gender hierarchy as a social ideal, still requires the binary but *perfectly balanced*, a balance so essentially 50/50 it seems equally oppressive: too much femininity is spiritually lopsided, just as it is at the level of the sissy's body, leaving me in essence *not androgynous* because—as ever, as ever—I was not masculine enough.

Finding an identity—finding out who you "really" are, or, for New Agers, who you "were"—obsessed North Americans in the 1980s. The integrity of human experience seemed marked by the degree to which you were an individual, to which you were *your own man*. This pursuit, however, was in constant conflict with anxieties about difference that plagued the last of these Cold War years as much as it did the first of them, especially when it came to *being a man*. Infection as a metaphor for the commie/queer "menace" in the 50s became literal in the 80s when AIDS was a "gay disease," so even though "the 'sensitive New Age guy' poised as a masculine template for the decade," very few revered him. According to Michael Kimmel's *Manhood in America—A Cultural History* (1996), "the manhood regained under Presidents Reagan and Bush was the compulsive masculinity of the schoolyard bully..., a defensive and restive manhood, of men who needed to demonstrate their masculinity at every opportunity" (292). Kimmel examines the media-dubbed "wimp factor" of the 80s, how quiche-eaters like the "New Age Guy" were actually sought out as negative models to attack (292-293). And gays—especially ones marked by gender transitivity—were sought out to bash: gays were seven times more likely to be crime victims than the average American, according to the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force (*Newsweek* 12 March 1990: 22). GenderPAC founder Riki Wilchins told A&E's "Investigative Reports" that gender hate crimes were almost always "up close and personal" which means "when you look at the police autopsy reports you see the same phrase over and over again: multiple stab-wounds to the head, breast, and neck area. They want to

basically make this person go away...” and by extension make go away the whole lot of gender-nonconformists scapegoated more and more in the U.S. Tellingly, the faggots that Axl Rose sang about with such paranoia were paired with immigrants coming into “our country”: “They don’t make sense to me.... they think they’ll do as they please” (*GNR Lies*, 1988).

Galvanized by crises, gay communities pulled their grassroots together and really came into focus in the U.S. “We’re here, We’re Queer”: coming out by saying just who I am: naming myself out and loud: claiming a community as I claim an identity: having parades. In Chicago, the city of parades, a city diverse in its communities, having an ethnic identity is “a critical part of Chicago’s political map and idiom” and “‘ethnicity’ has become a model for gays and lesbians, who now think their community as one like other[s]” (Herrell, 422). Richard Herrell’s semiotic analysis of how the gay pride parades have changed over the years proves that *assimilate-able* is the newest demand on gay identity; gay parades seek to “present the gay community as composed of families, of churches and sports leagues, of clubs and professional associations, of everything about normative society except simply sexual behavior” (427).

Following the example of the women’s movement, self-identity for gays and lesbians in the 1980s further conflated the personal and the political, helping to advance “gay rights” and AIDS research. Christopher Capozzola examines how the Names Project’s AIDS Memorial Quilt participated in the reworking of American identity in the 1980s by “accommodat[ing] multiple identities at the same time that it created a collective one.”

Arriving in the middle of an era of identity-based politics, the AIDS epidemic taught that diseases create identities.... People with AIDS did not exist as a social category that could act in the arenas of interest-group politics before the disease.... Had gay men not already been organized as a political and cultural body around their identities, they would not have been able to mobilize politically and culturally specific responses to a crisis that disproportionately affected them as a group. (102-103)

Identity politics served a vital purpose as political expression, then. But now, by essentializing the meaning of gay or lesbian (in sexed definitions and in more abstract notions like “gay sensibility” and “gaydar”), identity politics are said to reproduce the very marginality that gay oppression attempts to enforce (Fuss 1989; D’Emilio, 2003).

In 1989, in the Women’s Studies course for which I originally addressed the subject of “woman-identification,” theories that constructed “woman” as “born woman” and/or women’s culture as defined by “female energy” were in a tense relationship with the theories that invited—and effectively complicated—my so-called identification with women, theories to which I will now turn.

Milk Signatures—or: Conceptualizing “Lesbian”

The term “woman-identified” goes back to “The Woman-Identified Woman,” a paper written in 1970 by a group named the “Radicalesbians” who

hoped to find a common ground within feminism for all women by providing a theoretical counter to accepted understanding of lesbianism.... Thus the radical feminist focus on sex and sex roles was joined with the issue of “sexual preference” to produce a common base for lesbians and heterosexual women.... The conclusion...is that the basic structure of control over women is that of sexuality, and in particular the requirement of heterosexuality. (Phelan, 40-41)

In the Philosophical Perspectives of Women class, one of the first essays we read, “To See and Be Seen—The Politics of Reality” (1983) by Marilyn Frye, changed my life, though it seemed to have nothing to do with my life. I was not a lesbian, but in asking the question “What is a lesbian?”, Frye’s epiphany that *there is no lesbian* in “phallographic reality” [= “reality” constructed and maintained by patriarchy] reflected my own failed attempt to find myself there. Given the dictionary’s tendency to cater to stereotype or reduce “lesbian” to either genital-contact or “female versions” of gay men, and given the socio-political and historical invisibility of lesbians, Frye’s epiphany is accessible for any reader. She also points out that there is no opposite word for misogyny, no word in the English language that means “woman-loving” (81). This question of “What is a ‘woman-loving’ woman?” asked at the same time as the question “What is a lesbian?” opened for me a closed vision. If woman-loving or woman-identifying can be philosophized as a “reorientation of attention in a kind of ontological conversion,” as “the event of becoming a lesbian,” then even I could come out of the closet as a lesbian? But to name myself “lesbian” seemed cheeky, an easy appropriation of a word only an elite few might hear as metaphor for woman-identified experience. I did recognize, nonetheless, ways of appreciating my identity *at once* as a “perceived woman” in my body and a woman-perceiver, or “woman-seer” as Frye puts it, in my values.

The “gynocentric” movement within feminism spoke profoundly to me because it brought androgyny down to earth, releasing me from the idea that my gendered soul need achieve perfect balance to “transcend.” On earth, where we live, gynocentrism roots women’s oppression not in being or having to be “feminine” but “as the devaluation and repression of women’s experience by a masculine culture...[and, in fact,] argues for the *superiority* of the values embodied in traditionally female experience” (Young, 73) [my emphasis]. Here we go, I thought, but still, what right did I have to claim a name like gynocentrist? Alice Walker helped induce gynocentrism by naming her prose “womanist prose,” introducing *In Search of Our Mothers’ Gardens* (1976) with a two-tier definition laid out dictionary-style on the page following Walker’s dedication to her daughter. The first tier defines womanist as “a feminist of color,” and on the second tier “womanist” is: “a woman who loves women, sexually and/or nonsexually. Appreciates and prefers women’s culture, women’s emotional flexibility..., and women’s strength” (xi). I found it interesting that the racialized definition resisted outright gender specificity (even if the 70s assumption was that there “were no male feminists” to include), while the universal definition specifies first word that a womanist is “a woman.” Did Walker mean woman as a biological female, or woman as a cultural experience whose values are informed but not strictly defined by biology? I presumed she meant the former and I resented it. I preferred and supported women’s culture. I marched to Take Back the Night when, in the 80s, the connection between rapist and basher was loudly unacknowledged. And then I felt guilty, afraid I was “typically with penis” by centering my concerns for half a minute. Looking at it another way: Wasn’t I, in this apologetic deference to biological females as more “authentically” or “credibly” feminist, acting more like a “typical woman”?

I was confused a lot, yes. Just as my perception of my gendered-self shifted continually walking down any given street, when reading feminist theory my perception of my gendered-self vacillated between *not forgetting that I was biologically male* (having “less claim” to feminism) and *liberating myself from biological destiny* (through feminism, especially its meta-categorical use of “lesbian” as a figurative term for a woman-oriented consciousness).

In the women’s studies classroom, I had to ask myself: was I reading like the women I sat with? I was reading feminist philosophy, but was I reading it like a woman? Jonathan Culler exposes as a divided request that women should read so because “it appeals to the condition of being a woman as if it were a given and simultaneously urges this condition be created or achieved” (49). Few women may actually read as women, until recently anyway, either

“identifying against herself” and reading as a “man” (in order to assimilate into patriarchal academia, for example) or just *not* reading as a “woman” (alienated from their own interests as a social group and not recognizing the “specific defenses and distortions of male readings”) (49-54). So reading like a woman is a paradoxical act, even for a woman, for whom “to read as a woman is not to repeat an identity or an experience that is *given* but to *play a role she constructs* with reference to her identity as a woman, which is also a construct, so that the series can continue: a woman reading as a woman reading as a woman” (64) [my emphasis]. Perhaps I was a male-bodied homosexual reading as a feminine man reading as a perceived woman reading as a woman-identified person? Rachel Blau Duplessis might have granted me a pink guitar. Helene Cixous might have allowed that I too write in “white ink,” a gynocentric manifestation—central in political/cultural debate in 1970s France—which she refers to as *écriture féminine* [“feminine writing” = writing like a woman].

Cixous may at one point assert that feminine writing involves

- a) woman writing through her socially/culturally censored body
[a body that I can’t write through even if perceived as having one], and
- b) woman writing woman, and man writing man
[the former which I learned from, and the latter which I, as an “effeminate” man, neither accessed nor knew how to accomplish],

but she does later concede to a “decipherable libidinal femininity” which can be read in writing produced by a male or a female (qtd. Conley, 129). As Showalter⁴ elucidates, feminine writing is a style, it is *how* you write: non-linear and open-ended, carrying not containing, multiple in tongue: “writing (in) the in-between...not fixed...but infinitely dynamized by an incessant process of exchange from one subject to another” (Cixous, 353). It is not reduced to signature, not *who* is writing, not merely the sex of the author. Cixous’ *écriture féminine* reflects what Sherry Ortner calls woman’s psyche—not innate to females but accounted for by the socialization experience they nearly universally share, that I shared, too, whether I was supposed to or not. This “psychic mode seemingly typical of women...tends to disregard categories and to seek ‘communion’...directly and personally with others” (37). Cixous herself refuses to subject feminine writing to category, closure, or code. When she says she writes as a woman toward women, she is “speaking of woman in her inevitable struggle against conventional man” (347), which was my ongoing struggle then as now (though I’d struggle, too, with the difference between “conventional man” and “conventional masculinity”).

Adrienne Rich, in her 1976 essay “It Is the Lesbian In Us,” believes

it is the lesbian in every woman who is compelled by female energy, who gravitates toward strong women, who seeks a literature that will express that energy and strength. It is the lesbian in us who drives us to feel imaginatively. (143)

Rich was first to untether the term “lesbian” from its marginalized and too-literal bed, making it available—as a consciousness, as an “orientation of attention,” as a political affiliation—for all women, for all.... I still can’t say it:

I am (not) a lesbian.

Her classic essay “Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence,” written in 1980 with addendums in 1982 and 1986, is a perfect example of the resistance to closure Cixous respects as feminine writing. Rich’s concept of a *lesbian continuum* “includes a range—through each woman’s life and throughout history—of woman-identified experience” (237). By woman-

identified experience Rich means “a source of energy, a potential springhead of female power, curtailed and contained under the institution of heterosexuality” (245). Would she have said “feminine power,” I could have felt included, if only indirectly, for my apparent femininity was indeed curtailed (punished) and contained (by fear and shame), too, under the patrolling eye of patriarchy. By using “female,” Rich risks what Iris Young claims that gynocentrism risks: essentialism via the retention of dichotomous terms (88). Furthermore, reference to female “energy” smacks of that New Age spin on essentialism discussed earlier.

Julia Kristeva believes that feminism should not fight for “woman”—not the “female” nor the “lesbian”—but against fixed identity and the sexed body (see Oliver, 97-99). Kristeva posits “feminine” as *both* the experience of female bodies *and* the cultural experience of aspects of language and behavior Western culture has devalued and repressed (see Young, 85). But “feminine” is still limited. I could have said “I am ‘feminine-identified,’” but I know many feminine women and men who are far from feminist. Furthermore, if I were strictly “feminine-identified,” how could I claim influence by figures like Patti Smith (70s rock-poet messiah who had only male rebels to model herself after), Grace Jones (one of the women who “scared men most,” according to a *Men’s Health* poll), Wendy O. Williams (pacifist vegetarian metal-punker), and Polly Styrene (screaming the anthem “Oh Bondage Up Yours!”) who set the stage for Bikini Kill and L7 (politically-charged lesbian “riot grrrls”) in the 1990s? Gynocentrism’s exaltation of the feminine as superior to the masculine displaces women who appear and/or behave in apparently masculine ways yet claim to be feminist in values, to be woman-loving, woman-identified, or lesbian in the woman-identified sense of the word as well as in the “butch” sense of the word. Not until Judith Halberstam’s 1998 book *Female Masculinity* did a theorist seriously attempt to detach misogyny from maleness and social power from masculinity⁵. The above-mentioned icons taught me that I could swagger—be aggressive, angry, and loud (all “masculine” traits)—with a feminist conscience, reorienting patriarchy’s masculinity.

At the time of Rich’s essay, the male-dominated “gay rights movement” mostly begrudged lesbians a space, so why should Rich have included gay men in her feminist theory? Regardless of this general truth, many female-born feminists in the 1970s-80s may have guarded too defensively their conviction that “their experience as women is a source of [feminist] authority” (Culler, 46). Janice Raymond in 1979 refused to applaud either androgynous men or transsexually constructed lesbian-feminists who “lure women into believing that they are truly one of us—this time not only one in behavior but one in spirit and conviction” (100). The place for transsexuals to deal with their problems, she concludes, is among transsexuals themselves (116). Lesbian feminist Shane Phelan asks too the “nagging question among feminists: ‘But what about men?’ The answer can now be given straightforwardly: Men must take care of themselves. The priority for women, the truly revolutionary call of feminism, must be the union of women” (45). Except obliquely, Cixous excuses herself from having to address traditional *or* exceptional males: “It’s up to him to say where his masculinity and femininity are at,” she explains, later calling this man’s “other history.” “This will concern us once men have opened their eyes” (348, 353). All these years later, reading this, I shift here in my chair: “once men have opened their eyes”: she can’t be talking about me?

The Commute—or: “Well Then, I’ll Come To You”

An essay that spoke directly to my daily “shifting” experience as an undergraduate addressed the conscious “traveling” from one identity-defined context to another. I became a “willful ‘world’-traveler,” according to philosopher Mary Lugones, who thinks the flexibility needed for this “traveling” is more readily acquired by outsiders who continually shift from a mainstream construction of self to other, more “at-home” constructions (275). Let me explain why this pertains by telling you about my first job.

Employed by a state agency in Southern Illinois, I provided “in-home assistance” to elderly, mostly female clients like my own grandmothers: white, working-to-middle class, rural and religious, whose fortitude deferred as a rule to a generally bigoted male authority. Many of these women simultaneously contradicted and reinforced the gender hierarchy, and for five years as an undergraduate I cleaned and cooked in their kitchens and vacuumed their widowed or “spinstered” rooms. Daily I “traveled”—well, commuted— between the feminist “world” of the women’s studies classroom and the traditional “world” of these women’s homes and communities in which their ideologies often opposed feminism outright. I admit my homosexuality and feminism were closeted in their world, reducing what there was for them to accept to a quirkily-dressed sissy good with a dust rag, but in that shared space I came to see complexity in their faith-driven domestic-centeredness. They were connected to a power that fluctuates between an oppressing Old Testament God (wrathful, to be feared like The Great Depression) and a sacrificing New Testament God (who values mother, beckons children, reunites loved ones in a mansion in the sky). Coming to this appreciation required that I “see with her eyes,” “go into her world,” as Lugones describes the concept of “world”-traveling, that

I see both of us as we are constructed in her world, that I witness her own sense of herself from within that world. Only through this traveling to her “world” could I identify with her because only then could I cease to ignore her and to be excluded and separate from her. (280)

Mary Lugones’ 1987 essay “Playfulness, ‘World’-Traveling, and Loving Perception” helped to liberate me, as an outsider, from the dread of not *belonging* (as in, to one place). Her primary example of “world”-traveling involves her mother—whom she had always seen as passive and victimized. When she comes to see how she and her mother are constructed *in her mother’s world*, only then does she feel she can really see and love her mother. The essay idealizes its own theory, alas, by evading the issue of what we might call reciprocated travel. Lugones may conclude, “We are fully dependent on each other for the possibility of being understood and without this understanding we are not intelligible, we do not make sense, we are not solid, integrated; we are lacking” (280), but I haven’t the understanding that Lugones’ mother has “traveled” to *her daughter’s world*, seen mother and daughter constructed in daughter’s world. Maybe it is so, but it cannot always be so, as with my elderly clients.

Of course they could not travel to my world, really, due to miles *and* the cultural distance to the college town where I was *out*, where “Melissa the Mohawk Girl” wore rosaries and combat boots, where god in the classroom loses capitalization. And of my own mother: knowing I am homosexual, she must live in her world in a closet as the mother of a homosexual. She’s in the closet more than I am. That she cannot “travel” to my world does not mean she doesn’t love me, but it might mean she can’t risk identifying with me, can’t risk seeing my world too closely lest she lose sight of my father’s world—where she lives and I only used to live. And as much as she wants to brag on my writing she cannot brag too loudly lest someone in the family seek out publications like this one.

Having, Desiring, and Lacking—or: Sissies Against Freud

I tend to come away discussions about Freudian theory feeling somehow complicit in the construction of a false given: a “family” defined by the presence of (or the absence of) a heteronormatively gendered mother and father⁶. Even what’s called “Feminist Mothering Theory” negates the possibility of a healthy or genuine male identification with mothers. If I bring up Freudian theory now it is to point out its inadequacies as a way to think about gender, sexual orientation, and identity.

I prefer Judith Butler's description of gender as a "performance that *produces* the illusion of an inner sex or essence or psychic gender core" ("Imitation," 317) because she stresses the production (an ongoing process) rather than the illusion achieved. Experts in 1975 called that illusion one's "core gender identity" and declared it "locked tight" by eighteen months (Money, 91). In 1987, they linked unequivocally "sissy boy syndrome" and homosexual orientation: "Barbies at five. Sleeps with men at twenty-five."⁷ Of the relationship between sex-typed behavior and homosexual orientation in men, Zucker & Bailey in 1993 noted that "homosexual individuals recall substantially more childhood cross-sex-typed behavior" (55), but analogous studies for women remain to be done and "within-orientation variation in sex-typed behavior" has yet to be explained. Ken Zucker, current head of the Child and Adolescent Gender Identity Clinic in Toronto, believes in a treatment for boys with Gender Identity Disorder (GID) that encourages acceptance of birth sex and disallows "feminine play."

Resistance to this kind of thinking and treatment is becoming less uncommon. Most recently, K.K. Wilson challenges the "disparate" classifications of gender and sexual orientation in American psychiatry and criticizes GID as problematic in that—for one example—boys are inexplicably held to a much stricter standard of conformity than girls (www.priory.com/psych/disparat.htm); boys, too, are more likely than girls to be referred for psychiatric help in the first place (Frable, 141). Richard Ashmore, back in 1990, defined gender identity with more sensitivity to its complexity: "the structured set of gendered personal identities that results when the individual takes the social construction of gender and the biological 'facts' of sex and incorporates them into an overall concept" (512; see Frable, 144). To pull the rug out from under gender's feet, some critics demand we call into question the social norms of masculinity and femininity themselves (Raymond, 77), that, for example, studies reveal fathers as more concerned with sex-typing than mothers (75) and that a child's cross-sex-typed behavior could be the *cause* rather than the *consequence* of father-distance (Langlois & Downs, 1980; see Zucker & Bradley, 46). The most current psychoanalytic theory still fails to allow for

the possibility that a feminine boy could have his own feminine identity. Rather he is seen as subsumed within his mother's identity. There has been no effort to entertain the ways in which a boy may identify with his mother distinct from a regressive lack of separation.... There is no consideration of the possibility that a mother's and son's subjectivities may afford greater closeness and empathy. (Corbett, 129)

Nancy Chodorow's "Feminist Mothering" spin on Freud (*The Reproduction of Mothering*, 1978) and Adrienne Rich's engagement with Chodorow (in "Compulsory Heterosexuality") present theories in which male identification with mothers is, at best, unsustainable. Isaac D. Balbus, in "Masculinity and the (M)Other" (2002), explains the consistent flaw in Chodorow's theory as an assumption that all mothers and girls experience themselves as the *same* (discouraging separation) whereas boys separate with greater ease from mothers "both because of the *internal pull* toward separation that results from the boy's experience of an opposition between his gender and hers and because this internal pull will be complimented by an *external push* toward separation that results from her experience of him as a 'male opposite'" (221). Balbus challenges the claim that "mothers necessarily treat their little boys in a way that is fundamentally different from the way they treat their little girls" (222), responding to Chodorow's "gender determinism" by pointing out, first off, how she "ignores differences in the quality of parenting practice under the prevailing mother-dominated structure of child-rearing" (212). To take Balbus's challenge a step further, we should explore how differences in parents' individual gender experiences inform parenting practice. Mothering

theory makes no allowance for the varying “success” with which females (mothers) succeed—physically and behaviorally—at being women (maternal); nor does it deem possible the maternal father. Furthermore, variation in children’s “success” at gender-appropriateness remains largely unacknowledged: of children who do “succeed” at appropriate gender display, these theories fail to consider how inconsistently absorbed are the terms of that display.

Private practitioner Ken Corbett, in his 1999 essay “Homosexual Boyhood: Notes on Girlyboys,” chooses to add “girlyboy” to the queer nomenclature because the inherently contradictory name grants gender—rather than denies it—possible forms within homosexuality that unsettle and/or transcend the gender binary. A keenly defined but open-ended category, “girlyboys” do not deny our penises, do not believe we are girls, nor do we want to grow up to be females, exactly, but we are aware of identifying with our mothers more than most boys; neither do we feel ourselves to *be* boys, exactly, at least as defined by fathers and male peers (121, 126). Of one such “girlyboy” client, worried obsessively that getting an erection in the boys’ locker room will “make him a girl,” Corbett’s epiphany (akin to Frye’s about the lesbian) is that in our two-gendered culture this client may have no way of perceiving himself—his body *versus* his identity—as both a male-desiring *and* female-identifying boy. “Having, desiring, and lacking contribute to a unique gender experience” (125), Corbett concludes. And this doesn’t touch on how commonly sexual abuse, physical and verbal, complicates a girlyboy’s already complicated sense of self and other.

It’s not that I made a choice, really, to resist male identification and prefer interaction with females; we’re born into a world that genders us before we know it. As I started to “know” I failed to conform; over time I resisted conforming. Over time: always shifting between—or experiencing at once—failure and resistance, unconscious identification and conscious identification. How do you measure that? Psycho-barometrically? As the distance between Venus and Mars? The combined volume of a classroom, a mosh pit, and a kitchen?

Where Women Are—or: Where the Men Aren’t

If an individual’s identity depends on recognizing how others are different, then shared space might diminish the gender difference between a mother and son assumed to push and pull them apart. “The girlyboy’s domain” is the kitchen, according to Corbett, described as a “domestic vision” wherein the “girlyboy” identifies with women. The isolated and in its way independent sphere of “the kitchen,” as a distinctly feminine space inside the man’s house, makes for women a life of duality: as women with men in the dominant culture, and as women “in the kitchen” with other women and away from men (a “cultur-ette” so to speak). Recalling her childhood, bell hooks honors “a deeper intimacy in the kitchen on Saturdays when hair is pressed...a time without men. It is a time when we work as women to meet each other’s needs, to make each other feel good inside” (221). Male children among this tableau seem almost unnatural, but we are there—sometimes doing the hair ourselves. One of my best friends was a Pentecostal sissy whose hands were in constant demand in his childhood home; how ambidextrously he piled into a sort of cursive his mothers’ and sisters’ never-cut hair. Eventually he was excommunicated.

Remember that margarine commercial with the tag-line, “It’s not nice to fool Mother Nature”? How nature’s wrath (thunder) and a lady’s propriety (being “nice”) came together in a single female icon: all related to the butter dish in your refrigerator. A “woman-defined sphere” may well be carved from margarine: alluding to the natural while reinforcing domestication. In this section, I will look at the theoretical construction of this sphere in which I identified with women, and, in the next section, I will examine class assumptions about this sphere and the identification assumed to go on therein.

Cixous calls the feminine sphere “the realm of the gift,” described by feminist critic Toril Moi as full of milk and honey, “a deconstructive space of pleasure and orgasmic interchange with the other” (113), and from this space *écriture féminine* is born. In 1972, Edward Ardener—proposing that “women constitute a muted group, the boundaries of whose culture and reality overlap, but are *not wholly contained* by the dominant (male) group”—calls that *uncontained* sphere a “wild zone.” He considers this zone *spatially* (as a place forbidden to men), *experientially* (as aspects of female life disregarded or unexperienced by men), and *metaphysically* (claiming there is no corresponding “zone” for males whose consciousness belongs to the dominant structure totally) (see Showalter, 199). “Wild” seems the wrong word, though, and Sherry Ortner’s “Is Female to Male as Nature Is to Culture?” (1996) in title alone points out an essentialism in the alignment of woman with the wild. Anyway, we’ve all heard that “the frontier is no place for a woman”; it’s a literary commonplace, asserts Dawn Lander, outright contradicting Ardener’s “wild” metaphor. Actually, as Culler explains, “the myth of women’s hatred of the frontier [is] an attempt by men to make the frontier an escape from everything women represent to them” (45).

That all-female spaces are indeed “woman-defined” is mythical. Even privacy—trademark of female space—is a compromise of “everything women as women have never been allowed to be or have” and “everything women have been equated with and defined in terms of *men’s* ability to have” (McKinnon, 656; see Sedgwick, 110). Female-dominated spaces are often patriarchally-maintained in the absence of males, as in conservative girls’ schools or nunneries (Rich, 182) and in factories where women doing piece-work rarely form alliances. One would *have* to speak metaphysically to think of a space not contained by patriarchy; and would a traditionally-experienced woman’s “psyche” be that liminal space, mightn’t it be contained by *metaphysical* walls? Phoebe Snow sings that her world is composed of “ceilings, floors, and hallways...my seasons and my days.”

Virginia Woolf, quite critical of “walls,” sings the tune her own way: concluding chapter one of *A Room of One’s Own* (1929), she equates “locked in” with the safety and prosperity of men, and “locked out” with the poverty and insecurity of women. This makes sense in that those inside are sheltered and those outside are exposed to the elements thus vulnerable. If it were that simple, though, the vulnerable would have adapted to “wild” life centuries ago and the two gendered spheres of existence—as we see it in the West—might be in very different proportions. But there is no such bucolic realm for women. The world for most women is not the hills alive with the sound of music, no matter what the first scene tells you. Their world is mostly inside after all. Not inside like men are inside, but inside inside. Where warmth (security) often feels like heat (claustrophobia) and the wallpaper fades yellowly like an unwritten page. Of ceilings, floors and hallways, of women’s seasons and days, Woolf says:

Women have sat indoors all these millions of years so that by this time the very walls are permeated by their creative force, which has, indeed, so overcharged the capacity of bricks and mortar that it must need harness itself to pens and brushes and business and politics. (91)

Marilyn Frye describes women’s lives as “background” to phallographic reality’s foreground (90-91), while Simone de Beauvoir’s starkly metaphorizes their lives as “imprisonment.” That I might be identifying with women as prisoners, as confined, interests me as one-time closet-case. Tennessee Williams claims that his ability to create believable female characters is due to his sense of his own psyche as inhabited by “a little congregation of panicky ladies, and/or tramps. Why panicky?” he asks. “Because they are confined there” (145). So shared understanding of confinement could be the key to woman-identification, but, as much

I've sweated claustrophobically from being trapped in place, I know at times I have envied the security of having "a place." My mother, as a woman whose femininity ceased to matter in the glue-fumes of a windowless shoe factory, she dreamed of being a middle-class housewife, of that *pretty* version of confinement. Would she have been this traditional wife in our home, according to Beauvoir, she might have been "deprived there of activity, los[ing] herself in things and becom[ing] dependent on them" (see Young, 78). Losing herself to pretty things.

"Pretty Things"—or: Risk in the Kitchen

"He just loved pretty things," said one girlyboy's mother (Corbett, 130). "I was always in the kitchen with the women," said another (128). Corbett says this "in-the-kitchen-with-the-women sentiment embodies a stereotype of protogay boys" (128), extending the kitchen—as if all kitchens were pretty—to include what Ken Zucker discourages: "feminine play" (doll play, dress up, etc.). My issue with the term "feminine play" is twofold: 1) the term sums down play to a feminine essence, and 2) that feminine essence is a middle-class construction.

For kids, play is an ongoing experiment with physicality, a general truth of which adults lose sight. I liked to clop around in my grandma's shoes, and swing a towel like long hair, sure, but I also remember being obsessed with casts, crutches, and wheelchairs; the latter, however, did not cause my parents to worry about the possibility of my someday becoming handicapped. This is not to claim that physicality is sole compelling factor behind what is called "feminine play," but that by the time play is deemed "feminine" the more generally physical aspect of play is eclipsed. Judy Attfield's semiotic analysis of the designs of Barbie and Action Man provides another way to think about doll play and the child's imagination in relation to physicality and gender identity. Careful not to conclude that design dictates play,⁸ Attfield points out how "fashion dolls" like Barbie feature only elemental joints for dressing and posing while "action figures" like Action Man are designed to act physically, adding an anatomically incorrect joint to the biceps for maximum flexibility (85-86). Instead of disallowing "feminine play," Zucker et al. might do better to examine dolls as gendered objects shaping a child's understanding of femininity *through* play. And as for baby-dolls being outlawed, "mother blamers" will always be in business if boys are raised to avoid being maternal.

Even if we accept the play and the sphere as "feminine," the girlyboy's body is not merely dolled up or accessorized: it is the site of a delighted-in masquerade that neither claims femaleness nor disowns maleness. In "de-feminizing" a boy, femininity is often reduced to a petty vanity ("prettiness") not necessarily inherent to his displays. He may suffer more from their projection than they believe he suffers from identity disorder and the tragedy may well be that the "girlyboy" does not develop beyond surface-fixations equated with *stereotypical* femininity. He may "lose himself," as Beauvoir warns many women do, to signification by "pretty things."

And here I stumble onto the second half of the false given. I've already touched on the truth that female-dominated spaces are often patriarchally-maintained in the absence of males, but in exploring the "women's sphere" and the girlyboy's "domestic vision," it becomes evident that both are specifically middle-class constructions. My logic slips—almost helplessly—into the assumption that all girlyboys have access to the class of femininity or bourgeois culture that invites or allows him to "lose himself" to "pretty things." This is not realistic and Corbett does remind us, though not in reference to class, to think of femininity as a contested realm of human experience (117). The "women's sphere" theories assume a woman at home, therein sacred or lovely, in a way lower and working-class women are far less often "at home." In the most practical way, spatially, opportunity for a separate "sphere" is greatly diminished in a trailer, for instance, where kitchen, dining room, and living room are generally one room. My childhood home was kept-up but not lovely, in spirit or décor, really, and factory-work had dinged the prettiness my mother boasted in old photos. She says of my childhood years that she was so tired

all the time that she “doesn’t remember much”; that tiredness left her in rare moods for clothes shopping and dressing up. Her reason for not going to church was never having anything nice to wear. So I cannot claim that I as a “girlyboy” was identifying with my mother by dressing up as she never dressed up. What if a girlyboy’s over-worked mother cannot achieve, afford, or identify with the femininity to which girlyboys seem to “aspire”? If femininity as a middle-class ideal is not maintainable for many lower and working class women, then are lower and working class girlyboys fixated on appearance to be double-shamed?

This makes me wonder if the mothers and mother-figures with whom “girlyboys” identify most are as appropriately feminine as their boys are inappropriately so? Or is it possible that the majority of case studies on which “sissy” theories are based are from classes who can afford such therapy? The “Annual Review of Psychology” (1997), emphasizes that current gender identity research excludes racial and ethnic minorities and those who are not middle class, and sexual identity research focuses on white middle-class gay men and lesbians (Frable, 155).

I claimed the kitchen my safety zone, but this was precariously so, never quite the “girlyboy domain” of which Corbett speaks, nor the “domestic vision” I would like to remember. The more apparent my comfort in this women’s room, the more conspicuous I was, not always to the women present but the working-class men passing through. My presence in “the kitchen” unfortunately jeopardized its independence, for the corruption of my masculinity could be blamed on that sphere, thereby requiring the interference of patriarchal forces. Should that sphere be evaluated by men, then whatever “women’s culture” there was in my family stood to lose its unacknowledged status as a system beyond men (if not beyond patriarchal ideology). My father would never have sought the advice of a therapist, but had he in the 1970s or 1980s, he would have been told: “You’ve got to keep these mothers out of the way. Feminine [boys] don’t need their mothers around” (Green, 275).

So-called feminine spheres outside the home were shaky too, when I could get into them. Boys then did not take “home-ec” or typing, boys did not play flute, boys did not read “Teen Beat.” I remember how hurt I was in 7th grade when my best friend called me to say she couldn’t talk to me anymore, meaning at school where we shared a girly sphere in the notes we passed, and where boys in targeting me isolated her. “You’re just too faggy,” she said. Another best friend across the street could have girl friends over when her parents were away but not me; as non-threatening as I was, to enter her house, with her there alone, would get her grounded. My alternating comfort-within and compromise-of feminine “spheres” buoyed and crashed me time and time again throughout childhood and adolescence, dosing me with a suspiciousness of females as allies that properly exploded my essentializing of females as allies. Imagine hanging out one night in the wrong parking lot: you’re the high school fag: imagine you run to your friend sitting in her car with her boyfriend and he won’t let you in. “Sorry,” she says.

Inconclusion—or: “Necessary Trouble”

Have I really been identifying with “woman,” or instead what Cixous calls the “false woman”? There is popular drag number that always gets a crowd chanting: “I’ve got the power! I’ve got the power!”, ringing like an empowerment song. Only the umpteenth time witnessing the number did I hear past the remix-redundant chorus to the female voice singing that she has the power...to love her man. The “false woman” is not pretending to be a woman but is *falsely pro-woman*. *Pro* or *anti*, speaking of “woman” at all opens one up for Monique Wittig’s criticism that “One Is Not Born a Woman” (1983), that we should

thoroughly dissociate ‘women’ (the class within which we fight) and ‘woman,’ the myth. For ‘woman’ does not exist for us: it is only an imaginary formation,

while 'women' is the product of social relationships. 'Woman' is not each one of us, but the political and ideological formation which negates 'women.' 'Woman' is there to confuse us, to hide the reality of women. (107)

Maybe I should have called myself a "women-identifying man" instead? But "women" as much as "woman" cannot be defined to please everyone. Already apparent is it that girlyboys do not necessarily identify with "women" but more narrowly with conforming middle-class women⁹. Even transsexually-constructed lesbian feminists, in claiming a place among women (not that all do), are denied peer status, accused of "violating women's bodies by taking on the artifactual female organs for himself" (Raymond, 118). "Transgender" is a compelling term, made a cause with *Boys Don't Cry* (2000), but it seems attached at the categorical hip with "transsexual" and both as identity categories have somehow come to stand less for transcendence than transformation, often pushing appearance-marked essences. Androgyny may be "the new sexual ideal," "tantamount to sexual ambiguity, a redistribution of power and, above all, freedom" (Gaudoin, 116), but Kate Bornstein isn't satisfied: "Androgyny is as rigid an assumption as a bipolar gender system. In fact, androgyny assumes bipolar, it assumes a scale along two poles" (Barnes, 52).

"Gender outlaws" like Bornstein and poststructuralists like Kristeva want to dismiss "female" outright by way of abolishing binarized sex-category, allowing for limitless genders¹⁰. Referring to the gender system as a class system is a way some critics rethink gender: some "masculinities," for example, achieve greater social power than others. If identification need not be gender-based at all, I might have been identifying with the disempowered or muted: women as marginalized "others." Am I a self-perceived "other" identifying with the most immediate "other" in my environment? This seems just as riddled with presumption, saddling otherness with the primary characteristic of disempowerment and reducing a whole identity to who I am *not*. Anyway, some traditional femininities do achieve power: for example, the "Lady" over the servant.

Bornstein may be onto something, though, with her qualified definition of the transsexual as "anyone whose performance of gender calls into question the construct of gender itself" (42), a concept akin to *queerness*. "Queer," which "loosely connotes sexualities and genderings without pinpointing single and stable, specific, homo/hetero sexualities and genderings" (Morrison, 11; qtd. Slagle, 86) has come to the forefront of identity politics through embrace of a collective identity not based on unitary identity. Guerilla activists Queer Nation transcend essentialism by emphasizing members as "similar because they are different" (87), allowing for not only the "unfixing" of gender and sex identities, but class-based, ethnic, and national identities too.

Maybe I'm.... No.... Nevermind.

After all this naming and renaming, I remain *inconclusive*.

Appropriately so.

Kristeva advises we "steer between stable identities/positions" (Oliver, 107). Simone de Beauvoir, all those years ago, anticipated this debate when she suggested we provide ourselves coherent identity without finalization or closure (Vintges, 139). Particularly useful to critic Toril Moi is Beauvoir's concept of the body as a situation, and of "lived experience, [which,] she would say, is an open-ended, ongoing interaction between the subject and the world, where each term continuously constructs the other" (56). Moi reminds us that post-structuralists specifically and feminists in general are missing out when overlooking Beauvoir, who "never forgets that one of the many possible answers to the question 'What is a woman?' is 'a human being'" (8).

How many times in the 1980s—a “gender freak” on the street, a-strut or full-sneak—did I hear that publicly-announced question: “What in the hell is that?” I internalized that question, asked God, asked psychoanalysis, asked gay culture, asked feminism for an answer, a name. But as soon as I re-formulated this question I was caught up again in a patriarchal pursuit: for the crown of the “real me”: that titled myth with the mononuclear name.

Endnotes

1. Actually, Kate Bush in 1978 claimed to identify more with male musicians. Female rock pioneers like Bush, Chrissie Hynde of the Pretenders, Patti Smith, and Joan Armatrading “were venturing into uncharted territory, and pretty much the only models available to them were male. To make an impression at all, they had to imitate male rebels and define themselves against the ‘limitations’ of femininity” (Reynolds and Price, 236). These artists were far from anti-female, but feminine equaled sweet and lyrical, a restriction according to Bush who wanted to write songs that intrude and interrogate (240-241). Avant-garde storyteller Laurie Anderson often distorted her voice into an electronic androgyny, and Grace Jones sang that she felt like a woman and looked like a man (a demolition man!), naming her postmodern cabaret *One Man Show* “punning on both her androgynous looks and on the fact that there was no single, no real, Grace Jones” (292). See *The Sex Revolts: Gender, Rebellion and Rock’n’Roll* by Simon Reynolds and Joy Press (1995). These ideas will surface at various points throughout the essay.
2. I am quoting dolphin-spirit channeler Neville Rowe in Tom Corboy’s trickily satiric documentary about the New Age movement *The New Believers* (1990). Both Rowe and a dubious healer named Master Ho dwell intensely on childhoods brutalized by hyper-masculine fathers and school bullies; regardless of the legitimacy of their New Age careers, their telling of personal empowerment is poignant.
3. In “Narrating Ourselves: Duped or Duplicitous?” (1997), Karen Nakuma critiques a primary theme in transsexual narratives: transsexuals as “women trapped in men’s bodies.” In “attempting to stand outside the sex/gender system, they are still defined by it” (84), Nakuma explains, and, as well, the narratives reinforce “the notion that transsexual women are handmaidens to the medical community” (75).
4. As for “reading like a woman”: Elaine Showalter, though I did not read her until much later, might have suggested I was reading as a feminist (CC, 126).
5. In the essay “The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly: Men, Women, and Masculinity” (2002), Halberstam says that masculinity need not be read “as the powerful and active *alternative* to female passivity and as the expression therefore of white male subjectivities” (345) [my emphasis].
6. Another false given: with heterosexuality as the norm and homosexuality the fixated-on anomaly, bisexuality is rendered more or less invisible.
7. Robert Stoller and Richard Green, classic “mother-blammers,” were considered pioneers. In the 1970s, Green became the principal analyst for the UCLA Feminine Boys Project. His “landmark work” *The ‘Sissy Boy Syndrome’ and the Development of Homosexuality* (1987) equated childhood cross-gender expression with pre-homosexual orientation. It was on *Dateline* that he quipped, “Barbies at five. Sleeps with men at twenty-five.”
8. Attfield: “There is enough evidence to suggest that much could be learnt were we to study how children subvert the ready-made meanings inserted into toys by manufacturers” (86).
9. Like 1980s feminism was accused of not speaking for all “women” but for middle-class white women.
10. Though Bornstein—a male-to-female transsexual—disdains androgyny for the binary it supports by its position in the middle, some critics wonder if sexual reassignment in and of itself can be interpreted as so complicit. One reviewer of *Gender Outlaw* asks, then, “If the problem of

gender identity lies in its social construction, why is the problem even addressed through ‘penile inversion,’ vaginoplasty, estrogen and progesterone?’ (McCann, 21). The question takes us back to endnote 3, and then back to 1979, to the sound but unfortunately harsh Janice Raymond who, like the more fair-minded Toril Moi, thinks we’re “strait-jacketed” by the sex/gender binary. Raymond argues that transsexuals are “uniquely restricted by patriarchy’s definitions of masculinity and femininity” thus “body-bound by them” (70) and accuses the medical-psychiatric establishment of reinforcing sex-role stereotypes by “transforming transsexual bodies into the desired sex and instructing them in the rudiments of cultural femininity and masculinity” (74). To me, the transformation of bodies rings with possibility, but the assimilative gender-training to which those bodies are submitted reeks of hypocrisy.

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ⁱ Dedicated to Bonnie Heidingger, Shirlene Holmes, Elyse Pineau, Joan Hawkins, and Susan Gubar.