COMING TOGETHER, COMING APART
IDENTITY, COMMUNITY AND POLITICAL STRUGGLE

by

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This work seeks to understand the effects on political practice of identity conceptualized as marginality, as innocent, and as stable. We need to consider the repercussions of this identity formulation in and for political practice.

I have addressed these issues through interviews with women active in a progressive political group, where conflict arose. I spoke with them to comprehend the conflict, which had to do with identity: its boundaries; who determines its contents; and how identity is represented. I asked how each woman came to her identity and how she understood the conflict.

Based on my research, I have come to believe we must allow for fluidity in our identities, to avoid becoming threatened when definitions change. We must understand how we are dominant and marginalized. We must develop theoretical frameworks that account for how power is enabling and limiting. We must make these shifts for greatest political effectiveness.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Out of a desire to mix theory and politics and cultural production, I have been determined throughout this process that graduate school would not be the centre of my universe. I would therefore like to thank the people who make up the rest of my world. First, I would like to thank the five women I interviewed, who were willing to go through it all again, and who trusted me with their thoughts and beliefs. It goes without saying that this project would not have been without your participation. If I have not told it right, I hope this work will at least encourage you to think about our predicament so we might do it differently anon.

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Preface: Comings & Goings

I began this project as if on a dare. I've often been called stubborn, and surely what follows is proof of that inclination: to undertake a task despite glaring signs that it will be difficult if not impossible. However, if this is what characterizes my specific thesis, it can also be said to describe the act of researching and writing any thesis. While I do believe that I could have chosen a study that was less obviously messy, in the course of reading poststructuralist, postcolonial, feminist and queer theories I have come to suspect that there is no such thing as a tidy thesis, indeed that there can be no easy, clean production of knowledge. And so I call into question not only whether I could have chosen this investigation (did it not choose, make me?), but also whether it is possible for there to be anything other than partial conclusions arising from this endeavour. Which brings me to my first disclaimer: During the course of this document, I will attempt to unsettle the notion of the autonomous, liberal individual. But in order to write this thesis, I have had to suspend my disbelief in the existence of a coherent subject. Therefore, I will be defeating myself at every turn, composing a challenge to the notion of authorship, and in so doing, implicitly positioning myself as an autonomous subject who is the source of original thought.

In the late winter of 1994, the dozen or so members of a group called Jewish Feminist Action (JFA)1 were engrossed in organizing an event to commemorate

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1The name of the group, as well as all the names of those involved and interviewed by me have been changed. For a number of reasons, this anonymity feels artificial: my own membership in this group allows anyone who knows me, and indeed anyone familiar with grassroots, progressive politics in Toronto, to recognize the group in question, and from there to surmise who's who in the cast of characters. This decoding might have been rendered more difficult if I had changed the identity of the group (swapping Muslim for Jewish, or socialist for feminist), but these identities are precisely not interchangeable. What happened in JFA was historically and culturally specific. I could no more have changed the central identities of the group than I could have claimed these incidents took place in the 1950s.
Jewish resistance during the Holocaust. From a pamphlet produced for International Women's Day in 1994, here is a brief description of the group's mandate:

Jewish Feminist Action (JFA) came together in November 1992, to join the fight against fascism at a time when fascist and racist organizing was escalating in Toronto and globally. Fascism is manifested in many ways. We feel that as Jewish feminist activists our experiences of anti-Semitism, and also sexism, homophobia, classism, ableism, and so on, help provide us with a complex analysis of the structure and operations of the oppression. The far right has made many gains; consider the number of recently established white-supremacist groups and the increase of 'above ground' anti-Semitic race-hate literature as well as fascist violence. The extreme right has also gained legitimacy in mainstream electoral politics across North America, as well as internationally. Symptomatic of the rise of the neo-right are the renewed vicious campaigns against immigrants, refugees, gays, lesbians, people of colour, women and people with disabilities.

Although the Holocaust memorial event would take place in the name of the whole group, the bulk of planning, telephoning and arranging had fallen on a smaller number of people who were meeting regularly outside of JFA's biweekly meetings. One of the tasks of the subcommittee was writing and designing a pamphlet that would function as both a programme for the commemoration, and as background information on JFA. Fanny, who was on the subcommittee, took on the job of compiling the pamphlet's text from various other JFA documents, and then also doing the layout, because she had familiarity with desktop publishing and a computer that could run the necessary software. The finished draft of the pamphlet was then brought to a subcommittee meeting for approval. It is at that point that trouble arose. Not coincidentally, it is also there in the story that accounts begin to differ. For one reason

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2 On the subject of how using text from one of our pamphlets might destroy anonymity: anyone who possesses one of these documents, or who recognizes the text, could identify the group even without citations from our material. Further, members have written articles for local publications and spoken publicly (on television, on panels) about various JFA matters, sometimes referring to the same series of events that I describe. JFA was never a secret organization, nor was membership hidden - we met in a public place. However, when we spoke publicly, we often used only a first name. This was to protect us from harassment by the extreme right, never to conceal ourselves from other progressive people. I find it highly unlikely that anyone from the far-right would bother to read my thesis, but if they do, they have no way of knowing who's who in this thesis, beyond what they might already know from having infiltrated events we held. I was involved in writing the International Women's Day pamphlet.

3 The committee was made up of six people. Of those six people, I have interviewed Alex, Cara, and Danni. Fanny is another member of the committee who will be mentioned.
or another, Gayle, Fanny's partner was at the meeting, though she was not on the subcommittee. As the meeting was wrapping up, there was some discussion of the programme's text, at which point Gayle commented that bisexual oppression wasn't mentioned in a list of oppressions in one section. Again, although accounts differ, Alex remembers commenting that

...it wasn't just an issue of adding in a word, it was going to be something that might require some discussion, and that I thought it should be something that was discussed. There was a really major reaction leveled towards me, at which time I was called biphobic, and yelled at.

And then the situation went from bad to worse. What followed was our own personal sex wars, only this time, it was the bisexuality war. Fast forward three months.

Having spent weeks embroiled in tense meetings and involved rehashings of all that was said, I initially felt oversaturated with the subject and eager to put the

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4Some of the people I interviewed remember that Gayle was there to meet Fanny, others recall that she was dropping off draft of the pamphlet that Fanny had forgotten at home.

5There are two specific places in the pamphlet where this omission was felt to be glaring. Both are in the last section. "Carrying Our Memories Forward." The two sites are lists, one of people "considered 'other' and being targeted" by "right wing violence and white supremacist groups," and the second a list of different forms of oppression faced by members of JFA. In the first instance, those targeted read as "Jews, lesbians, gays, people with disabilities, First Nations people, people of colour, immigrants, refugees, and psychiatric survivors," and in the latter case, the text stated that "as Jewish feminist activists who have experienced anti-Semitism as well as sexism, heterosexism, lesbian oppression, classism, ableism and ageism, we are committed to fighting oppression in its many forms."

6Transcript of Alex's interview. All further quotations of Alex, Bayla, Cara, Danni or Emma will be excerpted from recorded interviews I conducted.

7The "sex wars" refers to political and theoretical debates on pornography and censorship that came to a head around the content of papers and workshops that were to be part of the Scholar and Feminist IX Conference, "Towards a Politics of Sexuality," which took place at Barnard College in 1982. Carole S. Vance (1992), editor of Pleasure and Danger: Exploring Female Sexuality, the collected papers from that conference, says "for many feminists on the East coast, the Barnard conference signaled the beginning of the 'sex wars,' the impassioned, contentious, and, to many, disturbing debates, discussions, conferences, and arguments about sexuality that continued unabated until at least 1986" (xxii). Vance goes on to describe the terms of the debate. I quote at length here because both the issues, and the dualistic stance of defining sides are relevant for this thesis: "The common conceptualization that the sex debate had two 'sides,' dichotomized by opposing positions (pro- or anti-pornography, or pro- or anti-sex, for example) is erroneous, a fallout of the phantom conference effect. In many respects, the two factions were far from equivalent, and efforts to portray them as mirror images of each other did considerable damage to the discussion. At the simplest level, anti-pornography feminists had a clear name, which was self-chosen, and a purpose which could be succinctly summarized: to eliminate pornography. Their critics had a different objective - to initiate a more expansive agenda on sexuality - which was not so easily labeled or expressed in slogans. Were they pro-pornography feminists, as their enemies charged? Hardly. Although they rejected anti-pornography analysis as exaggerated and dangerous, they agreed that pornography was often sexist" (xxii-xxiii). There are a number of parallels that can be drawn between the two sides in the sex wars and in the bisexuality wars, as well as there are similar cautions about overemphasizing the existence of two discrete sides in either debate.
whole mess behind me. Before long, however, I found myself wondering about what had happened and why. In some respects, this thesis has its genesis in entirely selfish motives: I began this project out of a desire to make sense of an unpleasant experience that I didn't entirely understand. I thought that by unraveling the many threads of the dispute, I could figure out a way to avoid a recurrence.

Though I will go into the details of the dispute in chapter 4, suffice it to say for now that at the time, it was apparent to me (and others) that we were arguing over categories and definitions (what is their function - should they be preserved or exploded), and who has the power to name an identity (is it an individual decision, or is group consensus relevant). Nevertheless, though at the time I could make out the contours of the debate, I was puzzled by the intensity of reaction on the part of nearly everyone involved, and by the seeming impossibility of resolving the issue. As I grew chronologically and emotionally removed from all that had gone on, I found myself becoming increasingly invested theoretically in what had been played out. It seemed the more I talked with people about it, the more I came to view the incident as not unusual, but emblematic of a common theme in various progressive bodies. And the more I situated JFA's problems within a larger political context, the more I noticed a synchronicity between the issues and the reading I was doing in some of my courses. It began to dawn on me that those questions I had been plagued with in my studies - what is identity all about, how do we come to name ourselves in certain ways, why is claiming an identity sometimes both so fraught and so powerful - could be seen surfacing throughout the JFA dispute. Indeed, by way of investigating the dynamics at work in JFA, I might find a practical application for my theoretical inquiries.

By the fall of 1994, just a few months after the zenith of debate, and while we were still attempting to stumble through regular JFA meetings, I was still only circling

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8 The most current examples that came to mind then were the conflicts at Nellie's, at the National Action Committee on the Status of Women, and at CKLN Community Radio Station. In all three cases, there were internal conflicts between women from different racial or sexual locations.
around what had happened, tentatively making connections to larger issues. According to a statement of intent I wrote for the Qualitative Research course I was taking in September of that year.

The dilemma I encounter when I am required to provide some accounting of my principle interests and the area of my research (and, strangely enough, this is often a demand in graduate school!) is that I am relatively certain of my methodological concerns, but I have not yet determined an appropriate site for the simultaneous unraveling and tightening of my theories....Recognizing that to some extent any inquiry is a study of the self, I turn to a community of which I am a member: the lesbian community (though it is by no means homogenous or unitary). Conveniently, this is anyway (and not coincidentally) where I want to focus my attention. Particularly, I am interested in lesbian constructions of self, in how we reinterpret our pasts through the lens of present understandings of our sexuality, and how we then move towards the forging of group identities, which permit us a political presence. From there, how do we accomplish organizing across differences, this question that has caused so much pain and splintering of communities. And yet, I want to approach all of this without reformulating an identity politics... (emphasis added)

Though elsewhere in this statement I allude to an interest in other related questions (the female body as a site of cultural production, how recollections of the past are inflected by current identity), the central concerns of my current project are scattered through the text: 1)"I am interested in lesbian constructions of the self"; 2)"how (do) we then move towards the forging of group identities, which permit us a political presence"; 3)"how do we accomplish organizing across differences, this question that has caused so much pain and splintering of communities."

And then one day I found myself deciding that I would make my thesis a discussion of these JFA events. Seemingly without warning, I started declaring that I would immerse myself in the very tangle from which I thought I wanted greatest distance. Distance from the JFA discussions seemed wise, given how close they had come to getting nasty. It had taken much effort just to put a lid on the subject, and now I was planning to take the lid right off, not just in a room by myself with my computer and books, but with the very people who had been key players. Yet the more I mulled it over with people, the more I knew it was the right decision. By then I had of course
inflated the importance of my undertaking: I was no longer doing this just to settle my own mind, but to help countless other groups solve their disputes.

The task of this thesis then is to untangle the complexities of the JFA dispute, always keeping strategy in mind. To get to that strategy, first I have to understand what discourses were in operation in JFA. One of my starting points, for it would seem that I have many, is to clarify the relationship between identity and political struggle. My desire is to understand how it is that identity can paradoxically be both a catalyst for, and an impediment to political struggle. In order to undertake this inquiry, I need a working definition of identity, as it is understood and formulated by numerous theorists, and by the five JFA members I have interviewed. It will also be incumbent on me to problematize whatever notion(s) of identity I formulate. From there I will consider whether there's an inherent flaw in certain North American, late twentieth-century identity formulations that renders identity ultimately incompatible with collectivity, and with political struggle. What are the specific qualities of identity that make it both useful and deleterious for political struggle? This investigation of necessity implicates a small handful of fundamental tenets of Western thought, about the autonomous subject, knowledge, experience, the function of categories, the workings of power. Finally, I return to strategy, in a discussion of how identity might otherwise be formulated to ensure more effective political struggle.

The structure of my thesis is not unlike that of a film. The scene starts with a wide angle colour shot of a room. Cut to a close-up of a woman's face. She speaks, telling us her story. Her head turns, and we follow her gaze to an object on the table. We zoom in on the object, an inscribed book, and the scene dissolves to a black and white sequence, where she remembers being given the book by a former lover. The scene dissolves, and we return to the present, but now we are following the woman as she walks down a path. I have attempted to edit together many pieces, some that involve close attention to few details, and some that require a broad sweeping glance
over an entire landscape. I hope that this movement in and out, from one woman's account of why she joined JFA, to a discussion of the differences between postmodernism and poststructuralism, to strategies for political struggle, will not lose you along the way. In chapter one, I provide you with an outline of my theoretical framework, and explain what I mean by 'unsettling theories.' In chapter two I discuss my methodological approach in the interviews and in this knowledge production. In chapter three, I first provide an account of JFA's short life - why and how it came together, and what it did. Then I introduce you to Alex, Bayla, Cara, Danni and Emma, and to how they identify, all the while interweaving theoretical positions on those identities with their personal narratives. The chapter focuses on the question of identity, as marginality, as self-knowledge, as innocence through a consideration of how each of the women I interviewed, as well as I, came to and negotiated her most contested identity. In chapter four I am in the thick of the bisexuality wars. I lay out the evolution of the debate, and discuss the themes that recurred in the course of my interviews. These include the idea of JFA as family; questioning the usefulness of categories; how power operates; and negotiating difference, sameness and community. I then theorize some of the debates, as well as trying to deconstruct concepts like the subject, identity and knowledge. This analysis is in service of my starting motivation - how identity might otherwise be formulated - to which I return in the final chapter. There I consider the alternatives, for JFA, and for other political organizations. I also suggest ways in which the five women I interviewed employed some of the strategies I am advocating.
Cast of Characters

**Alex** had a fairly traditional upbringing. She grew up in a small Canadian town with an even smaller Jewish population (only one synagogue, an Orthodox one, though she was brought up Conservative and is now Reconstructionist), so felt isolated and like an outsider. As a child, she was the only Jew in her class. Both her parents are Jewish. She believes that Jewish identity should not be narrowly defined. She identifies as a lesbian/separatist, an identity she came to in graduate school, where she was studying in a professional field. Before she came out as a lesbian, she says she was "lesbophobic." At college, she felt drawn to feminism and began to be more political. Alex sees need for and value in identity politics and coalitions. She has been fairly demonized, both in feminist organizations, and particularly at work, for her identity as a lesbian separatist. At the time of the interviews, she was on leave from her job in the public sector. Alex was at the first meeting of JFA. As a member of the committee organizing the memorial event, it was she who raised the question about whether biphobia belonged on the pamphlet. She argued during subsequent discussions that lesbians can't discriminate against bisexual women, and that bisexual women have heterosexual privilege. She feels strongly that lesbian-separatism is not accorded enough respect, and disagrees with people who dismiss it as passé.

**Bayla** grew up in a large Canadian city, in a reconstituted family. Her mother was Jewish and her father is not. She was brought up in a left-wing, academic, atheist family. Bayla spent time in Israel as an adolescent, but continues to feel some ambivalence about her identity as a Jew. She had a fair amount of previous exposure to feminist groups in the 1980s, at college. It was during that time that she began to get sexually involved with women, but has only recently started identifying as bisexual, which feels powerful to her though also ambivalent. Then, she believed in and practiced identity politics, though she critiques it now. She sought out JFA for a
community of Jewish women, more than for political activism. Having only joined JFA a couple of months before the conflict, she says she always felt like an outsider there. Though her analysis of identity and power differs significantly from Emma’s and Alex’s, she was the one bisexual woman who positioned herself as sympathetic to them during discussion. At the time of the interview, she was finishing up graduate work in Toronto, living with a man, and had just given birth. She suggests we think about groups organized around interest rather than around identity - though she still feels a pull towards identity-based work - for pleasure.

**Cara** had an upbringing that was religious and zionist. The Reform Judaism of her parents, both of whom are Jewish, was the root of her politics, especially the combined concepts of particularism and universalism. She describes that her Jewishness is not built primarily on experiences of antisemitism, which she thinks was rare in JFA. Cara grew up middle-class in a small city in the north-central US, and went to a nearby university, where she became involved in feminist organizing. She became involved in JFA early on, after having gone to meetings of other Jewish groups and not found her needs met. She too was on the committee charged with organizing the memorial event. Her understanding of power is that it is complex and context-specific. She is critical of identity politics and believes that in some instances, being oppressed becomes the central identity. Cara has been sexually involved with a woman for some time, but still calls herself bisexual in some circles. Her sense is that lesbians would like her to call herself a lesbian for their own comfort. At the time of the interview, she was pregnant, working as a therapist and finishing graduate school in Toronto.

**Danni** grew up in a middle-class 'professional' liberal Jewish family in a large Canadian city. She had a religious upbringing, and describes always having had a positive sense of her Jewishness. She went to university and then to Israel. Danni says she came late to politics, through feminist literary criticism in graduate school. Identity politics were in full swing when she became familiar with feminist organizing, and she is now...
critical of identity politics because she believes the politics get lost in favour of identity. The first JFA meeting was held at her house, and she was also on the committee that was organizing the memorial event. She doesn't see categories as fixed, though during the conflict she identified as bisexual. Danni is cynical of the possibility for change, because of her understanding of power dynamics. She disagrees with the use of a hierarchy of oppression. As well, she thinks we made a mistake trying to create community that resembles family. At the time of the interview, she was still living with her husband, though they were in the process of separating, and she was beginning to be more inclined to identify as a lesbian. Danni works as a consultant in the public sector.

**Emma** grew up in a large Canadian city with her father, who is Jewish but converted to Jehovah's Witness before her birth, and her stepmother. Both of her parents, as well as her biological mother, are deaf, and Emma often had to act as their interpreter. As a result, she says she grew up very much an outsider. She was also expected to look after her siblings, all of whom are boys. This was expected of her as a girl. She went to university in her hometown and then worked before moving to Toronto with her girlfriend. She came late to Jewishness, and sometimes struggles with calling herself a Jew. She identifies as a lesbian and as an anarchist, though she feels this second identity didn't always fit with JFA - because there were too many lawyers in the group. Emma was the person who started talking about organizing a women's antifascist group, and she passed around a sign-up sheet at a Rosh Hashanah party in 1992. To her, JFA was a place to be all identities at once, which is what made conflict and dissolution of the group so painful. She says as a result many women now feel homeless. She characterizes the debate as split between lesbians and bisexuals, and thinks the term biphobia is mostly used against gays and lesbians, that bisexuals are really subject to homophobia/heterosexism. Her notion of identity categories is that
they are fairly fixed for political reasons. At the time of the interview, Emma was not living in Toronto, and was working on finishing graduate work.

**Fanny** was the member of the committee who designed and wrote much of the contentious pamphlet. She identifies as lesbian, but was in favour of opening up categories. She moved away a few months after the initial conflict, while we were still negotiating how to return to 'normal.'

**Gayle** is Fanny's lover. She identifies as bisexual, and was the person who raised the question of why bisexuality was not mentioned in the pamphlet. She moved away with Fanny.

**Jack** was Danni's partner at the time of the conflict.

**Kim** is Cara's partner, and they have a child together.
Chapter One: Definitions and Defeat

Everything begins with, and is already, a reproduction: meaning is always already reconstituted by deferral and delay (Makaryk:161).

This thesis is a document of time and place. The events as they transpired, and the resulting outcomes are specific to a late twentieth-century,1 large urban setting. What I describe in these pages would have looked different a decade ago in Toronto, and is happening otherwise in Vancouver or Chicago or Johannesburg at this moment. Even in this city now, a group comprised of people with divergent ethnic and social backgrounds from those of Jewish Feminist Action (JFA) members would have produced a story that might be as dissimilar as it is like this one.

What further complicates this account is that it is ultimately my story that I am telling. This is relevant in two senses. In telling this story, I am telling of myself. As Toni Morrison has realized, "the subject of the dream is the dreamer" (17). My presence in this thesis is multiple: I was one of the actors in JFA, and so will relate my version of what occurred; I am making sense of what transpired, in an exercise that constitutes me as a knowing subject. The relevance of my position, as both researcher and subject, will be addressed in chapter 2, on the subject of methodology. The second significance of "my story" is that I am relaying these events from my point of view. Anyone else in JFA might have told this story, and her telling could have focused on any number of details of this one event in the history of JFA, thus altering the contours (and content) of the narration and yielding an alternative outcome. The frame for my sense-making is poststructuralist, postcolonial, queer and feminist theories, what I will sometimes refer to as 'unsettling theories'. Without attempting some awkward

1It could be considered a failing of my work that all of the works cited in this thesis were published in the last two decades, in Canada, the United States, France or England. I prefer to think that this detail is further proof of the situated, specific character of my work.

2I find this term useful, because it conveys what I consider the critical aspect that is common to all these various theories. They serve to unsettle, to disrupt, to problematize a whole range of concepts and beliefs upon which rest much of North American culture. These are concepts and beliefs related to truth, knowledge, history, the subject, nature, sexuality, and on and on. I also appreciate the double meaning of
(and artificial) divide between form and content, it is relevant to consider that the questions I have asked, the issues I have concentrated on, and the answers I have attempted to arrive at are produced by my conceptual framework. For example, though I discuss the significance of class in the lives of the women I interviewed, my approach has not been to use economic theories to account for the JFA events. As I have previously mentioned, in the winter of 1994 I was already immersed in reading and applying the above constellation of theories in my graduate studies. 'Unsettling theories' are thus a dialogic force in this thesis: the sense I made of JFA arguments was shaped by an already existent theoretical lens, and so it is not surprising or coincidental that it is in these same theories where my questions are most often addressed. Therefore, to introduce you to the subject of my thesis, I will briefly discuss where and how I position these theories, and in so doing, make reference to a few pivotal concepts of unsettling theories.

Before I delve into the substance of the matter, let me step back for a moment and try to contextualize these theories and their importance. I would argue that the reason there is such conflict about unsettling theories is precisely what makes them so critical. They represent a tremendous shift, a rethinking that does not just involve a few minor adjustments here and there, but a thorough and ground-shaking reconceptualizing of principles which have been the basis of much twentieth century western thought. To demonstrate the kind of shift I am referring to, I will give you an example that is directly relevant to this thesis. Joshua Gamson, a sociologist at Yale, has written a paper entitled "Must Identity Movements Self-Destruct? A Queer Dilemma." In this article, he uses "internal debates from lesbian and gay politics" to focus on "a key dilemma in contemporary identity politics" and to follow the implications of said dilemma "for social movement theory and research." As you will this term, which suggests that I am unsettling theories while I am citing them as evidence. I must acknowledge the influence of the book Unsettling Relations: The University as a Site of Feminist Struggle on my choice of this term.
soon see, my work is a near replica of his. He starts off by suggesting there are two sides in this debate, and it is his description of the sides that I will quote at length to illustrate how great a challenge is posed by unsettling theories. To the first camp, then:

On the one hand, lesbians and gay men have made themselves an effective force in this country over the past several decades largely by giving themselves what civil rights movements had: a public collective identity. Gay and lesbian social movements have built a quasi-ethnicity, complete with its own political and cultural institutions, festivals, neighbourhoods, even its own flag. Underlying that ethnicity is typically the notion that what gays and lesbians share - the anchor of minority status and minority rights claims - is the same fixed, natural essence, a self with same-sex desires. The shared oppression, these movements have forcefully claimed, is the denial of the freedoms and opportunities to actualize this self. In this *ethnic/essentialist* politic, clear categories of collective identity are necessary for successful resistance and political gain (Gamson:39).

And then along comes the other side, the "directly opposing logic, often contained in queer activism (and in the newly anointed 'queer theory')," intending to take apart the identity categories and blur group boundaries. This alternative angle, influenced by academic 'constructionist' thinking, holds that sexual identities are historical and social products, not natural or intrapsychic ones. It is socially-produced binaries (gay/straight, man/woman) that are the basis of oppression; fluid, unstable experiences of the self become fixed primarily in the service of social control. Disrupting those categories, refusing rather than embracing ethnic minority status, is the key to liberation. In this *deconstructionist* politic, clear collective categories are an obstacle to resistance and change (Gamson:39).

It is in the midst of this struggle that my thesis and I find ourselves. And I contend that it is over the content and ramifications of this shift that the bisexuality wars broke out.

Just as I was faced with a contradictory moment at the very outset of this thesis, when I had to become the knowing subject who will expound on the instability of the subject, I once again find myself confronted with a somewhat uncomfortable task: delineating categories and defining terms. What is poststructuralism? How is it
different from postmodernism? Where do postcolonial theories fit in? Is queer theory the wayward child of feminist theory? To begin with, none of these separate apppellations can be said to be distinct or even particularly informative. There is no "unified school of thought or even a movement" called poststructuralism (Makaryk:158). There are many different postmodernisms and feminisms (Hutcheon 1990:141). It is because of these multiplicities, and from an awareness of critiques of 'post' theories, that I have undertaken the somewhat unpleasant task of delimiting what I mean by those theories. For the sake of specificity, and because my temporary definition may be unlike anyone else's, I have tried to outline what I mean by unsettling theories. As the name suggests, postmodernism is relational (Huyssen:110), and therefore must be contextualized to have meaning. Even those authors who have typically been termed 'poststructuralist,' such as Derrida, Foucault and Barthes, do/did not generally characterize their work as such (Makaryk:158). It is indeed not easy to pin down that which is "a number of related cultural tendencies, a constellation of values, a repertoire of procedures and attitudes. These we call postmodernism" (Hassan:274). A partial list of these tendencies might include the disruptive assertions that language is not neutral; knowledge is fragmented and constantly shifting; power circulates in a non-linear exchange. Further, 'postmodernism' "suffers from a certain semantic instability: that is, no clear consensus about its meaning exists among scholars" (Hassan:276). Kobena Mercer echoes that sentiment:

3There is the further rubric postmodernity, which refers to a temporal, historical location or condition - the late twentieth century. For more on this distinction, see Grewal and Caplan's introduction to Scattered Hegemonies: Postmodernity and Transnational Feminist Practices (1-33).
4 Hutcheon apologizes for the awkwardness of "feminisms" but observes "as a verbal sign of difference and plurality, 'feminisms' would appear to be the best term to use to designate, not a consensus, but a multiplicity of point of view which nonetheless do possess at least some common denominators" (1990:141).
5Judith Butler, among others, provides a definition of postmodernism in "Contingent Foundations: Feminism and the Question of 'Postmodernism' " (1992a:3-7)
Postmodernism means many different things to many different people, but the key motifs of displacement, decentering and disenchantment have a specific resonance and relevance for the Left and new social movements after the demoralizing decade of Thatcherism.

In philosophical terms, postmodernism has been discussed as a weakening, fading or relativization of the absolutist or universalist values of the Western Enlightenment. The master narratives are collapsing, which is to say we no longer have the confidence to invest belief in the foundational myths of inevitable human rationality or social progress (265).

There are nonetheless unifying features in the work of these three men - skepticism for one - as there are in the work of other theorists classified as postmodern or postcolonial. Doubt is central to postmodern projects:

This suspicion of humanist aims and projects is one of the unifying, guiding threads of what has come to be known as postmodernism. Jean-François Lyotard defines the postmodern stance as one of 'incredulity toward metanarratives.' Metanarratives are those discourses that establish the rules of truth and legitimacy for narratives, the stories we tell ourselves about the world. This incredulity is connected by Lyotard to 'the crisis of metaphysical philosophy' and the university. Its result is dispersal - of knowledge claims and discursive rules, of identities that once were bound by these narratives (Phelan 1989:140)

The three 'posts' can be said to have emerged in the 1970s, along with deconstruction (Huyssen:123-135). Another similarity is semantic: the presence of the prefix 'post' seems to indicate a common position, indeed "a symptom of the very malaise it illuminates" (Makaryk:158). This 'post' can be seen merely to mark a temporal progression (postcolonial theory is merely that which comes after colonialism6), to indicate a relation to (postmodernism depends on modernism for meaning7), to mark a rupture8 (poststructuralism is a critique of structuralism9). Inderpal Grewal draws our

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6Grewal and Kaplan flag this as a particular danger of the term 'postcolonial.' Its temporal aspect can be used in service of the argument that colonial rule is a thing of the past: "In its current usage in the humanities, 'postcolonial' does not imply a critique of colonialism but a way of denying that colonialism continues in various forms at the present time" (15).

7Any postmodern definition of modernism is inevitably a straw man. I will simply insert that what modernism conjures up for me is an entrenchment of Enlightenment values - the belief in, and privileging of rationality, objectivity, truth as a knowable entity, and the self as autonomous and rational.

8There is much debate about whether postmodernism marks a break from, or a continuation of, modernism. Hassan would argue that many postmodern attributes are characteristic of avant-garde expression, and are therefore not a departure (279-280). Huyssen also debates whether poststructuralism is postmodern or modern (134-144)
attention to the fact that postmodernism has a very specific historical location, and as such involves the deconstruction of previously unexamined concepts:

An important implication of this postmodern is the critique of those binary oppositions that have structured Western epistemology, and the consequent rejection of such structures, including the notion of the unified self, of the well-defined centre easily separable from and created out of a clear distinction from the periphery and the Other (231).

Although Linda Hutcheon concedes that there is "overlap" between postmodern, Marxist, feminist, postcolonial and poststructuralist analyses, she warns against conflating them (1993:612). Andreas Huyssen agrees that "however much postmodernism and poststructuralism in the U.S. may overlap and mesh, they are far from identical or even homologous" (135). The significant difference Hutcheon fears might be elided is that "the Marxist, feminist and post-colonial, in particular, possess theories of political action and agency that the postmodern appears to lack" (1993:612)\(^\text{10}\). She quotes Chris Weedon saying "Feminism is a politics" but argues that "postmodernism is not; it is certainly political, but it is politically ambivalent, doubly coded as both complicity and critique" (1990:167-8). Feminism, because of its revolutionary potential, cannot and should not be subsumed within the category.

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\(^{9}\)En bref, structuralism has its origins in application to linguistics (by Ferdinand de Saussure) and in anthropology (by Claude Lévi-Strauss). Saussure developed the sign and sign system, wherein distinction is made between signifier (the representation, in speech or writing, of the signified), signified (absent and abstract), and sign (the combination of signifier and signified). What is revealed is that the relationship between these elements is arbitrary, "meaning ceases to be intrinsic to the signifyng element...[and] the meaning of signs emerges only in relation to (that is, as difference from) other signs and thus exists in the form, not the substance, of language" (Makary:159). A significant disruption of structuralism is then that the speaking subject, in discourse, ceases to be in the position of one who "confers and authorizes meaning" (Makary:159). Poststructuralism represents a departure because, according to Foucault, structuralism "may have realized the death of the speaking subject but not the death of subject-centred discourse" (Makary:159). This job, of effecting the second realization, is thus undertaken by poststructuralism, as exemplified by Foucault in his various genealogies/histories of sexuality, medicine, punishment - which "examine the complex relations between discourses and their objects (the body, disease, sexuality, order, truth, knowledge) in order to write a genealogy of the modern subject" (Makary:160).

\(^{10}\)You will note that my spelling of 'postcolonial' differs from that of Linda Hutcheon. I have opted for this composition of all the 'post' with the following rationale pointed out by Jonathan Hart and Terry Goldie: "Post-colonial criticism offers a counter-narrative to the long tradition of European imperial narratives yet its 'post' prefix is not always easily worn. Whereas historically these cultures are after the colony, many theorists would present the post-colonial, often without a hyphen, as like poststructuralism and postmodernism, a word best seen as presenting an almost completely different state of consciousness from the antecedent enclosed" (155)
'postmodern'. There are aspects of feminist projects which nonetheless would be familiar to the counter-narratives, or 'writing back'\textsuperscript{11} of postcolonial theorists, such as the task of recovering the excluded feminine from the dominant discourses of philosophy, criticism and narrative (in fiction and cinema)...poststructuralist feminism is a quest for this excluded voice in the sciences, in philosophy and other arts, and in feminist writing itself" (Makaryk:161).\textsuperscript{12} Feminist theories can be said to have inflected postmodern thought, or even to have changed its course:

[feminisms] form the single most powerful force in changing the direction in which (male)\textsuperscript{13} postmodernism was heading but, I think, no longer is. It [sic] radicalized the postmodern sense of difference and de-naturalized the traditional historiographic separation of the private and the public - and the personal and the political (Hutcheon 1990:142).

Other shifts occasioned by "feminisms" are a renewed focus on the social construction of representation, knowledge and desire (Hutcheon 1990:143), and a theorization of agency, necessary for strategizing resistance (Hutcheon 1990:168).

Similarly, though on other fronts, postmodern thought has influenced gay and lesbian studies. The very name of this 'school' has been altered by postmodernism, becoming 'queer theories' in response to a problematizing of normalized categories and notions of deviance (Andreadis:566). Sexuality, as we have learned, is culturally produced, not biologically determined (Andreadis:566). Therefore, we can study the history of the construction of sexuality, which throws into doubt the cultural/historical

\textsuperscript{11}As in "the empire writes back." This is a twist on the concept of "writing back to the master narrative," as described by Ramabai Espinet (class notes, January 12, 1994). Two examples of this postcolonial practice are L Tituba, Black Witch of Salem by Maryse Condé, in response to The Crucible, and Wide Sargasso Sea by Jean Rhys, in response to Jane Eyre. The notion of the empire "writing back" also borrows from the book title, Returning the Gaze: Essays on Racism, Feminism and Politics.

\textsuperscript{12}This also relates to moves towards rupturing the seamless text in psychoanalytic theories, which apply Freudian notions of the unconscious as "a theoretical strategy that unsettles an economy of discourse by reinserting its order's repressed and excluded voice" (Makaryk:161). This matter of the absent presence is of particular relevance to my thesis, and will re-enter the text - at times unbidden?

\textsuperscript{13}One of the most obvious divisions within all these theories reflects larger societal structures. Postmodernism and poststructuralism can be written off as the exclusive domains of straight white men, while people of colour are only represented in only write postcolonial theory, women of colour and white women in feminism, and gays and lesbians in queer theory, depending on which identity category you first name, and what issues you take up in your work. This is certainly a valid criticism of postmodern and poststructural theories, but I am not convinced that the lines are that clearly drawn, nor that even if they are, the postulations of these theories can or should be dismissed.
universality of sexual categories. Identity politics are both challenged and informed by these suggestions. Self‐reflexivity, another tic of postmodernism, requires that we consider gender performativity (Andreadis:566). These shifts have resulted in queer theories becoming 'cutting edge' within postmodernism, with the paradoxical move of queer theories from marginalized discourse to respectable academic theory (Andreadis:566).¹⁴

Let me suggest another broad difference between all of these 'unsettling theories': postmodernism seems generally to refer to movements in architecture, art, literature and cinema, whereas poststructural and postcolonial theories refer to a theoretical stance which is synchronous with these trends.¹⁵ However, in speech and in writing, distinction is often not made between postmodernism and poststructuralism¹⁶. Hutcheon's caveat aside, there are moments when any distinction would be spurious, and serves only to detract from more pertinent matters, such as the content of the argument rather than its classification. For instance, in one of the quotes that follows, Judith Butler refers to postmodernism, when her comments could just as accurately be made of poststructuralism or of postcolonial theory. This is particularly relevant with those theorists I cite. Like 'postmodern,' 'poststructural' is already a term that is semantically unstable, and I need to further complicate the category by adding that there is an interdisciplinarity to the work I read: Butler is a feminist poststructuralist (or is that poststructuralist feminist?); many aspects of postcolonial theory are echoed in poststructuralism (or is poststructuralism used in postcolonial theory? which came first?). Unlike structuralism, which first gained

¹⁴This is an example of Hutcheon's reading of postmodernism as both complicity and critique.
¹⁵The tidiness of these categories obscures as much as it reveals: feminism and queer theories fall between and straddle the cracks. What do we do with the political character of both these bodies, with their simultaneous applications at demos and in conference papers? What injustice is done by naming postcolonialism only a theory? What of feminist art?
¹⁶In the course of this text I will also move between referring specifically to one set of theories (such as poststructuralism - though there will be times when I am talking about poststructuralism, but the person I am quoting is referring to postmodernism. I have done this when it seems to me that what is being said relates to poststructuralism, or at least my idea of it.) and speaking generally of unsettling theories
prominence in linguistic and anthropological circles, poststructuralism has infiltrated science (Donna Haraway), philosophy (Judith Butler), comparative literature (Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Rey Chow), history (Joan Scott), law (Drucilla Cornell), film theory (Trinh T. Minh-ha, Teresa de Lauretis), education (Deborah Britzman) and women's studies (Inderpal Grewal, Caren Kaplan). This crossover is further exemplified in a number of anthologies from the late 1980s and 1990s which represent a hybrid of various disciplines and theoretical frameworks. It is in these anthologies that you will find a kind of conversation that my work attempts to join, both by citing people who refer to each other in the course of their arguments, and by taking up issues raised by these theorists/activists/cultural producers.

On the subject of investments, there is one point I wish to make clear about unsettling theories: this discussion is not motivated by the desire to render poststructuralism or other unsettling theories sacred. While I take exception to some critiques of poststructuralism, I find others entirely accurate. My views are summed up by Inderpal Grewal and Caren Kaplan, on the subject of postmodernity:

our discussion of postmodernity does not seek to justify or defend a pure postmodern practice as a utopian theoretical methodology. We argue that postmodernity is an immensely powerful and useful conception that gives us an opportunity to analyze the way that a culture of modernity is produced in diverse locations and how these cultural productions are circulated, distributed, received, and even commodified (5).

Poststructuralist theory, then, is admittedly an imperfect tool, but one that is useful nonetheless.

Critiques of poststructuralist theory are numerous, but I will take up only those that are most relevant to this thesis. Given the tendency of poststructuralist writing to

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17 Just scanning my bookshelves, I come up with the following titles as examples: Out There: Marginalization and Contemporary Cultures, Feminists Theorize the Political, Scattered Hegemonies, Postmodernity and Transnational Feminist Practices, Feminist Studies Critical Studies, Inside Out Lesbian Theories, Gay Theories, Making Face, Making Soul Haciendo Caras: Creative and Critical Perspectives by Women of Color, Activating Theory: Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual Politics, Fear of a Queer Planet, Queer Politics and Social Theory, and Race, Culture & Difference
be dense and composed of language that is not found in most dictionaries, it is reasonable to ask, to whom is this writing accessible? To quote bell hooks,

student frustration is directed against the inability of methodology, analysis, and abstract writing (usually blamed on the material and often justifiably so) to make the work connect to their efforts to live more fully, to transform society, to live a politics of feminism (1994:88).

Or in Spivak's words, "how about attempting to learn to speak in such a way that the masses will not regard as bullshit" (1990:56). It is not only the style, then, that seems removed from everyday life, but the content as well that cannot immediately be applied. Without creating an overly artificial and deterministic split between academia and the 'real world,' we do need to investigate how these theoretical positions might play out as political strategy, and where are the oversights resulting from work that is insufficiently grounded in front-line struggles? Although there may be political support for the conceptualization of the subject as "multiple-voiced," as a "disidentification with prevalent formulations of the most forcefully theoretical subject of feminism" (Alarcon:364-366), there is also risk implicit in this same position. hooks observes that this too relates to the question of strategy:

a totalizing critique of 'subjectivity, essence, identity' can seem very threatening to marginalized groups, for whom it has been an active gesture of political resistance to name one's identity as part of a struggle to challenge domination (1994:78).

At stake is a balancing act: between a conception of identity which Trinh T. Minh-ha points out understood in the context of a certain ideology of dominance has long been a notion that relies on the concept of an essential, authentic core that remains hidden to one's consciousness and that requires the elimination of all that is considered foreign or not true to the self (371),

and the legitimate concern raised by Christine Di Stefano and Nancy Hartsock that "exactly at the moment when so many of us who have been silenced begin to demand the right to name ourselves, to act as subjects rather than as objects of history, that just then the concept of subjecthood become 'problematic'?" (in Grewal:233) While
this is a valid question and suspicion, the conceptualization of the subject as singular is not suddenly under attack. I think in particular of more than a decade of challenges by women of colour to notions of universal womanhood. It may be easier for white feminists to discredit what may amount to critiques of white feminist positions through a wholesale dismissal of so-called postmodern claims, than it is to accept the criticisms of women of colour. In this move, challenges by women of colour then become tainted with the suggestion of collusion with dominant - if postmodernism is conceived as the domain of white men - ideologies. As Jane Flax observes,

since directly attacking women or color or voicing our resentment of them (in public) would be politically unthinkable, is it easier and more acceptable for white women to express our discomfort with difference discourses and the politics of knowledge claims by categorically rejecting postmodernism and branding it politically correct? (459).

This masking, the critique of postmodernism in place of an invalidation of the writings of women of colour, mirrors another slippage: as I will discuss, I suspect that the claims of bisexual women were confronted rather than those of women of colour.

There is thus more involved than finding some happy medium: Grewal critiques Hartsock on the grounds that the "new subjectivities" she is defending are "the autonomous, full subject, the imperial subject that has structured both colonial power relations and Anglo-American feminism" (233). Norma Alarcon seconds this objection when she says that "some Anglo-American feminist subjects of consciousness have tended to become a parody of the masculine subject of consciousness, thus revealing their ethnocentric liberal underpinnings" (357). And Butler addresses the metonymy of more conservative postmodern theories standing in for the whole:

Do all these theories have the same structure (a comforting notion to the critic who would dispense with them all at once)? Is the effort to colonize and domesticate these theories under the sign of the same, to group them synthetically and masterfully under a single rubric, not a simple refusal to grant the specificity of these positions, an excuse not to read, and not to read closely? (1992a:5)
It strikes me that this kind of generalized labeling and consequent wholesale dismissal is also at work when people talk about both 'political correctness' and 'identity politics.'

Undoubtedly, there are valid elements to all these concerns about poststructuralism. Without sounding patronizing, I wish to suggest that resistance to these unsettling theories is perhaps warranted but it is not simple. In large part, angry responses from some people is the initial position of the subject who presumes herself possessed of a core self that is unchanging and coherent, and who feels threatened by the possibility that she is not who she thought she was. I have observed these kinds of responses in JFA, as well as in graduate classrooms, the latter directly in response to unsettling theories and their implications.

Given my current physical location at a North American institute of graduate studies in education, it is reasonable to assume that I am informed by those theorists who, in the present historical moment, have most currency in my corner of academia. This hybrid of postmodern, postcolonial, poststructural, feminist and queer theories is sometimes known as 'critical pedagogy and cultural studies' within the physical and intellectual structures of my university. Despite this explanation of my context, my choice of references, and thus my interpretive framework, could easily be criticized because I am quoting only a small and specific segment of all those authors who may be classified as poststructuralist. On the subject of interpretation as a virtual Procrustean rack, Joan Scott quotes Michel Foucault, as will I, to inject a further cautionary note:

If interpretation were the slow exposure of the meaning hidden in an origin, the only metaphysics could interpret the development of humanity. But if interpretation is the violent or surreptitious appropriation of a system of rules, which in itself has no essential meaning, in order to impose a direction, to

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18 I want to flag that even as I will be talking specifically about the implications of these theories for political practice, I am also concerned with how unsettling theories play themselves out in the classroom. Critical pedagogy is thus the context of my studies, but it might as easily have been the focus of my studies as well.
bend it to a new will, to force its participation in a different game, and to subject it to secondary rules, then the development of humanity is a series of interpretations (37).

Undoubtedly, one can always find backing for any argument under the sun. While this may be true, as I have already stated the works I have chosen remain examples of excellent and highly recognized scholarship.

Rather than attempt to provide a concise or complete definition of my theoretical mindset, which seems to me paradoxical, for as Grewal and Kaplan point out, "we are not looking for terms that remain pure, authentic, or unmediated" (2), I will cite a few examples of what I believe are pivotal claims held by a some of the theorists who have influenced my thinking. The concepts I will discuss in varying detail are the subject; identity; knowledge; representation; interlocking structures; power and agency. The first four issues under discussion all share the common characteristic of being in crisis.

UNSETTLING SUBJECTS
Judith Butler says that 'postmodernist' is "a name that one is called if and when one offers a critique of the subject, a discursive analysis, or questions the integrity or coherence of totalizing social descriptions" (1992a:3). And she does indeed have some doubts about the autonomous subject:

There is no volitional subject behind the mime who decides, as it were, which gender it will be today. On the contrary, the very possibility of becoming a viable subject requires that a certain gender mime be already underway. The '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. In this sense, gender is not a performance that a prior subject elects to do, but gender is performative in the sense that it constitutes as an effect the very subject it appears to express (1991:24).

Rather than attacking the question of whether 'our' - western - notion of identity assumes and requires an autonomous subject, she suggests that the subject and
identity - gender - are inseparable. The subject is not prior to the gender, to identity - the performance of identity is constitutive of the subject.

Butler has also been informative on a point that relates to one of the central questions of this investigation, namely how the point of departure in political activism, such as how you formulate the subject and identity, shapes the politics you wind up practicing:

There are still many people (Simon Watney in particular) who think that political activism depends on a very coherent notion of the gay subject. I think he bases his concept of activism in a strong notion of an ethical subject - that he believes the production of a unified, collective subject is necessary for political effectiveness. I'm not at all sure that activism requires a unified subject (1992b:87).

Rather than a unified or coherent subject, Grewal suggests that a poststructuralist view of the subject might serve to avoid conflicts such as the one JFA became embroiled in:

For such a nonessential subject, difference would not be an obstacle to political praxis, since differences usually are taken to mean essentialist differences that are insurmountable for the formations of coalitions or for solidarity to various struggles (234).

As a result of JFA members' sometimes rigid stand on identity, much time that could have been devoted to other political struggles was spent in internal conflict.

Another question that I return to again and again in the course of this thesis is how does this thing, identity, which is sometimes expressed in fairly essential and absolute terms, depend on an equally solid and discrete subject? What happens to identity in the face of conceptualizations of the subject such as have been proposed by unsettling theories? Flax notes that,

if one takes some of its central ideas seriously, even while resisting or rejecting others, postmodernism is bound to induce a profound uneasiness, or threatened identity, especially among white Western intellectuals, whose consciousness and positions are among its primary subjects of critical analysis (447).
Spivak goes to great lengths to call into question whether feminists specifically can continue to take for granted the chain of logic - "knowing - being - the epistemo/ontological - and right doing - the ethicopolitical" - that undergirds much of our political platform (1993:129). She explains that this is in doubt because so much of our argument around sexism as a sweeping discrimination depends on the organizing principle of woman as a universal category, which is "a metaphor without a literal referent standing in for a concept that is the condition of conceptuality" (1993:127). If we have built political positions and theories on a fictional subject, is our struggle imperiled? But more crucially where I am concerned, have we built a project that cannot but self-destruct, dependent as it is on incompatible elements: identity, as marginality, as self-knowledge, interlocking stereotypes, difference as danger, sameness as community.

Another of my points of departure is these deconstructions within and against what Catherine Belsey refers to as "the epoch of capitalism" (67). As she outlines it, the ideology of liberal humanism assumes a world of non-contradictory (and therefore fundamentally unalterable) individuals whose unfettered consciousness is the origin of meaning, knowledge and action. It is in the interest of this ideology above all to suppress the role of language in the construction of the subject, and its own role in the interpellation of the subject, and to present the individual as a free, unified, autonomous subjectivity (67).

It is in this context, as Scott explains, the belief is that "knowledge is gained through vision; vision is a direct unmediated apprehension of a world of transparent objects" (23).

If my suspicion is correct, there is great reluctance to admit that the subject, the self, is not eternally coherent and self-defined. It is not the origin of meaning, nor is knowledge intrinsic. There is the assumption that this subject and the identity it bears are necessary for political engagement. It is understood, then, that without the liberal subject, the whole enterprise disintegrates. What I am thus engaging in is an attempt to gesture towards those moments when there is conflict over some named matter,
such as whether lesbians can oppress bisexual women, but when the real issue is a
desperate attempt to re-consolidate the subject.

THE SUBJECT OF IDENTITY
Identities are categories, short-hand groupings of diverse and minute life events. They
allow us to stake claims; they provide a sense of belonging; they facilitate finding
allies, in a world where enemies are common; they are a rallying point; they provide a
sense of purpose and a language to a set of experiences, which can then be argued as
political, not merely personal. Identities are useful and even necessary in the face of
adversity. To agree on a group identity is simultaneously to define a common enemy.

Identity is also by definition contradictory. According to my computer's
thesaurus identity means both sameness and singleness. There is a domino effect to
identities, wherein one identity is informed by another, either in opposition to or
solidarity with, and that identity then depends in part on the continued existence of the
other. Move one identity, and the others will tumble. Identities are easily challenged:
there are fundamental principles, of behaviour, dress, opinion, which, if disputed, can
cause a crisis of identity in those who believe there is one, and only one, way of
possessing/expressing this identity. These rules are often invisible and unspoken,
which is a further test of whether or not you belong. And these principles often remain
silent until you challenge them. Like religion, identity has the potential to bring people
together, to provide a rallying cry. However, like religion it can also cause factions to
develop, and contribute to the eventual (though not inevitable) explosion of
internecine warfare.

There are aspects of identity as a concept that are surely unsavoury. Identity is
a narrowing, a categorizing, a limiting of possibility; it provides a facile analysis of
complex situations; it creates easy divisions for conflict; it artificially promises
similarity, safety; identity encourages the search for sameness and resistance to
difference; it rests on conception of people as autonomous individuals; it is only in
response to an organizing system which categorizes to dominate; it sanctifies
(certain)'experience' within the narrative of identity; identity is embedded in the binary
logic of me/not me. And yet identity also enables.

My participation in JFA came as a result of private reflection. When I decided
to join, it was because I had received encouragement that a part of my identity which
had always been in doubt for me - the question of whether or not I am Jewish - is
legitimate. In becoming confident that I am 'authentically' Jewish, I began to need that
identity to move outside of me, and to want to incorporate Jewishness into my political
activism. JFA, a group that had come together out of sense of not being at home
anywhere else, provided me with the space to assert Jewishness as a public and a
political identity. JFA came into existence because a few people began realizing, in
casual discussion, that many of their experiences, specifically doing anti-racist work,
were similar. From this common bond came political positions, tactical approaches and
a list of aims. The same assumed common bond, and the conception of identity as a
representation of a real, true self, were perhaps the two premises that ultimately
caused greatest disagreement in JFA. So my question, or my hypothesis, is this: what
sense do we make of this paradox, that identity can create, and then almost destroy, a
political organization/movement? Why is identity so pivotal, and so fragile? Can we
function without it? Is it always only temporary and partial? Why do people get so
entrenched in identity that they will fight to the death to maintain the 'purity' of it?

Butler might account for these tangles by explaining that "identity categories
are never merely descriptive, but are always normative, and as such, exclusionary"
(1992:15). Thus far, the best lead I have on an alternative to fragile identity is
Spivak's discussion of strategic essentialism (1990:11-12). The error is in falling
captive to your own invention. You create something, an identity, that is useful and
makes sense in the moment, and then you forget that it is not definitive or eternal.
There are moments when it is strategically necessary to insist that there is such thing as an essential lesbian experience, and that assertion requires that we abandon belief in "theoretical purity": in other words, we must accept that there is no one theory that will work in all sites (Spivak 1990:12). This essentialist claim is only momentarily the truth: fluidity is the only constant. Spivak describes herself in the terms I imagine as paradigmatic for identity broadly: "I'm a very eclectic person. I use what comes to hand. I'm not a fundamentalist" (1990:55).

Starting from Butler's position on the matter, I set out to investigate identity not simply as a construct, for there are problems implicit in that claim, but as a performance, the repetition of a symbolic category that can never be fully embodied. (Gender) performances are repeated in order to create the effect of the idealized gender which they are seeking to approximate. Between these performances, which are of necessity compulsively repeated to deny that gender is an illusion, that some loss has occurred and there is no seamless whole self, there are the intervals during which there is constant threat of disruption of the carefully established (through performative repetition) gendered heterosexual order. Butler writes of the struggle that ensues over heterosexual 'identity,' a discussion that we might transpose to address that which is also enacted for/by lesbians - in relation to bisexuality? - given the similar instability of the identity. It is the threat of disruption, what produces that threat, and how it looks in relation to (sexual) identity that interests me. This lengthy passage also helps to clarify what Butler means about the subject and how it comes into being through the performance of gender:

19See Judith Butler, Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex, specifically the introductory chapter, in which Butler thoroughly unsets the binary of sex as natural, and gender as constructed. She then goes on to expose the problems inherent in the very notion of construction, for "if gender is a construction, must there be an 'I' or a 'we' who enacts or performs that construction?" (1993:7)
The denial of the *priority* of the subject, however, is not the denial of the subject; in fact, the refusal to conflate the subject with the psyche\(^\text{20}\) marks the psychic as that which exceeds the domain of the conscious subject. This psychic excess is precisely what is being systematically denied by the notion of a volitional 'subject' who elects at will which gender and/or sexuality to be at any given time and place. It is this excess which erupts within the intervals of those repeated gestures and acts that constructs the apparent uniformity of heterosexual positionalities, indeed which compels the repetition itself, and which guarantees its perpetual failure. In this sense, it is this excess which, within the heterosexual economy, implicitly includes homosexuality, that perpetual threat of a disruption which is quelled through a reinforced repetition of the same. And yet, if repetition is the way in which power works to construct the illusion of a seamless heterosexual identity, if heterosexuality is compelled to *repeat itself* in order to establish the illusion of its own uniformity and identity, then *this is an identity permanently at risk*, for what if it fails to repeat, or if the very exercise of repetition is redeployed for a very different performative purpose? If there is, as it were, always a compulsion to repeat, repetition never fully accomplishes identity. That there is a need for a repetition at all is a sign that identity is not self-identical. It requires to be instituted again and again, which is to say that it runs the risk of becoming *de*-instituted at every interval (1991:24. bold added).

As a result of the above, we are compelled to mentally rearrange the understood order of events: the subject chooses an identity, and then performs that identity in various sites for various effects. Instead - and this is perhaps what Spivak means when she reflects that it is "the chain of knowing/doing (pouvoir/savoir) that is under discussion" (1993:126) - we must consider that where we believed that there is first a sex that is expressed through a gender and then through a sexuality, it may now be necessary fully to invert and displace that operation of thought...It may be that the very categories of sex, of sexual identity, of gender are produced or maintained as the effects of this compulsory performance [of sex], effects which are disingenuously renamed as causes, origins, disingenuously lined up within a causal or expressive sequence that the heterosexual norm produces to legitimate itself as the origin of all sex (Butler 1991:28-29).

While Butler suggests that performativity can be strategic and quite literally a theatricalization, she also warns against the "bad reading" of her ideas, wherein the assumption is "I can get up in the morning, look in my closet, and decide which gender

\(^{20}\text{The psyche can be thought of "as a compulsive repetition, as that which conditions and disables the repetitive performance of identity" and as "the permanent failure of expression, a failure that has its values, for it impels repetition and so reinstates the possibility of disruption" (Butler 1991:28).}
I want to be today" (1992b:83). She describes this view as the "commodification of
gender," which reinstantiates the notion of the omnipotent, self-determining subject
(1992b:83). Still, she concedes that "gender is an impersonation" (1992b:85). This
conceptualization of gender as something externally imposed, and embodied only
through performance, is echoed by Teresa de Lauretis, who asserts that "the
representation of gender is its construction" (1987:3).

The performance of identity is sometimes called forth in moments of crisis - in
response to essentializations (consolidation) of the identity, or attacks
(fragmentation) on the identity. Deborah Britzman cites a situation reported by Eve
Kosofsky Sedgwick, in reference to a seminar Sedgwick once taught on gay and
lesbian literature. As I suggested earlier, we are not talking only about the political
realm - through classrooms are by no means politically neutral sites. Sedgwick talks
about how people - from a variety of subject locations - reacted to the material in ways
that seemed unexpected, even to themselves. Britzman attributes this dislocation to a
confrontation "with their own self-knowledge" (17). She suggests that they were
"subjected to someone else's control, even while they scrambled to become tied down
to their own identity" (17). This would seem to be a direct consequence of the very
ontology of the subject: Foucault is quoted as characterizing the subject as "subject to
control of others and tied to self knowledge" (Britzman:17). I infer from this then that
for the subject invested in an identity, which must endlessly know and recognize itself,
or, by definition, cease to exist as such, challenges to identity categories are
dangerous. These conflicts arise in political groups, just as they do in seminars, and
neither discord will be solved by the facile solutions (rearranging the furniture in the
classroom, having go-arounds, playing reversal games) we have employed so far.

Though it is not the explicit purpose of this project to ask about the implications for
critical pedagogy of these interactions and disruptions, it is not far from my mind. It is
my hope that this work might also be read as applicable to issues arising in the classroom where unsettling theories are studied and contested.

What I want to argue for as necessary here and now is a conception of identity as fluid, having boundaries which are more permeable than rigid, which are constantly shifting, where there is always room for play and subversive self-mockery. What remains to be seen is what formulation of identity was at work in the conflict that arose in JFA.

AGENCY & POWER
The identity of the coherent, comprehending subject, in control of one's self is threatened by unsettling theories. Occupying this differentiated position enables the embodiment of an active role, in language ('I'), society, power. Scott explains that the constitution of subjects as "fixed and autonomous" provides for actors "considered reliable sources of a knowledge that comes from access to the real by means of their experience" (28). Assuming this agentic position suggests the ability to have control over one's actions and future. And yet the encounter with the postmodern is a situation of having that subject, and therefore authority, thrown into doubt. Butler, however, proposes that it is only in the context of the endlessly constructed subject that agency is possible:

if there is agency, it is to be found, paradoxically, in the possibilities opened up in and by that constrained appropriation of the regulatory law, by the materialization of that law, the compulsory appropriation and identification with those normative demands (1993:12).

Agency is lost if we construe the constructed subject as an entity created through a single act. Butler disagrees with the view of construction as "not an activity, but an act, one which happens once and whose effects are firmly fixed. Thus constructivism is reduced to determinism and implies the evacuation or displacement of human agency" (1993:9). Similarly, she would disagree with how power would be thought to be
involved in this construction, for "[t]here is no power that acts, but only a reiterated acting that is power in its persistence and instability" (Butler 1993:9). The repeated construction is an effect of power, itself an endless cycle of relations. Sherene Razack would seem to agree that resistance, like agency, is available in a limited way if we conceptualize power as a "net," rather than as a simple hierarchy with power flowing only from the top:

The individual...does not simply possess power but is constituted by a set of power relations cast like a net over how we see and think. It is precisely these power relations that are obscured when we balance competing claims. The individual can, however, resist these relations at nodal points along the net (1992:9).

This understanding of power heralds a departure from a model where there are simple dualisms of oppression and freedom, powerful and powerless. The workings of power, according to Michel Foucault, are tremendously elaborate and pervasive:

The omnipresence of power: not because it has the privilege of consolidating everything under its invincible unity, but because it is produced from one moment to the next, at every point, or rather in every relation from one point to another. Power is everywhere; not because it embraces everything, but because it comes from everywhere....power is not an institution, and not a structure; neither is it a certain strength we are endowed with; it is the name that one attributes to a complex strategical situation in a particular society (1978/1990:93).

If we do not develop this more complex understanding of power as a set of relations that enables and impedes, constitutes and organizes both covertly and through the obvious mechanisms of law and force,

we will be unable to determine who is being oppressed and what should be done about it. Oppression, in liberalism, means the imposition of unjust constraints. When one departs from the notion of choice and freedom that is the beginning of this particular story, the 'contract-oppression scheme' to use Foucault's (1980) words, and comes to see power as a net organizing how individuals are constituted in any one context, oppression becomes a story of 'struggle and submission' (Foucault 1980: 92), of how what is present is made possible by what is absent (Razack 1992:9-10).

Judging by the serious quality of these messages, the JFA dispute was rendered more fraught because we did not agree on a conception of power as a set of relations. That
we debated the issue of whether oppressed people can in turn oppress others indicates a view of power as something possessed by only certain individuals, while others remain exclusively oppressed and innocent. That we only discussed power in the context of oppression also suggests that we understood power as solely "unjust constraints," and not as an enabling force.

UNSTABLE KNOWLEDGE

Why are reactions to unsettling theories often strong and adamant? What is at risk, what is so easily threatened and so in need of defense? Since when are learning (in Sedgwick's case) and politics supposed to be safe and comfortable? This is perhaps the expectation when nothing you learn or do obliges you to challenge any of your set beliefs, or to recognize that what you hold to be true simultaneously supports who you are, and depends on your ceaseless maintenance of a particular position. Britzman contends that on the contrary, "reading is always about risking the self" (22). In the first model of learning, what is unknown is conceived of as a blank empty space, just waiting to be filled. When pertinent facts and information are poured in, the area of knowing increases, and not-knowing diminishes. However, suppose that rather than being an inherently valuable field, what we know is only distinct in relation to what we don't know, that not-knowing is as much a form of knowledge as knowing. If this were the case, then any challenge to ignorance would amount to a disruption, a threat to knowing. Just as we cannot conceive of human freedom without a circumscribed enslaved population, the ability to assert what we know rests on being able to define what is unknown and unknowable. Implied in this separation is that what is unknown is unnecessary and marginal. Further, the limits of our knowledge exclude what is deemed incomprehensible: information that either cannot be easily categorized, or that disrupts truths to which we cling for a continued sense of order and innocence in our
lives, is deemed unintelligible, irrational. Sedgwick most eloquently expresses the
mis-perception around ignorance:

If ignorance is not - as it evidently is not - a single Manichean, aboriginal maw
of darkness from which the heroics of human cognition can occasionally
wrestle facts, insights, freedoms, progress, perhaps there exists instead a
plethora of ignorances, and we may begin to ask questions about the labor,
erotics, and economics of their human production and distribution. Insofar as
ignorance is ignorance of a knowledge - a knowledge that may itself, it goes
without saying, be seen as either 'true' or 'false' under some regime of truth -
these ignorances, far from being pieces of the originary dark, are produced by
and correspond to particular knowledges and circulate as part of particular
regimes of truth (25).

What Sedgwick renders intelligible is that this conceptualized opposition between
knowledge and ignorance circulates within the same discourse as the notion of the
coherent subject. This opposition even undergirds the subject, who may be convinced
of her autonomy and cognitive abilities by being able to 'make sense' out of chaos.

Belsey traces a connection between the structuralist idea of 'truth,' and the
autonomous subject: "the reader is invited to perceive and judge the 'truth' of the text,
the coherent, non-contradictory interpretation of the world as it is perceived by an
author whose autonomy is the source and evidence of the truth of the interpretation"
(68-69). Flax observes that

psychoanalysts call into question the autonomy of reason, the equation of
consciousness and mind, and the unity and stability of the self. They
emphasize the existence and partial autonomy of an inner world pervaded by
desire and fantasy. This inner world has unconscious and uncontrollable
effects on other aspects of human subjectivity such as thought. Postmodernists
compose more complex and less hopeful stories about the relationship
between knowledge, power, history, and subjectivity (451)

Britzman talks about "discourses of difference" and "exploring what one cannot bear
to know" (23-24). She suggests that "the new questions that must be addressed
concern what education, knowledge, and identity have to do with the fashioning of
structures of thinkability and the limits of thought" (23). This goes to my earlier point
about implications of unsettling theories for critical pedagogy. Britzman also signals
the need for thinking through the conflicts that arise in the classroom, and, I would
add, trying to devise strategies for negotiating these conflicts when they manifest themselves.

**INTERLOCKING SYSTEMS & ABSENT PRESENCES**

In much the same way as 'knowledge' is only meaningful as a category when it is placed alongside 'ignorance,' I want to consider in this thesis primarily how lesbian identity depends on bisexual identity for its meaning, but also how white lesbian and white bisexual Jewish identity relate to the identities of women of colour - in other words, how identity is relational. Diana Fuss describes how it is in that relationality that the boundaries of identity are constituted:

one of the fundamental insights of Lacanian psychoanalysis, influenced by a whole tradition of semiotic thought, is the notion that any identity is founded relationally, constituted in reference to an exterior or outside that defines the subject's own interior boundaries and corporeal surfaces (2)

This notion of identity as relational disrupts the conception of identity as autonomous. Rather than identity as a free standing, singular, accurate representation of a true self, we can think of identity as contingent, as a game of dominoes, where shifting one piece causes a ripple in the whole snaking chain of figures. What is interesting to me about JFA is how people constituted each other, both through their perceptions (how they 'read' each other and then responded) and through their actions (how responses established a particular dynamic, and interpellated someone else). Less clear to me is how all of us in JFA are constituted by absent, but equally constitutive stereotypes or identities. This is problematic, because particularly of concern is how our identities rested - and continue to depend - on unnamed racialized others.

Sander Gilman provides a historical example of how absent presences work. He is tracing how certain bodies have been pathologized and demonized.\(^{21}\)

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\(^{21}\)There is, however, a significant problem with his work: it has been suggested that he does violence by employing some of the images he does (the Hottentot) without discussing the real violence done to Black bodies in the nineteenth century. He fails also to make the connection between representation and material realities.
Specifically, those bodies are the Black female, the (white? female) prostitute and the lesbian. By looking at a few artistic representations (in novels and paintings), combined with 'scientific' and medical texts of the late nineteenth century, Gilman shows how those bodies were made deviant by symbolic links to each other, and how visible, physical markers were attached to that deviance:

Such labeling of the black female as more primitive, and therefore more sexually intensive, by writers like Abbé Raynal would have been dismissed as unscientific by the radical empiricists of late eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Europe. To meet their scientific standards, a paradigm was needed which would technically place both the sexuality and the beauty of the black in an antithetical position to that of the white. This paradigm would have to be rooted in some type of unique and observable physical difference; they found that difference in the distinction they drew between the pathological and the normal in the medical model (177-178).

By association with the figure of the oversexed Black woman, the (white?) prostitute came to be marked as similarly deviant:

In the course of the nineteenth century, the female Hottentot comes to represent the black female in nuce, and the prostitute to represent the sexualized woman. Both of these categories represent the creation of classes which correspondingly represent very specific qualities (Gilman:172-173).

One image of blackness came to be metonymic for all female blackness, while the prostitute comes to stand in for all sexualized women. The Black woman, declared less evolved and more animal, is also said to be more concupiscent. She sexualizes by association. There is a link between these two types: the Black female, who is considered physically (genitally) deformed represents both deviance and sexuality. It is by reference to her physical attributes that the prostitute, who is also already sexualized, is shown to bear this sexualness inherently. Both types manifest their taints outwardly. Though initially, it was necessary to show the Black woman (in paintings) alongside the white woman, so that we infer the white woman's sexualness (and thereby her deviance), once the category had been symbolically delineated and psychologically installed (complete with rules about what to look for and how to
interpret findings), the Black woman literally disappears from view, because she is no longer necessary: even in her absence, she lends meaning to the white female body. Ultimately, prostitution, blackness, and homosexuality were all conflated, thus leading us to consider what the current construction of white lesbians/women as sexual relies on.

What Gilman doesn't go on to discuss is that this creation of a deviant class was necessary as a purge, so that certain bodies - namely white and male (not Jewish), and sometimes white and female and upperclass ones - could be verified as pure and free of taint. Gilman has given us an invaluable illustration of interlocking systems at work: one category or identity depends on another to make sense. He demonstrates how stereotypes emerge/are developed alongside each other, with reference to each other, as part of an interlocking, interdependent system. His work acts as a reminder to me that the self-constructions of the women I interviewed rest on various other (absent) selves. Race, in other words, is never absent.

Another historical example of how absent Black women gave meaning to white women is provided by Christine Stansell in her essay "White Feminists and Black Realities: The Politics of Authenticity." She outlines American white women's contribution to the disappearance of Black women, at the time of the Fifteenth amendment:

Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony - broke ranks to form their own uncompromising movement for 'woman suffrage,' in the process abnegating their commitment to black freedom. In the postwar movement they helped to found, black women would be excluded for decades and black men would long be disdained (252).

Politically, the example of Black women structured white women's view of themselves and their presentation of their plight:

The demand for women's rights had grown from the movement to abolish slavery, early white feminists had developed their program of full citizenship in concert with a vision of freedom for Afro-Americans, analogizing 'the bonds of womanhood' to the bonds of slavery (Stansell:252)
History repeated itself when white women gained political training in the civil rights movement, and then went on to become involved in the women's movement (Echols:24-27).

As I will discuss in chapter 4, there are ways in which a dispute between JFA members and members of a larger coalition, many of whom were women of colour, predisposed us to the bisexuality wars. I have attempted to discuss how the debate about bisexuality was also about this other conflict. However, this was not apparent to me as an avenue to pursue until after I was well into writing this thesis. And yet there was always this absent presence in JFA, of an underlying disagreement with women of colour about our marginality. In a sense the relationship with them was one that threatened to strip us of our claim to innocence; in the dispute about bisexuality and in the interviews I conducted, the apparent absence of those women, and of the exchange with them enabled the bisexuality wars, because it allowed us to continue as marginalized subjects in the world at large. It was then in the context of JFA that we did battle for a place on the margins in relation to each other.

**REPRESENTATION IN CRISIS**

There is no singular way to discuss representation, because its significance has shifted substantially over time and across communities. Throughout this century, naming and representing ourselves has been a central concern for lesbians in North America, in the face of dominant definitions which either dismissed us or criminalized us. These issues have similarly been critical for other marginalized groups in the quest for community and liberation:

The struggle to come into representation was predicated on a critique of the degree of fetishization, objectification and negative figuration which are so much a feature of the representation of the black subject. There was a concern not simply with the absence or marginality of the black experience but with its simplification and its stereotypical character (Hall:252).
And yet the effect of unsettling theories has been a complication of the struggle for representation. We have witnessed what Stuart Hall, quoting Cornel West, describes as "the end of innocence", or the end of the innocent notion of the essential black subject:

Here again, the end of the essential black subject is something which people are increasingly debating, but they may not have fully reckoned with its political consequences. What is at issue here is the recognition of the extraordinary diversity of subject positions, social experiences and cultural identities which compose the category 'black'; that is, the recognition that 'black' is essentially a politically and culturally constructed category, which cannot be grounded in a set of fixed transcultural or transcendental racial categories and which therefore has no guarantees in Nature. What this brings into play is the recognition of the immense diversity and differentiation of the historical and cultural experiences of black subjects. This inevitably entails a weakening or fading of the notion that 'race' or some composite notion of race around the term black will either guarantee the effectivity of any cultural practice or determine in any final sense its aesthetic value (254).

This speaks both to an alternative to the essential subject, but also to the importance of strategic essentialism, Hall's "necessary fiction." Though acknowledging the constructed character of race allows room to address the problem of why we have to struggle for unity in our communities, it simultaneously can have the effect of undermining critiques of racism: if there is no such thing as 'race', political doublespeak can then assert the disappearance of the problem of racism. We have to maintain this tension, between making room for tremendous differences, and yet holding fast to how the system organizes us and (mis)treats us similarly, in order to be able to argue for change. A feature of this 'new' cultural politics:

Once you enter the politics of the end of the essential black subject you are plunged headlong into the maelstrom of a continuously contingent, unguaranteed, political argument and debate: a critical politics, a politics of criticism (Hall:254).

Contingent fragmented politics are produced by this shift, and demand this shift. Also produced is "a change from a struggle over the relations of representation to a politics of representation itself" (Hall:253). That is, seeing representation as not just mimetic or reflexive, but constitutive. Representation is not unproblematic.
You can no longer conduct black politics through the strategy of a simple set of reversals, putting in the place of the bad old essential white subject, the new essentially good black subject (this is a Fanonian idea). Now, that formulation may seem to threaten the collapse of an entire political world. Alternatively, it may be greeted with extraordinary relief at the passing away of what at one time seemed to be a necessary fiction. Namely, either that all black people are good or indeed that all black people are the same. After all, it is one of that predicates of racism that 'you can't tell the difference because they all look the same' (Hall 254, emphasis added).

So there are advantages to the end of the essential subject. Hall's sense that there was a time when an essential Black subject was necessary, but that this time has passed, is crucial to my argument about how certain formulations of the subject cease to be effective and even become destructive. But would I agree with him that this time is entirely in the past? Or are there not further moments when such a figure need reappear? I am not drawing parallels between the Black and the lesbian subject unaware of the possible dangers in such a move. I do it in part because I mean to suggest similar historical patterns for both groups, and also because these subjectivities rest on each other, are informed by each other (as Gilman discusses).

Therefore, a shift in Black cultural politics would likely trigger a reaction in lesbian cultural politics. If indeed one did not signal movements in the other, they might certainly inspire shifts.

Hall says that although there may be some relief in the passing of the essential Black subject.

This does not make it any easier to conceive of how a politics can be construed which works with and through difference, which is able to build those forms of solidarity and identification which make common struggle and resistance possible but without suppressing the real heterogeneity of interests and identities, and which can effectively draw the political boundary lines without which political contestation is impossible, without fixing those boundaries for eternity. It entails the movement in black politics, from what Gramsci called the 'war of manoeuvre' to the 'war of position' - the struggle around positionalities. But the difficulty of conceptualizing such a politics (and the temptation to slip into a sort of endlessly sliding discursive liberal-pluralism) does not absolve us of the task of developing such a politics (254-255, emphasis added).
This is politics in the time of differences. Again we confront the tension I described, between drawing the lines (of necessity, Hall says), and allowing the boundaries to change - over time, from locale to locale and situation to situation.

**RESEARCH IN CRISIS**

If it is not already apparent, I hope it soon will be that given the above discussion, the act of researching is increasingly problematic when unsettling theories are the operative framework. When we take into account that "the effacement of the referent in postmodern culture has made 'the real' contested territory." (Lather 1993:675) we must "shift our sense of the real to 'discourses of the real'," (Britzman 1991, in Lather 1993:675) and call into question virtually every step of researching.
Chapter Two: Methodology in the Time of Postmodernism

What does it all mean, anyway, when the talking is done, the microphone cable is rewound, and the tapes are labeled and transcribed? What is the status of an interview narrative? An interview is not, in any simple sense, the telling of a life so much as it is an incomplete story angled toward my questions and each woman's ever-changing sense of self and of how the world works (Frankenberg:41).

Whatever name you affix to your methodology under the conditions of postmodernity, whether you call it "situated methodology" (Lather 1995:41), or "a praxis of the present" (Lather 1991:80) or emancipatory social science (Lather 1991:72), the dilemma remains how to be in many places at once. How do you recognize the crisis of representation and yet present your research nonetheless? How do you deconstruct social and political narratives without installing new ideological practices? How do you critique your work and your desire to be authoritative, while acknowledging the paradox of being a graduate student who is interrogating the claim of being a knowing subject who must assume this contested position to dissect her own work, all of which she does in the hopes of becoming qualified to someday do something for pay, but simultaneously must investigate her investments in making meaning in order to successfully complete her master's thesis? It may seem that I am mocking the project - though it may just be a little of the old postmodern college irony - when what I intend

1My linking of postmodernism with cholera is inspired in part by Patti Lather: "At the 1989 New Zealand women's studies conference, a keynote speaker termed poststructuralism a 'virus' which threatened the coherence and effectivity of feminist work in the world....Many women branded it as a 'male conspiracy' which both re-presents in obtuse jargon what feminists had already formulated and serves to mark the panic of the de-centered white male intellectual....On the other hand, as I spoke throughout New Zealand, others, both male and female, viewed these theoretic movements as a way to get 'unstuck,' a way to think and act outside of the logic which limits us in the face of right-wing discourses that have seized the imaginations and meaning-making of so much of the populations of both the U.S. and New Zealand" (Lather 1991: 162-163). As already stated in the previous chapter, I have also witnessed this kind of averse and violent reaction to unsettling theories in the graduate classroom, and I tend to agree that they help us get "unstuck." As I will raise in my discussion of bisexuality, it seems at times as though interruption of certain categories also makes some people come unglued.

2Patti Lather defines emancipatory social science as "the dialectical, reciprocal shaping of both the practice of praxis-oriented research and the development of emancipatory theory. In praxis-oriented inquiry, reciprocally educative process is more important than the product as empowering methods contribute to consciousness-raising and transformative social action. Through dialogue and reflexivity, design, data and theory emerge, with data being recognized as generated from people in a relationship" (Lather 1991:72)
to do is indicate the most crucial, and exciting, methodological dilemmas I face. I will try to draw a map of the theoretical and practical terrain surrounding me, and at the same time trace how I have navigated the land.

Education scholar Patti Lather summons us to accept that validity is "multiple, partial, endlessly deferred" (1993:675). What does research look like when this is acknowledged? She refuses to provide any prescriptions for methodological practice:

Rather than a general practice, my intent is to sketch ephemeral practices of validity after poststructuralism within the context of a particular inquiry to generate a theory of situated methodology as we try to understand what is at play in our practices of constructing a science 'after truth' (Tomlinson 1989:44, in Lather 1995:41).

Gone are the days when the researcher's job was to choose a subject, collect data, analyze it, and write it up the findings. Now the task must be to stop and question at every step, subjecting the process to critique, so that it becomes not just a consideration of what we know, but how we know it.

How I know what I am presenting to you here is largely influenced by how I collected my data, as well as by the theoretical and personal backgrounds I bring to this research. As well as reading extensively about identity, the construction of the subject, and struggles for lesbian and gay communities, I also conducted single one-on-one interviews with members of the political group Jewish Feminist Action (JFA). Collecting oral histories is a practice that seems favoured by people interested in disrupting received wisdom. Using interviews to write a thesis on the relationship between identity and political struggle might be compared to the politics behind story-telling as a tool for social change in law. Popular educator and academic Sherene Razack describes the usefulness - though not as unproblematic - of 'story-telling,' particularly to unsettle legal hegemony: "In the context of social change story-telling refers to an opposition to established knowledge, to Foucault's suppressed knowledge, to the experience of the world that is not admitted into dominant knowledge paradigms" (1993:55). Because "law relies on a positivist conception of
knowledge...a straight line between the knower and the known," and because in law "there is only one objective truth and it is empirically provable," story-telling in law has the potential "to interrogate the space between the knower and the thing known; its function is one of putting the context back into law" (Razack 1993:56). The specificity of interviews, and the multiple truths they present, demand that we unsettle not only how meaning can be seamless and singular, but that we attend to the construction of individual and social knowledge.

Two of the other studies that have greatly informed this work are similarly based on interviews with members of specific communities. For their book Boots of Leather, Slippers of Gold, Elizabeth Kennedy and Madeline Davis interviewed working-class lesbians who were part of the bar scene in Buffalo in the 1940s and 1950s. Kennedy and Davis believe that oral history is "an invaluable method for documenting the experience of the invisible; it allows the narrators to speak in their own voices of their lives, loves, and struggles" (15). While I am uncomfortable with the suggestion that oral history provides access to 'true' voices, or that it is a method for 'uncovering' an authentic past, I do agree that it is through oral history that we can assemble a version of the past which has been undervalued, and is very useful in strategizing for future political struggles. The other aspect of their approach that appeals to me is the notion of developing a sense of the life of the community through personal accounts of the time: "Our purpose...was not only to collect individual life stories, but also to use these as a basis for constructing the social structure and culture of the lesbian community" (Kennedy & Davis:21). Again, interviewing not only offers the possibility of attending to details (like how an event made someone feel, or why their childhood might have made them more adamant about a certain principle) that might be considered trivial in other historical accounts, but it allows us to record a history that is not singular or definitive. As I will discuss at greater length shortly, the
narrative contradictions characteristic of this method of information gathering are an invaluable reminder of the limits of any knowledge production.

Becki Ross's *The House that Jill Built: A Lesbian Nation in Formation* is the second study that my thesis resembles. To consider the workings of identity and community formation, Ross interviewed lesbian and straight feminists who were politically active in the 1970s in Toronto. She echoes Kennedy and Davis in her desire to piece together a whole from its parts:

I chose oral history not simply as a way to collect individual life stories, but as a basis to construct the history of a community. The ups and downs of building an 'army of lovers' and ex-lovers are far more likely to be communicated via oral histories than they are in print. Furthermore, few groups recorded the internal workings of their collectives, for instance, consensus decision makings, the dynamics of 'trashing,' and the problems of leadership and membership. Only through in-depth interviews was I able to tap my subjects' often emotional recollections of a time they equate with unparalleled exuberance and growth, as well as vigorous, sometimes immobilizing controversy (17-18).

As long as I had a theoretical understanding of the JFA dispute, I conceived of it as discord produced by individual identities in conflict with each other. Recording personal accounts of what happened then provided me with an opportunity not only to re-collect the events of the debate, but to interrogate members of JFA about their relationship to their own identities.

Of course, there are a number of ways in which interviewing remains problematic. Perhaps one of the greatest risks involved is the possibility of objectifying or otherwise harming those participating as "narrators." Participants open themselves up to sometimes difficult memories to tell their account; I theorize and distort it, and then put my name on the result:

there is in general a power imbalance between a researcher and the subjects of research in the sense that the researcher sets the agenda and edits the material, analyzes it, publishes it, and thereby takes both credit and blame for the overall result (Frankenberg:29).

3"Narrators" is the term used by Kennedy and Davis for the women they interviewed (15). It appeals to me, because it suggests agency on the part of the interviewee - a clumsy term at best, as well as it connotes that these are *stories* being told.
Though I already knew there was a problem I wanted to think through, it suited other purposes to interview the particular people I did, namely it was a practical way to minimize the uneven power differential between researcher and researched. Like Ruth Frankenberg, who interviewed white women about their understandings of race, I was interested in finding some way to "democratize the research process" (31). I began to consider how to enact this leveling when I was designing the project. It made sense to me that if I interviewed women in JFA, I would be avoiding a number of pitfalls. First of all, I knew the women already, so our relationship would be less likely to become a formalized, authoritative interviewer - naive informant exchange, and be more akin to a conversation between equals. In fact, everyone I was going to be interviewing is older than me, has at least the same or a higher level of education as me, and was in JFA longer than me by a year (except in the case of Bayla, who joined at the same time I did). Therefore, I would not be "researching down," but across or even up: the participants are experts of a sort, more knowledgeable than me in many respects, and accustomed to theorizing on their own. Having those conditions in place allowed me to be relatively comfortable that I would not replicate a dynamic in which the Other relays her pure, unmediated 'experience,' and the I stands at a distance, objectifying and theorizing. Frankenberg addressed this dilemma in the following way:

Rather than maintaining the traditionally distant, apparently objective, and so-called blank-faced research persona, I positioned myself as explicitly involved in the questions, at times sharing with interviewees either information about my own life or elements of my own analysis of racism as it developed through the research process (30).

In my case, though I spoke little during the meetings devoted to discussing bisexuality and the materials I gave to possible participants contained no overt mention of my position on the issues, there was no question that I was "explicitly involved." And as Frankenberg states, "no presentation of self is really neutral" (31). To remain "blank-faced" is to view the participant as no more than a source of 'data,' which "keeps in place an extreme power differential between interviewer and
interviewee" (Frankenberg:31). Another of her strategies I too employed was to insures that my five 'expert witnesses' were adequately prepared for the interviews. This approach stands in opposition to 'traditional' practices, which do not sanction "sharing with interviewees...research goals and...analysis of the issues at hand. The argument here is that this standardizes and makes more scientific one's results, minimizing the chance of 'leading' interviewees to say what they believe the researcher wants to hear" (Frankenberg:31). I certainly did not aim for neutrality, though I may not have made some of my politics explicit. Instead, I gave the five women as much preliminary material on my project as was possible. After calling them to inform them of my plan to carry out this study, I solicited their participation by sending them a package that contained a letter describing my project, a list of the questions I hoped to ask, and a contract which stated clearly our mutual obligations. In the contract, I informed them that they had advance veto (not to mention the option to suggest additional questions) of any of my printed questions, and that during the interview, they could refuse a question, and/or ask that the tape be turned off at any point. Further, they had five days following the interview to contact me and change their mind about any or all of what they had said. No one took me up on my last offer, nor on the offer to add or subtract questions. Though I can't provide statistics, I suspect my numbers would be at least as high as Frankenberg's: "at least 80 percent of the questions and answers traveled in the 'traditional' direction: I asked and they answered" (30).

After a varying degree of discussion with each woman I contacted - some asked me almost no questions about my intentions or approach, stating that they trusted me, while others wanted clarification on this or that point - everyone whose participation I solicited agreed to be interviewed. I then went about arranging convenient times and dates with each person. I planned to record the interviews on ninety minute tapes, in the hopes of not winding up with more than seven and a half
hours of talk to transcribe and consider, and asked them to set aside two and a half to
three hours for the interview. In all but one instance, I went to the home of the
narrator, in order to conduct the interview in an environment where she would be most
at ease. Except for the first interview, when I got halfway to Alex's house before I
realized that I had forgotten my tape recorder, and so had to turn back and
recommence my journey, the interviews were straightforward and most remarkable in
how interesting they were. Otherwise, the only notable features are that I had to
conduct two of the interviews from the foot of sickbeds, where my 'expert witnesses'
were confined on account of entirely unrelated back problems, and that I had a cold for
both my first and last interviews.

The final safeguard in my system was that because I know these people quite
well (I socialize with them, we are connected to the same communities), I would have
an immediate obligation to represent them and the various JFA dilemmas as faithfully
and carefully as possible. This choice was also self-serving. I wanted to interview
these people because of what they could tell me. They knew me already, and so would
be more likely to provide me with details and background than they might an 'outsider',
whose motives might not be so clear, and whose political and philosophical positions
they might not be familiar with. In other words, they had observed me and interacted
with me for over a year, during which my involvement with the group was not merely
out of academic curiosity - though I suppose whether consciously or not, it was always
that to some extent - but politically engaged. This mutual familiarity and relative level
of trust meant that I could ask them not just for a blow-by-blow account of events, but
also request of them that they analyze why and how those events occurred. I wanted
them to be not subjects, but expert witnesses, thus transforming our interview from

4As it was, once transcribed, the interviews ranged between 17 and 22 pages single-spaced.
5Emma was living out of town, staying with family, and when I was in the same city as she was it was just
as easy for her to come to where I was staying.
6A postmodern virus.
unequal power relationship to a meeting of two theorists, both informed and equipped. And yet interviewing the people I did is problematic - because by choosing some members of JFA and not others, I have in a sense predetermined the outcome of my study. As Kennedy and Davis worry, "although we are confident that our analysis of lesbian community history is revealing and reliable, we also recognize that it has definite limitations based on who agreed to be narrators" (24).

Despite the problem of power imbalances, Kennedy and Davis assess the interview process to be one that may be profitable for all concerned:

Oral history as a method involves a personal relationship between the narrator and the researcher; in any successful interview there is a bond of affirmation and understanding that can be very rewarding for both parties. The narrator has a chance to reflect fully on her life with the interested attention of another person (21).

Indeed, I rationalized the demands and invasions of my research by thinking that a different form of discussion might provide some closure to a debate it often seems only came to an end because we just stopped talking about the issue. Alongside the chance to speculate is unfortunately the pain of telling, because "the memories shared were often very painful" (Kennedy & Davis:21). When she started describing the outbreak of disagreements about bisexuality, Alex remarked that

this is hard to talk about, you warned me that it would be, and I knew in my head that it would be. I think even though I tried in some ways to prepare for this interview that I'd not really gotten myself right there, because it's hard for me to remember.

The sustaining - or self-deluding - hope is that "one of the values of doing an oral history for a narrator might be the chance to air some of these painful experiences" (Kennedy & Davis:21). This was my belief, that the interviews might provide participants with some resolution in the shape of critical analysis of what happened, from a safer temporal and emotional distance.

The added issue Alex raises, remembering as painful, adds further complexity to interviewing. Kennedy and Davis discuss how problems inherent in the telling of
incidents that are sometimes 40 years old. They admit that this produces contradictions and distortions born of hindsight and forgetting. Though the events in my case are temporally closer, these issues are still relevant because "the working of memory is complex, political, and idiosyncratic" (Frankenberg:42). But like the contradictions of multiple recountings, the limitations and complex psychological workings of memory are what render the material all the more useful:

What makes interview narratives readable, analyzable, open to questioning and critique - in effect, 'writerly,' in Roland Barthes's terminology - is that they contradict themselves and each other. They are self-reflexive, and they confirm as well as contradict other accounts of the social world outside of the project. In a wider sense, they intersect with other local and global histories....I have tried to analyze the narratives in all of these ways: in terms of their internal coherence and contradiction, in relation to each other, and in the context of a broader social history (Frankenberg:42).

I similarly have tried to preserve the ambiguities while making meaning of the contradictions.

The second reason for wanting to do this particular project and in this mode was that I am acutely familiar with this kind of group struggle, and all too aware of the fallout from it. So my investments, besides lying in my relationships with the people I was interviewing, also lay solidly in thinking through the problem of the paradoxical dual relationship between identity and political struggle, and trying to conceptualize why the dispute in JFA happened as it did, whether it had to happen, and how it might have transpired differently. Though I am not naive or arrogant enough to contemplate that my 'findings' might somehow translate into real and lasting change, my aim all along has been to add some little piece of insight to volumes of already existing thought on the subject, 7 much of which is devoted to making emancipatory projects more viable and less cannibalistic. Or perhaps my motivations were more self-interested: I needed to figure out what had happened to me in that space, and I wanted

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7I am thinking of work by people from Audre Lorde, to the Yours in Struggle trio, to contributors to Activating Theory, to bell hooks and Judith Butler
to consider strategies, short of ceasing to be politically active, for avoiding finding myself in that space again.

At the same time, digging into the past and laying out the dispute felt disloyal and dangerous. What I have ultimately done is to provide you with a picture of JFA that is fairly critical. It should always be apparent that I undertook this work because the group meant as much to me as it did to so many other women, and that JFA was indeed home - whether that is ultimately productive or healthy is another question; it was a kind of refuge. That I am so critical is because I had so much hope. And like Ross, "my aim is neither to patronize nor to romanticize white, middle-class lesbian feminism, but to illuminate the richness and density of one historic moment of courageous resistance" (18). She too expresses something akin to guilt about presenting "the often-unforeseeable pitfalls that unsettled, contained, and in some instances disorganized the efforts to make manifest a downtown Lesbian Nation in the 1970s" (19). Her reluctance to convey shortcomings is because she is "deeply aware of the desire among the women [she] interviewed for a celebratory reclamation of this period" (18) She also theorizes about the political motivation behind her wariness:

Lesbian (and gay) grass-roots activists have long relied upon the assertion of a positive 'minority group identity.' Hence, a number of lesbian scholars, myself included, have wondered whether organizing the achievements and the limitations of lesbian-feminist organizing will lead to a sense of group frailty instead of robustness (19).

She continues with her qualms that
documenting experiences of alienation, extreme disappointment, and loss of self internal to lesbian-feminist communities may be seen to undermine the ideologically preferred image of these communities as open, stable, and conflict-free. Furthermore, it could be argued that turning our postmodern attention to the strength and the fragility of lesbian-feminist identity and community formation is a politically dangerous enterprise given our present climate of moral and economic conservatism (19).
Criticizing something I view as precious remains a dilemma for me as well. But I do it out of a sense that we can, and must, improve on the past. JFA has not been my focus because it is unusual, but precisely because I believe its aspirations and flaws are typical of many groups. To statements about "the fragility of lesbian-feminist identity," I would argue that there may be sites where identity is beginning to be sufficiently sturdy, even too sturdy, so that we can now begin to deconstruct what we first had to construct. It seems that Ross agrees that at least we must live with this "very fundamental (and unresolvable?)" tension (19).

Although Lather provides no grand scheme for methodology, she asks herself a series of questions that act almost as a checklist for the researcher.8

Did I encourage ambivalence, ambiguity and multiplicity, or did I impose order and structure?...How have I policed the boundaries of what can be imagined?...What is most densely invested? What has been muted, repressed, unheard?...Have I confronted my own evasions and raised doubts about any illusions of closure?...Did I create a text that was multiple without being pluralistic, double without being paralyzed [sic]? Have I questioned the textual staging of knowledge in a way that keeps my own authority from being reified?...Did I focus on the limits of my own conceptualizations?...Who are my 'Others'? What binaries structure my arguments? What hierarchies are at play?...Did I make resistant discourse and subject positions more widely available? Did my work multiply political spaces and prevent the concentration of power in any one point? Perhaps most importantly, did it go beyond critique to help in producing pluralized and diverse spaces for the emergence of subjugated knowledges and for the organization of resistance? (1991:84)

These are the questions that inform my methodological practices. These questions relate to four methodological issues that most concern me: the crisis of representation; the fine line between unsettling and re-inscribing; the demands and limits of reflexivity and self-critique; and the constitutive presence of my investments and desires.

While we have seen "the end of pure presence" (Lather 1993:675), there is no hope of escaping the necessity of representation, though it may be in crisis and badly

8She later develops these questions into the ironic "Transgressive Validity Check-List: A Simulacrum" (1993:685-686). The list is broken down into four sections: Ironic Validity, Paralogical Validity, Rhizomatic Validity and Voluptuous Validity. I refer only to her earlier questions in the body of the text, but I will at times quote from later works where she describes the various forms of validity.
wounded. Instead, our responsibility becomes "not a matter of looking harder or more closely, but of seeing what frames our seeing - spaces of constructed visibility and incitements to see which constitute power/knowledge" (Lather 1993:675). Again, there is no simple prescription for how to effect this. The only practical ways I know how to examine what frames our seeing is by asking questions about investments, by trying to trace patterns, by using a conceptual model that says what is present rests on absent people/stereotypes, that the present and the absent are interlocking, which then obliges us to consider what is absent from the 'picture.' Razack writes of storytelling and critical pedagogy in relation to this attempt to get at underlying structures:

a radical or critical pedagogy is one that resists the production of the status quo by uncovering relations of domination and opening up spaces for voices suppressed in traditional education. How critical educators do so is once again through the methodology of story-telling. Individuals who develop critical thinking can challenge oppressive practices; the critical educator thus 'takes as central the inner histories and experiences of the students themselves', seeking to foster critical reflection of everyday experience (Weiler 1988:22-23 in Razack 1993:60).

In this case, I have used interviews to rupture the illusion of a singular history, and have then asked what structures the narratives of those interviews, while trying to untangle how we are constructed as subjects in our lives. At times I have been faced with the conundrum of competing claims, various versions of the same events in JFA meetings. In keeping with a desire to unsettle and open up, I have navigated those claims by considering all of them, within reason, as 'true', in relation to the narrator's personal location and investments. This 'truth', however, does not mean exemption from critical reflection. Razack echoes this move, recommending the following compromise: "respect the diversity of voices, of stories as it were" as valid, but still critique those stories (1993:63) The researcher is called upon to recognize that she cannot ever hope to 'accurately' represent (the people she interviewed, what they said, the problems they are confronting), but to try and discuss what prevents
this pure access to 'the real', what shapes the meaning she does produce, and further what underlies the desire for 'truth'.

One shaping of reality that I must note here is how much I have condensed, and thereby distorted, the interviews. As it is, the interviews I conducted are one and a half hours of observations from one afternoon. The information that I collected therefore already represents a fraction of what I might have gathered, and is ultimately only one version of the same story that I could have recorded another day. And with those interviews I recorded, that one afternoon, with those few people, I made transcripts, which despite care and attention must be full of inaccuracies. And from those transcripts I have chosen passages, those phrases that best capture what I am trying to say, and that do my arguing for me. I have left out far more than I have included. Mary Louise Fellows and Sherene Razack describe their experience working with transcripts to produce an account of a series of events:

Our account, is, of course, contrived, involving as it does a reduction of the words of participants to a fraction of their original volume. Not all participants are present in this account to the same extent they were during the actual discussions; conversely, others have a greater prominence here than they might have had then...we inevitably became gatekeepers - eliminating parts of the discussion we considered peripheral to what we came to identify as the central issue (1050-51).

Recognizing the impossibility of transparent representation and the insufficiencies of language is, however, not a license to play fast and loose with details. There is no less of an invocation to be precise and accurate under these conditions, even as I call into question precision and accuracy. Acknowledging that reality is a construction and that I have a hand in shaping it here in this pages bestowed greater responsibility on me, to consider at every turn what is constituting this 'reality.' Relinquishing the illusion of "represent[ing] the researched better" (Lather 1995:42) is superseded by the aim of determining "how researchers can 'be accountable to people's struggles for self-representation and self-determination'" (Visweswaraian 1988:39, in Lather 1995:42). Just as I cannot hope for an unmediated
presentation of the voices of my interviewees, I reject the notion of them conveying pure experience to me.

While I may never hope to provide a definitive picture of JFA or its members, what meaning I make of their accounts must still respect what they have told me. During the time after I had transcribed my interviews, when I was reading each one closely and looking for patterns within and throughout the five, I often found myself worrying that I might impute motives that were not there. This is the dilemma of theorizing other people. One of Frankenberg's correctives is to position herself "as much as the women [she] interviewed, as situated within the relations of racism" (30). I have tried to indicate that I was equally invested in the debate, and that I too conceptualized identity as self-knowledge. Because "there is no disinterested position to be adopted in scholarship," another of Frankenberg's checks is to render her analytical method as apparent as possible, by addressing "the problem of the researcher as an 'invisible hand' that guides the analysis and the final written text" (30). She believes that stating the problem and "providing as clear an account as possible of both the interviewing strategy and the theoretical positions that underpin the analysis" works to 'show her hand' (30). This is where qualitative research is advantageous: it opens possibilities for multiple readings, allowing "room for disagreement and alternate readings" (30) Still, as Frankenberg notes, "while readers can reinterpret the material I have included, they are at a disadvantage with regard to what has been left out" (30).

In the process of 'making sense' of the five interviews, one of the most troubling aspects has been just how much it is necessary to omit, to edit out, to deem irrelevant. Initially, I felt that every word, every thought, was precious and worthy of discussion; as I have become practical about space constraints but more the necessity of creating as clear and arguable a case as possible, I have become ruthless about
leaving out the material that does not bear on these few issues under discussion. What then of my lofty desire for this research to be about and for other activists?

Lather identifies "three interwoven issues in the quest for empowering approaches to inquiry: the need for reciprocity, dialectical theory-building versus theoretical imposition, and issues of validity in praxis-oriented, advocacy research" (1991:72-73). If my aim is to do 'empowering research', in hopes of providing some form of assistance both to those I interviewed as well as to other political bodies, then it is necessary that I take into account the first two of her issues in the process of representation. One of the ways that I attempted to do this in the course of the interviews was to test my theories on the interviewees (e.g., about the correlation between the intensity of the fights and people being already divested from JFA), and to theorize with them, in effect. There is no doubt that I have imposed my 'reality' throughout this work anyway, but I attempted to build checks into my system. Another way I organized my findings was to read the interviews for recurring issues and patterns, rather than first determining what my themes would be and then looking for them. Kennedy and Davis used a similar method: "We juxtaposed all interviews with one another to identify patterns and contradictions and when possible checked our developing understanding with other sources, such as newspaper accounts, legal cases, and labor statistics"(21). I attempted a similar verification, by asking the "narrators" to name writers who had informed their thinking. Surprisingly, almost everyone was reluctant to name specific authors, and said instead that interactions with other activists had most influenced them.

I want to return to the question of which account is told, and how it is told. The wish for tidy, easily comprehensible stories is again at hand with respect to the constant possibility of "reinscription of some new regime, some new systematicity" in my thesis (Lather 1993:686). Unfortunately, when it comes to methodology, intent to be oppositional - or even just to do no harm - is no guarantee of successful outcome. A
methodology that explicitly seeks to critique ideology can become ideological (Bredo and Feinberg 1982:439, in Lather 1991:79). Indeed, Razack has warned us of the ways in which story-telling can be as problematic as strategic:

First, how are the stories going to be received? Can the Man hear it the way she means it?...A second problem is that one cannot be ambiguous or contradictory when playing this kind of game in a court of law, given the power of law's positivism. The stories are being told to make a particular point and they are being heard in a particular way. It will not be possible to squeeze all the realities of daily life into this framework: some realities are distorted to the point of being unrecognizable (1993:58).

Even a challenge like that of presenting stories as 'official' knowledge can be employed in the service of hegemony: The problem is not only how the story gets heard, and whether its intended meaning is distorted, but we come up against what it is possible to say. In this text are multiple layers of knowledge production: I have encoded by deciding on a thesis, making up questions, selecting participants, taping, transcribing, organizing, editing, contextualizing, analyzing, and then there is reception - how you 'hear' it. The risk is always that once I have made these stories intelligible, the recounting of those narratives "can lead very quickly into dichotomies and generalizations that make it difficult to describe the intersections of race, class, gender and disability" (Razack 1993:58). All of this talk of interviews or stories as a corrective has the effect of installing a once peripheral knowledge - 'experience' - as the solution: as I discussed in chapter one, 'experience' becomes defined as all that 'science' and 'objectivity' are not, and becomes essentialized. The practical consequence is that stories cannot really be critiqued in this framework; they are unproblematically conceived of as suppressed knowledge. There is an assumption that the living voices (and sometimes the written texts) of the oppressed express a truth that will win out. There is little room for questioning that voice or text as the transmitter of authentic 'human' experience (Greene & Khan, 1985, p.25). Here the authentic voice rests on a conception of the self as unitary and coherent. Language is seen as simply representing reality rather than constructing it (Razack 1993:61).
While it may not be my intention to posit interviews as more truthful and beyond reproach, it is tempting and sometimes unavoidable to present simple and definitive solutions.

Not yet one-half of the way through writing this thesis, I have already twice described my struggle not to reproduce that which I was critiquing. I want to unsettle the notion of the autonomous individual, and to write that sentence, I must become that very thing. I believe that investments in identity categories caused many of JFA's troubles, and yet I spent many pages explaining how postmodernism is different from postcolonial theories is different from poststructuralism is different from feminism.

There are, however, measures - checks and balances - that can be taken to minimize the risk of reinscription. Lather suggests three specific tactics. We must, she says, critique ourselves and be reflexive (1991:80), we must examine "how our value commitments insert themselves into our empirical work" (1991:80), and we must refuse the "illusion of closure" (1991:84). If we do this, there is some slim hope of resistance. These strategies are recommended by Razack, Ross, Frankenberg and Kennedy and Davis, though in different language.

Perhaps one of the greatest rigors of this situated/emancipatory/praxis-present approach is the exigency of self-critique and reflexivity. It is present in most every caution I have sounded here: be self-aware, question what you are doing, proceed with caution, acknowledge your limits. It is a practice that demands being in two places at once, "a double science that works from within a tradition even while exposing what that tradition has ignored or forgotten" (Lather 1995:62). As "feminist teachers and scholars," we have become adept, Lather claims, at critiquing "patriarchal mishapings in all areas of knowledge" (1991:80). We - whoever we are - are not quite so skilled in applying this same scrutiny to our own work, though there is no shortage of rectification necessary. The paradox is that in questioning my own work, I am once again positioning myself as (all) knowing, rational subject. This double turn of making
meaning, and standing outside of it to catch my own assumptions smacks of the totalizing "god-trick of seeing everything from nowhere" (Haraway:189-191). While this is a danger, it should not be an excuse to avoid reflexivity. Recognizing that there are flaws in self-critique becomes one aspect of always questioning everything.

Elizabeth Grosz proposes that this excess, this critique of critique can be a moment of possibility, when we can acknowledge that "there is much here I cannot reach, much that eludes the logic of the self-present subject" (1989:29, in Lather 1991:83).

One of the most slippery and contentious of all these deconstructions is the requirement to "probe the libidinal investment in form and content of the author-text relationship" (Lather 1991:83). Every self-critique of my text of necessity involves the potential revelation that I am not in control of this/my subject and that I am not a reliable researcher. But signaling the extent of my dependence on this knowledge production threatens to blow the words right off the page. If I am writing this thesis, it is because I have an investment in the academy, however contentious that relationship may be. If I am writing this thesis, it is because I have a stake in theory as significant and meaningful. If I undermine my own position, by acknowledging that at every turn there are omissions and manipulations made in this text so that it appears authoritative, then I risk being discredited. And yet by any other name, manipulation is editing, or focusing. If I do not perform these glosses, my work may become incomprehensible and chaotic. Lather describes "consternation" (1995:57) when she refuses to turn women's words into tidy stories. The risk I run if I don't organize, explain, summarize, is of impeding my quest to be a legitimate academic figure. If I do not contest my role here, and my investments in this production, my "lust for authoritative accounts" (Lather 1991:85), then I will not be permitted entry into the realm of unsettling theorists.

9Lather was working on a project with women living with HIV/AIDS, as a "chronicler" of their lives
The strategy upon which Razack insists is equally applicable to my researcher position as to the general discussion of investments in the JFA debate: we must acknowledge that there are no innocent subjects:

We work from the basis that we all have only partial knowledge, that we all come from different subject positions. Most important of all, no one is off the hook since we can all claim to stand as oppressor and oppressed in relation to someone else (1993:63).

This stance, along with the observation that each of us possesses multiple identities, is instrumental in deconstructing the notion of the unified subject: "Without absolutes, no true self, no pure origin, it becomes all the more imperative to pay attention to how our multiple identities are constructed and played out at any time in any one context" (Razack 1993:69). Multiple in this context means not just that we occupy plural sites of oppression, but that we are a mix of marginality and privilege.

My investment is not only in general knowledge productions, but it is intricately sewn into this one before you. I thought I had planned my project so carefully, choosing to interview people whom I would have great difficulty objectifying. I padded myself with these reassurances: they know me and so will hold me accountable beyond these pages; they have as much social and economic privilege as me and so I would not be researching 'down'; they are politically astute and so I could ask them to theorize themselves. It was only reading Lather that I realized the arrogance of my position. She writes of her work on a study of the lives of women living with HIV/AIDS. She ponders at what point she should have herself tested, knowing that this will have bearing on her relationship to the women and to the study. It was with some smugness that I read this passage:

Finding out that I was HIV negative, 'negative women,' as Chris said to me after I got the results, we jumped up and down with the joy of it. Now I know what she learned from her dream of June 18: the distance between someone who 'helps' and someone who is in it. Three days after getting the results, it already seemed distant, even melodramatic, but it is a marker of our positioning in this study: Non-HIV positive women telling stories that are not ours. Such a position cannot escape being, to some extent, part of the
traditional spectator-narrator, purveying the less fortunate and parading our
good will (1995:60).

I thought, how much better my position, not interviewing a 'foreign' group. And then it
hit me that I had bought into all the illusions of sameness that I argued in the course of
the JFA dilemma. Methodologically, I had assumed that I knew what my interviewees
were saying, that there was no excess in their testimonies, that I understood it all.
My choice of interview subjects served to conceal from me the investments we protect
through our knowing.

Even as we work towards such enormous projects as 'justice,' we need to
refuse "any grand transformation" (Lather 1993:685). Instead, we should attempt to
create "a questioning text that is bounded and unbounded, closed and opened" (Lather
1993:686). One step in maintaining this tension is stating within your work the
inconclusive character of your work: "None of these samples is exhaustive"
(Ross:17); "Built from limited data and shaped by the researchers' perspectives, such
studies need to be open to revision when new information appears" (Kennedy &
Davis:15). As I suggested about my small and selective group of narrators, my work
is not definitive. To extend the effort of defying closure, Lather describes a "rhizomatic
validity" (1995:58), which involves resisting traditional ways of organizing and
communicating knowledge. The written text, then, will not have a singular line of
progression, but will pose more questions than it answers, its flow will be
interrupted,\(^1\) it will echo many voices and textual forms, it will disrupt and unsettle by
embodying "a situated, partial, positioned, explicit tentativeness" (Lather 1993:686).
In situated methodology, there is no one right way to deploy interview text. There are
only relative decisions, "appropriate to this time, this context" (Lather 1995:58). This

\(^1\)I think of footnotes as providing some of this interruption, digression, multiple-meaning. Literally a
sub-text here on my computer screen, they act as another mode of address. I am conscious that my voice
here is subtly different from my voice there. Footnotes, dangling off the torso of the text, offer another
route. They suggest that there are multiple ways of thinking about any given object, and that even as I
propose an interpretation of this or that, I am simultaneously sent off in various directions, as you likely
are. What must be resisted, however, is the false dichotomy between here and there: this is no more the
truth than that is, although I may sound as though I am confiding, in this moment, what I really mean.
form is uncomfortable, to be sure. In a moment of self-critique, Lather cites some of the ways she re-inscribes the very order she resists. I quote it at length because I am similarly 'guilty':

Within my own work, 'the people,' a somewhat undifferentiated mass, are foregrounded as capable of grasping a reality of domination, subordination and resistance, once engaged by 'critical pedagogues.' Enlightenment goals are unproblematized, especially the excessive faith in the powers of the reasoning mind. Subjects are theorized as unified and capable of full consciousness. Additionally, my text is a conventional univocal text, unless one counts what might be seen as excessive quoting to be an effort toward many-voiced discourse as opposed to exhortations of authority and a didactic mode of critique (1991:84).

When I read this last sentence, I realized that I had been irritated with her exactly because she refused to perform as a single, all-knowing subject. I had been irritated with her constant quotations, and felt that she was hiding behind the words of others. I wanted to hear her words, her voice, her experience, even as I was reading and seemingly absorbing her critique of these very notions. And yet I may have replicated this (irritating) style, with lengthy quotations from interviews and from other theorists. Kennedy and Davis also employed interview texts by "interweaving the narrators' voices and our own" (25). As much as possible, I have tried not to interpret the words of the narrators, though I do critique, synthesize, make connections, and summarize.

I had decided beforehand with my supervisor that six people would be a sufficient number to interview, and that my account could be one of those six. My task was then to choose five people to interview out of a possible fifteen or so members of JFA. An obvious selection criterion was involvement in the discussions about bisexuality. Though I was loath to reduce the whole complex exchange down to two sides, there was one central notion around which people did align themselves with one of two positions: whether categories, such as lesbian and bisexual, should be clearly bounded and carefully defined; or whether categories should be expanded and even
exploded altogether.\textsuperscript{11} Given this distinction, it was then important to equally represent both polarities. However, I also wanted to simultaneously complicate those two seeming extremes. In the end, my sample group looks like this: on one side (keep identity categories clear, or at least in relation to the line between bisexuals and lesbians, and do this for specific historical, political reasons), there are two people who self-identified as lesbian, and one who self-identified as bisexual, at the time of the debate. On the other side (categories are only useful strategically, self-identification and blurring of categories is necessary for various present-day political reasons), there are two people who self-identified as bisexual, and one who self-identified as lesbian, at the time of the debate. What this satisfies is a desire to represent multi-faceted positions on the subject. Perhaps more importantly, it illustrates a point I will be arguing: JFA was always as much a coalition as a 'home' group.\textsuperscript{12}

For every detail of the argument that the three members of 'one side' agreed on, there was another on which they might have clashed wildly. And yet our commonalities are many: We all came of political age in a time of coalitions and identity politics. We are all white, we were all raised in North America and now all live in an urban centre, we all have higher than average level of education (all having done or currently doing graduate work). Alex, Cara, and Danni were raised religiously as Jews, while Bayla and I were raised with cultural Jewishness. Bayla, Cara and Danni spent some time in Israel as young women. Alex, Emma and I all sexually identify exclusively as lesbian. Bayla and Danni were involved with men at the time of the interviews, and both felt like they didn't entirely have the right to identify as bisexual. Cara and Danni now identify as bisexual, and as lesbian in certain contexts.

\textsuperscript{11}It is certainly not coincidental that these positions correlate with ideas about bisexuality specifically: if it exists, if it is positive or negative. I will elaborate on these parallels.

\textsuperscript{12}See Bernice Johnson Reagon's "Coalition Politics. Turning the Century," on the difference between coalition and home (357-360).
Bayla and Cara both have babies. Bayla and Emma are interested in children's rights. Alex, Bayla, Cara and Danni have worked directly in 'violence against women.' Bayla, Cara and Danni describe feeling that they have considerable privilege in the world which offsets experiences of discrimination. They describe discrimination as freefloating, ambient, not as directed specifically at them. Emma and I both reached a point with our Jewish identity where it had to move outside of us.

Given all of these rich and intriguing details, there is another remaining 'unnamed' aspect of this project that frustrates me: I have used pseudonyms in the course of this thesis, for the group, the narrators, and for anyone they mentioned. All along, this felt like a fairly artificial move, given the likelihood that anyone who knows me will know exactly who and what are the subject of this work. My supervisor and I agreed that it would be impossible and nonsensical to transpose identities to further disguise JFA and its members; to have instead claimed to discuss the machinations of a group of South Asian transsexual men would have made a mockery of the historical and social specificities of identity. Still, when I read the following words in Ross's study, I was...envious:

All but one of the former LOOT members I interviewed wanted their real names to appear in the book. They argued strongly for visibility on strictly political grounds as a way of lesbianly claiming pride in themselves and their community (18).

The anonymity in this thesis was required by institutional ethical guidelines, and so I never even offered narrators the option to be identified or not. My guess is Alex, Bayla, Cara, Danni and Emma would not have objected to being identified on the grounds their sexuality would be made public, but for other safety concerns: we never used our last names when we spoke publicly, because of what we knew about the intimidation and harassment tactics of the Heritage Front.
Chapter Three: Coming Together

I want to begin here to demonstrate that how we formulate/conceptualize identity has an impact on how we do politics. I have been gesturing towards a chain of logic that goes like this: the subject is coherent and seamless and knowable; identity is a manifestation of the knowledge and representation of that subject, and as such is similarly stable and autonomous; political identification is born of experiences of marginalization and homelessness - Lacan contends that "loss is a condition of signification" (in Creet: 188), so identity is always about marginalization; marginalized subjects will, once they have publicly identified themselves, come together and work towards liberation. We have come to know ourselves as those Others that dominant society sets apart to know itself, and we have taken up the categories and become - not necessarily all they said we were - but we have defined what we are, in resistance. After this marginality is embraced as an identity, it must be policed. We have to set the definitions, we have to deny what they say we are.

And yet Judith Butler reminds us that the process of identification is always ambivalent and unstable, so the job of policing is not just being externally vigilant, but self-monitoring. And it is a job without cease, without end. This chain, I believe, is and has been the foundation of lesbian and feminist political platforms. What I have come to suspect is that these ideas, this chain, is equally responsible for making possible our political projects as it is for rendering them unworkable. I have therefore tried to trace the workings of this chain through the identifications of six Jewish Feminist Action (JFA) members, and then, in the next chapter, through 'the bisexuality wars.' I have also tried to problematize the above formulations and to suggest alternatives, for theory and practice. Postmodern theories, as one example of unsettling theories, have

1This observation was made by Sherene Razack, in the context of a conversation about my thesis. It is with appreciation that I employ her point here.
presented us with a critique of the subject as coherent and autonomous, and of identity as free-standing essence.

A PARTIAL HISTORY OF JFA
FROM PRIVATE IDENTIFICATION TO PUBLIC DECLARATION

JFA came together in 1992, at a time when antisemitic, racist and homophobic attacks and sentiments seemed on the rise in Toronto - on our very streets, in our neighbourhoods and parks. Wolfgang Droege and Ernst Zundel, prominent figures in the white supremacist organization The Heritage Front, were vocal and active locally. JFA was conceived in the midst of an appropriately Jewish feminist scene - a potluck Rosh Hashanah dinner. There was already the felt need for a local feminist/women's antifascist group to respond to above events, and then it was suggested that more specifically, this group should be made up of Jewish feminists. This was apparently understood to be a fine idea, because of the number of Jewish feminist activists who were becoming increasingly frustrated with, and alienated from, the work they were doing in various left-wing communities.

The idea of having a Jewish feminist antiracist group came to Emma in the course of conversations with other politically-active women. The last of these conversations took place at the Rosh Hashanah party, where Emma immediately circulated a piece of paper for phone numbers of women interested in such a group. About twenty women signed up. Emma and Danni then called people to come together at Danni's house on November 4th, 1992. They both remember the first few meetings as intense and exciting, predominantly because women were discussing issues that had never before been enunciated in quite the same way. Emma recalls that

one of the first questions [at the first meeting] was basically 'why are you here,' like the therapists ask you! And overwhelmingly, without a doubt - and this is why this group is so precious, it was 'I need a place to be all of my identities at once.'

Danni also remember that sense of commonality:
It was just this amazing thing to be able to find ourselves together and to be able to talk about experiences that we'd had - mostly experiences of antisemitism - and people had really hard stories to tell about things that they'd gone through, and then other women going 'oh my god, and this happened to me,' and being able to just identify with those things, and having never had a forum where they could actually talk about them.

When women got together at the first ever JFA meeting this common 'experience' became overwhelmingly apparent. In talking about why they had come to this group meeting, and how they imagined (the then unnamed) JFA should look, it seems that one story became emblematic in its repetition: it was about having encountered antisemitism on the left while doing feminist, antiracist and radical work. And the story was not just of antisemitism being overlooked as a category to list alongside all the other 'isms', but of hearing blatantly antisemitic things said, of having it made clear that all Jews are bad (the stereotype resembles that of the greedy wealthy Jew), that Zionism is the same as racism, that the Holocaust has been spoken of too much already. It seems clear from my interviews that JFA came into being for two reasons: to be a political force from a particular standpoint, and to provide community. Alex states this first motivation:

[JFA] was going to be a group of Jewish women who were committed to fighting fascism, wanting to try and take some kind of an alternative perspective, both in the sense of being alternative to the left, and having some kind of a feminist analysis... it was a group of women who cared a lot about their Jewish identity, and that wanted to be speaking from that place in terms of doing the antifascist work.

Bayla describes "JFA's reason for existing" as "to do fairly grassroots, fairly concrete political work around antisemitism and racism in Toronto... what I understood was that there were women who wanted to do work, not just around the Middle East, who wanted to do antifascist work in Toronto." Danni talks about doing the work in coalition with others: "I think we saw ourselves as potentially being a group that could work in solidarity with other antiracist and antifascist groups, and... also have a very big focus on doing work against the rise of the extreme right in Canada." Cara also
says that JFA formed for political reasons, "to be a Jewish feminist presence in the antifascist movement, to address antisemitism within the left, and the right, and as a place for Jewish women to come together, strong feminists," but she suggests community was equally important, that because of rising antisemitism there was "a need to connect with other Jewish women to do more of this work together." I asked Emma if JFA was not only about being active as Jews, but also about having a kind of safety, and she replied:

yeah, being allowed to be who you are. And if being who you are is Jewish and lesbian and feminist - and anarchist - I mean I felt like JFA was a strange place to try to play with the anarchist stuff. There were too many lawyers in the group for that! (laughing) I think the Jewish thing in particular - maybe it smells of family, reminisces of family. Maybe antisemitic unsafety is more scary than homophobic unsafety....I'm sure you can't measure.

Safety was a concern for concrete reasons, such as the perceived rise in antisemitic and racist activity in Toronto, but the expectation of safety is also related to privilege. White, middle class young women, challenged by women of colour about the privileges of skin, experience, for perhaps the first time, a profound threat to our sense of belonging and entitlement. Shaken by this, we sometimes articulated our marginality as lack of safety. I will return to a discussion of safety and privilege.

The desire of the small group that ultimately became JFA was not just to counter the extreme right in all its guises, as Jewish feminists. It was also to celebrate all of one's multiple identities (woman, Jew, feminist, dyke, bisexual, anarchist, separatist) and to create community on the basis of that. When I asked in the interviews, what brought you to the group, the common motivation seemed to be that JFA represented the possibility of being able to be in the company of others who are alike, whereas in previous groups there had been a sense of alienation. JFA would be not just community, but family. Alex talks about the appeal of JFA for her, after being involved in another Jewish feminist group that didn't share her "commitment" to Jewish identity. She therefore joined JFA out of "a real burning desire to come
together with a group of Jewish women who cared a lot about antisemitism...[a] craving^2 to be with a group of Jewish women to do political work." Alex "had a sense that [with] the women who were coming to JFA...I'd find more commonality in terms of issues of Jewish identity." Bayla similarly talks of a previous political experience in a group that was predominantly composed of Jewish lesbians, who teased her about being with a man: "it made me feel not very understood, and like there was a part of my life that was shut out from this group." She came to JFA because "I wanted community. I think I joined JFA for Jewish feminist community." Cara had no luck feeling at home in a Toronto group until she joined JFA, but even then she noted some differences:

When I came to Toronto, I tried really hard to find something within the Jewish community to be connected to, and had a very hard time....JFA was actually one of the first groups that I felt connected to Jewishly, although I felt frustrated that while the common denominator was that people were Jewish there, the Jewishness seemed to be largely absent from a lot of our thinking about stuff, which I found disappointing, but I think it made sense in terms of where people were coming from. I think that something that was different for me than for a lot of other women in JFA was that my primary Jewish identity was not built on antisemitism. My sense is that for a lot of women who came to that group, that was part of what brought them there, the existence of antisemitism, the experience of antisemitism (emphasis added).

Danni's description of why she was drawn to JFA illustrates our belief that a certain identity sensibly leads to a certain kind of action - that knowing, being and doing are interconnected: "JFA came logically out of...putting together some of the things that I'd been thinking about, and how I defined my own identity, to fight against something that I found to be really oppressive." Emma offers an inversion of that same chain: doing as proof of being - authentically, and acceptably Jewish:

maybe for me, because I was questioning my own Jewish identity - is my mum a Jew or not, I don't know, her dad's a Jew, does that mean she's a Jew, my dad's a Jew but then he converted, I didn't grow up with Jewish culture - so

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^2The idea of "craving" Jewish community echoes Melanie Kaye Kantrowitz's statement about "hunger for Jewish culture, music, food, language, humor, perspective, Jewish people" (1992:92). She connects this desire to an awareness of "anti-Semitism, palpable - and growing - around me" (1992:92)
maybe it was so important for me because I was a Jew there [in JFA]. Not only was I a Jew, but I was a dyke and people seemed to like me.

The illusion of sameness, and with it the expectation of safety and acceptance, was one of JFA's strongest magnets for people, and was to become one of our greatest stumbling blocks. Similarly, the assumption embedded in the promise of JFA as community was that this group would be the one place where we could reveal and act from all facets of ourselves, as if we could finally be our true selves. The equation of identity with self-knowledge had also proved very attractive, and yet would contribute to the impasse.

Building community and identity became the focus. I think, rather than, as activist and novelist Sarah Schulman advises, weaving the 'consciousness-raising' and caucusing into activist work. Schulman quotes her friend Maxine Wolfe: "a movement has to be flexible to provide access to activism for everyone at every stage of their personal and political development. A consensus model inhibits this possibility" (6). Instead, during the late 1980s in the US, for some progressive movements praxis became central. The idea was that 'personal development' should be synchronous with organizing, rather than the necessary precursor of (with the tendency to monopolize) organizing. (Schulman:6). Schulman gives as an example the work of ACT UP:

instead of stopping the activism of ACT UP to do consciousness raising on sexism, or developing a women's caucus inside the organization principally to provide support (which would have been the old identity politics model) the question became one of application. How can the entire organization address women's access to AIDS services in the practicalities of our organizing?(6)

It was perhaps the life and death urgency of the AIDS crisis which produced this method - or rather, set aside the previous "two-step" approach (first process, then act). AIDS unites some people, because it does not distinguish between identities: "it defined activism as something available to everyone, immediately" (Schulman, 7). I don't mean to suggest that we spent all our time socializing or 'sharing'. As Danni recalls, JFA was very active for a time:
there was just an enormous amount of work to be done. We were in pretty big demand...when we were first formed, and we were often getting called to represent ourselves at bigger demonstrations and actions and things that were going on at the time.

But all along, even as we wanted to be politically active - and many of us were "women who had been doing feminist work for a long time, and had been involved in various forms of feminist, or at least left-wing politics" (Cara) - we were very pulled by the promise of community. Antisemitism and homophobia in dominant society, and antisemitism in other progressive groups produced this desire for home and safety. And yet I would argue that community as a goal is also what endangered JFA, because of how we formulated that community.

What was to bring and bond people together - the initial and then layered common identities, and the concurrent performance/expression of them - was also the model that later got called into question, around which the whole enterprise derailed: which identities are acceptable, what those identities (lesbian and bisexual were the central ones under fire) should look like, why, and when they are no longer recognizable. At work here are three problematic assumptions. First, that there is such a thing as a stable, common identity. Second, people who identify the same way - as lesbians - will then act the same way. Third, identity provides sufficient basis for a community. What was not taken into account is that The Lesbian is a fantasy, the combined creation of pathologizing discourses and romanticizing discourses. Identity is always unstable - because it is constructed through a repetitive performance - and ambivalent - because it involves "an internalization of the self-as-other," a doubling of fear and desire (Hall:255).

Even as everyone extols the virtues of JFA - feeling accepted, understood, connected - Cara signals a less apparent uniting element that she found problematic: Jewish identity informed by antisemitism. She states that "my primary Jewish identity was not built on antisemitism." Though she does refer to feeling "connected Jewishly"
to JFA, being with other Jewish women does not seem to be her primary motivation for involvement in the group. This brings us back to the idea of identity as always founded on a sense of marginality: if you belong exclusively to the dominant group (which is composed of white North American Christian able-bodied men), you do not have cause, or means (if you consider that there is no separating off without a loss or negation) to name for yourself an identity outside of the universal: human being. While all the women in JFA were there as activists, the suggestion that antisemitism is interconnected with needing a Jewish feminist/lesbian community provides a clue to the conflict that ensued.

If "the existence of antisemitism, the experience of antisemitism" (Cara) was an integral part of being Jewish, then that identity would always be ambivalent and premised on victimhood. It is ambivalent because it is the result of internalized antisemitism alongside pride; for Bayla, Emma and me this ambivalence also resides in not feeling 'authentic' - which is anyway a feature of the unattainable ideal of identity. Jewish identity is also ambivalent because of the possibility of passing, which symbolically is an erasure of the identity, and materially can produce benefits. Identity, as marginality, is a priori premised on victimhood, which equals a claim of innocence and a denial of dominant parts of identity. These two elements of identity - ambivalence and innocence, as well as the idea of stability that I named above - all in one way or another contributed to our dispute.

What is not always explicit is in whose company these women felt alienated. When other groups they belonged to are named (by Alex, Bayla, Cara), they are ones composed of Jewish women who view either Jewishness or sexuality differently than JFA seemed to. However, in descriptions of what JFA was/was meant to be, everyone makes reference to experiences of antisemitism in the left and of needing to address antisemitism in Toronto. What I observed was that JFA's political activities were typically in response to two kinds of antisemitism: state or institutional
antisemitism; and the antisemitism of other small progressive organizations. Sometimes the latter were groups of non-Jewish antifascist women and men who were white and of colour, and sometimes they were feminist antiracism collectives comprised predominantly of non-Jewish women of colour. The level of politicization of all the women I interviewed was such that they would not have been seeking refuge from already familiar mainstream antisemitism; I suspect that the succor provided by JFA was defined against the difference of unnamed, absent women of colour.

In some respects, the fragility of the community provided by JFA was also in relation to women of colour. Consider the features of the community: much like the basis of our identities as Jewish and bisexual/lesbian, the community defined itself in part, though not exclusively, as oppressed, innocent and coherent. The foundations of that community were unsettled by encounters with some women of colour, who told us at various times that we were being racist, that zionism is a form of racism, and that antisemitism doesn't rate as a form of racism. If we are capable of being racist, then we are not innocent. If we can be oppressive, then how can we be oppressed? If we are like other white people - oppressive and dominant - then what is unique to being Jewish? This questioning of our individual and community claims, a questioning that emerged in our relations with women of colour, then prefigured the bisexuality conflict, which pressed all the same buttons: if lesbians can be biphobic, then we are sometimes dominant, not exclusively oppressed; if lesbians can be oppressive, then we are not innocent; if bisexual women have long-term relationships with women, then what is distinct about being lesbian? The two debates are analogous in the threat they posed to our identity claims.

At the time I conducted the five interviews, this parallel was not apparent to me, so I am responsible for not raising it as an issue with the narrators. My choice of interview questions is revealing of a structured lacuna in my own thinking: that I was not always concerned with how JFA and its dispute are raced. It was not a central
question that I was posing, nor was it an influence I was easily able to perceive. However, my ignorance born of privilege does not account for replication of the lack in the interviews. Everyone I interviewed was encouraged to suggest questions, and even when that did not occur formally, we frequently spent time discussing issues I had not anticipated. My conjecture about how and why this slippage - from conflict with women of colour, to the debate about bisexuality and biphobia - occurred links up with interrogations of identity founded on victimhood, which requires the continued presence of an aggressor for the preservation of innocence. In the course of this chapter, I will return to deliberation of how it was possible - and even necessary - for the debate in JFA to take place without talk of whiteness or women of colour. And yet as Sander Gilman helped me to illustrate in chapter one, race is never absent.

COMING TO POLITICAL CONSCIOUSNESS

Before tracing the effects of ambivalence and victimhood/innocence in the JFA disagreement, I want first to further discuss identity in relation to the women I interviewed. I asked the five of them to tell me about how each 'came' to her various identities. I was curious about what compels people to certain choices, how they arrive at naming or labeling themselves, and how this is brought into a political context. The relation of identity and political consciousness presupposes certain qualities of identity: that it is a political act to identify, and that identity is a necessary aspect of political organizing. As I have already argued, identity seems to be a central organizing principle in any North American organization which has as its aim the struggle to end political disenfranchisement. Any identity can cease to be individual and become political. 'Mother' might have certain exclusively private connotations, and yet it can become a politicized identity. Consider maternal feminism, or Las Madres de la Plaza del Cinco de Mayo (the mothers of the disappeared, in Argentina). Identity has been a useful if not indispensable organizing principle for groups (such as they are
- in many shapes and sizes) dedicated to fighting for social change, justice, reform, revolution.

What I am attempting to establish by discussing identity as a 'journey' and in relation to political struggle is that individual 'coming out' stories are a microcosm for the process of building political movement. These two processes - individual and group identity formation - also dovetail, and political movements become invested in announcing and reclaiming definitions of (individual) identities. Individual political identities are however always relational: they depend on the perception of common experiences and world view. Identity as political also comes out of idea that the personal is political. Your individual identity is not just the product of your personal history, nor is it a matter that should remain private (to be expressed only behind closed doors).

Although all of the five women spoke about how they think and feel about their Jewish, feminist and sexual identity, I am going to limit my discussion to each woman's most contested identity. By most contested, I mean the identity around which there is greatest conflict from all sides: internal doubt; mainstream discrimination and disapproval; subculture criticism and scrutiny. This identity is perhaps most relevant, and most contested, in the sense that the claim on which it is based does not feel secure. Internal doubt, I would contend, is indicative of how the identity is unstable in relation to its claims - to marginality, and to coherence.

For all five of them, this was the identity arrived at as an adolescent or adult, the one where there was some illusion of choice and self-determination. 'Choice,' the reward of the liberal subject, is simultaneously a destabilizing element, for if there is choice, the identity is not natural. Though all of them may have felt conflicted about other identities as children (Bayla, Cara and Danni all talk about being directly or indirectly discriminated against as Jews when they were children; Emma felt oppressed as a child and as the only girl in her family), they were indoctrinated into
those early identities before they even had the illusion of choice. For example, Bayla says

in some way, I think my childhood environment made me a very political person and aware of being political, and that was the home I grew up in, mostly my mother, but that was politics around race and politics around sex, sexism particularly, not sexuality at all. As long as I can remember I've been aware of issues of sexism and racism. And so I would say in some sense that I grew up with a notion of what it meant to be political (emphasis added).

Emma similarly describes having always had a sense of certain inequalities:

I think my earliest sense of oppression was adult-child stuff, and definitely girl-boy stuff, 'cause I have 5 brothers, 2 of whom are younger, one who lived far away, I never saw him, and 3 older brothers. But of course I had to be the responsible one, and I had to clean up after them, because you know, boys will be boys blah blah blah. So gender oppression and generational shit.

Identities arrived at as teenagers or university students are enmeshed with struggles for autonomy and a sense of self, the issues under consideration here. Contested identities are therefore most useful because in recounting how we 'discovered' our marginality, all six of us illustrate my point about identity, as marginality, as self-knowledge. My 'story' follows the five accounts, in a somewhat different form that I will explain later. After I have sketched these individual 'journeys' for you, I want to pursue another component of identity that I see as linked to problems in JFA: the equation of identity with self-knowledge. The 1970s construction of lesbian feminist/separatist will be deployed to stand as an example of the identity model at play in JFA.

I started off a discussion of identity by asking all five women to tell me if they describe themselves according to identity labels. I asked them to tell me what label(s) they would use, and whether they identify differently in public and in private. What follows is their discussion of coming out, visibility, labels, discrimination and feelings of inauthenticity in relation to their most contentious identity.
CONTESTED IDENTITIES

Alex describes the emergence of her sexual identity and her political identity as intertwined:

I don't know if I could say that there was one event, but when I think of a political self emerging, it happened when I was in graduate school and it had to do with the feminist legal theory that I was working on, and it had to do with my own stuff about being a lesbian, and it completely interconnected.

Though there was no single moment where she magically 'became' this new person, the path Alex delineates, of reading feminist theory and considering herself a lesbian, resembles the course described by the other women I interviewed. The next familiar step, after identifying privately, is to move into the public realm, through political involvement:

I think through that process of my own consciousness raising I started to be interested in issues of violence against women....And so I started volunteering [at a shelter for battered women].

Coming out as a lesbian had its difficulties, on one level because of Alex's own homophobia. She describes being excited about going to a meeting of a women's caucus in graduate school, but when she arrived, she found the other women at the meeting intimidating: "they were too radical! I was scared off! I was also majorly lesbian phobic, and there were dykes who were in this thing, so I headed for the hills."

She attributes the importance of coming out to the necessity for being visible, to combat the hegemonic sexual - and cultural - order. She compares the imperative to be recognized for lesbians and for Jews: "I think there's quite a similarity between the Jewish and the lesbian in terms of the reasons why it matters, because in the lesbian context, most people would assume all females to be heterosexual unless you make a point of letting them know otherwise." This relates to the issue of passing: unless you "look the ways stereotypically dykes are thought to look...if you're female you're assumed to be heterosexual." She states that being out is important for two reasons:
"disrupting the homogeneity:" and "feeling like I exist, and...demanding some kind of existence that's on my own terms, instead of feeling like I'm completely invisible and not in the room." This question of visibility for Jews is an important distinction that sets the identity apart from other racialized identities. And while the option to pass bears potential for greater privilege, it has contributed to the appearance of a past-less people, and creates conditions for ambivalence: if I am not recognized as a Jew, am I a Jew? If I am not visible as a lesbian, and therefore not subjected to discrimination, then do I live as a lesbian?

Some years after coming out as a lesbian, Alex became increasingly interested in separatist politics. However, before she began to label herself a separatist, she ran into difficulties at her job which she believes were the result of coworkers perceiving her as a lesbian separatist. This was a complex situation, not only because she was passed over for a job, but because she was effectively outed as a separatist, before she had even begun to use that label for herself in any situation, lesbian or straight:

I don't think I identified as [a lesbian separatist], but I was identified as one. They wanted to get rid of the lesbian separatist who'd never said she was a lesbian separatist. I guess I've been burned so much that I'm a bit more cautious, and it bothers me, 'cause I don't like to be closeted (emphasis added).

The issue for her was not only weighing the risks of discrimination versus the benefits of public identification, but like being assumed to be straight or Christian, Alex was externally labeled a separatist. She thus lost the bid for autonomy that is offered by self-identifying. The power to name, and the power of naming oneself was a theme throughout the JFA dispute, on the question of where and whether to draw a line between 'lesbian' and 'bisexual,' and who draws this dubious line. Eventually she did come to apply this designation to her self, which was enabled by reading and then meeting separatists. Much like the process of coming to lesbianism, Alex's separatist identity emerged gradually, out of reading theory, and in relation to others:
it wasn't like I had this big shift in politics, so then I thought oh now I'm a lesbian separatist. It was more like when I thought about the kind of politics that I had and the things that I read that made sense to me and that I connected with, that excited me or that I felt passionate about, it was always written by a lesbian separatist. So I started to seek them out more, like going to Michigan [Women's Music Festival]. And I think when I actually connected with others who identified similarly, real people as opposed to just books that I was reading, that's when I started to identify.

Unfortunately the sense of community afforded by Michigan is not typical of Alex's life; more often, she feels misunderstood by other lesbians, and sometimes unwelcome in their midst. According to her, the identity of lesbian separatist is contentious and marginalized in mainstream as well as lesbian culture, to the extent that "I don't feel like I can even in lesbian circles often be who I am or say what I think, which are things that were created by lesbian feminist theorists, and it's like they're somehow not ok to talk about amongst lesbians anymore." Alex equates lesbian separatism with who she is and how she represents her self. She is frustrated by being frequently misunderstood by people because of her politics, and this frustration is perhaps connected to understanding her political/sexual identity as who she is.

Alex is stuck in the familiar position of having to defend her identity, to address people's misperceptions of it, and trying to live what she believes without succumbing to pressures to assimilate, though she finds no compensatory home for separatism. The absence of felt safety was paradoxically to be the great void filled by JFA. The way she describes not having safety reverberates with earlier statements about finding community in JFA. She relates that the absence of safety, combined with feeling marginalized even in JFA, causes her sadness. She says she finds it disrespectful that things that somehow I associate as being fairly basically feminist have somehow become radical, wacko or passé values. There's this thing about people thinking, 'oh you're so seventies'...A lot of things you take for granted wouldn't have been here without that energy...I'm also watching those things I treasure be undermined.
There is perhaps some link between seeing values being undermined, and having one's identity unsettled. Though she doesn't expect groups like JFA to reflect her separatist politics, she feels excluded by

groups of lesbians who talk about what the community needs and what they need is to have more affinity with their brotherhood, and what they don't need is a bunch of women saying they're separatists. And I'm thinking, so why is it that they want to make men more comfortable than they want to make me?

There is in this exclusion a denial of sameness and commonality, "lesbians who really would rather put men first than put a lesbian sister first, or even see her as a sister."

Sometimes, Alex says her situation comes to resemble the lesbian purges of the 1970s: "I do think there are very serious analogies to the way heterosexual feminists have historically treated lesbians in organizations." Consequently, she reports experiencing the most discrimination as a lesbian separatist, because it comes from two sides at once, with little cushioning in between. Though Alex might argue with me that she gains no privilege from identifying as separatist, her situation parallels that of bisexual women who are simultaneously rejected by centre and margins. And where she argued that lesbians cannot oppress bisexual women, she does seem willing to suggest that lesbians discriminate against her as a separatist:

The things that stand out for me the most are my experiences being marginalized as a lesbian. There's a general theme to my being marginalized as a lesbian, and it's as people discern, or when people discern that I have very little interest in putting energy into men in my life, everything changes, all the rules change. If people see me as a lesbian who's just like them but for the fact that I prefer to be sexual with women, then that's ok, but if there's very little that I want to invest in men, that completely changes the dynamic. And I would say that that's true for lesbians - lesbians do that to me, not just straight people. Mostly it's more virulent coming from heterosexuals, but definitely it is an experience that I've had with lesbians (emphasis added).

As a result of being misunderstood, ostracized and patronized, coming out as separatist has subjectively been most difficult, "more oppressive to me than anything I can think of," for Alex. This is arguably exacerbated by the absence of 'home,' an immediate community of other lesbian separatists.
Brought up with progressive discourses around gender and race, the quandary of her sexual identity was not Bayla's first encounter with the personal as political. Still, bisexuality has been a difficult identity for her, though not primarily because of internal struggles around embodying a 'deviant' sexuality. In university, it was problematic for her to identify as bisexual because of her surroundings. Bayla started volunteering at a local rape crisis centre in her first year at university, and found herself immersed in unfamiliar political waters, where bisexual was a highly contentious identity:

kind of by mistake, I got slipped into a CR group with the women who worked at the Centre, who were mostly older women. They were [local] residents, they mostly weren't [university] students, they were mostly working-class, about half of them were lesbians. I don't know how the hell I, this little 18 year old waif got stuck in this group. It was heavenly for me, and kind of miraculous, 'cause this was a group of women who were quite antagonistic to the university students, and kind of pissed-off at university students coming and going at the Rape Crisis Centre, quite pissed-off with a lot of class stuff around young university kids coming into [their town].

She recollects that the centre in the early 1980s was practicing identity politics. As in other Canadian rape crisis centres, the model was of group and caucus:

Caucuses are a mechanism for women dealing with an additional facet of oppression to take care of each other, discuss areas of shared reality and to work on developing policy and action plans for the collective as a whole...The collective is prepared to take direction, to deal immediately with any criticisms from a caucus and give serious weight to any recommendations (Toronto Rape Crisis Centre:71).

While at university, Bayla began to be sexually involved with other women, but did not feel politically free to call herself bisexual, nor were her relationships accepted by most lesbians at the centre. She says it would not have been "politically astute" to call herself a lesbian, because

I was working in a very strong identity politics, a lot of lesbians who voiced very strongly a kind of frustration with bisexuality as a getting-the-best-of-both-worlds position, not as a real position, either het women who were just screwing around with lesbians, or lesbians who hadn't figured it out yet. And there was something really politically hurtful about taking that position. It was
kind of sick, you know. I slept with women, and I got severely chastised for doing it. If I'd slept with other het women, that would have been ok, but to sleep with lesbians was bad, was really a political mistake. So it never occurred to me to identify myself as bisexual, it wasn't even in the realm of things.

Only when she moved to Toronto and "became involved...with a different kind of politics," and found a community of lesbians, in Toronto, who in effect condoned bisexuality did she feel it was possible to go 'public' as a bisexual woman. This support was necessary for Bayla, "cause I still had this kind of power hierarchy - lesbians are more oppressed, so if they say it's ok that I'm bisexual, then that's ok."

Within this context, Bayla indicates that the authority to name is held by those deemed most oppressed. Self-identification is not available to those who are viewed as holding more power. Identity politics were operative in another group to which Bayla belonged, where bisexuality was less criticized than mocked. Her sexual identity was defined for Bayla, as an intermediate or undecided state:

There were bad sexuality politics in Montreal too - in a much less structural way, but I experienced a lot of lesbians - and this is real identity politics, which I wouldn't have named it then - not really getting why I would be involved in a group like that [a group which represented itself as being made up of Jewish lesbians and their friends], and this kind of perpetual teasing/joking, like I was going to come out sooner or later, I just hadn't quite figured it out yet. And it was real identity politics - like what the hell would a straight woman be doing involved in a group like this....And then it was very uncomfortable, 'cause it was kind of a perpetual teasing about a part of me that I didn't think was that funny. And it made me feel not very understood, and like there was a part of my life that was shut out from this group (emphasis added).

Like Alex, having her identity misconstrued was a personal issue for Bayla, because how she knew her self was being mocked. Her recent graduate studies have enabled another political and sexual awakening. Though this shift resembles the identity-emerging-from-theory model, Bayla's identity and theoretical positions were already embedded in and informed by politics. Feeling misunderstood and not at liberty to identify as she desires has been somewhat alleviated by studying poststructuralist theories, which have given her an alternate conception of identity.
and "some concrete tools to trash identity politics with, which I hadn't had in the past." Poststructuralist theories have enabled her to defend her identity, and to deconstruct the framework that denied her identification with marginality. If what I have postulated about identity as marginality is accurate, then Bayla could not claim an oppositional sexual identity unless she could simultaneously claim oppression. In some respect, she's still in the process of moving from a private identity to a public performance. Bisexuality has not become a central identity in all parts of her life, the way being Jewish or a feminist has, in the sense that "there's a handful of people in my life who would have no notion that I would identify myself as bisexual, and who I probably would choose not to tell, yet anyway." Bayla asserts this notion of choice - which seems to be about passing - in relation to how she publicly names her sexuality:

[Naming myself as bisexual] is the only one [of my identities] that I would say I've made a decision about. All my other identities are kind of without as much choice, and I guess it's always that way around sexuality - some people would say not always - but I would say sexuality is the one on that list of identities that one has more choice around how you name yourself. I don't think I could ever not name myself as middle class, or as white. So sexuality is the only one that's more complex.

Having a sense of agency about public declarations of her sexual identity is part of what renders that identity contentious, because the option to pass exists.

Bayla expressed similar discomfort with her Jewish identity: because she does not look typically Jewish, and because her father is not Jewish, she feels her Jewishness is somewhat in question. One strategy has been to mark herself as Jewish, by wearing a star of David. However, she does not mark herself as bisexual or announce her identity in public, because it is doubly complex:

to a straight community, it feels too huge to explain. Even with good friends, I don't know where to begin. It's interesting that it doesn't come up, because I do a lot of lesbian cultural and political things, so I find it interesting that it doesn't come up with friends or my in-laws. My guess is they're clueless, which is part of that ambient ism [heterosexism], that it just doesn't occur to them. It goes the other way, with the lesbian community, that I'm not legit. Sometimes I get assumed to be lesbian, when people don't know me, but when they do know me, I feel they'll think I'm not legit, because I'm in
a long term relationship with a man. It's not an ism so much as it's part of the 
rigidity of how we think about sexuality. Lesbians are not exempt from this 
static thinking, though some do think sexuality in more interesting ways. So 
when you're bisexual, you fall into this kind of nowhere land, where you don't 
get recognized by either side. And that's a real drag.

What further complicates the issue of sexuality is that passing can be as either 
straight or lesbian - which exemplifies how positions of dominance and oppression can 
shift depending on the site. If Bayla is with straight people, being assumed straight 
means access to benefits. If she is seen as lesbian by them, she loses these 
privileges. And yet if lesbians assume she is lesbian, she gains a sense of community 
- however fleeting - and is temporarily granted status as oppressed and thereby 
innocent.

Like the label separatist, identifying as bisexual is doubly contentious, 
maligned as it sometime is by straight people and by lesbians. As Alex pointed out 
about the similarity between being Jewish and being lesbian, being able to pass can 
mean disappearing. For Bayla, the risk of passing either way is a sense of 
inauthenticity and a fear of discovery. When an identity emerges or is claimed as an 
adult, it appears to exist as a matter of choice. The illusion of free will, of a self that is 
independent of discursive systems, and can know and reveal itself through an identity, 
is a constant feature of the 'journey' of coming out. What is paradoxical is that this 
same impression of choice undermines the imagined authentic self, that which is 
uncovered via an unambiguous identity.

_Cara_

Cara recalls her political involvement as initially rooted in Jewish issues. At 
university, this engagement came to include feminist politics, first through Women's 
Studies courses, and then involvement with women's groups on campus. She 

describes her political framework as "hugely" informed by "the feminist politics of the 
seventies and eighties....Probably I was more affected by radical feminism than any of
the other kinds of feminism." It was in the women's counseling collective she belonged to that Cara worked with lesbians who maintained that bisexuality doesn't exist as more than a stage in coming out as a lesbian. Nonetheless, Cara held her own convictions that bisexuality was an actual and separate identity. The collective did peer counseling, and also

did a lot of public forum kinds of things, and I remember that this other woman and I wanted to plan an evening on bisexuality, and there was a lesbian in the group who said 'there's no such thing as bisexuality,' and over her dead body would we have a speaker on it. At that time I was actually involved with a man, and I was actually pretty sure that bisexuality was a real thing, but somehow she seemed to have the upper hand. And probably as a lesbian she was absolutely convinced that bisexuality is just closeted people's way of coming out, or a process, or a stepping stone.

Although some people in JFA have argued that lesbians cannot be in dominant positions, the woman Cara refers to had the final say on the existence of bisexuality. Though there are of course contexts in which being a lesbian means being oppressed, when she was involved with a man and thus supposedly in a position of greater privilege, "I remember there were times when I felt guilty...feeling like somehow I wasn't as good a feminist as all my lesbian sisters."

The environment in which Cara became political as a feminist, a context that continues to inform her sexual politics, was one where bisexuality was disparaged. Like white middle class lesbians in the 1960s who sought to dispute sexual definitions that didn't represent them, Cara would come to identify in opposition to a negative construction of bisexuality, though in her case, that derogatory definition was the one held by lesbians and not by straight people. As much as Cara may have had access to certain kinds of privilege when she was with a man, in this regard lesbians were in a position of power relative to her. She describes how initially she was not satisfied with her own conclusions about her identity as bisexual, and that although she had previously been involved with a woman, and then with a man,
when I got involved with this relationship [with Kim], I spent a lot of time, and
too much money in therapy trying to sort out whether or not this meant that I
was really a lesbian. It took me probably about a year to realize that I was
struggling so much because somebody else had the question of what are
you.....when I finally realized that it was other people's need for me to define
myself in one category or another, and not my need, I could let go of it.

Lesbian feminists have not been the only ones expressing negative opinions
about bisexuality in Cara's life; like Bayla and Alex, Cara has been subjected to
disapproval from both sides. Her mother is troubled by Cara being bisexual:

Bisexuality makes my mother crazy. She hates the fact that I'm involved with a
woman, but both of my other sisters are as well. But at least my older sister
who came out as a lesbian, and absolutely knew she was a lesbian when she
was 16 years old - it took them about 10 years to come to terms with that - but
at least that was the way it was. Bisexuality just makes her crazy - there's
hope, there's choice. She can come to terms with it if there's no choice,
like 'what can I do, my daughter's a lesbian, she can't help it.' If you can
choose, that just boggles her mind beyond belief. So when my other sister
got involved with a woman a couple of years ago, that nearly sent her over the
edge....My mother was always very excited when they came out with studies
that showed how you became a lesbian. She always wanted to believe it was
my father's fault - he wasn't strong enough, he left - they were divorced about
10 or 15 years ago - it's because their relationship didn't work out, or it's
because my last boyfriend dumped me in such a bad way...Kim's my rebound
relationship. So [my mother's] real pleased about the baby! (emphasis added).

The existence of choice is what makes bisexuality so problematic for Cara's mother.
Where Bayla discussed choice (in her case, to pass) as somewhat troubling, Cara
seems to view it as liberating. In keeping with the accounts of the other women I
interviewed, she points to reading other people's discussions of bisexuality -
particularly the book Closer to Home, "a collection of essays written by
women...specifically about bisexual feminism," as helpful. She has come to some
clarity about her own sexual identity, which in her case means allowing for greater
fluidity: "But for days like that JFA day when you're pushed to the wall to come up
with this thing, I sometimes call my self bisexual, sometimes lesbian. It depends on
my mood that day or who I'm talking to!" (emphasis added) The pressure to identify
one way or another, and a resistance to dichotomous categorizing were present as
issues in the JFA dispute. While the labels lesbian and bisexual both hold significance
for Cara, she identifies differently depending on the setting. In her job, where she will soon be up for reappointment, she has decided for now to conceal that her partner is a woman because she believes she will lose her job if this becomes known. She argues that

I have nothing to gain by being out there at this stage, other than losing my job. There are people I'm sure who would feel very differently about that, that you should be out wherever you are. But I figure at this point having this job is more important than being out, and coming out will happen when it feels right for me to do that.

The process of coming out has not only required an appraisal of risks involved, but has also compelled Cara to question what it means to come out under one banner as opposed to another. Simple visibility in any community is not desirable if the price is acceding to a definition that is merely expedient, for the sake of order and ease. In the course of coming out, she has called under scrutiny definitions of bisexuality, and has mounted a challenge to misconceptions of the identity:

Bisexuality has gotten a bad rap - the assumptions people make around bisexuals being promiscuous, more promiscuous, that it doesn't matter, just sleep with whoever you want to - that's not been my experience of the bisexuals that I've met. It seems to matter a great deal, and cause a lot of questioning and a lot of struggling, so I think that there's a lot of assumptions about what it means to have a bisexual identity.

At the same time, she interrogates the meaning of identity:

I think that lesbians would just much prefer that bisexual women, especially if they're involved with women, were lesbians or called themselves lesbians. But for me, I guess, it depends on what is a lesbian? Is a lesbian just somebody who's involved with a woman? What about lesbians who aren't involved with anybody? What about lesbians who are much more woman identified and attracted but have a fling with a man? It's a lot more complicated than that.

Cara critiques the notion that bisexuality is a category of partial heterosexual privilege, on the grounds that ambiguity is regarded by dominant culture with as much if not more suspicion as is homosexuality. The suggestion is that even deviant identities, so long as they conform to a binary order, are valued because they support the current hierarchical system, and that complexity is eschewed by some lesbians as
well as by straight society. The result is that both some straight people, like her mother, and some lesbians, are troubled by her identity, which brings her to wonder, "who do we identify for?" While it may be true that Cara is ostracized from two groups rather than just from straight people because she identifies as bisexual, if her partner were a man there would be ways - just walking down the street, or if she were in hospital and her partner came to visit her, or in trying to get a mortgage - that she would have access to privilege denied to same-sex couples. In Cara's case, she cannot produce a man on demand, and so the suggestion that she accrues heterosexual privilege by naming herself bisexual is hard to support.

If the move from private to public identity is inspired by the desire to disrupt the appearance of homogeneity and to seek out a community, then publicly identifying as bisexual has the added potential to unsettle the status quo of dualistic identity and of the taxonomy of categories. She says that "the more specific and the more defined we become as categories, the more problematic it is, and I think that bisexuality for me was a way of bursting open somebody else's categories." Cara's explanation of why this expansion or explosion of categories is desirable contains elements of my argument about how the relationality of identities makes them vulnerable to shifts in neighbouring identities:

it is the categorization of people which allows for hierarchies to be created. If you can be slotted into a place, and somebody else can be easily slotted someplace else, then you can see the direct relationship and it's a very easy equation. I don't think that most identities work like that.

Cara's statement prompts me to think of Judith Butler's dislike of categories:

I'm not at ease with 'lesbian theories, gay theories,' for as I've argued elsewhere, identity categories tend to be instruments of oppressive structures or as the rallying points for a liberatory contestation of that very oppression. This is not to say that I will not appear at political occasions under the sign of lesbian, but that I would like to have it permanently unclear what precisely that sign signifies (1991:13-14. emphasis added).
Her "rallying points" are the "coming together" of my thesis title. Julia Creet sums up the conflict over static categories:

Notions of fixed identity have been recently charged with upholding regulatory regimes - the laws of sexual difference and the stability of heterosexuality - while concepts of masquerade and performance have become popular as figures of the embodiment of mutability (182).

Cara, like Butler, calls into question why people slot themselves into identities, for whose benefit this is performed, and

what we're even categorizing. Are we categorizing attraction, are we categorizing who we sleep with, are we categorizing political affiliation? What do the categories heterosexual, gay, lesbian, bisexual even mean? Certainly there isn't agreement. Everybody probably has their own opinion about this, but certainly there isn't one right answer.

I would extend this inquiry to ask who has the power to name: what must be operative for a lesbian to declare that bisexuality is non-existent?

In this context, the idea of one right answer, and of one source for that answer or for the assignment of an identity category, follows from a system where the authority to name is allotted to those who are understood as most marginalized in mainstream society. As I have already signaled, the model of victimhood as identity adhered in some of JFA's interactions. Cara, however, portrays herself as steadfastly not a victim:

I have no doubt that I live in an antisemitic world and a heterosexist world. But I guess because my identities do feel so solid, and because I do believe that most people are marginalized in some way, I don't feel like an oppressed person in the day to day world.

Her sense of freedom from oppression is partly relative, but is also premised on the stability and unambivalence of her identities - which is paradoxical given that her sexual identity is an ambiguous, unfixed one. Unlike Bayla, who spoke of uncertainty arising from choice, Cara seems rooted by the act of unsettling identity categories. At the same time, however, her last statement evokes the notion of the coherent, seamless liberal subject. This apparent solidity may be in some part due to her partner
being a woman: for Cara, the risk is not of being presumed straight, except when she
chooses to pass this way. Bayla may sometimes be assumed to be a lesbian, or may
claim bisexuality, but both identities carry the potential threat of being 'discovered'
with a man.

Danni

Danni characterizes the evolution of her attraction to women as intertwined with
feminism. She went from being straight and active as a feminist, to suddenly
understanding desire for women as more than an abstract concept. I will quote her at
length because her language is fairly evocative:

There was just no doubt in my mind until I was in my mid-twenties, maybe
even a little later, 26, 27, that I was anything but straight....And then I started
becoming more and more involved in women's issues, and meeting women and
hanging out socially with women. I remember thinking when I was actually an
undergraduate, so this goes back a long time ago, I was 21 or 22, and I had a
professor at [university], and I remember thinking at the time I was really
drawn to her... I was physically attracted to her, but I didn't think it was
sexually attracted to her, and I wondered at the time what that distinction was
- that distinction between being gut physically drawn to someone, and being
drawn sexually to someone, and...I remember thinking that it would become
clear. The more I got involved in doing stuff with and around women and dykes,
the more it was a waiting thing. I just figured that at some point I would meet
someone and I would understand that distinction immediately. And that's
exactly what happened. I met someone and I flipped over her, developed this
mad crush that was very clearly totally sexual. I mean it was political - I was
drawn to her as a political person. And there it was (snaps fingers). Prior to
that I had no desire to go out and make it happen, and no desire to not have it
happen. I don't think that I'm any kind of norm, although I don't think it's
abnormal.

She suggests that the sudden shift she underwent, the revelation that ultimately
involved a change in self perception, is not unusual. Indeed, arriving at a change in
sexuality through politics is relatively common for the women I interviewed, who came
to feminism through women's studies at university and then became aware of other
women as sexual interests. It is the sense of discovery of difference, marginality, that
I would argue leads to claiming an identity. I want to make it clear that I do not
consider this route to identity to be a capricious one, as if without that one course in
women's studies, all these women would be straight today. That stereotype, of middle class women who casually or adventurously decide to sleep with other women is part of the same discourse about how lesbians can be converted to heterosexuality by having good sex with a man. Those women who describe coming to identity via theory obviously did so because the theory they were reading, or the course they were taking, addressed an already existent sense of being marginal. Danni was first immersed in theory and then became politically aware. She says she knows many other women who got sexually involved with women as the result of "activism and social and political interaction," but says these are "really conscious choices...I came to some kind of political awakening through an understanding of...literary theory...It started spilling over out of the realm of just the theoretical." She began to spend a great deal of time with women and then decided that she wanted to leave school: "I got involved working [at a shelter for women] as a volunteer, and then started working as a relief worker there." She attributes her political awakening to a combination of her social circle, which was feminist "and later almost exclusively lesbian."

The transition from detached curiosity about women, to specific interest in one woman, resulted from various political and social events. However, Danni also recalls the turn in revelatory terms, as a moment when she came to know herself:

At some point, it no longer was other, it no longer seemed that I was this thing and then there was this other thing. It was as much mine as anyone else's, and women being with women didn't strike me as anything different than me, even though it wasn't what was going on in my life.

This description summons up Stuart Hall's explanation of why identification is ambivalent: it is "the internalization of the self-as-other" (Hall:255). Only in this case, Danni is speaking of an internalization of the other as self, of an entity that had been foreign and external which once incorporated was not "anything different than me."
As epiphanic as the change may have been, it was not easy to translate feeling attracted to a woman into first a private, and then a public declaration of identity. Where private acknowledgment of desire is conveyed as virtually effortless, Danni speaks of identifying publicly as a difficult process, because of her personal situation at the time which contributed to her fear of inauthenticity:

I decided to identify as bisexual, to come out as bisexual, on the night that I decided to go to a Hanukah party that was organized at [a community centre] for bisexual and lesbian Jewish women. And it's really funny, because no one would have questioned me at the door. I talked to Jack [her then husband] about it at that point, I said 'I want you to know that this is how I'm going to identify myself.' It was a big huge thing for me. It wasn't just can you walk in the door of this Hanukah party, because somebody was saying, 'this space is for bisexuals and lesbians only, so who are you'. And that means that you have to identify yourself publicly....That's been the site of a lot of conflict and a lot of personal pain and tension.

It is the public coming out, performing identity through a speech act, that is fraught for her. There is danger in this public announcement to a group of lesbians and other bisexuals because it implicitly involves a request for recognition and acceptance by the community. For Danni, as for Bayla, coming out to lesbians and other bisexual women carried with it the risk of rejection and of being pronounced inauthentic. Though for Alex and Cara there is also the expectation of rejection by their putative community, they anticipate castigation because of their declared identity, not because it is in doubt. At the time of the interview Danni's living arrangement resembled Bayla's, and so a predominant feature of her anxiety about identifying as bisexual was that her relationship with a man would be 'outed': "I used to be really nervous about being outed in all sorts of different situations, as a woman who was living with a man, because I hung around with lesbians a lot." Her fears were already an issue, and JFA was the site where they were "played out." She considers this ironic, because

So many people I'd talked to prior to the whole thing coming up in JFA had said to me 'no, it's totally cool, you identify yourself the way you want to identify yourself, and nobody's going to trash you, and nobody's going to tell you what you can and can't call yourself.'
Concerns about authenticity and whether she has the authority to name herself are combined for Danni with a certain mistrust of categories:

categories of identity are often things that are imposed. There's some kind of an imperative to choose a category and to fit within it. People love to know exactly who you are and where you fit. I've certainly had that experience amongst lesbians, which is why I really felt nervous a lot, and scared - not that anyone would hurt me, but that I'd be rejected...Even...stepping out and saying I'm a Jew was to counter the most overt forms of rejection.

Like Cara, Danni seems to feel that the agency necessary for asserting a bisexual identity makes for less clarity - about how to identify, when to perform this identity, for who, and why. Echoing Bayla, she says that "the only category that has ever been blurry has been sexual orientation."

In the above mention of her Jewishness, Danni is referring to an earlier comment about how sometimes public performances of identity are preemptive strikes, a defensive stance to ward off antisemitic/homophobic remarks made to Danni because she is assumed to be Christian/heterosexual. Again, the option to pass signifies there is choice even around those identities that are familial as opposed to 'chosen.' It may be somewhat inaccurate to refer to passing as a choice, since when it is done consciously, it may be a survival mechanism, and we may sometimes pass though we do not intend do, given North American automatic assumptions of Christianity and heterosexuality. Thus we return to the importance of publicly coming out. Despite all of this ambiguity, and though at the time of the interview she had begun to think of herself as lesbian, Danni was still private about calling herself a lesbian,

even though I'm happy to have that assumption made of me publicly, but when called on to say who I am I feel a bit awkward about leaving behind the identity of bisexual. I'm not certain whether I'll ever be in a relationship with a man or desire a relationship with a man again, and I suspected that when still in a relationship with a man, and was obligated by circumstances to define myself as nothing but bisexual, and even that at a certain point seemed to me to be pushing it. Probably just because I assumed that for other people it would be pushing it, taking advantage - who the fuck was I as a woman who was in a long-term relationship, a marriage with a man, who had never slept with a
woman - where did I even get off identifying myself as bisexual, as opposed to just identifying myself as straight.

The authenticity anxiety that Danni indicates is familiar to Jo Eadie:

throughout the bisexual community there are fears about not being bisexual 'enough'. With alarming regularity I encounter people who feel that, in the absence of a coherent (which would also mean policed) bisexual identity, their expression of bisexuality is wanting (144).

For an identity to be coherent, then, it must also be policed. Eadie suggests that when an identity is unregulated, and therefore incoherent, the consequences are that though you may feel insecure, there's greater likelihood of a community that has room for differences:

This persistent insecurity is generated by the absence of any normative identities which might provide the security of being bisexual in 'the right way'. However it is this very absence which, when valued, enables the growth of communities where a range of sexual subjectivities are articulated with one another (144).

I want to qualify Eadie's first comment, because even in those identities, like Jewish and lesbian, which are 'policing,' feelings of inauthenticity exist nonetheless.

Refraining from public declarations of the identity you hold privately is bound up with the conception of identity as marginality and as self-knowledge. Instead of viewing yourself as fully equipped to be the judge of who you are, your identity, still conceived as knowable and apprehendable, must be confirmed by more oppressed outside sources, who are seen to know better. Even if you think you know your self, and have determined which identity best represents that self, there is doubt about your own accuracy; if oppressed others don't see you as you see your self, then you, not they, are wrong. If they assume you are one of their own, then maybe you are. As Danni says, the way her identity is received has an impact on her sense of it:

I feel very positive about...my identity as queer, aside from isolated shitty experiences with people from within my community; it makes me happy, it's a source of positive feeling for me. And maybe that is a privilege - of passing, how your family reacted, who your community is, what your childhood was.
Unlike the situations of Danni, Cara, Bayla and Alex, Jewishness was never an always-already identity for Emma. Because her parents had converted out of Judaism, she didn't grow up with Jewish culture or religion. It was only in adolescence, from her father's sister, that she began to get a sense of what it means to be Jewish. But Emma was in some respects always politically aware, because her family was outside the norm in other respects:

My dad converted out of Judaism before I was even born, and he converted to Jehovah's Witness. He's deaf and so is my step mum and my real mum, so in terms of outsidersness and identity and locating myself, outsider Jehovah's Witness, outsider deaf parents, signing in public and people staring at you. I had to grow up really fast 'cause I had to be my parents' translator to the planet, 'cause you know girls are more responsible than boys! Only if they're told to be...My parents and I didn't get along needless to say, and when I was 14 I went to live with my aunt, and that's when any meaning that I now attach to Jewishness - I say Jewishness instead of Judaism - started to form. Started barely - I had no sense of what it meant to me. So I'm 29, and it's really in the last 5,6,7,8 years that I've started to develop a meaning for myself of what it is.

She considers the way she made meaning of Jewishness to be unusual: however, much like one of the other four in relation to sexuality, she became comfortable and familiar with Jewish identity by reading about resistance and revolution, which then informed her sense of self. Consequently her Jewish identity developed politically as much if not more than culturally. The formulation of the identity as an adolescent and an adult also had the result that for her, Jewishness is not located primarily in family and tradition, as it is for the other women I interviewed. The way she describes her 'discovery' of Jewishness seems to differentiate between the identity as oppression, and as resistance:

I feel like I came to Jewishness through the back door. I didn't even read about the Holocaust, I read about resistance. What I do know about the Holocaust I learned by reading resistance stuff. My anarchist and Jewish identity very much go together, because what happened when I started getting interested in anarchism, immediately you're taken to the Russian Revolution and the 1860s, and some crazy people popping off the chief of police - anarchists. A lot of women involved. Some of the groups were antisemitic...
And my grandmother was a Russian Jew, so I immediately thought 'ok, that would have been my circle then.' I immediately transported myself there. So I started getting really excited about not only anarchism historically and all of the branches - socialism - but started thinking more and more about Jewish radicalism, Jewish identity, Jewish activism...So it was very political for me.

Where many children learn about the Holocaust as an event of profound significance for Jews, and thereby learn of Jewishness as equated with oppression, Emma first consciously linked her Jewish identity with resistance.

Having some connection to the past - both through her grandmother and historical political struggles that are meaningful for her - helped Emma to feel 'authentic.' Nonetheless, this sense of belonging has not come readily:

I struggled with those questions - who am I to call myself a Jew? What the hell do I know from being Jewish? I know I'm 8, I walk into my aunt's place, and there's smoked meat and fries that my great-aunt paid for 'cause she has money, she's the only one in the family with money. She wears a fur coat, she owns a little dress store, and on Sundays occasionally will go and order a whole whack of smoked meat and fries. And me with my discombobulated family - these step [siblings], and some are Christian, my dad's Jehovah's Witness, everybody's crazy - we come over and we eat, and this is one of the feelings and smells of my aunt's kitchen that I associate with being Jewish (emphasis added).

Claiming Jewish identity is contentious for Emma because she feels she has insufficient background in Jewish culture. The issue of how she identifies is critical to her because she believes that how you present yourself to the world is significant, even if the world doesn't pay attention: "these big questions were very political for me, because I think it's very important how you tell the world who you are. In a way, In another way, they don't listen anyway." How you identify in the world is consequential because even if you don't state an identity, one will be assigned you. And if being Jewish is part of your family background and influences how you view the world, then you have the choice to be assumed Christian, or to have it be known that you are Jewish:

Audre Lorde...[is] very clear that there are categories, in some ways I think that helps - maybe just to make sense of the world. She writes about cutting across race and class and sexuality, but she understands that race and class
and sexuality exist. Even if we don't want it to it does. Even if I said 'oh, I don't want to be a Jew,' I am. That comes back to the they would say I was a Jew, so I better say I'm a Jew first and take what that meaning is to me and use it in all the ways I want to use it.'

But it's not enough to just stop at saying you are Jewish; for political purposes you also have to specify what 'Jewish' means, in order to challenge stereotypes. Like any other political identity, the contents of the category must be questioned and reconfigured. Identifying is then not just a speech act, it is taking control of the definition of who or what you are perceived to be. Part of identifying is stating that the identity is stable: you can't say you are something unless you are clear about the limits of that thing. For Emma, one way to be clear that she is Jewish is that had she been alive and living in Europe in the 1940s, she would have been classified and persecuted as a Jew. Confirmation that she is Jewish comes part and parcel with a knowledge that being Jewish is being oppressed.

The perception/reception of identity is a feature of its relationality. Successfully embodying an identity rests in part on being recognized as that identity; not being recognized is painful because it threatens your sense of self-knowledge. Not being seen as a Jew can result in indirect exposure to antisemitism, as Danni worries, whereas being recognized or out as a Jew can mean being subjected to (aware of and the target of) more discrimination. As Emma explains,

Identity is a two-way thing. But I've been living it as if it's a one way thing - this is who I am, and this is what it means to me, and I'm going to act accordingly, and whether you get it or not, I'm going to keep acting accordingly. So it's your job to figure out my identity. (laughing) It's not my job to dilute my identity for you. If you think I don't fit into what is a Jew, that's your problem. Mind you, it comes back at you, and it's a very emotional thing for me, and I'm always trying to figure it out. I tell people the more I call myself a Jew, the more antisemitism I experience.

The paradoxical effect of antisemitic discrimination is that when you have doubts about your authenticity, being assaulted verbally or physically may be one of the ways
you feel yourself to be genuinely Jewish. The identity that is bolstered by such negative experiences is consequently one that is based in oppression and victimhood.

As Emma became more confident about her internal sense of being Jewish, she grew to need the identity to move outside of herself. This again was a highly political move, premised on an understanding of Jewishness as a political identity:

The Toronto experience, the JFA thing, has been mindblowing and boggling, and I think it was the exact moment, it was like "here it is, you've got to do it, it's right here," because it came at a time when my Jewish identity was forming in such a way that it had to move outside of me. It had to stop being 'am I a Jew because under the Nazis I would have been killed,' or 'am I a Jew because my grandmother etc. and all these people are Jews?'...But then it's 'who am I now?' I don't know who I would have been. Everybody says you don't know what you would have done, and I believe that but I attach that totally to other struggles (emphasis added).

JFA represented the opportunity to do just that; it is significant, I think, that Emma was the instigator of JFA, because she was so keenly seeking a community where she could come to know herself as Jewish, and thus make the move from knowing and being, to doing. Her desire to be political as a Jew is an illustration of how we conceive of identity as a representation of the self and then pursue sites to perform the consolidation of that identity.

A consequence of conceptualizing identity as the truth about who you are is that when that identity is attacked, you feel personally attacked and called on to defend your identity. In our interview, which took place in December, Emma described having recently been at a potluck, one that was attended by "Christians and Jews and dykes and straight people and fags." The potluck was not to celebrate Christmas of Hanukah, but when a birthday cake with candles was brought out for one of the guests, Emma says she "thought of Hanukah":

So I said [to the woman having the party] do you have a menorah. Just 'do you have a menorah.' And she said 'no, and I don't want one in my house.' And I really felt hurt, like 'ouch, why are you doing that to your identity? why do I have to hear this? why do you have so much hatred/anger whatever about being Jewish?' And then she brought it up later as I was leaving, she said 'Emma, why does it make you sad that I don't want a menorah in my
house?... what if I said you having a menorah in your house made me sad? It was very weird. It's like 'wait a minute, you're with me, why are you defining yourself that way?' (emphasis added).

The same sentiment, of feeling one's identity under attack by virtue of how it was being defined and what claims were being made about it, was to surface in JFA on the subject of bisexuality. Some lesbians expressed discomfort that women who sleep with men call themselves lesbians, as well as about bisexual women suggesting that lesbians can be oppressive towards them. Where otherwise JFA encouraged self-definition, about Jewishness, 'lesbian' and 'bisexual' were apparently not open to personal interpretation. Again, Emma states that it would have been "painful" to have a debate about Jewish identity, which from her location we might assume means that it would have been distressing to be deemed inauthentic:

[Within JFA] 'Jewish' was self-defined. I think we really avoided [debate over] that one, because that was too painful. You know, I'm allowed to be a Jew 'cause there's Jews in my family, but I think if someone came in, freshly converted...very much the blood thing was affecting us, and the history thing. And that's a distrust - why should Jews trust people who don't have Jews in the family, who don't have history of Jewish oppression, who don't have that kind of emotional, unexplainable connection to these people called Jews. For all identities, I think that's true... (emphasis added).

And it is oppression - lived and historical - that is presented as securing one's claim to Jewish identity. As Emma explains, self-definition as Jewish was an important political position for JFA, in opposition to more traditional expectations of a 'proper' Jewish background:

Jewish being totally self-defined was part of the lefty feminist ethic. Half of us, besides being closeted about being Jews as activists or not closeted but not aware - for the other half Hebrew school was scary, when women would talk about that I didn't have that experience, or total alienation from Jewish activism, politics in that so-called mainstream setting.

I would argue that the apparent contradiction, between Jewish and sexual self-definition, goes back to the idea of contested identities. For most of the women in JFA, like the majority of the women I interviewed, being Jewish was not an uncertain identity for them. It was somehow more tangible than sexuality, which was something
they seemed to have 'discovered,' and so were perhaps more aware of as constructed. Jewishness was more tangible, experienced as more natural. What becomes evident then is that being aware of the constructedness of identity - aware of the fragility of one's claim to the identity as marginality, as innocent, as stable - compels a greater denial of those very aspects. I suspect that Alex, Cara and Danni (for Bayla there was less confidence about her claim to be Jewish) had greater comfort with fluidity around definitions of who/what is a Jew, because they feel secure - 'natural' - in their Jewish identity.

Though self-defining as Jewish was liberating for women in JFA, and while respect for that same principle in relation to sexuality would have spared some people's feelings, self-definition remains embedded in a problematic assumption of identity as self-knowledge - that the self is knowable, and you know your self best. Further, the emphasis on family background as guarantee of Jewishness created the illusion of safety in JFA that was so precious and was to be so painful to relinquish.

SELF-REVELATIONS

All along, my role in this research has been anything but objective. I was a member of JFA and I was present at the meetings about bisexuality. When I first drew up the list of interview subjects, my name was on it. I put it there because I could scarcely do this work without constantly positioning myself literally and figuratively within it, and so recording my participation would be an acknowledgment of my presence. By including myself as witness to what took place, I check my analysis of how everyone else operated, because I must subject myself to the same scrutiny. However, to have attempted to interview myself, or to have arranged for someone else to interview me, would have been excessively artificial. Much as I might like to, it is impossible for me to treat my history and my involvement in JFA the same way I might treat the testimony of Alex, Bayla, Cara, Danni or Emma. My account and history appear
therefore in a different form. The first part is a revised and altered essay I wrote for an OISE course on history and memory, and the second section is the transcription of voiceovers written to accompany a video I made about identity and the body. I use these texts because they relate so precisely to the issues at hand. But these narratives are even more useful because they reveal that my understanding of identity rests on the same assumptions as do those of the women I interviewed.

FRAGMENTS OF MY SELF

Memory is a stone.
Snip.
Clippers snip brush undergrowth over still rock. Mute granite same size shape texture gazes up, indifferent, unchanged as dense years wove a rampant weed cloak. Rampant years, dense cloak.
Gazes through a hole in time (Decter 1992b:15).

Labels are for cans, boxes, jeans, bottles, medicines, the mail, even. Identity is something you are, something you can modify, but can't really change, something you can't lose, you can only think you have lost it, can only discard it over and over again until you are able to recognize yourself in the mirror (Decter 1992a:80).

I am the daughter of a Jew, and a non-Jew. Neither of my parents are religious people: both would call themselves atheists, and raised my two older brothers and me to do the same. It is my father who is Jewish; it was my mother, Christian in her non-Jewishness, with whom I lived from an early age, after they divorced. Still, being Jewish was always a part of my life, in one form or another. My mother was brought up, and similarly raised my brothers and me, to view ourselves as outsider to mainstream culture. When one of my brothers was young, his motto was "do your own thing." My mother wrote that on his birthday cake. In food and in thought - "question
authority" was another phrase I heard often - we were encouraged to identify with outsiders, and often this meant with other Jews.

As much as I have always called myself a half-Jew, I also never forget that technically I am not Jewish. My not-stereotypically Jewish appearance, and my last name which is shared by a Catholic Cardinal have all contributed to my sense that others don't identify me as Jewish. I now realize that as a child, these things, as well as the absence of religion in my upbringing, and my relative unfamiliarity with Jewish custom led me to believe that not only would other Jews not recognize me as one of them, but they would reject me. And yet, in a group of strangers, I often felt most kinship with, and sought out, other Jews in the room. Ann Decter, whose mother is a Catholic atheist (a non-Catholic?) and father Jewish, talks about how "not-Jewish" is an identity category unto itself, because you are defining yourself in relation to Jewishness. She says "I'm not Jewish. But I'm more Jewish that I am anything else" (1992a:84). And perhaps this begins to account for my 'choice' to be Jewish. After all, who would want to be different when you can fit in and reap the benefits? That's all fine, unless the mainstream is not a comfortable place, because no matter how hard you try, they won't let you assimilate. And when the mainstream doesn't feel like home, then chances are it's because you have been marginalized. I don't just say I'm Jewish to exoticize myself, or to stake a claim at the margins. I say I am Jewish because I have come to realize that as much as I am other things, and as much as my Jewishness is unconventional or illegitimate in the eyes of some, my eyes have seen the world from the point of view of a non-Christian.

The community, not the individual, is the unit of solution. Judaism specifically incorporates time for each individual to make private prayer, allows for a huge range of debate and disagreement. But one is not truly Jewish alone: one is Jewish in community with others. Problems are conceived of in collective terms, and solutions likewise (Kaye/Kantrowitz 1992:89-90).
For several reasons, the last few years of my life have been a time of much self-evaluation and reflection. Starting graduate school coincides with becoming familiar with Toronto again, having spent the previous four years in Montreal. I have made a point of trying to establish a community for myself here, and in doing so, I have been compelled to consider a number of questions that pertain to identity. Central and prerequisite to finding a community of people I feel affinity with has been determining who I am, to myself and to the outside world.

My ability to do effective political work depends both on finding allies and on keeping a sense of home. Out of the larger 'lesbian community' or 'women's community' or 'Jewish feminist community,' we carve a smaller, more personally and politically compatible one made up of 'those among whom we can sit down and weep, and still be counted as warriors'...I believe...that our choices both of political priorities and of strategies are influenced by our definitions of our community, by the people we can trust are beside us and those we see only across the room or down the block (Bulkin:191, quoting Adrienne Rich).

There are times when it is safer to deal with a subject in a removed, distant fashion. I am at a period in my life when I need to take risks and confront myself on my beliefs. This, then, is an opportunity to methodically (and erratically) trace, weigh, and contemplate the fragments of ideas - the fragments of my identity - that have been floating in and out of my mind for months now. What you have before you in these next few pages is my 'journey' over the last two or three years, to the point of transforming my private identity to a public one, and joining JFA.

The left-wing politics of my parents have informed my current view of the world. Over time, I have translated their values into ones that sit right with me, modifying some and adding others. Given the place I start from, I consider identity political. For six years now, I have identified as a lesbian. Certainly, the reasons for labeling myself as such and pronouncing this publicly are motivated by an understanding that invisibility is a denial of the self. Moving from there, it is a challenge to the establishment to demand that my life be acknowledged and respected. There are times when I know that to categorize myself is to reify structures I do not
wish to support: naming one's identity is in this way an imperfect reaction to a system that operates by binary opposition, and marks as negative all that which is Other.

The movement I have felt within myself towards identifying as a Jew has much to do with external forces as well as with internal shifts. In my personal life, which is becoming more and more political in all its aspects, it has become apparent to me that identities are assigned by the dominant culture. If I do not announce myself in a particular, overt way, I will be classified according to my appearance, my accent, my skin colour. Dominant cultural production and institutions shape identity, stereotyping and fetishizing those people considered foreign. In this culture, the unmarked categories, the "norms," are whiteness, heterosexuality, maleness, Christianity.

Judging by images in common currency as compared to my physical characteristics, and by different people's reactions to me, I assume I am viewed as unmarked except for my sex. Most often, I am told I look Irish. It is no longer acceptable to me to be assumed to be straight, and so I consciously try to mark myself as a lesbian: I wear a triangle, my hair is short, I verbally "out" myself on a regular basis. As this has grown more significant to me, I have begun to realize that neither do I wish to be taken for a Christian. For the same reason I do not want to be thought straight, in "opposition to the tyranny of straight sexuality in all sectors of Western culture" (Gever: 191), I want there to be no mistake about my Jewishness. I am proud to be Jewish. Further, through association with other Jewish lesbians, I know that in many ways my experiences are those of a Jew.

'So, Melanie, what's with all the Jewish?' This was my father speaking, sometime in 1982, the year he died. I answered him clearly, carefully, the way I did that year because he often got confused, but the answer was not hard to find. I had been away from New York since I was twenty - I was then thirty-

\[3\]Since I first wrote this, I have grown my hair and become more comfortable with looking "femme." After years of believing that looking typically feminine (having long hair, wearing lipstick and skirts and jewelry) was irreconcilable with being a lesbian - because no one would recognize me as a lesbian, because I only looked that way to appeal to men - I started to realize that if I want to look that way, then that is the way a lesbian looks. This epiphany is expressed in the first of the voice-overs below.
seven - and I had noticed two things: my own hunger for Jewish culture, music, food, language, humor, perspective, Jewish people; and the anti-Semitism, palpable - and growing - around me (Kaye/Kantrowitz 1992:92).

Joining JFA was an enormous step towards integrating parts of myself. For me, being a lesbian and being a feminist have been linked - and comfortably so - since I first came out. Though in the Seventies, lesbian existence was suppressed and silenced by the women's movement, the Women's Studies department feminism I came into contact with in the late Eighties was far more intellectually accepting of lesbianism. In fact, lesbianism was idealized by some theorists we read, to the point of essentialism. But I have not understood implicitly until now how my feminism and my lesbian experience are shaped, coloured, by my Jewishness.

By chance, in the fall of 1993, I met Emma, who was to be a catalyst of this revelation. She was a friend of a friend, and we got talking, about politics, about the lesbian community. After some discussion, during which she mentioned being Jewish, I made reference to the fact that I am Jewish. Immediately, she began talking excitedly, demanding to know why I hadn't told her earlier. I tried to explain my ambivalence, my feeling of artificiality around identifying as a Jew, my sense of alienation from it as a religion. She seemed to know instantly what I was talking about, and told me that in JFA, the group to which she belonged, there were many women like me, who felt uncertain about whether they were entitled to call themselves Jews, and about what it would mean to do so. Emma insisted that I come to a JFA meeting. Although I was scared, I knew that I wanted to do just that. And so I went. And I was overwhelmed to discover how much my worldview is common to that of other secular Jewish feminists/lesbians. I am not looking to collapse our real and felt differences into a vacuum of sameness-by-virtue-of-otherness, but in this moment, I have found people with whom I am able to be understood, and whose vision of the future, and of how to achieve it, are not only acceptable, but positively inspiring.
Another strategy in coming out/coming into identity was making a video about the body as site of cultural production. The video is primarily a series of fairly static shots of me - barricading myself behind books, putting on lipstick, looking at a mezuzah, donning a tallis - which are accompanied by the voiceovers you see below.As the title of the video, De/Signing The Body, indicates, I was preoccupied by how we consciously mark our bodies to manifest an identity or to conceal an identity. We must first de-design or deconstruct gender and ethnic constructs before we can begin to design, or consciously mark our bodies. This marking is of particular relevance in relation to identities that are sometimes invisible, when passing is available as a survival mechanism, to gain privilege, or is thrust on us by others. The issue of being able to pass, as a Jew and as a lesbian, is relevant to the issue of ambivalence about identity. As I have argued, ambivalence is anyway a condition of identification, and it is only intensified by internalized antisemitism/homophobia, and by a sense of inauthenticity. Of course, as I have also argued, we cannot be anything other than inauthentically Jewish or lesbian, because identity categories are unattainable ideals which we can only endlessly approximate.

VOICES FROM THE BODY

In every un-making, there is a making. Each attempt to deconstruct an oppressive category -- or even categories themselves -- reproduces pre-existing systems. And any creation, no matter how well-intentioned and carefully thought-out, can be taken up and interpreted in ways far afield from intended meanings. Perhaps it is in the

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4Initially, this video was a combined effort with Lisa Gribowski for the OISE course "Cultural Production." That video was called Signing the Body. Subsequently, I shot more footage, wrote more voiceovers, and re-edited the video. That work became De/Signing the Body. These voiceovers are therefore a combination of the texts I wrote for the first video, and additional ones for the reworked version I made. I have indicated the temporal difference by placing in italics the text I wrote later for De/Signing the Body. The quotations set apart from the text do not appear in the video.

5A common feature of both Jewish and lesbian identity is that some, though not all, women can 'pass,' that is, appear to be Christian and straight. While there are many Jews and lesbians - some of whom are women of colour - whose physical appearance does not make passing an option, I do have that option.
disruptions, the gaps, the constant self-reflection, that we can unfix meaning from its constricting moorings. pry apart the preconceptions, and bring to the fore what has been taken for granted. Remaining silent is a strategy, to be sure, but for me, it does not address taking responsibility and overcoming guilt.

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I

The assumption in most of the United States is that everyone is both Christian and heterosexual. When people make anti-Semitic comments, they include me in their assumed commonality of judgment. In response, I feel the need to 'come out' as a Jew rather than pass, thus losing their acceptance of me as an insider, setting myself apart as the 'other' with its objectification and judgment (Mennis:133).

For many of us, unexpectedly, the experience of coming out as lesbians was a crucial step toward our coming out as Jews. The experience of being outside the bounds of society as lesbians makes a woman more willing to acknowledge other ways in which she stands outside (Beck:xvii).

Growing up as a femme-dyke was in some ways like growing up Jewish: there was this sense of invisibility, of knowing you were not like the others, the majority, even if you looked like them. You see I didn't really know I was a lesbian, any more than I really knew I was a Jew. In my Jewish neighbourhood everyone was Jewish; only in the outside world did my Jewishness become differentness, and there, I felt the difference even when others couldn't recognize it. As a femme-dyke, I fit into a socially prescribed role as a girl with which I was mostly comfortable, except for this one little thing: I wanted to fuck my girlfriends (Istar:380).

I put too much stock in outward appearances. Does this make me superficial? A fashion victim? Or just someone sick of being categorized? Maybe my feeling about categories would be different if I weren't always being mis-perceived, mis-taken. You see, what you see here is a Jewish dyke. Can you tell? Are you surprised? Well, most everyone is. For years, I have passed. Been closeted. As a Jew and as a lesbian. It has not been difficult - not practically, anyway. Emotionally and psychologically, that's a different story. And it has certainly fed and reinforced any of my pre-existing ambivalences - about being only half Jewish - whatever that means. And looking so damned sweet and feminine. Old men on the street - who seem to find me entirely approachable, (tough as I am) insist that I'm Irish. People always say "but you don't
look Jewish." Straight people talk to me as one of their own. And other lesbians smile tentatively at me when our eyes meet in a room full of straight people. Somehow, for years, I have taken this as a sign they all, you all, could see my essence, the true me. That I'm a fake Jew, a "it's just an experimental phase" lesbo. But enough. Yes, this looks like a lesbian. Even in lipstick. Yes, this looks like a Jew, freckles and all.

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Bronwyn Davies says, "Discourses shift in meaning according to context and to the positioning of the subjects within them" (Davies:11). She goes on to says that "the discourses and practices through which we are constituted are also often in tension, one with another, providing the human subject with multiple layers of contradictory meanings which are inscribed in their bodies and in their conscious and unconscious minds" (Davies:11).

She suggests that we think of a palimpsest as a metaphor for this multiple layering:

"This is a term to describe the way in which new writings on a parchment were written over or around old writings that were not fully erased. One writing interrupts the other, momentarily overriding, intermingling with the other; the old writing influences the interpretation of the new. But both still stand, albeit partially erased and interrupted" (Davies:11).

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II

And sometimes I feel inadequate to make any statement as a Jew; I feel the history of denial within me like an injury, a scar - for assimilation has affected my perceptions, those early lapses in meaning, those blanks, are with me still. My ignorance can be dangerous to me, and to others. Yet we can't wait for the undamaged to make our connections for us; we can't wait to speak until we are wholly clear and righteous. There is no purity, and in our lifetime, no end to this process (Rich:90).
Many Jewish feminists come from backgrounds of assimilation which continue to be a source of pain and potential tension. It can be tempting, especially for those of us who have emerged from years of silence and self-denial, to distance ourselves from our histories (Bulkin:188).

I never imagined I would own a mezuzah. There's something so serious and sacred about it. Something so unfamiliar and untouchable to me. And it's such a marker. The biblical command is to hang this little box on the upper right hand door-post or gate of your house, slanting inward. It stands as a reminder of a Jew's daily ritual obligations. As you pass by the mezuzah, you kiss your fingertips and press them to it, as a sign of reverence. As a child, I was always afraid of this simple gesture, this performance of worship and belonging. Afraid of not doing the right thing, and revealing myself an outsider.

But besides the religious significance, it has the immediate effect of marking the dwelling of a Jew. Just as does wearing a star of David. Or a tallis, a prayer shawl traditionally worn only by men. It is a code. Yet another layer of meaning is that the mezuzah is a talisman against evil, a protection at the border between outside impurity and inner sanctity. Just as the tallis marks the boys from the men, the Jews from the non-Jews, and the men from the women. Liminality, transgression, blurred boundaries, are all threatening. Just as it is threatening to fuck with gender identity codes, and explode the categories that contain us.

But this mezuzah is different from any I've seen before. It has no scroll in it, no passage from Deuteronomy. It is the most beautiful mezuzah I have ever seen. It was a completely unexpected present, a sign from a family member that they recognized my search for meaning and understanding about who I am, culturally. If I am to mark the outside of my home, to indicate to strangers and friends alike that a Jew lives here, as I adorn my body with traces and hints of who I am, who I want you to see, then I
must have at least the illusion of control over what it means - at least to me. And so I can fill this symbol with any passage, any meaning I choose. Maybe it will be the thunderous words of Audre Lorde, maybe one of Sappho's fragments, perhaps a few words of my own. Or maybe I'll just leave it empty, to be filled in the moment.

And if, as Teresa de Lauretis says, "the representation of gender is its construction" (de Lauretis: 3), then to be a Jew, I have to look like one and act like one. Do I? In the meantime, I perform the gestures, I walk the walk, until I can absorb the meaning of these traditions, and then adapt them to suit me.

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When we mark our bodies -- as catharsis, in rebellion, or for aesthetic reasons -- we are inscribing meaning on a surface that a priori bears marks. Even at birth, my body is not a blank slate. My whiteness, that apparently neutral canvas, is a vivid and unmistakable landscape. And yet how do I keep my whiteness from fading into the background, from becoming of secondary importance when I have experienced it only as privilege, while I simultaneously grapple with my gender and Jewishness? Surely these things are not separable from each other? How do I draw your attention to this characteristic, which is so easily and often elided? When it comes to toying with codes that do or don't mark me as a Jew and a lesbian, it is clear how to disrupt and shift meaning. Why do I find myself at such a loss to perform the same play with my whiteness? Richard Dyer says "when whiteness qua whiteness does come into focus, it is often revealed as emptiness, absence, denial or even a kind of death" (Dyer:44).

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III

I was admittedly young and trying to educate myself, but I was doing something that is dangerous: I was flirting with identity (Rich:79).

As a Sephardic Jewish heterosexual feminist I find myself more often being asked to give one aspect of my identity over the other. But to do so is tantamount to dismembering the identity of the self. To use Patricia Williams’ metaphor, the many different parts of myself are not like marbles in a jar, each of which is independent and equal, complete with little variation; if something happens to one marble the other are not affected. The different elements of the self are more like soap bubbles in a jar, all of which are slightly different; continually evolving and supporting the others. If something should happen to one soap bubble it affects the rest, there is a re-alignment of all (Dahan:50).

When I was 14, and starving myself, I was engaged in an all-out battle. Over my body. I was the only ally I had. My body was both the battlefield and my worst enemy. Food was my other great foe. And my obsession. Maybe it was then that I first began to viscerally understand the theory about the female body as a contested territory. About how the preservation of a culture is collapsed with regulation of the female body.

It would be doing an injustice to myself to say, with hindsight, that it was all just a struggle with representation, but that period has new significance to me now as an example of how I sought to express myself, through my body. How I subjected my body to a version of the same abuses - of conformity, docility, anonymity, obedience at a great price - that ruling bodies have heaped on foreign bodies for century after century. My body would have no excretions. No odours, no hair. I would make it as presentable, as unthreatening, as a bloodless, plucked chicken. Or starve it out of existence, into silence, trying. And those requirements, to rigidly abide by certain codes, came from me, of me. It was a battle I had no chance of winning -- on that turf. Eventually, I became a conscientious objector, just opted out of the contest for skinny perfection. Now, as I use my body to defy prescribed norm, I know I am doing something that feels right, powerful. But is it so very different from any other form of prescription? I know it is not the only battle, or even the most important one. But it
goes on whether we are willing participants or not. There's no sense in denying it. And it can crush us if we don't meet it head - and body - on.

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Taking on this task -- of making a video for the first time after talking about and around it for years -- has been daunting. Each time I sit down to compose these voice overs. I am caught. I search wildly for the appropriate voice -- to arrogantly address all those cultural absences and omissions, while avoiding being totalizing. And I find myself at a complete loss for the words to say it. I want to retreat, to hide behind someone else's voice, and not assume responsibility for what I'm creating.

Simultaneously. I scoff at the idea of dis-covering my own true, unique voice. This identity, as a cultural worker, is a performance like any other, which requires dress rehearsals and line prompts. Still, it is only a shadow presence, a layering of one narrative over another.

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IDENTITY AS SELF-KNOWLEDGE

This trajectory, coming to sexual identity through politics inspired by women's studies, is one that is heavily marked by privilege. All of the women I interviewed, including myself, attended undergraduate, and graduate school. Four of us traveled before, during or after an undergraduate program. The white middle class standard of a trip to Europe (and now Central America or Southeast Asia) - or, for middle class Jewish children, a trip to Israel - as part of one's cultural education is bound up with beliefs about finding yourself. The North American liberal ideal is that we come to know ourselves by expanding our horizons, by consuming foreign culture which leads to an appreciation of how civilized 'we' are back home. To borrow from bell hooks's discussion of young white men experimenting sexually with Black women,
one dares - acts - on the assumption that the exploration into the world of difference, into the body of the Other, will provide a greater, more intense pleasure than any that exists in the ordinary world of one's familiar racial group. And even though the conviction is that the familiar world will remain intact even as one ventures outside it, the hope is that they will reenter the world no longer the same (1992:24-25).

For some middle class white women, feminism and then activism and sexual experimentation are extensions of this same journey towards self-fulfillment and discovery. I want to argue that claiming a public political identity then can be seen as one more manifestation of the search for the true self, a self that is rendered distinct in relation to an Other. In the economy of the liberal subject, the market of self-definition depends on an interlocking system of absent presences that inform what you are by virtue of what you are not.

This 'journey' evokes the colonial quest to travel, conquer and come to know oneself in relation to foreign bodies who are all that you are not. The colonial figure assumes the right to go anywhere. While I do not mean to diminish the horror of colonialism, nor do I want to exaggerate the problem of identity framed as finding/knowing the self, I believe there are comparisons to be drawn between the two. The search for self is not just a mental activity, but even if it is, it still requires material resources, as well as a view of oneself as entitled to a kind of freedom. Mary Louise Fellows and Sherene Razack quote Patricia Williams to remind us that

freedom is...a relation (1991, 21). On whose back does my freedom rest? The freedom to act autonomously very easily can maintain the status quo, leaving many relations of domination untouched and even strengthened, because those who have choices and can pursue them are invariably of the dominant groups (1065).

As I began this thesis with a statement about how the JFA events could not have happened in quite the same way anywhere else, at any other time, I return now to the specificity of this dilemma. The particular construction of identity as marginal as self-knowledge that we employed, characterized by material and psychological soul-
searching, is an example of how our whiteness was a precondition for the dispute. Further, I want to question the expectation that doing politics will be safe. Like the presupposition that learning should be comfortable, and the classroom a safe space, I suspect that the expectation that JFA would be shelter, and thus the shock and pain when it proved not to be, is related to privilege.

The concept of lesbian identity as self-knowledge is a function of a liberal discourse about the coherent subject, this same subject which is possessed of a core self. Martha Gever maintains that "identity as a function of self-knowledge [is] an ideological position at the heart of Western systems - of domination and regulation" (196-7). She suggests that just being a lesbian is "engaging in a complex, often treacherous, system of cultural identities, representations and institutions, and a history of sexual regulation" (191). This engagement is however not unique to lesbians: "everyone is implicated in these systems" (Gever:191). She illustrates the way that those systems work in relation to identity by citing as an example the film Word Is Out, a 1977 "archetypal gay rights advocacy film" (195). In this film, she says that gay and lesbian identity is palatable to mainstream audiences only if it conforms to the model of the "intelligent and sensitive" private citizen (197). The subjects of the film are shot at home; no mention is made of sexual practices or of 'degenerate' subcultural practices (Gever:197). Like the 1969 changes to sexual offence laws in Canada, 'acceptance' of gay and lesbian identity is predicated on regulation and privatization. Word Is Out depends on "transcendent, individual identity" for its functioning; this notion of identity is what undergirds the above ideological system that produces "the project of classifying types and degrees of sexual deviance" (Gever:196). Therefore the identity that comes into being via self-knowledge is the same conceptualization of identity that has otherwise been in the service of

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6 Gary Kinsman's book The Regulation of Desire: Sexuality in Canada addresses the subject of apparently liberalizing changes to the legal standing of lesbians and gay men that have the material effect of regulation and privatization.
discourses that pathologize and criminalize us. While we may benefit from positing "identity as a function of self-knowledge," it becomes apparent that this stance is highly problematic. What further complicates this critique is that to a certain extent we are at this current stage in lesbian and gay organizing and public life because of those troubling models.

It is not by coincidence, but of necessity, that liberal discourse has been employed in feminist and lesbian liberatory struggles. That we - lesbians, women - have entered the political sphere at all is arguably because we conformed to this discourse of the subject. In order to agitate for rights within the system, we have had to argue that we are persons, equipped with the ability to reason. Like other marginalized bodies, subjecthood and autonomy have not been granted to or assumed of lesbians/women without a battle. Without the faculty of reason, liberal theory views us as lesser human beings, lacking in agency and self-determination (Phelan 1989:24). Even as we may have wanted to argue against an over-valuation of rationality (to the detriment of emotion), we had to be seen to possess reason in order to take up that position and attempt to be heard. Wendy Brown warns that "women will deconstruct only at the peril of sustaining their exclusion from history, losing the 'narrative' that is essential to their emergence into visible history, shying from power and from the discovery of their own voices" (in Phelan 1989:141). She suggests it is only as subjects that we will gain any ground in the world (in Phelan 1989:141). I am reminded of Di Stefano and Hartsock's concern that "exactly at the moment when so many of us who have been silenced begin to demand the right to name ourselves, to act as subjects rather than as objects of history, that [it is] just then the concept of subjecthood become 'problematic'?" (in Grewal:233). Shane Phelan, however, questions the claim that only as subjects will we "emerge into the world," and like Gever, further wonders "what does subjectivity imply and require?" (1989:141).
The Enlightenment vision of the subject was "the free, rational and responsible agent capable of consenting freely to rule, of being guided by long-term interests and principles, and of being punished for deviation from those norms to which it has voluntarily consented" (William Connolly, in Phelan 1989:141. emphasis added).

Michel Foucault delineated Enlightenment values as necessitating a rational subject which was not only externally disciplined, but self-regulating (Phelan 1989:140) - much like the border-policing required of identity as marginality. The self-disciplined subject was permitted a certain degree of civil liberty, and "it was the valorization and extension of such liberty that blinded individuals to the price paid by subjection to the disciplines required in modern schools, factories, and corporations" (Phelan 1989:140).

The rewards of subjecthood mask the cost of being subjected to controls and limits. According to Judith Butler, because of how oppression operates there is considerable risk involved in a bid to be cast as subjects, but there is little hope of mounting a challenge if we are not subjects:

...oppression works not merely through acts of overt prohibition, but covertly, through the constitution of viable subjects and through the corollary constitution of a domain of unviable (un)subjects - abjects, we might call then - who are neither named nor prohibited within the economy of the law. Here oppression works through the production of a domain of unthinkable and unnameability. Lesbianism is not explicitly prohibited in part because it has not even made its way into the thinkable, the imaginable, that grid of cultural intelligibility that regulates the real and the nameable. How, then, to 'be' a lesbian in a political context in which the lesbian does not exist? That is, in a political discourse that wages its violence against lesbianism in part by excluding lesbianism from discourse itself? To be prohibited explicitly is to occupy a discursive site from which something like a reverse-discourse can be articulated; to be implicitly proscribed is not even to qualify as an object of prohibition (1991:20).

This is the place from which we have been trying to speak, act, and it is the system we are bound to replicate. We have been engaged in a struggle to have our existence and our subjecthood acknowledged, so that we might at least occupy the semi-agentic position of the prohibited. The further dilemma is that just entering the debate as prohibited subjects involves oppressing someone else. Freedom, and autonomous
individuals who can campaign for rights, can only exist in relation to an enslaved population: the oppression - of women by men, or people of colour by white people - "is the hidden cornerstone on which rests individual autonomy" (Razack 1992:6). Toni Morrison vividly evokes this same interlocking relationship as "the parasitical nature of white freedom" (57). In relation to the problems encountered by JFA, because I suspect JFA came into existence via those same discourses, I am similarly concerned about what price we - and the absent unfree - have paid for deployment of discourses about the knowing subject and the knowable self.

I have situated JFA as predicated on the theories of lesbian feminists in relation to how we individually 'journeyed' from private identification to public declaration out of a desire to disrupt homogeneity, combat invisibility and contest definitions. Now, in an effort to set the stage for a more thorough analysis for what transpired - as well as why and how - in JFA, I want to discuss those strategies in the context of (lesbian) feminist conceptualizations of the subject and of identity as self-knowledge. This should be of particular concern in any feminist enterprise, given that

there is a great deal of material that not only questions the viability of 'the subject' as the ultimate candidate for representation, or indeed, liberation, but there is very little agreement after all on what it is that constitutes, or ought to constitute, the category of women (Butler 1990:1).

I want to continue to consider how the understanding of subjectivity and identity categories as stable and as the basis on which to build a politics is problematic and even destructive for liberatory projects such as JFA.

In the 1970s, lesbian, or radical feminist struggles for subjectivity7 were political, part of trying to be heard in the world. Though they were vocally inimical to the liberalism of the 1960s (Echols:15), lesbian feminist beliefs were embedded in a

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7At the time, the quest may not have been named one of coming to subjectivity, but I believe this is synonymous with the more common language of consciousness raising, finding yourself, or seeking self-actualization, personhood or independence.
liberal discourse, because they advocated personal transformation which would in turn lead to social change. But as I have noted, to embark on changing the system, one must first be acknowledged as legitimate within the system. Although being prohibited was what granted radical feminists legitimacy "to occupy a discursive site from which something like a reverse-discourse can be articulated" (Butler 1991:20), and even as that recognition was employed to reject mainstream society, their prohibited 'site' or position was that of the liberal subject. Like debates within gay and lesbian communities about legalized same-sex marriage, much as we may not want to become part of the system and though we may have substantial critiques of heterosexual marriage, we do not yet have the privilege to choose not to marry and opt out of the system. Though radical feminists dedicated themselves to change and even revolution, there were some principles, such as the liberal idea of the subject, that went unquestioned.

In order to advance feminist aims, it was necessary for arguments to be made by recognizable subjects, and that the idea of subjecthood remain enmeshed in their discourse. Otherwise, their cause would not have been heard. If radical feminists had not been arguing for their subjecthood even as they critiqued other precepts, they would not have been comprehensible to other women or to the mainstream. And if alongside charges of rampant sexism those women had advanced an analysis of why the autonomous, coherent subject is an unworkable model, their ideas would have been entirely too threatening to liberal society. As it was, many feminist principles were considered laughable and outrageous, and those that have been incorporated are those ultimately least disruptive to the status quo. It should not be surprising that those early radical feminists were the product of liberalism, nor that they were unable to disrupt the system. But it is significant to attempt to consider how the legacy of liberalism continues to influence identity and hamper political struggle, and specifically
how political identity built on the liberal subject cannot hope to undermine the system it aims to critique.

The discourse of radical feminists in the 1970s advocated self-definition and newly delineated identities as essential for freedom. Their diagnosis of the problem was that gendered role stereotyping of women was the cause of oppression; eradicating roles would lead to the emergence of androgynous people who would be "freed from arbitrary and stunting expectations and definitions" (Phelan 1989:42-43). Consciousness raising, the practice of communicating personal histories to "awaken the latent consciousness that...all women have about our oppression." was one route to 'liberation' (Echols:83). By examining their lives and discovering commonalities, women would be released from sexist roles, and thus their 'pure,' politically engaged selves would emerge. The path to emancipation advocated by radical/lesbian feminism is paved with a belief in the fundamental interconnection of knowing, being and acting. If you understand and then define yourself differently, you will inevitably behave differently. The first step towards freedom was to decide to reinvent yourself, which was apparently believed possible by "early radical feminists [who] lived in a world of endless possibilities and protean selves" (Phelan 1989:43). The challenge was to overcome culturally imposed limits and choose for yourself what is desirable as an identity. It is a philosophy that is not easily distinguished from the great liberal American Dream with its individualistic self-concept that assumes autonomy and 'choice'.

For self-definition to be possible human beings must be seen as "not necessarily constituted by society" but as "capable, in principle, of withdrawing from society to redefine their own identity" (Alison Jaggar in Phelan 1989:43). Again, there is postulation of an individual who can cast off her identity and choose another, thereby consciously determining her destiny (Jaggar in Phelan 1989:43). One move towards self-knowledge and improvement was deemed by radical feminists to be the
creation of collectivities separate from mainstream society. Separation from society was not just desirable, but essential for changing oneself and then society. What was accepted as necessary, and possible, is that those people who have removed themselves will be freed from mainstream influence, by virtue of their distance from it. The search for the authentic self would then proceed unhindered. In this model, power, like the taint of sexism, is an exclusively negative influence that must and can be purged from the individual. Shane Phelan characterizes the lesbian/feminist dynamic between society and the individual as a familiar one:

We are faced with a society that exists to repress, on the one hand, and, on the other, with an authentic being fighting for freedom, defined in opposition to that society. This 'inner compulsion' to be free, and the society that opposes it, move within the metaphor of power as repression, as silencing. Power functions, we are told, by limiting, by quashing this authentic being. The inner self is left unexamined; it simply is, in the tradition of abstract individualism. So we see here a rejection of Freud and his followers, but not of a discourse that refers to internal, psychological drives (1989:42).

Phelan quotes Sherry McCoy and Maureen Hicks on how we have defeated ourselves by our unrealistic and overly simplistic expectations of how power operates:

'because women have not experienced first hand the aggregation and utilization of power, we have been left to devise our own concepts of what power is, what it should be, and how it functions. Conceptualizing the community as a bastion of omnipotence reflects the immaturity of our experience with respect to power' (1989:56-57).

As in a discussion where lesbians are claiming that they cannot oppress other women, there is an insufficient understanding of where power resides and how power circulates. In part, this is the consequence of devising an identity where victimhood/impotence are significant influences. Consider this trap: a woman is being abused by her partner. Reluctantly, she comes to admit that she is that thing, a 'battered woman.' This naming of herself, in claiming an identity, is an agentic act, and an acknowledgment of certain systems at work. This self-identification would seem to be the first step in taking action, seeking assistance, leaving the situation. However, the very identity that might be enabling is also inherently one of victimhood, passivity.
dependence. How do you claim victim-status, and yet not become frozen by this very act? It is similar to the simultaneous enabling and limiting of lesbian identity, within a particular conceptualization of power and powerlessness as discrete, rather than co-existing within the same person. The concept of the liberal subject, the "independent, decontextualized individual," is one of the very mechanisms that conceals or denies an understanding of differences between individuals and groups, and of the complexities of power:

what this notion [of the autonomous individual] most inhibits is our understanding of power as something other than the power of one individual to assert his or her claim over another's. It is difficult to explain oppression, that is the consistent dominance of the claims of one group over another with this one-dimensional and individualized view of power. Further, it is a framework that effectively shuts out opportunities to propose new relationships not predicated on the concept of individuals in competition for pieces of the pie (Razack 1992:3).

What is rendered unintelligible is a view of power relations where investments inform identity, and where challenges to the purity of one's position trigger a race to innocence.

If coming into consciousness as a feminist and/or as a lesbian is, according to a radical feminist model, tantamount to becoming a political actor, and if becoming political means shedding the oppressive systems of patriarchal society, we can begin to account for how some lesbians in JFA were able to view themselves as incapable of discriminating against bisexual women. Bisexual women are not similarly cleansed of oppressive behaviour because they continue to 'choose' to be influenced by men. Those who do not cast off 'male' modes of thought and action are deemed 'male-identified,' which amounts to "lesbian feminist false consciousness, alienation from oneself" (Phelan 1989:62). The charge of false-consciousness, which can effectively be laid on anyone who 'deviates,' assumes there is one true nature that leads to one authentic experience which is perceived only one way and has inevitable actions attached to it. The twist on the American Dream was the lesbian/feminist ideal of
assembling individuals into collectives, which disrupts the idea of the autonomous individual because the group and not the individual becomes the authority about when an individual has reached its goal of self-knowledge. The goal itself is nothing new, and though the principle of collectivity was meant to be revolutionary, it seems incompatible with the individual thus conceptualized.

In similar ways, identity as marginality as self-knowledge rendered it problematic for us in JFA to accept that we occupy a dominant position in relation to women of colour. Fellows and Razack describe this situation as "the difference impasse": "Presuming innocence, each of us is consistently surprised when we are viewed by other women as agents of oppression" (1048). I suspect that we have sometimes conceptualized a rigid split between the powerful and the powerless, with ourselves on the latter side, in service of a denial of dominance - because there are indeed places in our lives when we are subjected to antisemitism and biphobia/lesbophobia. Yet to quote Fellows and Razack, "we have to pay careful attention to the multiple ways in which our listening and speaking are regulated...to the moments when we are simultaneously powerless and powerful" (1077). But as I will discuss, awareness of this problematic relationship may have contributed to an unsettling of our identities, and thus prefigured the dispute about bisexuality.

Butler contends that "the foundationalist reasoning of identity politics tends to assume that an identity must first be in place in order for political interests to be elaborated and, subsequently, political action to be taken" (1990:142). In the introduction to Activating Theory: Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual Politics, the anthology edited by Joseph Bristow and Angelia Wilson, the two discuss the structure and beliefs of the Gay Liberation Front (GLF), a British activist group that drew inspiration from the Stonewall resistance. Bristow and Wilson argue that

GLF and radical feminism...shared the same conceptual paradigm. They based their interests in a politics of identity: a politics that, in other words, assumed
that under the same banner our political interests were necessarily the same (5).

Within a certain kind of gay/lesbian or feminist politc, there is understood to be a necessary, constitutive link between identity and politics: having a certain identity means you will enact a certain kind of politics. This is the collision between the radical and the liberal. The contradiction is that we are said to possess distinct, individual selves and that we must come to these selves and represent them through an identity in order to become politically active and liberate ourselves and overthrow domination. We are individuals, but we will all arrive at the same place despite our differences; we are individuals, and yet we must act as one in community. As Razack observes, this last expectation is particularly problematic, given that

the liberal self is a being without links to community, that is, someone who is not socially constituted...liberalism...isolated the individual from his or her various communities to the point that one could no longer see how group membership altered or constrained individual choices and opportunities (1992:3).

How then do we argue that we suffer group-based oppression, as in the one purportedly experienced by all women? Even if this were desirable, given the erasure of difference necessitated by such a position, the group as a unit is one that is not comprehensible to regulatory bodies such as the justice system (Razack 1992:5). As Butler puts it,

the feminist 'we' is always only a phantasmatic construction, one that has its purposes, but which denies the internal complexity and indeterminacy of the term and constitutes itself only through the exclusion of some part of the constituency that it simultaneously seeks to represent (1990:142).

Like feminism, a partial explication of liberalism's endurance is that by its structure it "ignored difference" (Phelan 1989:159). And like the subject that knows itself best in contrast with the Other, the community is delineated as much by who is excluded as who belongs. That community, composed of subjects who are denied their context, will be at great pains to negotiate differences within its membership.
If we were to consider the subject as constructed - by and through power relations - rather than as naturally occurring, it would not be possible to conceive of power relations as separate from the subject or self. Understanding that subjects are constituted then requires that we question how the self was produced, which leads to a chain of queries familiar to poststructuralists:

By what or whom are we so built? The answer 'language' or 'culture,' or 'tradition,' is hardly an answer unless it is followed by more questions: Who controls the language, culture, and tradition? What interests and purposes are served by the present constitution of the self? The theorists of an expressive self decline to answer these questions (Phelan 1989:145).

Butler says the category (the feminist 'we') is "radically unstable" whether we want to admit it or not - there's no question of destabilizing it ourselves, so much as abandoning the endlessly repeated attempt to deny and conceal the "complexity and indeterminacy of the term" woman, feminist, lesbian (1990:142). Though admitting the precarious character of identity unsettles the foundations of feminist politics and theory, this is not a negative outcome. Indeed, Phelan believes we have always known of this instability, because of that within us which never quite fits the public boundaries, which defies the explanations of social construction. There is, indeed, no one so pathetic as the subject who fits without trouble, without thought, into public parameters. Such a subject is thoroughly subjected, fit only to be ruled (1989:159).

She implies that we already know that what's on paper is never an accurate description. The self, the murky "that within us," always exceeds, is surplus to, the subject it is interpellated into; however, there is also always room for stretching and reconfiguring the model to better fit. The former may well be valid, but I question to what extent the latter is: norms and molds certainly adapt (as per hegemony) but for what purpose? to suit whose needs? Is it possible that we are recreating the natural-constructed/sex-gender divide by evoking the (natural) self as uncontainable within the (constructed) subject? This is indeed a risk to be aware of, but one that we must presumably take, given that the survival of community - as an idea - and communities -
as living breathing specific entities - are at stake. Though we may not have a definitive sense of what community is, if we are to continue to seek out community as a social and political model, a pursuit which remains desirable to the women I interviewed, we have to consider what makes community unwieldy and counterproductive. Phelan does not advocate that we embrace community as the one and only political formation, but she does insist that we need to examine community as a concept, and we cannot accomplish even that first inquiry unless "we move past the subject as origin or fixed point to a self that is a node of communications" (1994:85). Donna Haraway conceives of "the knowing self," which I take to be the subject by another name, as eminently able to function in community. The subject as she perceives it is indeed unstable, but it is that state that renders it compatible with other subjects:

"The knowing self is partial in all its guises, never finished, whole, simply there and original; it is always constructed and stitched together imperfectly, and therefore able to join with another...we do not seek partiality for its own sake, but for the sake of the connections and unexpected openings situated knowledges make possible' (in Eadie:157).

There is considerable potential in what Haraway describes: we do have the capacity, even the psychic need, to make connections with other people, whereby we can supplement our own incompleteness. This seems to present an alternative to the suggestion that we only know ourselves by contrast with someone we point to as our opposite - perhaps we know ourselves in combination with others, as contributors to a relationship, a larger project. But what we do, it seems, is at odds with this potential complementarity: we put our energy into denying that we are partial, incomplete, always only becoming, and put in place mechanisms (belief systems, representations, laws) to assert our individuality and distinctness.

Conceding that there is doubt about concepts that previously appeared solid "opens up other configurations, not only of genders and bodies, but of politics itself" (Butler 1990:142). Identity categories, upon which we have so often built our projects, believing we were doing so successfully and of necessity, have limited and foreclosed
even as they have enabled. We would do well to disabuse ourselves of the notion that these identity categories are either necessary or natural. That they are constructed should not come as a surprise, nor need it be the death knell of feminist politics: "The deconstruction of identity is not the deconstruction of politics; rather, it establishes as political the very terms through which identity is articulated" (Butler 1990:148). The twist is that

the reconceptualization of identity as an effect, that is, as produced or generated, opens up possibilities of 'agency' that are insidiously foreclosed by positions that take identity categories as foundational and fixed. For an identity to be an effect means that it is neither fatally determined nor fully artificial and arbitrary (Butler 1990:147).

Butler says we, feminists, have misinterpreted the choice as being between the subject which appears to enjoy "free will," and bodies without subjectivity resigned to an existence that cannot exceed biology. Nor should we strive to escape the third possibility, that identity is always in the process of being constructed. To do so would be "the construction of an epistemological model that would disavow its own cultural location and, hence, promote itself as a global subject, a position that deploys precisely the imperialist strategies that feminism ought to criticize" (Butler 1990:147).

Instead, we ought to use the mechanism of construction (which is never a one-time creation, but a constant repetition) subversively:

The critical task is, rather, to locate strategies of subversive repetition enabled by those constructions, to affirm the local possibilities of intervention through participating in precisely those practices of repetition that constitute identity and, therefore, present the immanent possibility of contesting them (Butler 1990:147).

Phelan would seem to agree that acknowledging the constructedness of identity can and should lead us to an alternate conceptualization of difference:

As we prepare ourselves to question the nature and status of sexuality, we become open to reevaluate the claims of otherness in our lives. It becomes possible to imagine rights as adhering, not simply to the approved subject, but to the self as that which encompasses both subjectivity and otherness (1989:159).
Gayatri Spivak has a similar and yet subtly different take on how, through the device of strategic essentialism, we can perform ourselves for greater results. She does not advocate eschewing universalism for specificity, but instead that we should turn that universalism to our advantage:

I should see what in the universalizing discourse could be useful and then go on to see where that discourse meets its limits and its challenge within that field. I think we have to choose again strategically, not universal discourse but essentialist discourse. I think that since as a deconstructivist - see, I just took a label upon myself - I cannot in fact clean my hands and say, 'I'm specific.' In fact I must say I am an essentialist from time to time (1990:11).

She goes on to say that "since there is no discursive continuity among women, the prime task [of feminism] is situational anti-sexism, and the recognition of the heterogeneity of the field, instead of positing some kind of women's subject, women's figure, that kind of stuff" (1990:57-58, emphasis added). This I understand not as a contradiction of the above move to universalism, but as further support of the invocation to have a shifting strategy, adaptable and contextual.

Often when we talk about redrafting the subject, or reconceptualizing the premise of the liberal subject, we include in our critique an interrogation of 'experience.' What is held up for scrutiny is the presumption of a direct line from knowing to being, as if having certain experiences necessarily predisposes us to be a certain way. There is also in this interrogation a question about whether reported experience is accurate because a person says it is, which then undermines the pivotal feminist move of affirming feeling alongside rationality. But 'experience' is not the only way to represent emotion. If we conclude that 'experience' is problematic because it too often neglects to examine the investments of the recounter, then what is called for is an analysis that can consider absent presences that structure our lives and perceptions. This does not signal an end to affect, nor that our specific histories and locations are anything other than decisive in who we are and what we can do in the world:

A lesbian politics that is not based on the authenticity of personal experience or subjectivity should not be confused with one that refuses consciousness or
social location. On the contrary, it has been part of the ideological function of the subject to remove people from their social locations and present them as equal, autonomous agents, when in fact they are unequal and usually dominated. And try as we might, we have not been able to provide a reformulation of the subject that would eliminate this ideological function and enable us to base claims on our actual, concrete, specific lives (Phelan 1994: 145).

Though like Butler, Phelan frames the task as one of "reevaluating" the subject she also advocates working towards a new model of subjectivity. This model would draw on "the liberal notion of rights, and on the high valuation of individual freedom and dignity characteristic of liberalism," to enable us to recognize and value difference as well as commonality (Phelan 1989: 159). Again, I have difficulty with Phelan's model - of the self as separate from, or prior to, the subject. It seems that she is supplanting the natural subject with the natural self. In effect, she is recuperating the subject, but allowing that it may not be quite as coherent as previously believed. She suggests it is the tension between valuing difference and commonality both that makes the system - which seems to be a new and better liberalism - work. Though there is surely no perfect solution, I am not convinced that it is wise to embrace anew the concept of a core self, or the promise of liberalism. Still, if the tension Phelan is describing is akin to the acknowledgment of the subject as simultaneously powerful and powerless, there is perhaps some value in her model.

It is not a question of inventing a new form, or rejecting form altogether, but of seeing differently what already operates - identity as constructed - and entering the performance with this in mind. The outcome Butler hopes for is that we will "redescribe those possibilities that already exist, but which exist within cultural domains designated as culturally unintelligible and impossible" (1990:149). Given the necessity of making sense within the liberal economy, we should play along as intelligible subjects, all the while bringing our subcultures to the mainstream. Much as I find her analysis of the dilemma acute and useful, I have doubts about how her last words of advice would translate into daily behaviour: are we to be ever ironic,
performing the part with tongue in cheek? There is an element to her suggestion that sounds as though we should abide by the rules and present a sanitized sitcom version of our lives for general consumption, so that we are intelligible and unthreatening. How do we perform these commodified subversions? Even if we were to devise a plan and then enact it, and even if we were to be listened to, the risk is always the same: that we begin anew to believe (in the naturalness of) the subject or identity which we have self-consciously performed. Though acting on the suggestions of Butler, Spivak and Phelan certainly entails proceeding with caution, proceed we must. There is no fool proof solution, no oracle, only shreds, glimmers of insight. Like stepping stones that have landed - by coincidence - in a certain pattern, you pick your way along, and only with difficulty and a glance over the shoulder can you discern the pattern of how you've made your way, or how your way has been made.

I have tried to show that like lesbian-feminists the six of us in JFA formulated identity as self-knowledge, and that implicit in that conceptualization is a construction of the subject as stable and coherent. Why I have done this is because I believe that the way we think about and act on identity has repercussions for how we are political, and that if we think about identity in liberal terms, we will continue to run into obstacles like the JFA dispute. Phelan suggests that we have always known we don't fit into the universal subject, and I would add that trying to fit has been taxing. What I am arguing for instead is that we need to examine how the self is produced, how power relations operate throughout that production, and what the self produces. We need to deconstruct the model of identity as marginality as self-knowledge, to get at how this configuration inhibits acknowledgment of when we are in dominant positions, and compels us to exert energy on policing boundaries. We need to consider that this model makes us excessively vulnerable to change, and impedes us from using identity strategically. What does a denial of difference do to community, and to politics?

Ultimately, I am arguing that we must reconceptualize the subject so that our
politics look different, and I am looking for indications of how we might effect that shift. Phelan says that if we think of identity as constructed, we will see difference differently, because we will come to recognize that otherness is contained within us, and is not antithetical to the subject. We can then replicate this example by valuing difference and commonality within community. Spivak states that we must let go of trying to argue that we are either this (natural) or that (constructed) because we can never escape the bounds of either. Instead, we should strategically make use of the parts of each that best serve us in the moment. Haraway insists that it is our incompleteness which allows us to seek out others and in coming together with them as partial beings, new possibilities emerge. Butler seems to agree that unsettling produces new politics, ones that allow us to take up for consideration which relations are constitutive of, and circulate through the enactment of identity. She insists that agency is the result of conceptualizing the subject and identity differently, because what is revealed is that we do have a hand in our identity, and through intervention and subversion we can have even greater control. Agency is constrained if we regard the subject and identity as fixed and natural. I will now proceed to examine how identity as marginality as self-knowledge played itself out during the JFA debates on bisexuality and biphobia.
Chapter Four: Coming Apart

My main line of inquiry throughout this thesis concerns how we, as activists, repeatedly get ourselves into the predicament named as "the difference impasse" (Fellows & Razack:1048). We come up against "the difference impasse" in groups such as political organizations, classrooms and community centres when it is suggested that we are invested in the structural domination of each other. The impasse is that we have each presented ourselves as innocent, a claim which is shaken by the suggestion that we are somehow dominant, and that we then 'race' to innocence, refusing to surrender our purity. Jewish Feminist Action's (JFA) dispute is an example of "confronting...our different socially produced locations" (Fellows & Razack:1048), and how we react to that challenge. I have attempted to trace the foundations of our problems, and to suggest why we must do politics and identity formation differently.

What happens when we formulate identity as based in oppression, as innocent, and as stable/coherent? What we need to understand is the repercussions of this in and for practice. How did 'the bisexuality wars' push all the sensitive buttons that amount to a challenge to identity, and to the self (because identity is conceived as self-knowledge)? How were the bisexuality wars prefigured - how was the debate not only about bisexuality and biphobia, but about other similar challenges to Jewish lesbian and bisexual identities? Charges that we - Jews - are racist have the same effect as suggestions that a)lesbians are biphobic b)bisexual women have 'heterosexual privilege': charges about racism say we are not exclusively oppressed but also oppressive; we are not innocent, but complicit; and we are therefore like other white people, so what is distinct about us? In much the same way as this last implication, for Cara to maintain that she is bisexual upset lesbian identity: if she is in
a long-term relationship with a woman and yet calls herself bisexual, then what remains as the sole domain of lesbians? What are lesbians? As Jo Eadie points out,

So much disavowal suggests a very strong anxiety. And the anxiety is, very simply, this: if there is not a discrete group of people who only ever experience homosexual desire, then what if we are not so different from the straight world after all? While the fight is on to ward off bisexuality's presence as a 'heterosexual incursion' by consigning it to its own space, the basic anxiety persists: what if the rituals of exorcism fail? What if the enemy turns up in our own community, erupts - like the scene in Alien - in our own flesh? (153)

The irony is that if we are so busy policing the boundaries - which we must do to prove our absolute difference from the straight world and thus our innocence - then we are not out doing the things which might otherwise distinguish us, not only as not-them, but as us.

We have understood the subject as coherent and stable. We have understood that subject as a prerequisite for identity. We have understood identity as an accurate representation of our true self. Therefore identity is believed to be autonomous (not relational) and essential (not constructed). These identities are founded on experiences of marginality. Identity, therefore, is identity as marginality. We have further told ourselves the story that identity moves from the private to the public realm (or maybe we understood that in retrospect - that the personal was/brought us to the political) and is something to rally around. We have presented ourselves as legitimate spokespeople for The Lesbian, because we have believed there are unifying features common to us all. When that claim is challenged, by shifts in adjacent identity, by suggestions that we are not exclusively oppressed or wholly innocent, we react with considerable intensity. Not only are we in effect being told we are not who we thought we were (because we have believed that identifying is knowing and representing ourselves) - but a challenge amounts to the suggestion that we are not innocent or just oppressed, and we are not autonomous. So we react with great consternation and protest. We make essential statements, about ourselves and about what a lesbian
is/a bisexual isn't. And we race to the margins, where we might find our innocence intact, and our identity stabilized.

These moves I have just described are not simple. Nor are they malicious. I don't mean to suggest that we have carefully planned how to position ourselves to greatest effect - if the moves were strategic, they would be less problematic. Rather, they are the moves triggered by the chain that builds from the subject as coherent, all the way along to the marginal identity and its claims, to the community founded on sameness. However, I do not believe, nor do I mean to imply that it is not sometimes politically and emotionally necessary to present oneself as essential. Being fragmented is not mentally comfortable, nor is it strategically astute when we are under attack. We have only to think of Hall's statement about the essential Black subject, "what at one time seemed to be a necessary fiction" (Hall: 254). It is not only at certain historical junctures that we need to present ourselves as coherent, but throughout time there are sites where we virtually cannot, and for our own well-being should not, operate except as some version of the liberal subject. But I contend that the dispute in JFA was not such a moment nor such a place. It may however have been a 'safe' place to oppose contestations of the subject and identity: perhaps the debate occurred, as it did, in JFA rather than in another site, where it would have been more politically dangerous to do so.

THE BISEXUALITY WARS

Jewish women articulating issues and problems of Jewish identity, seeking strategies against anti-Semitism, will make mistakes - because we are just beginning. Some people will criticize not just the mistakes but the fact that we speak before we have every detail worked out. As women, as lesbians, as political thinkers, we have all at one time or another been told to keep quiet until we could formulate a fool-proof theory, until we had resolved or named every complexity. Such a demand for perfection is stifling, nothing more than a convoluted, covert strategy to shut us up (Kaye/Kantrowitz & Klepfisz 1989b:335).
'We don't have to be the same to have a movement, but we do have to admit our fear and pain and be accountable for our ignorance. In the end, finally, we must refuse to give up on each other' (Cherrie Moraga, Julia Perez, Barbara Smith & Beverly Smith, in Bulkin: 151).

We had endless meetings - sometimes devoting entire days to the bisexual question. We were also supposed to address the matter of process, which some contend was the underlying masked dilemma, but according to Danni, we never got that far, because

we started - and maybe this was a big error - but we started with the bisexual stuff in the day [meeting], when I think a lot of what was going on was stuff around process, was people's problems with each other and the way that interaction was going in the group. But it became almost exclusively about this issue.

Cara suggests there were multiple issues to address on the bisexual question alone. We not only had to decide "on a concrete level, what were we going to put in [the programme]" but there was also the "theoretical question of is there a difference between oppression against lesbians and oppression against bisexuals." For her, the central issue, and the one that made her agree with Alex that there needed to be a whole group discussion, was

who gets to decide, because it seemed kind of interesting to me that it was the non-bisexual identified women that wanted to decide whether or not you could be discriminated against as a bisexual. Certainly they would never have agreed that a non-Jew could decide what antisemitism is, or that a white person could decide what racism is...

In the course of the meetings where we discussed bisexuality and biphobia, Danni recalls that

the group managed to divide along two lines...the 'bisexual oppression does not exist as a separate category' lesbian group, and the 'bisexual oppression does exist and so do bisexuals' bisexual and lesbian allies. It seemed to me that that's kind of how it broke down. I think that there were other sorts of politics you could have dumped in the two categories, which include the censorship - anticensorship stuff, the pomo - nonpomo stuff. The only thing that it didn't break down along definitely was the whole question of Israelis and Palestinians and where we situated ourselves vis a vis Israel.
Some people eventually proposed that the only solution was to put the whole question aside and get on with the work, as the issue was obviously unresolvable, very damaging to individuals and the group, and taking up all of our time. This may be where we should have recognized and acknowledged that there's no such thing as home, or purity of identity, and that safety can't ever be guaranteed. And then we might have just gone on with the work and lived with our differences. This eventually did happen to some extent, though not with the above conditions explicitly articulated and accepted.

It is entirely possible that the dispute had been fermenting for months; another take is that the debate was a convenient tangent, a site where it became possible to play out old dynamics in the guise of an exchange on policy and political positions. As I have suggested earlier, this dispute may have been prefigured by dealings we had had with a group of other antiracist activists, women of colour and white women, just a few months earlier. We were invited to work in coalition with them, to develop some educational antiracism materials. Initially, it was agreed that antisemitism would be named as a form of racism in these materials. As documents were drawn up, antisemitism was unmentioned in a timeline of racist incidents, and elsewhere, and it began to be clear that racism in these texts only referred to people of colour. When omissions were pointed out by JFA representatives in the coalition, documents were modified so that they reflected the experience of Jews, as well as of Arabs. But when another document was produced, it again stated that racism is a form of oppression on the basis of skin colour. Once more a member of JFA argued against this definition, and once more a change was made, to include the naming of racial minorities. Throughout this process there seems to have been good will from all sides, and willingness to compromise and rethink. However, at a general meeting of the coalition,

1 Though I was not part of the coalition, I was a member of JFA at the time and recall discussions of these events at meetings. In this section, however, I am working not from memory but from minutes and from a detailed letter we wrote to the coalition to tell 'our' side of the story after we had withdrawn from the coalition, and I am using other correspondences to and from the coalition.
a statement was made that combating antisemitism was not a mandate of the group. When the member of JFA who was part of the coalition questioned this statement, she was told that this had been the coalition's mandate from the beginning, and that we had agreed to participate on those grounds. At that point, according to the letter we wrote, another member of the coalition got up and said that JFA had been "manipulative" at the last meeting, and had thus convinced the coalition to include antisemitism, and that we were trying to destroy the coalition. During that meeting, it was also suggested that antisemitism is not a form of racism. After the meeting, we drafted the letter stating our position, and asking for certain steps to be taken: a commitment from the coalition to address antisemitism in its mandate and work; an acknowledgment and apology that certain of the coalition's acts were antisemitic; and reassurance that members of the coalition would educate themselves around antisemitism. There was no response to the letter, it was not discussed at coalition meetings, or mentioned in their minutes. We withdrew from the coalition.

Eventually, a Jewish woman representing a different group withdrew, stating in a letter that she could not work in a group "where anti-semitism is expressed and not confronted," and that she did not believe that having an inclusive understanding of racism would weaken the coalition's work. She received a letter from a member of the coalition's coordinating committee, which asked why she was putting the fight against antisemitism ahead of the struggles of people of colour. The letter further claimed that while JFA had asked that antisemitism be put on the coalition's agenda, we had not attended the meetings where this issue was then addressed, and that coalition members hold opposing views about differences between racism and antisemitism. However, according to the member of the coordinating committee, there was no lack of willingness on the part of other members of the coalition to address the issue of antisemitism, and as proof, the coalition had approached other Jewish women's organizations "to continue these discussions."
My concern is not which version is true. Nor can I pursue this, given that I was not a member of the coalition, and that there is likely no one version that tells it all. In the case of matters as charged as this one and the bisexuality dispute, details often grow and shrink in significance, who said what to whom when becomes quickly blurred, and interpretations vary depending on location. The frailties and vicissitudes of memory should of course be kept in mind throughout this thesis. What I am concerned with is the perception of this exchange, and the effect it had on JFA members. From the contents of our letter, and the accompanying "Anti-Semitism: A Brief Overview of the Historical Roots and Its Modern Manifestations," it is apparent that we felt quite attacked, and quite defensive. Consider the similarities between these two incidents, in relation to identity claims: if antisemitism is not a form of racism, then Jews are not released from being racist: if biphobia is separate from lesbophobia, then lesbians may be oppressive; if Jews are racist, then we lose our place at the margins, and thus our innocence: if lesbians are biphobic, then we lose our place at the margins, and thus our innocence; if Jews are not subjected to racism, because we are not a race, then how are we distinct from other white people: if the designation bisexual includes women in long-term relationships with other women, then what is distinctly lesbian? The point I am trying to make is that the conflict about antisemitism made us feel that our identity claims were threatened, and our identities unstable. In this respect, the bisexuality dispute was not only about the specific questions of whether bisexuality and biphobia are separate from lesbian sexuality and lesbophobia, but about the more abstract concerns over the coherence of our identities.

During my interview with Emma, she made an indirect analogy between the two incidents. Though I didn't think much of her statement at the time, I want to quote it now, perhaps as proof I'm not forcing this comparison:

I suspect there were very heavy undercurrents of power stuff going on that in the end, what we could pin it on was this bisexual-lesbian thing...Biphobia's a very confusing thing. In a way that analogy that someone once said,
somewhere in JFA about 'it's like having one foot in oppression and one foot in privilege.' Us trying so hard to decode and decipher white Jewish identity in North America, Toronto, right now. In some ways it is that. Why did we spend so much energy figuring out antisemitism and racism? Because it's very precarious and strange, we can pass and yet we can't. We're safe and yet we're not.

Cara also states that the debate was not just about bisexuality, but "it was about a lot of other dynamics in the group, where this became an underlying catalyst." This is another way in which women of colour and race were absent presences structuring the debate and its outcome. I would contend that we engaged in the debate about bisexuality because we were predisposed to feeling defensive about our marginality, and because it was much safer, within our own group, to contest charges of dominance.

This particular disagreement did not come into focus until Gayle made what she claims was an innocent remark, not anticipating any dispute of her observations. Shortly after we called a halt to discussions of the conflict, some people left the group for various reasons, and might have anyway. A few stayed behind, and having dissuaded newcomers for months while we waded through all the messy business,² we then invited them anew. It's hard to say what state JFA is in now - maybe it has always been only becoming, maybe this is a welcome phenomenon. There were various configurations of people and interests in the two years after the conflict. Semi-regular meetings continued for a year or so, then dwindled and have now ceased. Until quite recently our input and participation remained in demand by other local groups - for an article in a special issue of a journal, to conduct a workshop at a conference. And we continued to 'put out,' though not with the same enthusiasm or determination, it seems. It's as though we underwent a loss of innocence - about community, about our selves. In the year after the conflict while we tried to get on with business, our projects were no longer so full of promise, as they once were when perhaps we

²A few times new women did come to a meeting, but quickly saw what was underway and asked that we contact them when we had resolved our conflict.
believed they might really educate or transform. Some of us are jaded, even bitter. It's not as though these same people were vastly different before, but for a little while, JFA was that new world, a community fashioned in our image(s), where almost anything was possible because we said it was. We would borrow the time from paying jobs, schoolwork, family and lover relationships, to make it so. Again and again, I hear people spontaneously speak of how JFA was the most precious place in the world to them, how the camaraderie and spirit in the group were theretofore unknown, how people felt hope, comfort, acceptance. The resulting letdown was marked by the initial heightened expectations. It's fair to say that JFA was never perfect, but I suppose it's the dearth of places that feel like home that made us all the more determined to be oblivious to all of JFA's shortcomings. It should come as no surprise to anyone that there was intense disagreement in JFA, as in any other political organization, but there was something to it that made us try to believe it wouldn't happen here, and that made it infinitely more wrenching when it did.

The issue that triggered the conflict was how to describe, and thereby represent, JFA in the programme for our annual commemoration of resistance during the Holocaust. There were two places in the programme that we had omitted mention of bisexuality: where we list who is JFA (lesbians, people with disabilities, feminists); and where we state what we stand in opposition to (racism, antisemitism, hatred of lesbians). This omission was apparently unintentional. In the former list, it was brought to our attention by Gayle that we should have indicated that JFA includes bisexual women, and in the latter, that we seek to combat hatred of bisexuals. When Alex, who was also on the committee charged with producing the programme, responded to Gayle with "we haven't had the bisexual debate yet," it was the beginning of the conflict that was to last months.
It's true that even without taking into account the cloud of the coalition debacle, there were other indications that things weren't running smoothly. Danni remembers that

There had already been a lot of tension, and I think that it was a lot of tension around process, around who had control over what, who had control over content, who was allowed to say they had a problem with that content, people taking too much control, people being seen as taking too much power - and this is in the context of a group that's trying to get a shitload of stuff done in a short amount of time with not all that many women.

Alex's position, then, was perhaps in some respects a lightning rod. She also remembers tempers running high, as soon as she asked for deliberation rather than immediate action:

the discussion got more heated about whether to even have a discussion, and it was like having a debate about this was perceived as very insulting by women who felt like it was clear that it needed to go in there, and I think it was perceived as equally insulting to feel that it was coming from a place of political either naïveté or dominance. to suggest that there needed to be some kind of discussion about it, that there wasn't any kind of legitimate lesbian interest in trying to have a discussion about what that meant in terms of potential issues of heterosexism...It just kept getting worse and worse as we tried to discuss it, such that there was more and more yelling and hurt feelings until we felt like we had to do something to move on or move out of it, at which time we decided to schedule some special meetings...(emphasis added).

What Alex was gesturing at, in the most tactful way possible, is that some feminists/lesbians take exception to the very category of bisexuality, or if they do acknowledge its existence, are not favourably disposed to it, and especially not to the idea that lesbians enact biphobia. Therefore, we needed to come to group consensus about 'official' JFA policy on bisexuality. Bayla recalls that there was no dispute about including 'bisexuals' in the list of who we are, but "to list bisexuality as an oppression was problematic for some women in the group." Cara seconds this memory, that there was no objection to inserting 'bisexuals' in the first place: "The place where there was an objection was in naming oppression against bisexuals as a separate oppression
from homophobia or lesbophobia or whatever it was." Danni says that lesbians' objections were disturbing to her, that the discussion opened this massive can of worms about what felt like - to those of us who were bisexual and those of us who allied themselves with bisexual women - almost their right to exist. I think for some people it felt that fundamental. I think for the women who were coming from the other perspective, it was about whether such a thing as bisexual oppression as a category of oppression can exist separate from lesbian oppression.

There are any number of positions possible: bisexuality does not exist, it's only the intermediate identity adopted by those a) just coming out as lesbians b) who are really lesbians but are afraid to say so c) who are lesbians but wish to preserve for themselves some fragment of 'heterosexual privilege'; bisexuals exist, but they're not to be entirely trusted because they fraternize/sleep with the enemy, and as a result won't always defend their lesbian sisters in times of need; bisexuals are a problem because usually when they claim discrimination they say it is by the lesbian/gay community (given that otherwise they face discrimination as defacto lesbians); bisexuality is a distinct, separate (from both homosexuality and heterosexuality) identity that is doubly oppressed: by mainstream society, which fears/dislikes ambiguity, and by gay/lesbian communities for the same reason; bisexuality is a separate and more highly advanced identity which is not bound by the sexed binary system; bisexuality is no more of a distinct category than any other, and is only an artificial name given to a constellation of beliefs and behaviours, and recognizing the artificiality of all categories is a valuable political project. Jo Eadie sums up the range of opinions about bisexuality:

bi people can be presented as no different at all: no need for change, questioning, adaptation. At the other end of the spectrum there is a talismanic power to the word 'bisexual' whereby it can invoke an entirely separate, discrete, dissimilar, self-contained group. It is sometimes said that bisexuals don't exist - we are 'really' gay, or 'really' straight. Now we are 'really' different (152).
The discourse in JFA similarly ran the gamut: from "why don't you call yourselves lesbian when you're with a woman" to "I just don't trust bisexual women in the same way." Despite this plethora of options, it was for some offensive that bisexuality would have to be discussed and analyzed, while for others the imperative to do so was genuine.

While the existence of bisexuals was not particularly disputed, the contents of the category were argued over. Bayla says she doesn't remember anyone claiming that bisexuality doesn't exist,

although I do recall some comments along the lines of, 'you're sitting on the fence, why don't you just make up your mind'...I remember one woman saying, 'I just don't understand why you can't decide,' to bisexual women, and I doubt she was ever intending to be so mean, but to hear that as a bisexual, that was really pretty high on the offensive scale.

It seems that Cara was the recipient of that particular question: "I was asked point blank: you're involved with a woman, why don't you just call yourself a lesbian? And I remember thinking, what, so that you would feel better?" Another argument made about bisexuality is that you can't trust bisexual women, which Danni felt was hurtful, and also nonsensical: "I...couldn't understand the concept - women betray women all the time. People betray people in the context of their relationships."

On the subject of biphobia, there is similarly a range of beliefs. Alex explained that while she does believe that bisexuals experience "some oppression," it is directed at them from "the dominant culture, to the extent that they're perceived to be lesbians or gays." At the same time, she thinks that bisexuals have "a lot of heterosexual privilege" when they're assumed to be heterosexual. Her concern then was that "when bisexuals have talked about bisexual oppression, rather than being directed to a dominant heterosexist and heterosexual culture as oppressing them, that it's mostly been directed to lesbian and gay communities for not letting them in." What is missing from the picture, according to Alex, is the concurrent privilege of bisexuals, and a careful survey of what the notion of biphobia does to lesbians and gay men:
Does this mean the oppression of those who identify as bisexual, by the lesbian and gay community? Is that what it means? Or are we talking about the dominant culture? I have no problem talking about the dominant culture, and I think then what we're talking about is the systemic heterosexism, where I do think there is a commonality. I was willing to talk about that in terms of this pamphlet, but my sense is that people on the other side couldn't get that there was anything in any way that should be seen to be at all threatening to lesbians by having this included.

Emma seems to agree with much of Alex's argument, that what is called biphobia is really homophobia, and that society doesn't hate the straight part of you. Society loves that, celebrates that, jumps up and down, puts it on billboards. What society hates is that at times in your life, or all the time, you are fucking someone of the same sex. It's a hatred of homosexuality.

She concurs that when she hears the term biphobia, it is almost always directed at lesbians and gay men, and not at straight people. While Bayla, Cara and Danni don't talk specifically about how biphobia exists and is a distinct form of oppression, we can easily draw from their above comments that one form of discrimination expressly directed at bisexuals is in the denial of their existence: lesbians have argued for some time now that suppression of our histories and our current lives is an attempt to render us invisible, and that it is oppressive.

I would venture to say that Gayle as well as other bisexual women and their supporters in JFA were aware of lesbian discourses antipodal to bisexuality, and likely even knew on some level that these views were held by their 'sisters'. However, the need had never before arisen for opinions and feelings about bisexuality to be spoken publicly, and to be raised as evidence in an argument about what should represent JFA.  

I think it is to everyone's credit that we managed to work together for

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3 There is in this an example of doubling, or of a phenomenon we might refer to as 'Baba Doll' - you open up one brightly painted wooden figure only to find another smaller, slightly different brightly painted wooden figure, inside of which is another smaller, slightly different... In the broadest sense, the question was anyway how to represent name define, and who was in charge of writing and designing the pamphlet. And around these decisions there were already disputes and power struggles. To then add to this a whole other dispute about naming and definition and identity - it is perhaps not surprising that things came to a head as they did. But this does not account for why people allowed themselves, or felt compelled, to say the things they did.
almost two years while holding such differing views. And yet I would maintain that we should have continued to do so, that we were always a coalition of sorts. This state of difference was never acknowledged, out of a need to find home and safety. As much as I understand that bisexuality is a contentious issue for some, I also believe that what produced such a conflict in JFA is quite apart from the specifics of the debate. Again, it is a question of broader issues surrounding the formulation of the coherent subject and the status of marginality claims.

As I pour over my interview notes, and reread theory about the subject and power and identity, I often feel like a detective surrounded by a pile of frustrating clues. Despite the chaos of excessive information, a pattern resurfaces, though I inevitably suspect I am missing something. In the course of this thesis, I have been trying to build a case, presenting you with each piece of evidence so that I might then weave them together into a sequence of events. Though I do not mean to suggest that the pattern has a simple chronological progression, I do imagine the links in the chain as connected and building on each other. Each concept depends on another, and so the conflict that ensued in JFA was the result of a combination of events, ones that would seem to have been almost inevitable. They are not predetermined, but they are the eventual consequence of each other. In succession, the pieces as I imagine them are the subject that is conceived as autonomous; identity that symbolizes the subject's self-knowledge; rigid distinctions between sameness and difference that bolster the subject's sense of itself; signs of change or blurring of borders that cause identity crises; and investments that must be denied and masked by assertions of innocence and oppressed status.

Let me clarify the story behind these elements. Surrounded by conceptualizations of the subject as a unified whole, we have come to believe the liberal subject to be a true representation of human experience. Feminist theory of the 1970s, for all its challenges and rebellions, built its position on this same foundation,
and out of that struggle - as well as other countercultural ones - emerged the current idea of sexual identity as a window onto the true self. That transparent sexual identity is recognizable in relation to concepts defined as its opposites - the Other. The identity depends on clear definitions and categories. The subject who performs the identity - of lesbian - must endlessly work to convince herself of the identity's legitimacy and coherence - because identity is not seamless, and because it can only ever approximate itself. Besides being always inauthentic, lesbian identity is only comprehensible in relation to certain other stereotypes. These include a view of lesbians as oppressed, located on the peripheries of society, and therefore innocent and powerless because divested, and a view of the Other as the antithesis of these qualities. In this case, the Other is the straight world, with bisexual women straddling the border between privilege and oppressed status. Lesbians are lesbians because they sleep exclusively with women⁴; bisexual women then are not women who are involved in long-term relationships with women. In much the same way as heterosexuality is definable in relation to homosexuality, bisexual and lesbian identities are interlocking:

the parodic or imitative effect of gay identities works neither to copy nor to emulate heterosexuality, but rather, to expose heterosexuality as an incessant and panicked imitation of its own naturalized idealization. That heterosexuality is always in the act of elaborating itself is evidence that it is perpetually at risk, that is, that it 'knows' its own possibility of becoming undone: hence, its compulsion to repeat which is at once a foreclosure of that which threatens its coherence. That it can never eradicate that risk attests to its profound dependency upon the homosexuality that it seeks fully to eradicate and never can or that it seeks to make second, but which is always already there as a prior possibility (Butler 1991:22-23).

This same uncertainty and resulting play are replicated in the relationship between lesbian and bisexual identities, ironically with lesbian identity assuming the position of the panicked and threatened heterosexuality. When the bisexual Other stands up

⁴An equal threat is embodied by the woman who sleeps with men occasionally and yet calls herself a lesbian. See the film "Go Fish" for a powerful and realistic scene in which a group of lesbians confront another lesbian who has just slept with a man.
and tries to define itself, insisting it is not what the lesbian subject claimed it was, the implication is explicitly and implicitly that the lesbian subject is not what it claimed to be. Threatened, because its own virtue but worse its intelligibility is in doubt, that lesbian subject must react by maintaining its absolute innocence. An additional complication of delineating the public sphere as discretely centre and margins, and then positing oneself as outside relations of power, is that

such polemics disguise the fact that most of us are both inside and outside at the same time. Any misplaced nostalgia for or romanticization of the outside as a privileged site of radicality immediately gives us away, for in order to idealize the outside we must already be, to some degree, comfortably entrenched on the inside (Fuss:5).

Further, to conceive of oneself as on the outside, there must exist a static and universal inside. If there are changes or specificities to that category, then outsider status and the identity it helps to define are disrupted.

Surveying the information I have before me, the conclusion I come to is that the JFA conflict - both the fact and the intensity of it - was the result of people feeling that their identities were under attack. And because they saw those identities as manifestations of their very selves, they reacted with great feeling. When identities are threatened, by a direct challenge to the definition of that identity, or by a proposed shift in a neighbouring identity, the reaction is often one of defensiveness. Diana Fuss discusses this defensiveness, in relation to the threat that lesbian identity poses to heterosexuality:

heterosexuality secures its self-identity and shores up its ontological boundaries by protecting itself from what it sees as the continual predatory encroachments of its contaminated other, homosexuality. Of course, any sexual identity, based on the complicated dynamics of object choice, works through a similar defensive procedure. Read through the language of psychoanalysis, sexual desire is produced, variously and in tandem, through acts and experiences of defense, ambivalence, repression, denial, threat, trauma, injury, identification, internalization, and renunciation. Indeed, sexual object choice is not even so 'simple' a matter of psychical identifications and defenses; it is also a result of the complex interaction of social conflicts, historical pressures, and cultural prohibitions (2, emphasis added).
Even under less acute circumstances, threat, defensiveness and ambivalence are aspects of identification. Alex describes people at the day long meeting as having "good intentions... but it was just such a deadlock." Danni says she thinks that though people were committed to carrying out the discussion,

what ended up happening ... was that people came to listen but they couldn't hear. We spent a lot of time waiting for our turns in the meeting, and preparing our own arguments and counterpositions, and really being unable to hear each other (emphasis added).

Bayla thinks the mood was hostile because "people really felt their identities were at stake. I suppose when you feel that you get incredibly impassioned, and I think most of us in the room were very passionate about what we felt" She says it makes sense to her that "passions are that high when you're talking about identity. Even those of us who want to critique it, it's pretty near and dear to us." Emma remembers the discussion turning "very ugly," very quickly, with the result that

right away the communication was closed, as though there was no room to talk. It just got worse from there. We tried to fix it, and it was like there was no going back. Some kind of scar had already happened, and people felt profoundly disrespected, and not safe to talk. On both sides - totally - there was no room to talk.

Cara remembers that the tone worsened as "people became more and more and more defensive, people retreated into their own positions, and people became incapable of hearing one another, and people caused each other a lot of pain, pain that in some instances was irreparable." Bayla suggests that the dispute called forth "hardline" stances from people who generally weren't very hardline: "you just get pulled into that space when you're fighting." "That space" is apparently one where the gloves are off: "People were mean, and snarky, and rude, and vicious, all those lovely things that come out when people are really impassioned about something." Danni describes similar aggressive tactics, "people calling [each other] on things," as "a silencing technique": she recalls that they said things like "you can't use that term. That term is classist.' It was so loaded - everyone who had something to say was really really
emotional about this stuff, because I think it got to their guts, virtually everyone who was there. What she calls "guts," I might term as their sense of self. As the discussion progressed (though it sometimes felt more like it degenerated), in our weekly meetings, and then during two all-day meetings, communication worsened as people became more defensive. It was as if their very being was under attack and had to be justified.

The endangered, self-preserving response is magnified in a group like JFA, which represents home and acceptance to its members. Home and acceptance, which are in other words an absence of difference - though it is difference that delineates the limits of identity. Ed Cohen problematizes the assumption that a common sexual identity "might appear to offer a stable basis for group formations" (72). The risk in "predicating 'our' affinity upon the assertion of a common 'sexuality,'" is that we tacitly agree to leave unexplored any 'internal' contradictions which undermine the coherence we desire from the imagined certainty of an unassailable commonality or of incontestable sexuality. Hence we almost inevitably render ourselves vulnerable to personal and political crisis whenever such putative certainty is destabilized from within the body, the psyche, the collectivity, or the polity (72).

This is the built in obsolescence of 'lesbian' and 'gay' categories: "unproblematically hinging 'our' personal/group identity upon idealized notions of sexuality and the body," often has the effect of masking "the very difficulties that both bring us together and keep us at odds time and time again - i.e., the force of 'our' difference(s)" (Cohen:72). The question this brings me to ask is, are groups implicitly an attempt to deny these differences? Do we come together in community precisely to deny the fragility of our individual identity claims? As Biddy Martin and Chandra Talpade Mohanty point out, 'Being home' refers to the place where one lives within familiar, safe, protected boundaries; 'not being home' is a matter of realizing that home was an illusion of coherence and safety based on the exclusion of specific histories of oppression and resistance, the repression of differences even within oneself (196).
The construction of home, then, is an attempted externalization of the idealized coherent, singular self. And like the illusory subject, which is premised on a denial of the other within, the desired 'safety' of community will always require us to find some new enemy within.

When people felt their identities were being encroached upon, or actually challenged (for lesbians, by bisexuals telling them they are oppressive; for bisexuals, by lesbians questioning whether they are not in fact just straight women - in the case of Bayla and Danni - or just lesbians - in the case of Cara), they reacted defensively. Kobena Mercer says "identity only becomes an issue when it is in crisis, when something assumed to be fixed, coherent and stable is displaced by the experiences of doubt and uncertainty" (259). Julia Creet restates this:

'Lesbian identity' like other kinds of identities is in a crisis of representation, entangled in the need for political and emotional stability, and subject to the radical destabilizing of post-structuralist theories, as well as challenges to boundaries by cross-currents with other categories (181).

Bayla and Danni, who felt their identity was being doubted - as a separate and genuine identity - felt inauthentic, which everyone is anyway. Because she is currently in a long-term relationship with a man, Bayla says she is "really tentative even to speak as bisexual, 'cause I'm not living out day to day life with women." Danni, then married to a man told me that the debate "felt like a questioning of [bisexual women's] very legitimacy to exist outside of under this loose umbrella of lesbians - we could be a subcategory but not really because we were potential betrayers [by virtue of being involved with men]."

Alex and Emma, who found the concept of biphobia problematic because it unfairly targets gays and lesbians, expressed feeling attacked and undermined. Emma recalls that "at the time...this term biphobia made me mental. Where did this term come from? This biphobia - and again, directed at the gay and lesbian community, so it felt very attacking, and very unthought out. We need time to educate ourselves on
these issues." Alex says that dismissal of her stand on bisexuality is part of people thinking that a certain politic is "passe." She finds that attitude upsetting and worrying:

There's this thing about people thinking, oh you're so seventies. It's very disrespectful. It's like, I'm young and I'm hip. I'm not really naive, I'm pretty intelligent, and I've thought about this a lot. A lot of things you take for granted wouldn't have been here without that energy. I personally wasn't a part of that energy, but I appreciate it, 'cause I see the connection between that energy and that movement to the things I have now. I'm also watching those things I treasure be undermined....I'm frustrated with how trendy issues are. It's not a trend for me. It drives me nuts when somebody is able to abandon what's gone on before(emphasis added).

This "undermining" is indirectly of Alex's sense of her self. The unsettling Alex and Emma both describe resembles the larger postmodern condition, outlined by Mercer:

In philosophical terms, postmodernism has been discussed as a weakening, fading or relativization of the absolutist or universalist values of the Western Enlightenment. The master narratives are collapsing, which is to say we no longer have the confidence to invest belief in the foundational myths of inevitable human rationality or social progress (265).

The blurring of categories unsettles a whole series of assumptions, and throws into question principles that appear foundational. Like Mercer, Joshua Gamson situates "boundary-disrupting phenomena" within "much post-structuralist sexual theory" (399). Gamson writes of the

'border skirmishes' over membership conditions and group boundaries...[which] spotlight the possibility that sexual and gender identities are not the solid political ground they have been thought to be - which perhaps accounts for the particularly frantic tone of letters (398).

The letters he refers to were written to a San Francisco Bay area newspaper, on the subject of 'queer' as an anti-identity. Gamson reads through these letters to track opposition to an unsettling of categories. Emma also talks about 'queer,' with some dislike of the term:

all of a sudden the Lesbian and Gay Friends of Concordia becomes the Concordia Queer Collective. Queer - all of a sudden our identities are whitewashed, invisible-ized, diluted...What are we? I think it's all artificial, but
it's so artificial that it's almost natural by now, it's in our blood... we get mad at each other's definitions...

And yet while bisexuality, like queer, represents the possibility of blurring and/or exploding categories, in other respects bisexuality is only another enunciation of a familiar desire for self-knowledge, self-definition, for a community of people who are like-minded if not similarly identified. I will advance a further discussion and critique of queer in chapter five.

For Cara, it was the fluidity of categories and definitions that was under attack. She says, "bisexuality for me was a way of bursting open somebody else's categories." She sees this as important because "it is the categorization of people which allows for hierarchies to be created." She goes on to present a theory about categories that closely resembles my analysis about what happened in JFA:

People like definitions, people like to know what the rules are, and when you change the rules, or there are no rules, people get scared and confused. I think that was what I was trying to get at, that we would probably be better off with shakier boundaries around these categories, more permeation, so that one could travel between categories if that was real for one. The whole construction of gender - it serves a great function to have gender very strictly defined, but it doesn't seem to help people very much....Which doesn't mean I would want to break down all categories...

Though Cara acknowledges that "lesbian identity is a really important identity, and...bisexual identity can be a threat to it, "she felt angry that the issue had taken on such importance, that she was being told how to name herself and that it was suggested she calls herself bisexual to retain heterosexual privilege. If identity is about self-knowledge, then authority to label and classify must lie with the individual in question; otherwise the illusion of choice and self-determination is destroyed. And yet as far as Cara is concerned, the debate was not really about discussing differences and similarities between bisexuals and lesbians, "it was about who gets to decide...but I was sort of shocked by the degree of rage around the issue." Emma expresses the same opinion, but as it relates to who decides which people are opposed, and which oppressive:
in the left, it's been so hard for us to make sense of this madness, to make sense of who's with us, and who's against us, and all the divisions. The media doesn't help. So for safety and to target our energies, we've had to make some strict boundaries to say 'look, Black people have been shit on since the beginning of wherever. When you use the term racist, it's only in the context of power over. When you use the term phobia or ism, it's about someone having power over. So when you use the term biphobia, you're saying that the gay and lesbian community is an oppressive sexual fascist force over you. How can that be when society wants to kill us for being who we are?" So it really fucked with those whole categories. And maybe we need to use those categories knowing their weakness.

The power to name may ultimately be precisely about saying who is oppressed, if identity, the name, always refers back to a position of marginality.

Am I a lesbian simply and exclusively because I say that I am - as was JFA's practice around Jewishness - or do we need to invoke the 'community standard' measure, as practiced in current legislation on pornography, to allow others to determine when my sexual/political behaviour ceases or commences to mark me as a lesbian? There is nothing new in this question. Cultural theorists like Stuart Hall, Martha Gever, Trinh Minh-ha, have spent the last decade or so articulating why it is so pertinent for oppressed groups to create and sustain media representations of themselves, and conversely, what the material and psychic effects are of representations produced by a commodifying, racist/sexist/classist culture. In other words, to members of JFA the discourse around the imperative to name and define oneself and one's group is a familiar one. There is evidence of this in discussions that took place early on about what makes a Jew: according to JFA, if you say you are a Jew, then you are. Despite other commandments about the minimum requirements for Jewishness\(^5\) touts by mainstream Jewish religious and cultural organizations, nowhere in the (formal or otherwise) policies of JFA is there the suggestion that more

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\(^5\)According to traditional religious law, to be a Jew your mother must be a - born or converted - Jew; if you are a man, you must be circumcised, and on down the line to you must keep kosher, you must celebrate the high holidays. Some less commonly cited, but still potent prohibitions in circulation include that homosexuality and Jewishness are incompatible.
than your own claim is required for authentification. Still, this complex political position was not mentioned on the question of what is (not) a lesbian.

Arguing a certain power analysis or position of oppression was another defense against unsettling suggestions. Sometimes the discourse around power seemed typical of identity politics:

The worst aspects of the new social movements emerged in a rhetoric of 'identity politics' based on an essentialist notion of a fixed hierarchy of racial, sexual or gendered oppressions. By playing off each other to establish who was more authentically oppressed than whom, the residual separatist tendencies of the autonomous movements played into the normative calculation of 'disadvantage' inscribed in welfare statism (Mercer:262).

So like the autonomous subject, identity politics is not a departure from established politics so much as another version of "welfare statism." Bayla outlines identity politics as she knew them at the Rape Crisis Centre:

I think the identity politics that I came to political consciousness with were very hardline. There are people with power, there are people without power. The way that you give power to the less powered people is to shut up the people with power....gentiles were really not supposed to talk about Christmas in front of me - as though I gave a shit, but it was that kind of silencing - 'we won't burden you with that part of our lives which just by its very nature is oppressive to you.' It was a very very simplistic, very black and white, cut and dried, easy to fit people into boxes, and real rules, really clear rules about how you behaved around your particular identities.

The apportionment of power in this politic resembles what Rey Chow calls "dominance through a representation of the self as powerless" (11). This is the case when identity as marginality is held up as a denial of dominance. Cara makes the connection between feeling under attack and formulating an identity based on oppression, and then feeling so oppressed that you fashion your analysis of power relations to position you as powerless. She says that

when you feel besieged, psychologically a pretty normal response to that is to then get incredibly defended, incredibly guarded, and attack back....we start thinking so besieged and so oppressed and we don't take responsibility for our own actions and think once in a while, maybe this isn't about power, maybe this is about respect, maybe this is about being a mensch....I think that identity politics places power as the pivotal thing, where it's always about who
has more power than somebody else to do something, to say something, to influence something, and it's just way too simplistic for me.

Including a mention of discrimination against bisexuals in the programme was immediately problematic for some members of JFA because for them, implicit in recognizing the existence of 'biphobia' is the suggestion that the discrimination is twofold. Not only are bisexuals the target of hatred and unfair treatment by mainstream society, but gay and lesbian communities are also culpable. Bayla compares the position of women who were arguing that bisexuality is a place of "quite strong privilege," to the identity politics she knew. She remembers that bisexual women who said that their sexuality is "a real place of oppression" felt "very hurt and stepped upon by lesbians, like they were experiencing a lot of oppression, particularly from lesbians, not just from the straight world." And that, she says, was intolerable to hear for a lot of lesbians. I think there was a real politic, like 'we are oppressed, we have no power to oppress from this position, it's not possible'. I don't know the theoretical interests behind those two different sides, but my sense is that some of the bisexual women who were talking were really talking from a kind of politic around difference, and power being much more diffuse than just you have it and I don't have it, and talking about the ability of people who were in some situations powerless, yes, they would still have power to oppress in other situations. To me that was a subtext that was going on.

Alex also states that she became aware late in the dispute that there were "very very very different views about power and how it works," in JFA and that those ideas about power "had an impact on how this discussion played itself out." This is her understanding of power:

if you have a subculture, it's a microcosm of the larger world, and you're still dealing with the same power issues, and just because you have a group that

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6'Biphobia' is a contentious term at best, disliked for the way it medicalizes, and thereby gives weight to, what amounts to hatred and not fear of a given group. If we talk of homo lesbo biphobia, we are saying the sentiment is somehow not the fault of the one feeling acting on it, that this person is not in control of her his feelings, as is consistent with the understanding of other phobias (agoraphobia, phobia of snakes, heights). Similarly, we might question the use of the term 'xenophobia'. This then shifts the discourse from one of power and systemic discrimination, to one of individual, innocent pathology which can only be resolved by redemption and healing.
has a number of lesbians doesn't mean that that's become the dominant world view. Other people didn't feel that way. They felt that there was such a strong concentration of lesbians in the group that lesbians had tons of power in the group and it wasn't an issue.

Cara maintains that she doesn't gain any privilege by calling herself bisexual rather than lesbian, that "it becomes more complicated in most cases." Danni repeats Bayla's analysis of how power was construed:

it was almost as though there was no context in which one could say that lesbians had any power, and that was what the whole debate ended up being, this whole thing about who has power and who has absolutely no power, and we were back in the identity politics hierarchy of oppression structure that we had been so clearly opposed to in other settings. That for me was a major source of frustration.

Emma thinks the whole debate was about power, and about having "a different analysis, understanding, a different grasp on what power is in the world, how it works, how it gets played out in our lives, in this group." She describes her understanding of power as

the way that society uses its hatred of sexuality is primarily against anybody who crosses gender. So of course bisexuals are included. Of course we can share things. Of course I probably have more in common with bisexual women and men than I do with straight women and men. But it brought up a really important thing: to assume that gays and lesbians can oppress, when we've been spending all this time saying we're so oppressed (emphasis added).

There is certainly reason to tread lightly around stating that discrimination against bisexuals originates from gays and lesbians as well as from dominant institutions and individuals. As Alex and Emma have observed, it is more often than not gays and lesbians and our community organizations (such as Lesbian and Gay Pride Day, Gay and Lesbian Film and Video Festivals, Associations of Lesbian and Gay Studies) that are criticized for excluding bisexuals. It is difficult not to suspect these charges, which suggest that gay and lesbian communities are much more powerful than they are and that not mentioning bisexuals is an intentional omission
rather than the result of an initiative by those people (gays and lesbians) named.7
Perhaps it is safer for bisexuals to find fault with lesbian and gay communities, given
the already existent anti-gay mainstream discourses, than it is to do David and
Goliath battles with mainstream discrimination,8 which in and of itself is doubled:
bisexuals are seen as deviants both for having homosexual feelings and preferences,
and for being here and there, neither/nor, simultaneously.9

However, where I part company with the idea that bisexuals' claims of
discrimination are overrated is when it comes to the notion that there is no such thing
as discrimination - of any kind - by lesbians, because oppressed peoples cannot
themselves enact oppression on another group. This logic rests on the assumption
that power is static and unidirectional. Some people have it, others don't. Either you
have power, and the potential to wield it over another, or you are exclusively in a
position of powerlessness and vulnerability from which you can harm no one but
yourself. This schema has no place within it for an understanding of being
disenfranchised here (at the office, when confronted with a cop in a dark alley), and yet
potent there (with one's children, in a political group that operates on a hierarchy of
oppression), nor for seeing power as other than a restrictive, limiting force. According
to Foucault, power is not only "what prohibits, what prevents people doing
something" (1988:102). It is "much more complex than that," because it is also
productive and enabling (Foucault 1988:102). A foucauldian view of power renders it
impossible to position oneself as only oppressed, with no recourse to resistance or
power: "as soon as there is a power relation, there is a possibility of resistance. We
can never be ensnared by power: we can always modify its grip in determinate

7By this I don't mean to suggest that bisexuals have been absent from community organizing, or even
silenced within them, but that it is a relatively recent phenomenon for 'bisexual' to be a political identity.
Undoubtedly, the slow emergence of bisexual identity has something to do with pressures from both the
mainstream and from gay and lesbian communities to 'choose' alliance with one or the other.
8And yet there is a way in which I justify this turn, by speaking critically of arguments used by JF/T against
other antiracism groups.
9This is according to those defending bisexuality.
conditions and according to a precise strategy" (Foucault 1988:123). Power is omnipresent, ever-changing and fluid (Foucault 1978:93-95). Power, "neither given, nor exchanged, nor recovered, but rather exercised," is the stuff of human relations (Foucault 1980:89). Resistance to the idea that lesbians can oppress bisexuals, for instance, is one of the threads that brings us to an investigation of identities premised and reliant on the notion of innocence, as well as simply the concept of identities as relational and thus prone to disruption when there is movement in a neighbouring category.

As I have already discussed, the argument is complicated by the tangle we had with a coalition some few months before the bisexuality wars. This presents a further snag in the wholesale dismissal by lesbians of their potential to be in a dominant position vis à vis bisexual women. We had previously claimed that women of colour, who are generally understood to be 'doubly oppressed' and therefore presumably powerless, had discriminated against us as members of JFA. If this is so, then how can it be that lesbians are incapable of discriminating against bisexuals?

Another manifestation of difference denied surfaces in discussions about how JFA was home for so many women. In this site that was supposedly safe, women expected to be known, which is part of the discourse around identity as self-knowledge. JFA was a mirror for people, where they saw their values reflected, and felt some comfort that though we may not see aspects of ourselves represented elsewhere in society, at least here we are recognized and accepted. Having argued that identity depends on externalized difference, it would seem contradictory to argue that women in JFA were threatened by an absence of sameness. However, the context of JFA was specifically that it was a refuge from the rest of the world where difference abounds.

I have also suggested that community built on sameness serves to bolster individual identity claims. When differences - bisexual women refusing to be lumped in
with lesbian identity, and lesbians telling bisexual women they are less trustworthy -
developed in this haven, the investments that people had in JFA as shelter and
validation became apparent. There is also an element of the belief in JFA as home that
sounds like a desire for a return to innocence, a wish to regress to a prelapsarian time.
Phelan characterizes this as a romantic quality:

The painful perception of the limits of naive liberalism which arose in the 1960s
resulted in the romantic reaction which focused on destroying the high walls
erected between public and private, and this reaction has suffered from the
same deficiencies as have other romantic movements (1989:58).

Collapsing the divide between public and private creates the illusion of a "prepolitical
community" that might somehow be regained (Phelan 1989:58). This requires an
endless, painful striving, all focused on 'getting rid of the old,' the externally imposed
ways (sexism), under the assumption that in the absence of these ways exists
harmony, oppression-free life: purity. But as Mercer points out, identity politics is just
another version of the welfare state. The deficiencies of the 'new' order Phelan
mentioned might include the assumption that lesbians can't oppress bisexuals. Placing
faith in a group fashioned in one's own image, and believing in the collective goodness,
is another way of asserting our individual innocence. The consequence is that with the
group's failure to overcome adversity comes self-disillusionment. Alex talks about
how much we had invested in each other, in the political work and in the ideal that
brought us to the group. She argues that these expectations were too grand, and they
were impossible to live up to. Consequently, there was widespread unhappiness: "I've
never seen as many people in one room feel so unhappy and feel so hurt and feel so
bad, and feel so isolated. It's so weird to have a whole group saying they all feel
isolated. That's so destructive and sad." Bayla blames our disappointment on
some stupid notion that we might have a common understanding of something.
Possibly because we thought we would be community and friendships and
support for each other in a unique way. And I guess that probably is at the
root of it, that there was some, what I think is obviously now quite a
mistaken belief, that we would share some common understanding, or
common approach, or common view of the world because we were women and we were Jews.

Danni also remembers a general feeling of "abandonment and rejection." Like Bayla, she thinks we made a mistake in expecting too much from community. She suggests that we used family as a model for what we were trying to build:

I think that probably people believed that JFA was going to be 'home' and there was certainly a sense of safety that was expressed in the very early meetings...that it was a space, for discussing things that were not discussible anywhere else without causing conflict or where you didn't feel like you had to defend your position, you just felt like you could state what happened to you and other women would understand it....I think the thing is that up until then [the bisexuality wars] through all the conflict, there had been this really strong feeling of belonging in the group...we'd built this thing that did feel kind of like home. It's danger, replicating home on...political groups...we don't steer clear of it enough. I think we want community desperately, I think we want models of family and community that are different from those that we've had - not that they're necessarily negative, but places where we fit completely as who we are.

Emma too has recollections of JFA as "the only place where we thought we were safe....The impact of this is that I think a lot of women feel homeless now." The desire for belonging and acceptance expressed in these passages reminds me of nostalgic longing, for a return to the halcyon days when we were perfect and undifferentiated from the world of our mothers, before the loss that produced the possibility of signification. The paradox is that identity brings us together, and yet it is the process of identification and differentiation that we want to deny.

Power relations are a significant ingredient in another feature of the argument against the very notion of 'biphobia'. According to some members of JFA, even if there is such thing as 'biphobia', the effects of it are essentially canceled out by 'heterosexual privilege'. A bisexual woman who is with a man, even if she loudly and publicly declares herself bisexual, is still accorded numerous societal benefits for appearing (in whatever respect) straight. She still has access to male power (which apparently only, and all, men have, and women are absolutely denied, regardless of
their skin colour, class, ability), and always has the option to claim to be straight if she finds herself in danger.\(^{10}\)

I have two objections to this attempt to disqualify bisexuals' claims of discrimination. In the first place, I believe it is important to trouble the idea of heterosexual privilege as universal. This privilege, which does exist in the form of societal approval of opposite-sex mating and disincentives against same-sex union, is nonetheless not the same across the board. Heterosexual privilege does not look the same if you are part of a couple where both members are white, second generation Canadian professionals living in the Annex in Toronto as if one member is a South American exchange student and the other is an African Canadian labourer in rural Manitoba. Further, since when do feminists believe so passionately in the benefits of having a male partner? What of male spousal abuse, marital rape, and the chances of being murdered by your male spouse if you're a woman? Since when is heterosexuality unmitigated privilege when you're a woman in a sexist, misogynist society? And yet while the condition of heterosexuality may not be unrelieved privilege, there are numerous material ways in which being (perceived to be) with a man makes life less complex, particularly in negotiations with institutional bodies.

The other difficulty I have is with the suggestion that 'heterosexual privilege', such as it is, somehow cancels out oppression born by bisexual women. The reason that this argument troubles me is that it so closely resembles one that has been used against JFA, and against other Jews. When, as members of an anti-racism coalition JFA asked that antisemitism be recognized by the larger group, in the wording of educational materials being developed, and in discussions during meetings, we were effectively told that because we have white skin privilege\(^{11}\), either we shouldn't speak

\(^{10}\)This 'choice' is also available to some, though certainly not all, lesbians. However, it is easier to prove heterosexuality if one has an actual male partner.

\(^{11}\)Of course, not all Jews are white-skinned. Ashkenazi Jews, or Jews who settled Europe, tend to be able to pass. There are Ashkenazi Jews who have very semitic features. As well, there are dark-skinned Sephardic Jews (from Spain and North Africa), Jews in India, Ethiopia and China. For an example of
of antisemitism, or that antisemitism is alleviated by this concomitant privilege. Though in JFA there was never any shortage of differing opinions on any subject, there was almost unanimous agreement\(^{12}\) that our suggestion about antisemitism does take into account the state of simultaneously inhabiting sites of privilege and sites of oppression. When antisemitism is declared canceled out by whiteness, it sometimes feels less like a legitimate critique of white skin privilege that an enactment of antisemitism. The parallels between ideas about antisemitism and white skin privilege, and ideas about bisexuality and heterosexual privilege were not apparent to some women in JFA until mid-way through the debate, and when this equation was suggested by bisexual women, it was rejected as unfounded, not to mention offensive, by 'the other side.' Without going into the various historical and material differences between the 'experience' of being a white-skinned Jew and that of being a bisexual woman, suffice it to say that while these two locations are not identical, they bear significant resemblances particularly as sites of both oppression and privilege. What this then leads us to ask is how it is possible to be simultaneously opposed to one suggestion (being white overrides being Jewish), while proposing a similar one (being with a man neutralizes being bisexual).\(^{13}\)

The final argument raised by the side in favour of clear categories again echoes lines used against Jews. This is the line about how Jews in antiracism/oppositional groups can't be trusted because we'll take over. We'll demand that certain items are placed on the agenda, we'll dispute the inclusion of other items, we will enact the same oppression against people of colour present as any white person would, and by our very presence, we'll disenable people of colour from speaking freely. All of this is a stereotypical response to a dark-skinned Jew, see Kyla Wazana's "JEW, JEWISH, KIKE, J.A.P., COLOURED, THIRD WORLD..." Most of the women in JFA, and all those I interviewed, are Ashkenazi.

\(^{12}\)The only kind of internal objection raised to JFA's response to this position was that even as we include antisemitism as a form of racism, given how Jews have been racialized for centuries, it is crucial for us to distinguish between antisemitism and discrimination based on skin colour.

\(^{13}\)A further parallel is that both Jewishness and bisexuality, as sites of oppression, can be invisible relative to the concurrent sites of privilege, which produces an ambivalent dance of being invisible and yet always at risk of discovery as a Jewish lesbian bisexual.
premised on beliefs about power (that there wouldn't be oppressive behaviour in a
group made up exclusively of South Asian bisexual women, for example), that Jews
have not really suffered and so aren't as enlightened as others. These same
sentiments were expressed about bisexual women - that they would demand that JFA
spend too much time talking about what it's like to be bisexual, that they would claim
discomfort around the amount of discussion of lesbian culture, that, as if they were not
part of the whole, they could stall 'our' debates/work by insisting that bisexuality be
included - whether in a title, or in the thinking through of some problem - and that they
bring with them some kind of negative male energy that would drag us all down.

Despite differences in how power was conceptualized, and what the function of
categories was perceived to be, it seems to me that everyone in the JFA conflict was
motivated by a similar concern, and that is the defense of the self. While Bayla and
Cara and Danni may have positioned themselves as critical of a power analysis that
posits a split oppressor-victim dynamic, and though Cara may have a substantial
critique of categories as dominating mechanisms, ultimately I believe they, and I, are
much like Alex and Emma in our desire to protect our self-perception, and to deny
upheaval to the knowing-being-acting chain of logic.

I have illustrated the built-in problems of identity as marginality, how it leads
to a "difference impasse" (Fellows & Razack:1048), and how we are pulled to try and
create communities that stand as externalizations of our desire for solidity and
sameness. These communities then bear the brunt of upheavals in our unstable

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14While I do believe in the notion of "epistemology of the oppressed," and so would hold that for Jews,
there is work involved in attempting to learn about the lives of people of colour. I have reluctantly let go
of the suggestion that being oppressed makes one less likely to enact oppression on another. Therefore, I
agree that white-skinned Jews (although also endowed with "epistemology of the oppressed") have the
potential to be oppressive in oppositional groups. By the same token, people of colour are not immune
from being oppressive. See also Razack's observation about how epistemic privilege becomes problematic
when we deconstruct the subject:
"The brilliant suggestion of Uma Narayan, that we grant epistemic privilege to the oppressed, falls apart
when the subject positions are so confused. Unless we want to fall into the trap of demanding that the
oppressed speak in a unified voice before we will believe them, we are still left with the difficult task of
negotiating our way through our various ways of knowing and towards political action" (1993:64-5)
identities, because we demand that they show no traces of difference; it is there that
we perform our 'border patrols.' If what we are policing is our claims to marginality, as
well as the fixed-ness of our identities, the question we need to pursue is how do we
think about marginality differently? On this subject, I have no conclusions, though I can
offer suggestions gleaned from the work of others. What is at stake is becoming able
to acknowledge how we are complicit in the subordination of another. Mary Louise
Fellows and Sherene Razack assert that we will not be able to manage this shift if our
"analytical framework" consists of an understanding of "difference and diversity...as
variety":

At worst, it leads us to consider that women are equally different; at best, we
come to see degrees of oppression, as in doubly or triply disadvantaged, but
we do not then ask about our complicity and responsibility. Put another way,
we operate with an analytical framework in which systems oppress but people
do not. Instead, we have proposed that as feminists we must uncover more
fully relations of domination, defining our complicity, and mapping out what it
might mean for working together for social change....this proposal relies on
our ability to move out of the subject position we claim on the margins and
into the shifting and multiple subject positions of oppressed and oppressor
(1075-76. emphasis added).

Gayatri Spivak gives an analogous piece of advice:

I would say that the major project for me is to unlearn our privilege as our
loss; however personally disadvantaged we might be, we are still able to
specify the problems of female specificity, and that is the beginning (1990:10.
emphasis added).

This proposal for how to proceed is by no means simple. I have argued that we come
to our identities out of an experience of negation or marginalization. This will not
change over night. We will continue to find ourselves cast out sometimes, and we will
continue to need support and comfort, and want to band together with others to fight
for social change. But once we are there, with our difficult histories, then how do we
conduct ourselves? Where do we go for support, and what do we expect when we get
there? Concretely, what I have gathered from the two above quotations, is that we
must avoid constructing a system whereby we try to cast off the ways in which we
have power, in the belief that to have power is to be oppressive. What we must recognize is that even that act, of shedding power, is born of power. Power circulates throughout our relations, it enables and it restricts. Power is not a force we should seek to destroy, both because we can use it to our own advantage, and because any attempt to be rid of it is fruitless. We are everyone of us sometimes more, and sometimes less, powerful. Sometimes we are truly oppressed, and sometimes we dominate others. What is so critical, and yet so confusing, is that these moments may not look the way we expect them to: taking into account the workings of interlocking systems, we must consider that there will be times when our freedom is structured by absent unfree bodies. We will not even be aware that we are at that moment requiring someone else to be enslaved so that we might know ourselves as self-determining, or autonomous or free. In the next, and final chapter, I will briefly consider how we can act more strategically, with greater awareness perhaps, and with a revised understanding of marginality.
Chapter Five: Strategies & Queer-ies

THE DILEMMA

We come to know our selves as different. Identity depends on a sense of difference from the norm or the dominant order, a loss of sameness, and so identity is always identity as marginality. Even though this is the case, that we take on an identity based on a claim of marginality, we are not forever only this marginalized body. Even as we are oppressed - materially, psychologically - in one site, we may at other times in other places be in a dominant position relative to someone else, and so it is sometimes necessary to cede our place on the margins and take responsibility for the power and privilege we possess.

But identity involves a binary relationship: in dominant discourse, there is self, and there is other. Though it is conceptualized as independent, identity is embedded in an interlocked relationship, dependent on other discourses for intelligibility. Those discourses, or concepts, act to inform one identity of what it isn't by virtue of what another is, and vice versa: ignorance is not knowledge; woman is not man. All that woman is then becomes other to man, and all that man is must repudiate woman-ness in itself. And yet we deny this contingency by formulating identity as free-standing, paired as it is with the liberal subject. The liberal subject is conceived of as autonomous, coherent, rational and natural. It is a knowable, definable entity which is unchanging, and can have unmediated representation. We have revised an imperialist tale of voyage and encounter with the Other to describe the 'journey' to self-knowledge, self-consciousness, agency and action. What we have come to believe is that identity requires such a subject in order to be intelligible, or at least if that identity is to be presented as the spokesperson for a liberatory struggle, it must be held by such a subject. And yet it is perhaps misleading to speak of identity as a noun, for it works as verb: there is no single moment of knowing and becoming an identity.
There is identification, which is ceaseless in its repetition, and in its failure. There is performance of identity, which is an ever-thwarted, but endless attempt to attain an impossible ideal. Identity is unstable, and so too are the claims that identity rests on. These are claims of oppressed status, of innocence and of stability. In the performance of identity is the constant risk - and possibility - of subversion. There is no innocent subject, for there is always relative dominance. And there are always absent presences that structure our perception and experience of ourselves as free and self-determining.

This identity as marginality, as self-knowledge, as innocence, is always imperiled, for it is based on denials: of instability and of dominance. Everywhere are threats to the subject and its identity, when the contents of a neighbouring identity category shift, or when there are questions about the borders of the identity, or when there are challenges to the marginality of the identity. We are then required to police the boundaries of our identity, and to 'race to innocence' to defend our contested claim. Coming together in community with people who apparently share an identity is a further way to bolster our claims and provide protection from a hostile world. But there is a risk in forming that community on the basis of putative sameness, for that community becomes required to reflect the imagined coherence and innocence of the subject.

This is what I believe happened in the group Jewish Feminist Action (JFA). Our 'discovered' marginality brought us to an identity, and then brought us together, to a place we expected safety and sameness. Because of a series of disruptions to sexual and Jewish identity claims, we were threatened and we responded defensively. There were the direct challenges implicit in the bisexuality wars: that lesbians can oppress; that bisexual women have privilege; that there is not clear difference between the two categories. And there were the underlying, older unsettlings from our work in coalition, which found a forum in this safer debate: are Jews oppressed, or
oppressive? How are Jews distinct from other white people? We fought to maintain our positions, but as our individual subjectivities were threatened, so too was the unity and purpose of the group. As we came apart, so did JFA.

While I do believe that the formulations of our individual identities, and consequently of the group were problematic and made for a built in obsolescence to our project, I also want to argue for what we may have done right. 'Right' in this case refers to our strategic moves. I want to try an illustrate how we employed the strategies that I contend we must equip ourselves with in order to be more effective the next time around.

SOLUTIONS?
There are five strategies I will discuss, and each one is exemplified by an action taken by one of the five women I interviewed. First, we must acknowledge that there are no innocent subjects, only multiple and coexistent locations of privilege and marginality. Second, we must be aware of how we are replicating other models, and build on them with caution. Third, we must use identity categories subversively. Fourth, at times we must be strategically essentialist. And finally, and our politics and our theories must be specific and grounded.

At one point during the day long meeting, Bayla spoke up. She had not been especially vocal before then, and describes herself as "peripheral" to JFA, as a new member, and so she was somewhat hesitant to address the issue. When she made the following statement, it had considerable effect:

I really felt myself as a middle person in the debate, and it felt like an odd position to be in for someone who had identified for most of her life as straight, and only recently as bisexual, to feel like I did have quite a strong empathy towards what a lot of the 'hardline' lesbians in the group were feeling. I didn't agree with them anymore, but ...a few years before that as a straight woman I would have agreed with them that [their identity was being trampled on]...what I really thought was if the bisexuals in the group could just say, 'I understand where your fear is coming from, I understand how you think we have power where you don't, and in some ways yes we do,' that if [the
bisexual women in the group] could just somehow say that, then there would be a way in which lesbians would be somehow freed to hear where bisexual women themselves felt hurt and oppressed, even by lesbians...My intervention was something along that line...And it was a bit of a nightmare, 'cause some of the lesbians in the group obviously loved what I said, I think that was really hurtful to some of the bisexual women. I don't know if they thought I was being a bit more lapdogish than I was or if they felt like I got heard where they hadn't gotten heard, I'm not sure. But I think it makes sense that I got heard where they didn't get heard, 'cause I think I just said something that I really felt lesbians needed to hear that wasn't really that hard to say (emphasis added).

In effect, Bayla was agreeing that yes, bisexual women do have privilege in dominant culture, but in a group of lesbians, they sometimes feel disregarded and criticized. And she was asking lesbians to similarly consider that while they may be oppressed by straight people, they do have the power to dominate lesbians. She was asking for an analysis that puts the lie to the innocent subject, and that incorporates an understanding of multiple subject locations.

Danni's contribution was made during the interviews rather than actually in the midst of the debate. But strategizing takes place before and after incidents, not just while the fighting is underway:

I think that probably people believed that JFA was going to be 'home' and there was certainly a sense of safety that was expressed in the very early meetings...that it was a space, for discussing things that were not discussible anywhere else without causing conflict or where you didn't feel like you had to defend your position, you just felt like you could state what happened to you and other women would understand it...I think the thing is that up until then [the bisexuality wars] through all the conflict, there had been this really strong feeling of belonging in the group....we'd built this thing that did feel kind of like home. It's danger, replicating home on...political groups...we don't steer clear of it enough. I think we want community desperately, I think we want models of family and community that are different from those that we've had - not that they're necessarily negative, but places where we fit completely as who we are (emphasis added).

But it is problematic to try and find, and in its absence make, home. There is no such things as "places where we fit completely." We always exceed, or fall short of identity categories. And we have a paucity of models, which points back to the problem: we are nostalgically trying to recreate something we never had. We need to take stock of
what we are intentionally trying to fashion, and be aware of what we might be inadvertently replicating.

Throughout the debate, Cara maintained 'bisexual' as her identity. In the interview, however, she said that "but for days like that JFA day when you're pushed to the wall to come up with this thing, I sometimes call my self bisexual, sometimes lesbian. It depends on my mood that day or who I'm talking to!" She called herself bisexual to be subversive, despite suggestions that because she is in a long-term relationship with another woman she should call herself a lesbian. She explained that "bisexuality for me was a way of bursting open somebody else's categories." She described her philosophy about identity and categories to me:

People like definitions, people like to know what the rules are, and when you change the rules, or there are no rules, people get scared and confused. I think that was what I was trying to get at, that we would probably be better off with shakier boundaries around these categories, more permeation, so that one could travel between categories if that was real for one. The whole construction of gender - it serves a great function to have gender very strictly defined, but it doesn't seem to help people very much....Which doesn't mean I would want to break down all categories...(emphasis added)

She sees bisexuality as a way to trouble categories that she believes ultimately serve to oppress by ordering hierarchically.

During the debate and the interview, Alex consistently refused to surrender any ground to the idea that lesbians can be oppressive. She would acknowledge that there is oppression of bisexuels, by straight people, but it is no different from hatred of lesbians:

My sense about that is that they experience oppression, in terms of the dominant culture, to the extent that they're perceived to be lesbians or gays, and that they also manage to have a lot of heterosexual privilege when they get perceived as heterosexual. My concern was that when bisexuels have talked about bisexual oppression, rather than being directed to a dominant heterosexist and heterosexual culture as oppressing them, that it's mostly been directed to lesbian and gay communities for not letting them in.

From her point of view, there are risks in admitting dominance. This is a genuine concern for marginalized people: admitting that your community or identity is flawed
and even similar to dominant culture provides excuses to dismiss your critiques of
institutional oppression, and feeds always-current discourses about difference and
pathology, or difference and criminality. It is thus sometimes strategically necessary
to "pick up the universal that will give you the power to fight against the other side,"
even if it means making essentialist claims about innocence and thus "throwing
away...your theoretical purity" (Spivak 1990:12).

Emma's observation was also one made subsequent to the debate. She made a
bid for a kind of balance: even while we are madly deconstructing, we need to continue
to contextualize, to be specific and clear, and to trace the repercussions of proposed
shifts. She gives the example of the terms 'queer' as just such a conundrum:

it's a strange time, because in a way identities are becoming more and more
fixed, and in another way, they're breaking down. It's like queer. It kinds of
irritates me. I use the term queer all the time, but I never use it when I want to
be clear about what I'm talking about. Language isn't the problem. Biphobia can
be a fine word - maybe. Queer is not the problem. It's how we understand what
that does to power.

When I started this thesis, I had imagined ending with a discussion of 'queer' as a kind
of solution. But I have become tentative about offering any magic bullet, and indeed I
have begun to suspect that 'queer' is fraught with some of the same problems as
identity, as marginality, as self-knowledge, as innocence. Still, let me briefly suggest
to you what is transformative about queer as a notion.

Like poststructuralist theories, there can be no clear definition of queer. As
part of its unsettling, I would argue it intentionally defies a singular linear
categorization. Helen (charles) writes of this resistance:

From the small amount of literature that I have been able to read, together with
the couple of conferences I've attended and the conversations I've held, I have
not been able to come any closer to a clear definition of what Queer is or what
it attempts to be. Instead, I have found that, like the early attempts at defining
postmodernism and global feminism, what surfaces in the process of analysis
is the sense that an eclectic 'anything goes' understanding is required to be
posited (99-100).
The only way she manages to sum it up is that "queer posture is transgressive, rude-positive, non-accommodationist, risky" ((charles):100). Joshua Gamson says 'queer' is both "a loose but distinguishable set of political movements and mobilizations," and "a somewhat parallel set of academy-bound intellectual endeavors," which has come to be known as queer theory (393). Queer politic "operates largely through the decentralized, local, and often anti-organizational cultural activism of street postering, parodic and non-conformist self-presentation, and underground alternative magazines" (Gamson:393). It is an anti-assimilationist, defiant, 'in your face,' aggressive, unapologetic celebration of difference, as in 'we're here, we're queer, get used to it'.

Michael Warner characterizes queer in a way that is interesting for my work:

The preference for 'queer' represents, among other things, an aggressive impulse of generalization; it rejects a minoritizing logic of toleration or simple political interest-representation in favor of a more thorough resistance to regimes of the normal... 'Queer' therefore also suggests the difficulty in defining the population whose interests are at stake in queer politics (xxvi).

The potential of queer then seems to be that we do not come together around an assumption of sameness, but around a critique of 'the normal.' But as you will see below, there are ways in which this approach too is embedded in a problematic discourse.

Queer theory is a hybrid of "constructionist history and sociology, feminist theory, and post-structuralist philosophy" (Gamson:393). It might even look something like this thesis...In all of these respects, 'queer' is "in opposition to the mainstream inclusionary goals of the dominant gay rights movement" (Gamson:395). And it makes many gay people unhappy - some argue we are making too much trouble, that the behaviour of self-described queers is disgusting and disgraceful.

What is brought to the fore by 'queer' is how much stasis is required for the development and survival of identity - any identity. In some sense, then, the birth of queer is the death of identity. This raises the suggestion that in identity, there is stagnation and resistance to change. Is this what makes queer not an identity? Is the
resistance to staying put not in and of itself a kind of refusal to change? Is there only good in constant shifting? What is lost?

On the other hand, is queer really such a challenge to current practices? For all its flashy glory, queer politics may be not that unlike the politics in JFA: "Queer is being used not just to connote and glorify differentness, but to revise the criteria of membership in the family, 'to affirm sameness by defining a common identity on the fringes' (Berube and Escoffier 1991:12)" (Gamson:396). According to Gamson, 'queer' does not contest the model of family, only who is allowed in. What happens when one person's position on the fringes is challenged? When there is jockeying for a spot furthest on the outskirts? Doesn't queer erase difference by saying we're all equally weird? (charles) raises this same question:

The way I see the direction of Queer is that it is not only aimed at mainstream gay and lesbian peoples. It has 'perversion' as a reverse-discourse strategy sitting next to it, and this title is being used to attract anybody....If this is going to break down the barriers of racism, sexism and homophobia, fine. If it is merely glossing over difference(s) and inequality, not fine (101).

The limitless limits of queerness may amount to no more than a mask of relations of power. And where there is denial of difference, there is the exclusion politics we know so well from the women's movement. Will exclusion of anyone who refuses to subsume her difference to pan-difference eventually be a part of 'queer movement', given that white gay men "orientated" the move? ((charles):105). This would seem to be a central concern to flag. Still, 'queer' evokes agency, action, taking charge and having power. At least it is not premised on admitting that we are sick and can't help it and shouldn't be punished for our deformation.

In sameness is a denial of difference. Paradoxically, installing difference as the norm also amounts to sameness. When power relations are left out of the equation, difference is leveled. Difference for the sake of difference, then, is not the basis for the politics I am seeking. It does not allow us to comprehend how we are positioning ourselves, and on what we are premising our communities. Linda Hutcheon suggests
that postmodernism is "doubly encoded as both complicity and critique" (1990:168). There consequently lies a risk that postmodern theories can be (and have been) adopted by both left and right wing projects, each ignoring one half (Hutcheon 1990:168). Like postmodernism, we are similarly composed of both these elements.

As I have attempted to demonstrate, even as we become political and join together to organize for social change, we sometimes reproduce the systems and beliefs - the autonomous individual, identity as self-knowledge, fixed categories - that are implicated in our servitude. These same systems may also support our privilege. And it is privilege dependent on the subordination of others. If we cannot achieve 'true' self-awareness, at least we can try to be cognizant of how we are produced by, and how we replicate, both aspects.

This work speaks to how we go about fighting for change, as well as how we manage negotiations of internal conflict. By internal, I am addressing not just the struggles within individuals, but the contestations between political allies, classmates, co-workers. All of these are connected. How we conceptualize our selves has bearing on how we view others. This is perhaps obvious, and yet given the trouble we continue to run into, it is enormously complex. And so are the reasons we have conceptualized our identities as marginality. We are invested in seeing our selves as innocent, and we believe that without these identities, our social and political structures cannot survive. But our communities are perhaps most imperiled by the very pillars we have cemented to support them. If we hope to make change, and we want to create change through community - as a different model, and as a powerful resistance - we will have to think of ways to disentangle our notions of the subject, of identity, and of power.

I hope I have conveyed to you throughout this thesis that projects for social change must occur in multiple sites. I have written of two kinds of communities in which I am most invested: the local progressive political organization, and the critical
pedagogy classroom. In these two places, among others, I believe the task is not only to consider unsettling theories, but to acknowledge their ramifications for our lives. I want to urge that we spend an inordinate amount of time thinking through, both as theoretically as these issues require, and as practically as we can be. It is not enough to know abstractly that the subject is unstable: this will disrupt our sense of well-being, but it is not the origin of distress. The subject is unstable. We can create structures to deny that, but it will not go away. When we experience these unsettlings, in political struggle, in the classroom, we would do well to try and recognize them as such. If we can discern that we feel under attack, and yet try to hold that sensation at arm's length and continue on with our studies and our resistance, then we can perhaps begin to apprehend the great secret: we will not dissolve under scrutiny, nor will our projects become unworkable if we acknowledge that we are not innocent or stable, because we have always been these things, and yet we have managed to persevere.
Bibliography


