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'DADDY'S GIRLS,' 'DEGENERATE DAUGHTERS':
TRACING INTERCONNECTED VIOLENCES
WITHIN WOMEN'S 'SURVIVOR' NARRATIVES

by

Christine Louise Hiller

A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements
for the degree of Master of Arts
Department of Sociology and Equity Studies in Education
Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of the
University of Toronto

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0-612-40649-0
'Daddy's Girls', 'Degenerate Daughters': Tracing Interconnected Violences Within Women's 'Survivor' Narratives

Master of Arts, 1998

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ABSTRACT

This thesis considers the languages through which women articulate experiences of 'incest survival.' First, I trace the social and discursive conditions that women-survivors negotiate in narrating 'incest,' noting how these conditions (re)produce normative narratives that elide differences among women. Then, I map how feminist theorists dispel 'mythologized' notions of women-survivors as abnormal and blameworthy by re-presenting 'incest' as essentialized gender domination. Next, I suggest that notions of 'respectability' and 'degeneracy' might underwrite the conditions that constrain 'survivor speech'.

Considering narratives by Liza Potvin and Elly Danica, I trace how these women-survivors mobilize codes of race, class, sexuality, and disability to translate their experiences as 'incested' and 'recovered' subjects. I argue that while they appropriate experiences of 'others', these narratives also gesture towards interlocking forms of domination. I conclude by advocating for articulations of 'incest' and 'incest survival' that highlight interconnected violences and render explicit differences among women.
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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

For me, the process of writing often seems to be a very solitary one. But even as I write these final words, I am aware of and very thankful for the many people who continue to inspire, inform, and sustain my efforts.

My first acknowledgement, along with my deep respect, is to the many 'survivors' -- and in particular, to Elly Danica and Liza Potvin -- who have had the courage not only to delve into and to remember their own experiences of sexual abuse, but to write them down and to share them publicly. Many of the writings of these women have deeply affected me both personally and politically, and I write with them always at the forefront of my mind.

I feel most fortunate for having the opportunity to study with some incredible students and faculty in the Department of Sociology and Equity Studies in Education at OISE/UT. In particular, I want to thank the members of my committee, Sherene Razack and Kathleen Rockhill. Sherene's tireless efforts to trace the complex interweavings of relations of domination have inspired me and shaped my thinking in profound ways. I am most thankful to Kathleen, my supervisor: for her sustained interest and support of my efforts, for pushing me to look past the limits of my own seeing, for refusing to turn away from troubling questions, and for providing a model of what it means to put one's body on the line in academic work.

This thesis never would have made it to the shelf if it were not for the support and encouragement of friends and colleagues too numerous to list. In particular, I want to offer my heartfelt thanks: to Sharon Rosenberg, whose support and commitment to carving out a space for (traumatized) bodies within the academy has meant more than she will ever know; to Nancy Chater, for keen insights, sacrilegious jokes, and commiseration over coffee; to Pamela Klassen
and John Marshall, for rejuvenating escapes to Princeton and for providing computers, desks, and countless meals; and to Magdalene, their daughter, for offering me her friendship in such an open-hearted way. I also wish to thank Mary Bender for her continued friendship and for offering me a cozy 'room of my own' in her farmhouse.

My deepest gratitude goes to Gennie Brukner, for emergency phone calls, for countless conversations over tea, and for helping me to move past blockages of fear and doubt. And most of all, I thank Maria Borsato -- my dear friend, with whom I began the journey that precipitated and fired these burning questions, and whose friendship has sustained me through so much more than just the (torturous) writing of a masters thesis. I will be forever thankful to Maria for her faith in me, for her willingness to listen through my silence and confusion, and for the ways in which she has helped me to stay connected to my life outside of graduate school (not to mention for awesome pasta dinners and late-night formatting sessions!).

And finally, my thanks to Kevin Ranney for seeing me through to the end of this writing -- staying up all hours of the night with me, reading final drafts, fixing computer foul-ups, promising me that there will be life and love on the other side.
INTRODUCTION

One memory...

Her mother stands before the bathroom mirror, clad in a nightgown, rubbing Vaseline Intensive Care into her permanently tanned skin. The girl marvels at her mother's quick and purposeful hands -- hands that travel up and down arms and legs, over shoulders, covering the expanse of that entire body in mere seconds. This is her mother's daily regimen of caring for skin: one that leaves no time for lingering, no room for sensation.

It is in watching her mother move this way that the girl begins to learn about propriety, about what it means to be bodiless. She learns about touch -- intimacies performed as duty, and only when necessary, like the perfunctory kisses that smack swift and clean upon her forehead. Each night, as her mother turns out the light and shuts the door, the girl's fingers instinctively find their way back to her face, tracing the place where her mother's lips had brushed her skin, trying to extend the contact. Wanting -- something.

In time and with practice, the girl perfects this trick of bodilessness -- the knack of evacuating her girl-body, rendering it invisible, sexually inert. She learns to exist as pure Mind, a sexless Spirit born again through the abdication and death of its earthly flesh. A neighbour lady down the street shows her how, taking her and her nine-year-old friends into the backyard, telling them The Old Old Story of Salvation from a book with pages of lusty red, death-like black, pure whiteness, kingly gold. From that day forward, the girl prays each night to the picture of Jesus on her dresser -- fervent prayers for protection: from her mother's rage, her father's 'love,' her own filthy desires.

As her body begins to develop, she learns other things: how to stand with stomach tight, arms held stiffly at her sides or across her abdomen, hands curled into fists. She learns to round out her shoulders just enough to hide budding breasts, to keep her knees pinned together at all times, even while standing. She discovers how to make herself wooden in embraces, how to stare blankly ahead or glare with contempt when her father reaches out to draw her to his side. She learns to narrow her body just enough to slip out of 'girlishness,' careful not to slide entirely into 'boyishness.' In this in-between space, she stays for the most part out of visibility, out of reach.

All of this she learns out of necessity, as protection -- her only imagined defense against his objectifying glances, his comments, advances made in the name of affection. And for her, it works. Most of the time.

is entangled in another...

They sit together in the basement, sharing lunch and stories. She, the only white woman sitting at this raucous table of Black women, her co-workers and clients. She feels a mixture of pride (She is the only one) and awkwardness. It is at moments like this that she is most
aware of the tightness in her limbs, the dryness of her demeanor, her complete inability to walk with hips unhinged or to throw her head back and let her belly shake with laughter.

In her (racist) imagination, she is Whiteness: the oppressive Mind, cold and detached. Protected. They are Blackness: the oppressed Body, warm and sensuous, connected. Vulnerable. She desperately wants to switch sides, to feel that warmth animating her limbs, flooding her veins. She pines for connection, for sexuality -- but also fears it.

* * * * *

In an article considering practices of reading women's fictions across categories of 'difference,' Donna Haraway aptly summarizes feminist post-structural debates regarding the political possibilities and limitations of notions of 'women's experience':

Experience is a crucial product and means of women's movement[s]; we must struggle over the terms of its articulation. Women do not find 'experience' ready to hand any more than they/we find 'nature' or the 'body' performed, always innocent and waiting outside of the violations of language and culture. Just as nature is one of culture's most startling and non-innocent products, so is experience one of the least innocent, least self-evident aspects of historical, embodied movement (Haraway, 1991a, p. 109; original emphasis).

'Experience,' as it is understood by theorists like Haraway, does not have a 'real-ness' that exists outside of language, culture, or history; nor is transparently or straight-forwardly render-able through language. Rather, 'experience' is constructed in and through language that is historically specific and non-innocently implicated in circulating systems of power. To 'struggle over the terms' in which women's experience is articulated, then, is to grapple with language on a variety of levels: to pay close attention to the ways that language shapes and constrains what is knowable and thinkable about our specific lives as women; to pull apart those categories of experience that limit, elide, or erase those specificities; and to piece together new categories and new languages that allow us to express what has been previously inexpressible about what it means for us to live and move in the world.
'Incest' as a category of women's experience has been one such hotly contested terrain. Clashes of discourses constitutive of disciplines of sociology, medicine, social welfare, psychiatry, and law name 'incested' female subjects in wildly contradictory ways: as shameful and shaming daughters; as crazed neurotics; as the innocent victims of perverted fathers, of the/rapists, of feminism, or of their own monstrous imaginations. Within much of mainstream feminist theorizing of sexual violence in the past twenty years, 'incest' has been articulated as a normative and normalizing violation which 'teaches' girl-children what it means to be female. More recently, some feminist theorists have also imagined 'incest' as a primary means of enforcing compulsory heterosexuality (See Rush, 1974; Herman with Hirschman, 1981; summarized in Bell, pp. 67 - 69). Many of these feminist struggles to re-define 'incest' and to articulate what it means to be a 'victim/survivor' have explicitly depended upon strategies of articulation: that is, political strategies of 'breaking the silence' about the ways that fathers sexually violate their (girl-) children.

But what might it mean to call into question the ways that various feminist discourses themselves construct 'incest' as a category of experience, and specifically, the ways that such constructions elide differences among women-survivors? Janice Williamson, in her consideration of the "critical implications" (Williamson, 1992, p. 141) of Elly Danica's

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1I base this discussion upon a feminist-informed definition of 'incest' as "the imposition of sexually inappropriate acts, or acts with sexual overtones, by...one or more persons who derive authority through ongoing emotional bonding with that child" (E. S. Blume in Champagne, p. 204). At various points throughout this writing, I refer to 'incest' in single quotation marks to represent it as a category of experience that remains 'up for grabs,' as well as to forefront questions of what it means to know and to speak the 'truth' about incestuous violence. As Mary MacLeod and Esther Saraga suggest: "The [very] term 'incest' itself has been further criticized by some feminists because it can imply a mutuality or complicity, and because it underplays the sense of violation or trauma" (McLeod & Saraga, p. 19).

2Proponents of False Memory Syndrome vilify therapists, counselors, and child welfare workers as the real culprits behind the rising number of sexual abuse accusations, arguing that these professionals "create new memories" (Globe and Mail, cited in Williamson, 1994, p. 202) in their unwitting clients. Although I disagree altogether with this premise, I do gesture here, in my reference to 'the/rapists,' towards the rather troubling reality that some therapists do in fact abuse their clients, sexually and otherwise.
ground-breaking 'auto-fiction' about 'incest,' locates herself as a "particular feminist reader/critic [who is also] a white woman who has had a fortunate education, a middle-class economy, and a painful memory of child sexual abuse." She then poses a hasty question without risking a reply: "Is it appropriate to speak of this?" (Williamson, 1992, p. 43). Williamson's question, along with the fears that lie just beneath its surface, remains an undercurrent within (mainstream) feminist discourse concerning 'incest' and sexual abuse: Is it appropriate to speak of social differences in relation to how one reads, knows, or articulates 'incest'? This question is particularly unsettling to feminist discourses that figure 'incest' as a *gendered* form of violence that cuts across all racial, sexual, cultural, national, educational, and class boundaries. Elizabeth Ward, whose theorization of 'incest' is exemplary of this universalizing perspective, writes:

In the case histories that I have read, and from women I have talked to, it is obvious that the Fathers come from every class in society. A judge, a barrister, a diplomat, an eminent doctor, a university lecturer, a teacher, a university student, a business man, a film star, a labourer, a tradesman, a public servant, a farmer, a counselor, a minister of religion, a soldier, a politician, unemployed, handicapped, very old, very young: *Everyman*. (Ward, 1984, in Bell, p. 83; emphasis added).

Questions of social difference and 'incest' have long been subjects of contestation and debate among feminist theorists/activists. As Kalí Tal's study of the literatures of trauma suggests, 'incest'-related texts produced by predominantly white, middle class feminists in the 70's and 80's address issues of difference among women-survivors tangentially or not at

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4I problematize the category of 'incest texts' in Chapter One.

5For example, Christine Dinsmore's *From Surviving to Thriving: Incest, Feminism, and Recovery* includes a chapter outlining issues specific to lesbians who live/through 'incest,' but addresses no other 'differences' among survivors. While *The Courage to Heal: A Guide for Women Survivors of Child Sexual Abuse* (1988) lists specific resources for 'women of color,' 'disabled women,' and 'lesbians' in its suggested bibliography and attempts to include a variety of different stories in its body, it also fails to specifically address how issues of racialization, class, culture, or ability pertain to sexual abuse. It does, however, address heterosexualization and homophobia to a limited degree.
all. Works produced by feminists of colour, lesbian feminists, and/or feminists with disabilities, on the other hand, strive to elucidate the specific ways that racializing, sexualizing, classing, and disabling practices interact with, and support, 'incest' as a violating social practice. In the past decade, there has also been a new proliferation of book-length autobiographical narratives of 'incest' written from standpoints other than that of middle class, heterosexual, able-bodied, white womanhood (See Bociurkiw, 1994; Hymiuk, 1989; Warland, 1993; Allenye, 1996). These texts constitute efforts to write-in previously unrepresented specificities and nuances of experience and subjectivity. As such, they have the potential to disrupt normative constructions of who women-survivors are and what 'incest' is and means. Despite these efforts to complicate notions of childhood sexual trauma, however, the overwhelming majority of scholarly and literary work continues to represent 'incest' as a singular, essentialized story: as a story of the violences that older men do their younger women. Within reiterations of this dominant construction of 'incest,' social differences often figure as 'add-on oppressions.' In turn, attempts to consider practices of racism, classism, heterosexism, and able-ism in relation to 'incest' often read as efforts to be inclusive and 'culturally sensitive.' To theorize 'incest' strictly as an effect of gendering is to consider such violences from a standpoint of 'unmarked' femininity -- that is, it is to leave

6For examples of these texts, see L'Institut Roeher Institute, 1994; Martens, Daily, & Hodgson, 1988; Queer Press Collective, 1991; and Wilson, 1993

7Sexual Abuse in Nine North American Cultures: Treatment and Prevention (1995) exemplifies this 'cultural differences' approach. In the introduction for this anthology for clinicians, Lisa Aronson Fontes writes: "Each chapter in this book highlights the vulnerabilities to incest that are characteristic of specific cultural groups in North America, as well as coping mechanisms that will reduce that vulnerability" (Aronson Fontes, p. 8; my emphasis). I will consider this notion of (culturally determined) 'vulnerabilities to incest' in the second chapter.

8Using the term 'unmarked,' I attempt to reference a process by which a "mythical norm" (Lorde in Rockhill, p. 42) is produced by discursive practices that categorize bodies according to race, sexuality, class, and dis/ability. Bodies that are categorizable as white, heterosexual, middle class, able-bodied, and male are un-marked or, perhaps more precisely, invisibly marked by these discursive practices. Bodies that deviate from this bodily norm, on the other hand, are 'marked' as abnormal by these practices. In referring to 'unmarked' women,
analyses of race, sexuality, class, and ability unintegrated with and far less sophisticated than analyses of gender. Unidimensional theorizations of 'incest' suggest that these 'additional' analyses are not necessary for understanding what 'incest' is and means for most women. In the end, such a one-sided analysis communicates a very strong and clear message: that 'incest' is primarily about gender, only secondarily about (hetero)sexuality, and that it is not about the race-ing, class-ing, or dis/able-ing of bodies. But what might it mean to re-imagine 'incest,' this time as a battleground on which girl-children learn to take on and perhaps contest the ways that they are in/visibly marked not only in terms of gender, but also in terms race, sexuality, class, and dis/ability?

As a means of engaging with this question, I am interested in formulating another story of 'incest': one that does not simply add on differences, but rather articulates the category of 'incest, as well as that of 'incest survivor,' in ways that pull apart conflations of difference. I am interested here in piecing together an incest story that specifies how violences are enacted by and upon different bodies, with different meanings and effects. At

then, I make reference to subjects whose bodies are 'marked' according to categories of gender, while they are 'un-marked' by racializing, (hetero)sexualizing, classing, and dis/able-ing practices. In a similar vein, Mary Louise Fellows and Sherene Razack describe how the (re)production of marked and unmarked identities is tied to an obscuring of systems of domination. They write:

Those who can be simply human, or simply women, Maria Lugones reminds us, are not allotted specific identity boxes. Their membership in the human community or the category 'woman' assured, dominant groups are not specifically labeled. White people need not and do not define themselves as members of a race; heterosexual people do not get defined as having a sexual orientation. Thus identity comes to bear an intrinsic relationship to subordination. Identity boxes contain those excluded from the dominant group. Conversely, to be unmarked or unnamed is to belong to the dominant group. The marking of subordinate groups, and the unmarking of dominant groups leaves the actual process of domination obscured, thus intact (Fellows & Razack, p. 341).

My work is informed by post-structural perspectives that view categories of difference (such as 'race,' 'gender,' 'class,' 'sexuality,' and 'disability') as shifting and historically specific social constructs produced by and productive of discursive practices. These social constructs also become structurally institutionalized as 'truths' that have 'real' material consequences for people's lives.

Laura Brown, in an article in which she re-reads psychic trauma literature from a feminist perspective, argues that we must "attempt to find the meanings of...[traumatic] events that constitute an assault on the integrity and safety of those who are not members of the dominant classes if we are to fully comprehend
the centre of this new story is an attempt to trace the invisible threads of 'whiteness,' 'heteronormativity,' 'middle class-ness,' and 'ability' as they weave through both the incest stories that 'unmarked' women tell and the various ways that feminists theorize these stories. It is my hope that such tracings will create a space in which 'incest' can be understood in a new way: as a practice that constitutes both a means and an effect of reinforcing 'interlocking' discursive processes that racialize, sexualize, gender, class, and dis-able bodies.

The 'Seductive Pull' of Victim Scripts

My desire to ask questions about interlocking systems of 'marking' can be viewed as an effect of conflicting discourses: specifically, discourses that produce and are re-produced by clashes among feminisms, anti-racist theories and practices, and what has been deemed 'the survivor movement.' These questions arise from a commonplace yet troubling observation: that so often when 'unmarked' women gather to talk about the multiple ways in which we are privileged, our discussions eventually devolve into discussions of gender oppression -- and that the central pivot around which these conversations almost inevitably turn is sexual violence.

the meanings and nuances of psychic trauma and its presence in the lives of all humans" (Brown, p. 102; emphases added).

11Anne McClintock describes this 'interlocking' of systems of domination in the following way:

[R]ace, gender and class [as well as sexuality and dis/ability] are not distinct realms of experience, existing in splendid isolation from each other; nor can they be simply yoked together retrospectively like armatures of Lego. Rather, they come into existence in and through relation to each other -- if in contradictory and conflictual ways (McClintock, p. 5; original emphasis).

12Although I later deconstruct notions of 'the survivor movement,' I use the term here, as sexual abuse 'survivors' and their advocates commonly do, to refer to the sum total of individual and collective efforts to theorize childhood sexual abuse(s), to 'break the silence' around these forms of violence, to 'heal' from them, and to bring about their end.
I am by no means the first to make or to theorize such an observation. Mary Louise Fellows and Sherene Razack refer to this dubious 'slide' that one makes from a position of acknowledging one's implicatedness in practices of domination to a position of clinging tenaciously to one's 'dominated' identity as a "race to innocence" (Fellows & Razack, p. 335). Feminist practices that figure experiences of sexual violence, and particularly intra-familial sexual violence, as *unifying* women in a common struggle and with a common agenda have been the subject of resounding critique, most notably by feminists of colour.\(^{13}\) According to these critiques, such practices inevitably construct 'unity among women' in ways that depend upon and reiterate an essentialized category of 'woman' -- a category that, in turn, erases the differences *among* women and reifies institutionalized practices of colonialism, racism, classism, homophobia, and able-ism. My intention here is not to rehearse arguments that have been made far more eloquently and extensively elsewhere. Rather, it is to consider how it might be possible for women -- and in particular, women who are otherwise positioned as 'unmarked' -- to negotiate the terrain of (re-membering and re-living) childhood sexual trauma, while at the same time grappling with the ways that we are positioned as 'unmarked.' In other words, how can we acknowledge and respond politically to our histories of sexual victimization without constructing and then barricading our bodies behind an essentialized 'victim identity? 

In my own experience, I notice the "irresistible solace of victimization, its seductive pull" (Potvin, p. 212) as I attempt to tease apart the knotted social histories of violence and

\(^{13}\)For examples, see Asch and Fine, 1998; Crenshaw, 1992; and Masuda & Riddington, 1990. Key collections are: *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Racial Women of Color* (Morraga & Anzaldúa, Eds., 1981) and *Making Face, Making Soul/Haciendo Caras: Creative and Critical Perspectives by Women of Color* (Anzaldúa, Ed., 1990). Audre Lorde elegantly encapsulates the gist of these varied critiques, arguing that "to imply...that all women suffer the same oppression simply because we are women, is to lose sight of the many varied tools of patriarchy. It is to ignore how these tools are used by women without awareness against each other" (Lorde, p. 95).
erasure that produce 'me' as a subject. A tug at one thread of my 'unmarked' subjectivity -- my 'whiteness,' for example -- seems to pull me headlong into a mass of entangled memories and experiences of being a 'marked' subject. It seems that what I am able to know about how I embody histories of racialization, (hetero)sexualization, class, and dis/ability is tied up with the knowledges that I have of myself as a marked subject: the ways that I know myself as a 'woman' and, in particular, as a 'survivor' of childhood trauma. Extrinsic my 'unmarked' self from this unwieldy mass of memory -- tracing and accounting for my participation and complicity in relations of domination -- becomes a circular process of perpetually sliding into, then struggling to resurface from, memories of violation.  

Becky Thompson, in "Time Travel and Border Crossing: Reflections on White Identity," contemplates her own experiences of this circular 'pull' into and out of memories of childhood violation. She uses these experiences to pose a thought-provoking question: "How does childhood sexual and physical trauma shape racial identity?" (Thompson, p. 95). In piecing together her experiences of grappling with racialization and racism, Thompson weaves a complex tale of how memories of childhood traumas crosscut and complicate her efforts to forge a white, anti-racist identity. Specifically, she traces how experiences of witnessing and enduring physical and sexual assaults both block and facilitate her ability to recognize her own white privilege and to engage in its disruption. Most interestingly, Thompson writes of the contradictory effects and meanings of her early "identification" with Black slaves. She re-frames her childhood fascination with Africans bound in chains in the hold of slave ships -- an 'identification' which continues into adolescence and adulthood -- as  

14Razack makes a similar observation. As a professor whose graduate courses focus on issues of racialization and white privilege, Razack finds that when white women approach her to discuss their feelings of being overwhelmed or 'frustrated' with class material, they often make reference to prior experiences of sexual victimization (S. Razack, personal conversation, September, 1996).
an "appropriation" and an elision of the specific horrors of histories of black enslavement. Thompson also considers how this identification has the effect of masking her own complicity and participation as a white woman in these on-going histories. At the same time, however, she reads this same identification as an effect of her own (survival of) experiences of bodily occupation. Thompson traces how these early experiences result in her forming of an "outsider lens"\(^{15}\) that she later uses to see and claim her subjectivity as both 'colonized' and 'colonizer' (Thompson, pp. 100 - 101). Thinking back over her experiences of participating in anti-racism groups with other white women, Thompson suggests that perhaps:

> it was no coincidence that most of us came from alcoholic homes and/or were survivors of sexual abuse. *Both identities fed our willingness to castigate ourself [sic] about 'our racism.'* Childhood experiences had taught us early in life what it felt like to be an outsider. Our task, then, was to learn how to use that knowledge without trying to appropriate the outsider status that women of color experience to explain our own (Thompson, p. 106; emphasis added).

Thompson's work raises some important questions. In interrogating her own 'over-identifications' with enslaved African peoples, Thompson holds up for scrutiny what she refers to as strategies by which un-raced (read: white) women who live/through 'incest' appropriate the language, experiences, and narratives of indigenous or African peoples as a means of knowing, articulating, and ultimately securing their position as 'victim/survivors.'\(^{16}\)

\(^{15}\)Thompson characterizes her(child)self as an "outsider at home, with other people, and even in [her] own body" (Thompson, p. 101).

\(^{16}\)Along with references to slavery and colonization, one of the major confabulations deserving of study is the way that 'incest' and childhood sexual assault are so often represented as a 'holocaust.' The question of what it means to appropriate images and narratives of the Holocaust for the purpose of articulating what it means to live/through 'incest' has been the subject of some feminist debate. Kali Tal, for example, dismisses critiques by 'Holocaust scholars' in relation to the ways in which feminist writers appropriate such narratives and images, arguing that "[t]he codified trauma of the Holocaust may echo [the] pain [of women like Plath and Randall] in language that is close to representing [their] reality" (Tal, p. 234). (See Plath, 1996; and Randall, 1997, pp. 58-60). She goes on to argue that such critiques stem from "the assumption that women have 'personal' rather than 'political' problems, and that, whatever these problems, are, they are not important enough to discuss in connection with an event as 'serious' as the Holocaust" (Tal, p. 234).
Of course, Thompson's critique is also useful when read in reverse. Not only does her work critique the use of analogies in articulating one's (sexual) oppression, but it also calls into question those strategies for examining one's (racial) privilege that depend upon simplistic analogies among 'privileges' -- particularly, analogies between racial and male privilege. Although she does not make this argument directly in her text, Thompson's article as a whole gestures towards the limitations of analogies that assume a straight-forward translatability of different experiences of oppression, suggesting that such analogies erase the interconnections and contingencies among different practices of domination.

As well, Thompson's work is useful in that it begins to trace how (discursively produced) feelings of 'shame' -- feelings of being 'guilty' or 'bad' -- might play a paradoxical role in the ways that un-raced women living/through 'incest' grapple with their racial privilege. On the one hand, the (sexual) shame that (white) women-survivors learn through incest might feed into their 'willingness to castigate' themselves for their complicity and participation in racist domination. On the other hand, their psychological survival seems to demand that they, in some way, throw off (or at least conceal) that regulatory shame and refute (or at least disavow) the ways that they might be named as 'complicit.'

Kathleen Rockhill, in "Home Cries," takes Thompson's comments concerning shame and incest one step further. Rockhill writes poignantly of her struggles to grapple with the invisible ways in which she is privileged. In so doing, she interrogates how socially produced feelings of shame regulate and limit what she is able to re-member and know of her past, constraining her to represent herself as an essentialized 'heroic victim' in order to "conceal the shame that lurks within":

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In the third chapter, I return to questions of appropriation and consider in greater detail the conflative effects of (unmarked) women's efforts to translate their own experiences of violation by re-working the...
As I reflect upon my history, I feel an imperative, in what I re/member, to wipe away the contradictions that otherwise paralysed me, to form a foundation upon which to stand, to feel OK about my life, to conceal the shame that lurks within. I forged a coherent, comprehensible identity in opposition to my oppression -- a heroic victim, oblivious to the possibility of my own power (Rockhill, p. 40).

Rockhill, like Thompson, goes on to map the painful process by which she begins to dismantle this 'heroic victim' script by de-constructing the shame that serves as a mechanism of "privatizing and individualizing domination practices" (Rockhill, p. 41), and by re-interpreting her experience within a larger historical frame. In doing so, Rockhill re-works her experience of living/through 'incest' to highlight the interconnectedness of relations of domination. She traces the ways that her 'rebellions' against being positioned as shamed and 'shameful' are "endlessly caught up in new conformities" (Rockhill, p. 38) -- specifically, in attempts to (re)gain 'normalcy' by performing herself as a properly gendered and (heter)sexualized subject. She also notes how the script through which she comes to know herself as a 'victim/survivor of incest' renders invisible her own racialization, as well as her participation in on-going practices of racial domination: "race is nowhere present in the story I tell, in the memories through which I shape my identity" (Rockhill, p. 39). Thus, Rockhill's unflinching examination of her experience of (surviving) 'incest' creates a space in which to contemplate what might be possible to know about sexual violence if women's experiences and memories of these violences were re-viewed within a frame that was informed by analyses of race, class, (hetero)sexuality, and dis/ability.

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17 In the concluding chapter, I return to questions of the shame of (surviving) 'incest' and its effects upon efforts to re-cognize privilege from an unmarked (female) subject location.

18 Attempting to translate the 'strategies' that she used to survive incest, Rockhill writes: "I will...I will do it differently...have a career, raise my children, build a happy home...I will not offend my husband's masculinity the way my mother emasculated my father. The man I marry feels safe as white bread" (Rockhill, p. 37). Re-reading these strategies through a lens of heterosexist privilege, Rockhill adds: "Years later, when I am comfortable in claiming my identity as a lesbian, I am horrified at the extent to which my rebellions have been framed through heterosexism" (Rockhill, p. 39).
Following in the footsteps of Rockhill and Thompson, then, I imagine this project as one of undermining 'essentialized' scripts in order to open up new possibilities for thinking about what 'incest' is and means. As McLeod & Saraga suggest, "the way that experiences [of childhood sexual trauma] are understood by children themselves, and by lay and professional people, depends on the ways these events are commonly theorized and categorized" (McLeod and Saraga, p. 18).19 What's more, theorizings of 'incest' -- and feminist theorizings in particular -- are derived in no small part from practices and reading and interpreting stories told and written by women-survivors. Thus, women's spoken and written autobiographical narratives of 'incest' both inform and are informed by feminist theorizings.

As a means of situating this investigation, then, I turn to autobiographical narratives of 'incest' that have been written by (otherwise) unmarked women and published by feminist presses. In my readings of these texts, I aim to trace how constructions of 'whiteness,' 'heteronormativity,' 'middle class-ness,' and 'ability' are (re)produced within and by these narratives. Again, my hope is that by rendering explicit these reproductions, I will open up a discursive space in which 'incest' might be imagined and articulated in ways that connect the violences done to one body to the violences done to (an)other. This research effort is also part of a larger political project of developing language that would allow feminists to situate 'incest survivorship' within broader histories: histories of racism, imperialism, slavery, and colonization; histories of bourgeois class formation; histories of the establishment of ab/normal sexualities, as well as those of the differentiation of 'fit' from 'unfit' bodies and

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19Danica gestures towards the importance of these prevailing notions of 'incest,' as well as to the ways that such notions can re-violate survivors. She writes: "I am becoming increasingly concerned about those many children, women and men who have survived abuse in childhood only to be further abused by the prevailing notions of what this means" (Danica, 1996, p. 140).
minds; and, of course, histories of men dominating women. It is yet another attempt to imagine languages that are capable of articulating 'sexual violence' in ways that make grappling with differences among women both discernible and unavoidable; languages that complicate moves to consolidate essentialized 'victim' identities; and ultimately, languages that open up new possibilities for how women make sense of their experiences of 'incest,' as well as how they/we work to bring about an end its end.

The question returns to her like an anguished spirit: "What right have you to utter the word 'incest' -- to claim 'it' happened to you?"

As far back as she can remember, he never 'touched' her sexually (although her thighs protest at the thought, refusing to be unclenched). What she does remember is the uneasy pride that she felt when he chose her as his confidante, the burning shame that flamed her cheeks and crept into her stomach whenever he would comment on her changing body. She remembers walking through the park with him, her child hand locked in his, her eyes darting from face to face in the sea of passersby, anxiously awaiting looks of judgement, or disgust -- fearing, perhaps hoping, that someone would notice that something 'wasn't quite right' between them.

But is this 'incest'? Is living with the fear that his affections might one day turn more sinister, that he might fail to control himself -- is living in the threat of 'incest' enough to claim 'it' happened to her?

As definitions of 'incest' shift and slide within clashing and contesting discourses, 'she' is named, then un-named, 'victim.' She reads Don't: A Woman's Word, recognizing her-self in one passage, only to reframe that moment as a mis-recognition in the next. She wonders: What happens to the specificity of Elly Danica's brutalized body within categories of 'incest' that include her? How is it possible for the words 'incest survivor' to signify them both? Their differences?

As an afterthought, she wonders: What would a 'non-survivor' of incest even look like? A woman who remains 'untouched' by sexually dominating Fathers? A body in a morgue perhaps...

Sensing itself beginning to slip out of language, her body infuses with panic. Feet move of their own volition, carrying her to the bookshelf. Arms reach up to pull down The Courage to Heal from the shelf, and fingers flip through the sacred text while eyes frantically search for words that dispel fear, consolidate faith, promise salvation.

Rocking herself for comfort, she sings an old song learned in childhood, adapted now out of need:
"Yes, I'm a survivor...
The bible tells me so"\textsuperscript{20}

* * * * *

Writing this particular telling of 'incest' fills me with dread -- that fearful apprehension that comes with trespassing into tabooed territory. It is the dread of stepping past limits that dictate whose words (and whose bodies) are to be valued and sanctioned, and whose are to be dismissed, deemed heretical, erased from possibility. The 'taboos' that I imagine myself breaking are ones that feminists have often associated with 'incest': cultural injunctions that prohibit not the enactment of violence, but its revelation -- invocations of the Law of the Father that forbid girls and women to speak of their violated bodies, to name their perpetrators, or to implicate cherished institutions and structures. In my more fatalistic fantasies, I imagine myself hesitating at the limits of boundaried speech, preparing to face the consequences of having my words condemned as 'in/appropriate(d)' (Trinh, 1992, p. 156) -- steeling myself against being marked as the 'bad girl' who speaks out of turn, and preparing to endure all of the violences that such a marking entails:

Disbelief
Retaliatiion
Vilification
Exile

But the boundaries that concern me are not only those that frame notions of 'the good daughter;' (I fear that) my efforts to speak will also trouble the boundaries that delimit 'good feminism,' that separate allies from enemies, sheep from goats. I am afraid to speak of what I know of 'incest' for fear of being accused of sacrilege -- of defacing sacred (and hard-won)

\textsuperscript{20} The Courage to Heal has been referred to by advocates of False Memory Syndrome as "the survivor Bible" (Williamson, 1994, p. 204).
feminist 'truths' of 'incest,' and siding with the enemy. Most of all, I fear betrayal: my own acts of betrayal, the betrayal of my family members, of other women.

Often when I talk about my research topic with people (and particularly with other 'unmarked' women), I find myself treading gingerly around an implicit and at times explicit question: "Are you a survivor?"21 Most often, these conversations happen in passing, without time or context in which to weave complexities into my reply. I respond with a hasty and embarrassed, "Well, yes...and no, depending on how you define it" -- a response which most often elicits looks of confusion, suspicion, or growing alarm, and on a rare occasion, one that sparks a more involved conversation. As I come closer to finally committing words to paper, this question looms large in my mind, at times incapacitating me with anxiety, insecurity, self-doubt. And FEAR. My desire to deconstruct these feelings of dread and to trace their reproduction and residue within this effort to write have led me to interrogate the question itself:22 "Are you a survivor?"

Read alongside of the recent and stunning feminist work within the social sciences that critiques illusory notions of objectivity, this supposedly 'innocent' question seems at first glance to be not only legitimate, but altogether necessary. Feminist queries into the possibilities of ethical relations between researchers and 'researcheds' would suggest -- and I wholeheartedly agree -- that rather than allowing the researching eye/'I' to rove invisible and omniscient outside of the limits of the page, a feminist researcher must locate her self(ves) within and through the production of her text, accounting for the shifting standpoints from

21It is very likely that I overestimate how pervasively this question occupies the minds of those with whom I speak. Many people assume, based on the very fact that I am writing about 'incest' narratives, that I must be have some history of sexual trauma -- for who else would be inclined to address such questions, let alone to read so many horrific stories?

22In interrogating these feelings, I once again take my lead from Rockhill: "I trace the words that haunt me -- traitor, hypocrite, cruel -- to break their regulatory chains" (Rockhill, p. 40).
which she views and critiques the experiences of others (Haraway, 1991b, p. 193). In my readings of the stories that women tell of living/through 'incest,' this obligation to locate myself in relation to these stories seems particularly pressing. For what would it mean for me to take up the position of 'critic' in relation to women's stories of violent betrayal and trauma, if, as a researcher, I am unwilling to risk my own body by offering up my own experiences for interrogation? Further, how could I acknowledge and account for the partiality and limitations of my readings -- as the perspectives of a locatable and specific theorizing body -- without at least raising the question of survivor identity and tracing the ways that I negotiate its terrain?

In a reference to the work of Vikki Bell, Williamson suggests that the "new discursive space of child sexual abuse narratives demands a feminist context of particularized listening, embodied speech, and a theorized social critique" (Williamson, 1994, p. 227). Such a context necessitates that as a researcher/reader of autobiographical narratives of 'incest,' I attend to how resonances and dissonances of my own experience affect my engagements with these texts. My responsibility is two-fold, then: to consider the various productions of my identity as insider as well as outsider, and to trace how this shifting subjectivity enables, limits, and regulates what I am able to see, know, and say about 'incest.'

My difficulties with this question of positioning arise from the way that such a question tends to devolve into one of locating myself within (only apparently) fixed categories of 'incest survivor' and 'incest non-survivor': after all, the popular logic goes, you're either a survivor or you're not. And yet such fixed categories deny the nagging

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23Many feminist researchers draw strict and essentialized boundaries around who is and who is not authorized to critique women's autobiographical narratives of 'incest.' Tai, for example, insists that: "No matter how empathic the critic (if she is not herself a survivor) the trauma of the author becomes, upon translation into text, merely metaphor" (Tai, p. 131).
'unknowability' that surrounds 'incest,' and particularly memories of incestuous trauma.

Many women have nothing but snatches of vague and amorphous memory on which to base the construction of their identity as 'incest survivors.' Some, indeed, have less than that: stretches of unaccounted-for time; unexplained and recurring body sensations; a life that reads as a text of after-effects (Champagne, p. 18) of sexual trauma. With no memory access to specific events of sexual violation, these women grapple face to face with the utter impossibility of narrativizing their traumatic experiences. But even if they are able to recall the specifics of how they were abused -- even if their minds continually replay the scenes of their violation, in brutal detail -- they still may not know for sure who their abuser was, or if what they remember really happened. For many women, then, living/through 'incest' means continually wrestling with doubt, fearing all the while that the condemning voices that crowd their minds are actually speaking the 'truth': that they really are vindictive liars who concoct such stories for their own 'sick' benefit; that what they remember is not 'abuse,' so much as sexual interaction that they themselves incited or perhaps even wanted; that they really are 'just plain nuts.' Thus, experiences of living/through 'incest' breathe new life into a postmodern questionings of 'truth' as singular and coherent, of 'experience' as knowable and transparent, and of 'identity' as fixed and altogether discernible. And yet, in a social and discursive context in which 'survivor speech' is called into question at every turn, the conviction that women are able to unequivocally know and name their experiences and identities as 'survivors of incest' is understandably 'sacrosanct' -- a line of feminist solidarity that must not be breached.

24By 'living/through,' I gesture towards 'incest' as a trauma that is continually re-membered from the past in ways that reverberate in the present. This representation complicates notions of 'survivorship' as 'living through' a trauma from the past by pointing to the ways that survivors are 'living incest' as a continuing life condition.
My own experience, however, seems to defy such easy categorization, in that the name 'incest survivor' has never fully fixed itself upon my body.\(^{25}\) As an unstable and destabilizing signifier of 'incest,' my body slips in and out of shifting and contradictory framings, becoming recognizable as 'victim/survivor' only within frameworks that stretch the limits of that category to include covertly sexualized father-daughter relationships: *Now you see me, now you don't.*\(^{26}\) Often, in the past, when the name 'incest survivor' has temporarily attached itself to my body -- that is, when I have either taken up that 'mark' myself or been so 'marked' by others -- that naming has resulted in liberating re-readings of my family history. Such re-readings unsettle violating constructions of 'me' as 'emotionally unstable,' 'autistic,' 'delusional,' 'self-absorbed.' At the same time, these re-readings often cover over some of the complexities of my experiences of 'family,' the ambiguities of my relational identities. How, for example, is it possible for me to forge a language that is capable of expressing the complexity of my relationship with my father? How is it possible to acknowledge the *contradictions* within that relationship: to acknowledge the love and care without displacing the pain, the anguish, and the innumerable costs that that relationship represents to me?

* * * * *

*Her father --*

*a man who discovered in her isolation and unfilled need for love an opportunity for himself to be 'the man' that he imagined himself to be -- magnanimous, fun-loving, desirous, a savior of women. a man who disregarded her reactions to his 'affections,' his efforts to*  

\(^{25}\)In interrogating my own 'claim' of 'surviving incest,' my desire is not to undermine feminist efforts to broaden the definition of 'incest' in order to take into account the subjective experiences of women-survivors. Instead, I seek to highlight the 'constructedness' of this category, as well as to trace how different political contexts and strategies cause it to 'shift.' For further discussion of feminist efforts to re-define 'incest,' see the section entitled, "Feminist Re-visionings of 'Incest Talk'" in Chapter 2.

\(^{26}\)Rosaria Champagne attempts to articulate the 'difference' as well as the 'sameness' of more covert forms of 'incest.' She writes: "While the overt victim feels abused, the covert victim feels idealized and privileged. Yet underneath the thin mask of feeling special and privileged rests the same trauma of the overt victim: rage, anger, shame, and guilt" (Champagne, p. 99).
make her feel 'good' about herself, her body -- failing altogether to notice how she went to stone under his 'playful' touch, her body rigid and withdrawing ("I only want to get close to you").

a man who turns to her in the awkward silence following an excruciating movie about another father -- one who had raped and institutionalized his daughter -- says: "now, aren't you glad I never did that to you?" a man expecting gratitude for the 'favor' that he does her, in being such a 'good father,' in not crossing over.

and yet, a man who also cherished her as 'daughter,' who did not defend her, but who admired her, believed in her, acknowledged and revealed to her her worth and gifts. the only one in her family who did not belittle her, or forsake her altogether when she spoke her 'truth' -- the one who was (initially) willing to find a way to work it out.

* * * * *

In attempting to throw off the regulatory constraints of rigid constructions of 'survivors,' 'non-survivors,' 'victims,' and 'abusers' -- to create and claim a viable middle ground by refusing to definitively name or be named, to remain a 'not-quite insider' and a 'not-quite outsider' (Trinh, 1990b, p. 375) -- I risk being read in a number of ways: at best, as a 'survivor-in-denial' whose unwillingness to (publicly) name herself is born out of, and reiterates, discursive frameworks that limit 'incest' to explicitly sexual offenses; worse, as yet another white, middle class woman who, in refusing to (publicly) condemn her father and in maintaining the semblance of 'family,' is clinging to heteropatriarchal privilege\(^\text{27}\) and thus feeding into larger myths that re-constitute 'the family' as a violent and violating institution; worse still, as a 'survivor-wannabe' whose frivolous play at the borders of 'incest' dangerously jeopardizes the survival and healing of other girls and women. I must admit that these questions haunt me, providing continual fodder for self-interrogation. And yet at the same time, I rage against the limited and limiting choices available to me for naming myself, my

\(^{27}\)In "Breaking the Ties that Bind: Healing as a Political Process," Susan Strega constructs women's decisions \textit{not} to 'tell' as complicit with relations of heteropatriarchy ("Daddy rapes his little girl, but he still 'loves' her and she 'loves' him and everything is alright in the end"), arguing that such silences are effects of how
father -- 'choices' that elide ambiguities and erase complexities. I am frustrated that (most) feminist theorizings of 'incest' offer me little more than the negative image of the essentialized family scripts of my childhood. Instead of dictating that I swallow a family narrative that writes out my experiences of pain, these frameworks demand that I re-write the narrative itself, this time denying the existence -- the very possibility -- of love.

Tracing the ambiguities that are written out of my own narrative of (covert) 'incest,' then, I become aware that my 'choice' to claim such a (normative) narrative as my own -- the act of writing myself into its scripts -- demands that I disavow other experiences, deny other 'truths.' Such an awareness prompts me to question what is relegated outside of (normative) stories of 'incest,' as well as what remains unspeakable or unthinkable within and through such narratives. At the same time, I become suspicious of what the act of writing myself into such narratives secures for me: how it authorizes me to speak in some contexts, while silencing me in others; how it provides me with an epistemological standpoint that allows me to 'see' some forms of domination, while rendering other forms invisible; how it in some ways 'secures' my marginalized position as an 'innocent victim.' And yet, the 'benefits' of claiming an identity as 'incest survivor' and re-writing my experience as a narrative of 'incest survival' are cross-cut by the costs of making such claims -- most poignantly, the pain of having one's truth-telling disregarded and dismissed ("You're just a lesbian and can't deal with it." "Did you ever think that you might be autistic, that you don't want anyone to touch you?" "You never came with a rule book." "You have two choices: Accept me as I am, or let me go." "Your friends will have to be your family now").

women are trained to believe that their survival is dependent upon accepting assault and abuse (Strega, pp. 14 - 15).
And yet, there are also fears attached to not claiming that narrative for myself -- fears that I experience viscerally, as a wrenching tightness that grips my chest whenever I pull at the edges of my subjectivity as 'incest victim/survivor.' The cost of questioning the frame through which I know myself as a 'victim/survivor of (covert) incest' is to unsettle the surety of that identity -- to watch it dis-integrate before my eyes, even as I continue to tally the losses and after-effects that (the threat of) 'incest' has meant for me: violated boundaries, evacuated body/parts, deadened sensations, doubted perceptions, self-hatred, shame. To question that frame is to risk actualizing the fear that has hounded me since I first thought the word 'incest' in relation to my own life: the fear that one day, I would be found out (or perhaps that I would find myself out) as a fraud, or worse, as a self-interested liar. Without a discursive framework that is capable of rendering my crazy-making experiences intelligible as 'sexual abuse,' I (fear that I) would be only that: crazy. To re-write my experiences within a narrative of 'incest,' then, is to weigh and re-weigh those costs against rather dubious benefits.

In approaching the stories that other 'unmarked' women write of what it means to live/through 'incest,' then, I again feel the weight of these costs and benefits. My fear is that in 'tampering' with these stories, I risk further rendering 'sacred truths' that have been painfully stitched together and that are already fragile from constant scrutiny. By interrogating these narratives, by drawing attention to their constructedness as 'fictionalized truths' in order to render visible the ways that they are 'unmarked' and to trace their 'implicatedness' in languages of domination, how might I be pulling apart framings necessary for the survival of others? How, in fact, is it even possible to ask such questions without giving fodder to the burgeoning number of False Memory Syndrome advocates -- without playing into the hands
of accused and incensed parents who point to the 'scriptedness' of survivor stories as a means of discrediting them altogether?

While these fears weigh heavily on my mind, I also trace the ways that such fears limit and constrain what 'good (feminist) daughters' are able to think, say, or do about incest. It is from a position of straddling the borders that differentiate 'survivors' from 'non-survivors' that I become most aware of the regulatory effects of these categories of identity and experience -- as products and producers of feminist counter-discourses that are themselves implicated in relations of domination. It is from this position that I am most able to re-cognize 'incest' as a category of experience that is constructed through exclusions as well as inclusions. I am also most able to see 'survival' as both contingent and relational, depending entirely upon whose body is being viewed, in relation to what history of violence.

Of course, efforts to complicate categories of 'incest' and 'incest survivor identity' must be continually read against the strategic necessity of essentialized categories -- the life-and-death urgency of speaking and naming 'incest' in specific sites and at particular moments. And one must also ask who has the luxury of contemplating such complexities. And yet, from another perspective, one might also ask: Who can afford not to consider such complexities? In other words, for whom does the straightforward 'inclusion' or subsumption of their experiences and identities into normative categories of 'incest' and 'incest survival' enact another set of erasures of traumatic history -- indeed, another set of violences?

* * * * *

In the following chapters, I consider questions of language, truth, and difference in relation to women's autobiographical narratives of 'incest survival.' In raising such queries, my aim is not to call into question the 'truths' that women tell of their experiences of
living/through 'incest,' so much as to consider the terms and conditions in which those truths are known, articulated and heard. In other words, I examine how 'unmarked' women-survivors "work the trap that [they are] inevitably in" (Butler; cited in Kotz, p. 84). In examining the ways that these women cobble together codes and vocabularies available to them in order to make sense of and to articulate their experiences of sexual trauma, I consider as well how these codes and vocabularies inevitably "smuggle along" (Nash, 1989; cited in Rattansi, p. 53) constructions of gender, sexuality, race, class, and ability.

In Chapter One, I attempt to trace how and on what terms women-survivors enter and negotiate a complex and politically charged field of speech and silences in order to narrate their experiences of 'incest.' Drawing upon insights from literary theory, cultural theory, and feminist post-structural theory, I consider the recent proliferation of North American women's writings in relation to 'incest,' mapping the ways that these writings construct normative notions of what it means to live/through childhood sexual trauma. In particular, I contemplate how these writings construct categories of 'incest survivor' identity and community that both depend upon and elide differences among women-survivors, as well as how these differences shape and constrain the very possibilities of subversive speech.

In Chapter Two, I consider the discursive conditions of survivor speech. Here, I examine in closer detail the discursive practices "through which ['incestuous'] experience becomes articulated in itself and able to be articulated with other accounts, enabling the construction of an account of collective experience" (Haraway, 1991a, p. 113; original emphasis). Specifically, I draw upon the work of Vikki Bell to trace how mainstream feminist theorists have constructed 'the story of incest' as an essentialized tale of gender domination. I argue that feminist theorists have done so in order to unsettle dominant
discursive practices that construct 'incest' as a rare form of sexual transgression that is committed by 'abnormal' fathers, daughters, and families, and that position women-survivors as pathological, inherently damaged, deviant, and blameworthy. After tracing the construction of this gender story, I draw upon the work of Ann Stoler to complicate it by re-imagining 'incest' within a colonial frame: both as a central technology for constituting 'respectable' (read: white, middle class, heterosexual, and able-bodied) ruling subjects, and as a narrative that references a slide from 'respectability' into 'degeneracy.' I then re-consider the discursive conditions that shape and constrain survivor speech, mapping how notions of 'respectability' and 'degeneracy' constitute those conditions, as well as how they undergird the social conditions that make it possible for Fathers to sexually violate their daughters.

In Chapter Three, I return to a consideration of the languages through which women come to know, re-member, and articulate their experiences of living/through 'incest.' In examining autobiographical narratives written by Liza Potvin and Elly Danica, I consider how these writers rely upon racialized, sexualized, classed, and dis/abled codes, figurations, and narratives as 'shorthands' for translating their experiences of being 'marked' for and by 'incest.' In so doing, I raise questions regarding the risks of appropriating experiences and conflating 'differences.' At the same time, I consider the ways in which Potvin's and Danica's (re)tellings might gesture towards interconnected forms of violence and domination.

In Chapter Four, I map the ways that Potvin and Danica narrativize their processes of 'healing' and 'recovery,' paying close attention to the multiple effects of their attempts to 'throw off the mark' of 'incest' and to re-present themselves as 'recovered' subjects. I conclude by attempting to re-imagine 'recovery' as a process that demands a pulling apart of interlocking discursive systems that privilege some bodies and dominate other.
CHAPTER ONE:

THE POLITICS OF (RE)TELLING 'INCEST'

It's too hard to write. There are no words.

She sits transfixed before a blinking computer screen, feeling hemmed in on all sides by the host of imagined audiences that crowd in around her chair. She imagines the round-eyed gaze of child terror fixed to the back of her hands on the keyboard -- child eyes watching adult hands, waiting for signs of impending violence. Red-hot on the back of her neck she feels the glare of women who have swallowed their fill of betrayal -- women whose mute mouths contort in unison around a single word: traitor. And hulking in the background of this vast sea of spectators is an aging face riddled with pain and confusion, its eyes downcast and averted. A face distant yet familiar. Her father's face...

With body bowed tight in an anxious arc over the keyboard, she contemplates the risks of speech, its inevitable silences. Inhaling deeply, she tries to focus, pushing back the encroaching hordes, straining to claim a small and tentative space in which to think her own thoughts -- to articulate her own reality.

She inhales again, types a few words, then erases them. She types a few more and waits, breath inhaled.

Panic ensues. Muscles in her jaw and neck tighten, constricting her throat. Her breath quickens. She begins to rock back and forth in a rhythm ancient to her body, head turning from side to side. Echoes of judgement resound in her head: Ugly. Stupid. Useless. Her fingers leave the keyboard to roam her face, clawing at imperfections, pulling absentmindedly at the hair fringing her forehead, clamping tight over her gaping mouth. She chants to the screen in a low, fervent whisper -- a mantra against the incoming flood of anxiety. Eventually, her fingers find their way back to the delete button...

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I begin this chapter with the question: What does it mean to "narrate the scene of one's own violation?" (Williamson, 1992, p. 142). What does it mean to root about in language, furtively snatching words from their discursive contexts and forcing them into new and unholy unions, in an attempt to translate the impact of a flash of memory so horrifying --

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1 My use of a third person reference in these passages represents an attempt to disrupt and complicate a straightforwardly autobiographical space -- a space that 'I' am unwilling and unable to fully occupy in relation to
so utterly untranslatable -- that it can be glimpsed only fleetingly, out of the furthest corner of one's eye? And how, in an attempt to utter some speakable and useful truth about that experience of violation, does one grapple with the impossibility of its telling: the reality that every story, no matter how 'true,' limits and distorts the experience as well as its teller? Further, how does one negotiate this terrain of truth-telling in a social and discursive environment in which one's efforts to speak are "absolutely prohibited, categorized as mad or untrue, or rendered inconceivable" (Alcoff & Gray, pp. 265 - 266)?

Women who speak or write about their own experiences of living/through 'incest' inevitably come face to face with questions of speech and silence. The discursive and social conditions that constitute this 'speech' and these 'silences' have, of course, shifted over time. Prior to the development and wide circulation of "survivor discourse" (Alcoff & Gray, p. 260)² in the late 1970's and early 1980's in North America, for example, 'incest' constituted what Sidonie Smith refers to as a "limit to everyday autobiography" (Smith, 1996, p. 227).

In Subjectivity, Identity, and the Body: Women's Autobiographical Practices in the Twentieth Century, Smith notes the central role that autobiography has served in (re)producing Western notions of 'selfhood.' These notions are, in turn, produced by and productive of scripts of 'universal subjectivity,' which construct the self as a rational, unitary, self-determining individual who is "unencumbered" (Smith, 1993, p. 5) by the "weighty drag" (Smith, 1993, p. 17) of a body. 'Incested' women, whose experiences of sexual trauma render their lives (even more) "contingent, chaotic, [and] tangential" (Smith, 1993, p. 8), were unrecognizable

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²Linda Alcoff and Laura Gray use the term 'survivor discourse' to refer to the efforts of "those who have survived rape, incest, and sexual assault" to speak of and interpret the meanings of their experiences of violation and survival (Alcoff & Gray, p. 261).
within these scripts in that their experiences exceeded and disrupted these limited and limiting constructions of selfhood. As 'unaobiographical subjects,' then, these women were also positioned within discourses of psychiatry, mental health, and law -- that is, the discourses that constitute and are constituted by Western liberal humanism -- as impossible subjects.

Little wonder, then, that feminist struggles regarding 'incest' have emphasized efforts to take up autobiographical practices in order to render intelligible women's experiences of sexual trauma. Smith might describe these practices as strategies that "the excluded and [sic] colorful have used...as a means of 'talking back' (Smith, 1993, p. 20) to exclusionary discursive practices -- that is, practices that simultaneously deny them selfhood (along with its rights and privileges) and construct them as chaotic bodies in need of rational 'management.' Smith notes as well that members of marginalized groups take up resistant autobiographical practices in seemingly contradictory ways. At some times and in some contexts, 'resistant autobiographers' might articulate their experiences within discursive scripts of universal subjectivity in order to gain legitimacy for themselves as unique subjects. At other times and in other contexts, these same marginalized autobiographers might engage in a "politics of fragmentation," in which they take up the position of the 'universal I' specifically to highlight its inherent contradictions, incoherences, and instabilities (Smith, 1993, pp. 155 - 157). Thirdly, Smith describes "autobiographical manifestos," by which she means publicly performed proclamations of oppositional subjectivities that are born out of "self-conscious encounters with the politics of identification" (Smith, 1993, p. 158). These proclamations, made by people who are relegated to "anonymous collectivist[s]" and who
must negotiate crazy-making tensions produced by clashing subject locations, are attempts to "bring [marginalized experiences] 'into the light of day'" (Smith, 1993, p. 158).

According to Smith's framework, then, early published autobiographical narratives written by 'incest survivors' constituted 'autobiographical manifestos.' Emerging as historically specific practices of feminist storytelling, these public acts of (re)telling 'incest' partially displace 'expert' knowledges that, in turn, position women-survivors as 'abnormal,' 'damaged,' and 'pathological' within institutions of mental health, social welfare, and psychiatry (based upon Smith, 1996, p. 240). These testifiers of 'incest,' by writing their experiences of being sexually violated, articulated and thereby instantiated a powerful shift in their own subjectivity: from being positioned as "unknowing victim[s]" to (re)positioning themselves as "[knowing and] engaged survivor[s]" (Williamson, 1992, p. 133).³

By tampering with discursive framings of 'incest' and pulling apart scripted subjectivities (such as 'slut,' 'liar,' 'mad woman'), writers and speakers of 'incest' narratives created spaces in which to articulate new narrative truths and to allow for a re-membering of disavowed experiences and bodily knowledges (based upon Spence, p. 133). These acts of (re)telling stories of 'incest' circulated so-called 'impossible' memories of trauma and survival within structures of language, thereby creating a robust counter-discourse: a survivor discourse, one that allows victimized subjects to "suture across" (Hall, p. 3) fragmented and disparaged subjectivities and thus to articulate new and more empowering identities. At the same time, these manifestos of transgressive subjectivity also constitute a means for women-

³Given the ways that traumatic memories continually return to disrupt coherent and cohering narratives of 'incestuous' experiences, this shift from 'unknowing-ness' to 'knowing-ness' of 'incest' can never be complete or permanent.
survivors to write and speak the specificities of their 'incested' bodies into normative scripts of universal subjectivity.  

As mappings of oppositional subjectivity, then, these narratives serve as technologies of subject (re)formation. In other words, they provide a means for women to speak and write their very selves into existence as 'survivors of incest.' As well, these written or spoken narratives, when addressed to other women who are living/through 'incest,' are a means of both passing on strategies for survival and spelling out the costs of such strategies (Spence, p. 133). These narratives of 'incest,' shared within relations of mutuality, become technologies for re-forming not only the subjectivity of the speaker/writer, but also that of the listener/reader. Women listening to 'speak-outs,' reading 'incest'-related autobiographies, or even flipping through the pages of The Courage to Heal encounter resonances of their own repressed memories of violation. Through their engagements with these stories, women come to re-cognize their 'selves,' and thus become 'hailed,' within and through representations of 'incest survival.' Such representations, in turn, inform and become part of their own performances of subjectivity as 'incest survivors.'

Thus, autobiographers of sexual abuse often draw heavily upon the stories written and told to them by other women in order to articulate their own experiences of victimization and survival. Elly Bulkin, for example, writes:

I'm struck by the extent to which my risks [in writing 'incest'] are inseparable from [the risks taken by other women]. For me, the movement out of depression, into some sort of

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4 These narratives can also be viewed as part of broader political struggles to de-colonize bodies by undermining the discursive practices through which, as Judith Butler suggests, "the body rendered as Other -- the body repressed or denied and then projected, reemerges for this [universal] 'I' as the view of other, as essentially body" (Butler, 1987; cited in Smith, 1993, p. 10).

5 This insight is based on the theoretical work of Teresa De Lauretis, as cited in Bell, p. 74).
healing has much to do with other women's stories, with what women have told me when I said, 'I never told you this, but..." (Bulkin, 1990; cited in Tal, p. 242).

By engaging in practices of re-interpreting and re-naming their experiences as sexual trauma, these women participate in "a new kind of 'coming out'" (Tal, p. 241). They emerge from this process as individuals who re-claim their experience as a sign of victimization as well as evidence of their strength and ability to survive. They emerge, as well, as members of a collectivity: as women who, through shared acts of truth-telling, "release [themselves] from silent collaboration in their own secreted guilt and shame" and form a "community of understanding" (Williamson, 1994, p. 224) that has the potential to be socially and politically agentic. It is the very existence and name-ability of this 'community of survivors,' constituted to no small degree through feminist engagements with autobiographical narratives of 'incest,' that allows the stories told by 'incested' girls/women to be recognized as more than simply confessions of painful personal experiences. They become, instead, specific tellings of collectively experienced forms of (gendered) violence. Thus, autobiographical narratives of 'incest' provide the basis for a feminist methodology of analyzing and critiquing (gendered) relations of power, as well as means of establishing a political movement to disrupt such power relations. But women (re)tell their stories of sexual violation and trauma for more reasons than simply to declare themselves 'survivors of incest.' They also tell as a means to bring about healing, both in their own lives and in the lives of other women. A brief browse through any of the myriad of feminist self-help books,

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6 Biddy Martin, in "Lesbian Identity and Autobiographical Difference[s]", makes a similar point in her analysis of what is made possible and what is covered over by the category 'lesbian autobiography.' Martin suggests that such a category "has specific purposes in the (not always synchronous) histories of the community and of the individuals who write and read them; it aims to give lesbian identity a coherence and legitimacy that can make both individual and social action possible" (Martin, p. 83).
therapeutic guides, social worker handbooks, and feminist theory texts will attest to the prevalence of the notion that in order to 'heal,' women must, on some level, 'break the silence' of her abuse. Although it is not my intention to prove this apparent 'truism' to be a outright falsehood, it is my intention to complicate the notion of '(re)telling incest' as a taken-for-granted necessity -- a notion that both shapes and constrains feminist political practices in relation to the sexual violation of (girl-)children by family members.

**Narrating and Healing**

In relation to Holocaust survivors, Dori Laub suggests that "there is, in each survivor, an imperative need to tell and thus come to know one's story, unimpeaded by ghosts from the past against which one has to protect oneself" (Laub, 1992b, p. 78; original emphasis).7 Laub goes on to suggest that "[o]ne has to know one's buried truth in order to be able to live one's life" (Laub, 1992b, p. 78). Considering these insights in relation to survivors of 'incest,' then, I suggest that this 'need to tell and thus come to know one's story' is in part a need to somehow contain, however incompletely or temporarily, the de-stabilizing return of unassimilated (and arguably unassimilable) scenes of past horror. It is a need to somehow hold disruptive memories of the past in order to 'function' in the present. This 'containing'

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7In this consideration of trauma and 'healing,' I am heavily influenced by the Shoshana Felman's and Dori Laub's *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History* (1992), as well as Cathy Caruth's edited anthology, *Trauma: Explorations in Memory.* (1995). It is important to note that these insights regarding trauma and its '(re)telling,' particularly those of Felman and Laub, are derived largely from their efforts to theorize testimonial practices related to the encampment and genocide of European Jewry during the Second World War.

To consider these insights as 'general' theories of testimony and traumatic memory which can be applied unproblematically to other 'historical' traumas would be to rob of their specificity the testimonial practices that Felman and Laub theorize, as well as the specific historical 'events' and the lives/deaths that these practices attempt to translate. The conflation of survivors of 'the Holocaust' into a general category of 'trauma survivors' re-enacts the very erasures of (traumatizing) differences -- in this case, an erasure of anti-Semitism -- that this work attempts to disrupt. With that caution in mind, then, I draw tentatively upon these works, wondering how they might inform as well as dis-inform readings of women's autobiographical narratives of (childhood) sexual traumas.

I will address the notion of 'incest' as an a/historical trauma later in the text.
knowledge is gained precisely through the enactment a *testimonial* process: a relational process in which a woman living/through 'incest' (re)tells her experiences of violation to a listening 'other' who, in turn, is capable of hearing her and reflecting back to her her 'truth.' As Shoshana Felman notes,

> [t]his knowledge or self-knowledge is neither a given before the testimony nor a residual substantial knowledge consequential to it. In itself, this knowledge *does not exist*, it can only *happen* through the testimony: it cannot be separated from it (Felman, p. 52).

Laub goes on to suggest that "if words are not trustworthy or adequate" -- if, as Margaret Randall notes, "the language of what really happened" (Randall, p. 71) cannot be forged from available discourses -- "the life that [a woman chooses] can become the vehicle by which the struggle to tell continues" (Laub, 1992a, p. 78). In her inability to 'tell' (and thus come to know) her own story in the presence of an audience capable of hearing her, then, a woman who lives/through 'incest' may be constrained to structure her life as a series of unconscious and violent repetitions: as resonating "after-effects" (Champagne, p. 18) which serve as an her unwitting testimony to traumatic memories that are (thus re)inscribed upon her body (based on Laub, 1992b, p. 78).

For such a woman, then, not knowing her 'truth' can constitute a costly form of 'forgetting.' In disavowing those traumatic bodily experiences and feelings that are unbearable for her to 'remember,' she 'forgets' in a way that dis-members her body as well as her subjectivity, cordonning off those parts that 'know' or 'remember' too much about past violation, deeming them shameful "zones of inhabitability" that she cannot, and must not, fully occupy (Butler, p. 3). For some women living/through 'incest,' the act of fully

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8Underlying any discussion of the politics of telling 'incest' are questions about the conditions and im/possibilities of hearing, particularly across categories of difference. I take up these questions more directly in the concluding chapter.
occupying their bodies is synonymous with opening floodgates to overwhelming tides of memory. Their ephemeral sense of 'the real' is often under-cut and disrupted by the traumatic return of invisible hands groping and probing their (child) bodies, pinning their limbs, constraining their throats. Thus, these women lead profoundly split and disjointed existences in which abjected memories threaten to disrupt the sense they can make of their lives.

Given the painful effects of such fragmentation, then, 'healing' from 'incest' has often been understood as necessitating a narrativizing process:9 that is, a process by which split realities, abjected memories, fragmented subjectivities, and dissociated bodies (Smith, 1996, p. 238) are pieced together and 're-written' within a recognizable and (re)tellable format (Smith, 1996, p. 231) -- as a story of 'surviving incest.' It is through this process of creating (partially) comprehensible and (temporarily) recountable narratives that, as one sufferer of post-traumatic stress disorder notes, "[t]he trauma is transformed from an intrusive re-living of the event into a memory that can be recalled when one wishes" (Johnson, 1987; cited in Tal, p. 202). Paradoxically, then, survivors of child sexual abuse and 'incest' engage in efforts to narrate the (crazy-making) splitness of their subjectivities and experiences and thus begin a process of "imaginatively restoring the split" (Williamson, 1994, p. 215).

However, this narrativization process, as necessary and inevitable as it might be, also poses some distinct political challenges. For the goals of such a process ('restoring the split,' recovering a unified and coherent subjectivity, finding one's 'authentic' voice, discovering and articulating one's 'true' self) reiterate liberal humanist frameworks. Judith Butler argues that efforts to establish "the 'integrity' and 'unity' of the body [as well as subjectivity], often thought to be positive ideals, serve the purposes of fragmentation, restriction, and

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9Later in the chapter, I call into question this 'narrativizing' process and its relationship to notions of 'healing.'
domination" (Butler, 1987; cited in Smith, 1993, p. 14). From another perspective: What does it mean to call into question the desire to (re)establish bodily and psychic integrity when that desire is articulated from the standpoint of a subject whose body has been dis-integrated through violence and abuse?

*Risky Speech*

*For there may be as many costs as benefits to surrendering to the 'I' that she finds installed there (Smith, 1993, p. 4).*

Much feminist theorizing of 'incest,' beginning in 1960's, emphasizes the political necessity of women's efforts to contest dominant constructions of 'incest' as a 'taboo' -- a prohibition that is only rarely broken, and only then by 'dysfunctional' families. Louise Armstrong writes that early efforts to 'tell incest' were attempts to disrupt such (mis)conceptions:

It was time to face up to the fact that incest was not an American social taboo. Sexual abuse is frequent and generally goes unpunished. Talking about incest is the taboo (Armstrong, 1994; cited in Tal, p. 162).

Early speak-outs by survivors revealed what was previously considered to be a 'rare crime' as pervasive form of abuse meted out against (young) women by men (Armstrong, 1994; cited in Bell, p. 2). Early published narratives also played a key role in "set[ting] the tone for later discussions of 'incest' by emphasizing the remarkable nature of a crime which is committed by 'normal' men in 'normal' (ie. white, middle class) families" (Tal, p. 161).¹⁰ Stories of 'incest' previously framed as unspeakable and unintelligible now "[circulate] in complex ways through various institutions -- through the family, the clinic, the penal system,"

¹⁰I address 'incest' in relation to normative constructions of gendered sexualities and notions of family more extensively in the next chapter.
the law, social service agencies" (based upon Smith, 1996, p. 234). But at the same time, these gains did not come without women-survivors taking immense risks and at times incurring huge personal costs by writing and speaking themselves into the autobiographical 'I' of narratives of 'incest.'

In many contexts, and particularly in courts of law, women must (still) edit what are often amorphous and fragmented memories of violence and shame, carefully knitting them together into air-tight stories depicting pristinely innocent child-victims and unambiguously heinous (father) abusers. To complicate stories of 'incest' by writing in contradictions and nuances of experience -- in other words, to gesture towards realities that rest outside of the discursive markers delimiting 'incest' as an identifiable category -- is to risk being framed as an in-credible victim and having one's experiences rendered unintelligible, deemed illegitimate, or dismissed altogether. For women who choose to publically pronounce themselves (or who are publicly pronounced) as victim/survivors of 'incest,' such nuanced (re)tellings, when spoken in particular contexts, can cause their fragile and hard-won 'truths' to disintegrate to dust. The act of (re)telling experiences publically only to have those experiences reframed and dismissed as 'unbelievable' results in immeasurable losses for those who tell: losses of court cases, of jobs, of children, of family, of sanity -- even of life. And, of course, there are excruciating psychic and emotional costs of being disregarded, ignored, or villified as the teller of 'inaudible' stories of sexual trauma. As Dori Laub suggests of Holocaust survivors, "if one talks about the trauma without being truly heard or truly listened to, the telling might be lived as a return of the trauma -- a re-experiencing of the event itself" (Laub, 1992a, p. 67).
Like most things, of course, the risks of being dis-believed as an 'incest victim' -- as well as the risks of being believed -- are not shared equally among all women-survivors. The risks of speaking of experiences of 'incest' and publicly naming oneself as an 'incest survivor' shift, depending upon how 'the victimized body' and 'the body that victimizes' are racialized, (homo)sexualized, classed, and dis/abled. One of the risks that is often referred to in women's autobiographical narratives of 'incest' as well as feminist theorizings of these narratives -- and one of the primary means of keeping women 'unaware' or unable to speak of the violences that they have endured -- is the (threatened) loss of family relationships and connections. Elly Danica, author of *Don't: A Woman's Word and Beyond Don't: Dreaming Past the Dark*, writes:

> For all of us, family is the biggest hurdle in any effort to make disclosures of child abuse...Our personal identity is rooted within the concept of the family, and disclosure could and often does mean the victim's banishment from the family and a resulting crisis in the sense of self" (Danica, 1996, p. 47; my emphasis).

This forefronting of 'the family' as a primary site of loss of identity conflates experiences of (white, middle class) heterosexual women with those of (white, middle class) lesbians, whose ability to 'root one's identity within the concept of 'the (heternormative) family' is always already problematic.¹¹

The risks of losing family connections as a result of telling personal stories of incest survival are also overdetermined in terms of class and dis/ability. Susan Strega, for example, interprets women's fear of losing family connections as a fear of losing *class inheritance*. Strega notes: "I have found dykes of poverty and working class lesbians much more willing

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¹¹Lesbians may in fact risk other losses of 'rooting identities' when they choose to publicly (re)tell their experiences of 'incest.' Within a discursive context that figures 'deviantly sexualized' women as effects of 'incestuous abuse,' such testimonies might result in lesbians having their identities as (real) women who desire other women called into question (Allisen, pp. 20 - 21).
to make the break/make the confrontation than middle and upper class lesbians" (Strega, p. 10). At the same time, working class and economically poor families who, given their lower class positioning, are *always already* constructed as 'prone' to sexually degenerate behaviour. For women from these families, then, their efforts to (re)tell 'incest' might (re)position them as 'betrayers' not only of their families, but also of their class. As well, the (threatened) loss of family/care-givers that so often accompanies women's efforts to 'break the silence' concerning 'incest' has altogether different connotations for 'disabled' women. For these women, such a 'loss' might, indeed, threaten their *continued* ability to survive.

For women of colour who live/through 'incest,' the risks of losing 'family' must be read within broader, historically specific contexts of slavery, colonialism, and on-going racisms. Their acts of naming male family members as their abusers may result in losses not only of family, but also of community, of culture, of language, and of racial solidarity. Sherene Razack writes: "racialized women who bring sexual violence to the attention of white society risk exacerbating the racism directed at both men and women in their communities; we risk, in other words, deracializing our gender and being viewed as traitors, women without community" (Razack, 1994, p. 896).12

Melba Wilson, in Crossing the Boundary: Black Women Survive Incest demonstrates how these various risks play out in African American communities. She notes that in "exposing the dirty linen" of child sexual abuse within Black communities, she is understood by many in those communities as having "breached an even greater taboo, crossed a bigger boundary (in their eyes) than incest [itself]" (Wilson, p. 1). Wilson suggests that speaking of

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12Razack defines 'racialized women' as "women whose ethnicity, as indicated by skin [sic] color, accent, religion, and other visible markers, denotes that they are of non-Anglo-Saxon, non-French origin. In the eyes of the two dominant groups, such women are raced" (Razack, 1994, p. 896).
'incest' from the position of Black womanhood is extremely risky in that such speech can re-circulate (within white as well as Black imaginations) sexually racialized constructions of Black men as 'rapists,' images of Black women as sexual animals or deviants, and racist notions of the "sexual manhandling of young girls] by their fathers, grandfathers, uncles, and friends of the family" as a "normal practice" within Black families (Wilson, pp. 7, 13). Elucidating the discursive conditions that Black women must negotiate in order to speak their 'truths' about 'incest,' Wilson writes:

When a white child is sexually abused, [she thinks she is] bad and dirty. When a black child, especially a girl child, is abused, she thinks she is bad, dirty and an affront to the race, both in sexual terms and in terms of being black and female. She thinks too, of the message it will send white society if she tells (Wilson, p. 86).

To speak of 'incest' within a racially minoritized community, then, risks reifying sexually racialized constructions of those communities and their families: constructions that position Black families as primitive, lacking in sexual restraint, as all-too-believably 'incestuous.' Such constructions paradoxically position Black families as prime targets for police and social service surveillance and intervention, while at the same time positioning Black women as less believable -- and therefore less worthy of legal 'protection' -- than 'innocent' (white) victims of sexual violence.13

Aboriginal women who live with and through 'incestuous' trauma negotiate a similarly complicated terrain of speech and silence in relation to 'incest.' Given that (white) feminist practices tend to figure sexual violence (and particularly intra-familial violence) in ways that erase the differences among women and reify institutionalized practices of racism and colonialism, and given as well the historical implication of (white) women's

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13'I consider 'incest' as a sign of primitivism and sexual degeneracy as well as constructions of innocence and guilt in the next chapter.'
organizations in efforts to domestically 're-educate' and actively dis-organize Aboriginal families (Monture-Angus, p. 176), Aboriginal women cannot straight-forwardly rely upon dominant 'feminist' perspectives regarding 'incest' within their communities. Patricia Monture-Angus argues that the pull towards 'silence' (particularly among chiefs and band councils), as well as Aboriginal women's hesitations in publicly naming abusive men in their families, must be read against histories of abuse within residential schools, on-going struggles and mistreatments within a racist and colonial (ie. foreign) criminal justice system, and the excruciatingly painful ramifications of efforts to name 'incest' violences within Aboriginal homes and communities:

The anger and frustration in Aboriginal individuals and Aboriginal communities swirls and swirls and all too often there is no channel for release. It is a cyclone of pain. It is a cyclone of pain that has no parallel in urban communities. I am able to understand why some people, faced with that cyclone of pain, may prefer to choose silence (Monture-Angus, p. 173).

Monture-Angus also spells out the risks of reifying legal, sociological, social welfarist, and therapeutic discursive practices that mark Aboriginal families as 'abnormal,' 'dysfunctional,' and in need of 'interventions' -- normalizing practices of assimilation that (attempt to) desecrate Aboriginal family systems and traditions. Despite her awareness of these risks, however, Monture-Angus continues to advocate for historically contextualized tellings of sexual violences and abuses:

It is only through individual acts of strength (breaking the silence) that our communities will become re-united and we will be able to re-claim for Aboriginal Peoples the healthy communities and lives we once had (Monture-Angus, p. 174).

Razack notes, however, that these efforts to contextualize sexual violences within specific histories of colonization and cultural assimilation pose new risks. They can exacerbate what she refers to as the "culturalization of rape": that is, the ways that "cultural
and historical specificities [are used to] explain and excuse the violence of men directed at women" (Razack, 1994, p. 897).

**Contradictory Effects of Survivor Speech**

While women-survivors and theorists from racialized, (homo)sexualized, classed, or disabled communities have been pointing to the limitations of straightforward efforts to 'break the silence' for quite some time, 'unmarked' women-survivors and feminist theorists have begun to consider such limitations only within the last decade (Tal, p. 185). Several of these theorists have begun to remark, for example, upon the number of children who tell and are not listened to (Kelly et al, 1991; in Bell, p. 104). Others point to the relative im/possibility of women's autobiographical narratives of 'incest' making a dent in -- let alone disrupting -- a social and discursive context in which "all our institutions including movies, magazines, art, advertising, and literature sanction child molestation" (Bass, 1983; cited in Tal, p. 188). Feminist historians have also begun to interrogate the supposed "unprecedented discovery" (Gordon, p. 56) of 'incest' in the 1970's in North America. Linda Gordon, for example, notes the prolific references to father-daughter 'incest' within case records of late nineteenth-century 'child-saving' agencies in the United States. Mapping the various and shifting "reinterpretations" of 'incest' that took place within American public discourse from 1920 to 1970, Gordon demonstrates that the so-called 'discovery' of 'incest' in the 1970's did not constitute a once-and-for-all 'breaking of the silence. Rather, it constituted yet another discursive shift in an on-going conversation about what 'incest' is and means (Gordon, pp. 56 - 57).

Given these re-readings of 'incest' history -- and given as well the depressing reality that the recent proliferation of 'incest autobiographies' has not markedly affected the rate at
which (girl-)children are 'incested' by their (male) relatives -- mainstream feminist theorists/activists are beginning to ask a new and troubling question: If efforts to 'break the silence' have not resulted in a decrease in the incidence or severity of 'incest,' then what "is the political effect of this speech?" (Alcoff & Gray, p. 261; my emphasis) What are the effects of the continual and pervasive circulation of these narratives of 'incest': in therapists' offices, in social service agencies, and in courtrooms; within survivor support groups, over sexual assault hot-lines, and through 'survivor speak-outs' and lobbying efforts; within self-help guides, therapeutic manuals, published autobiographies, and feminist 'statistics' and theory; and most troubling of all, as "eroticized, disturbing interludes between commercial breaks" (Williamson, 1994, p. 204)?

Drawing upon Michel Foucault's theorizing of "confessional speech" in The History of Sexuality: Volume 1: An Introduction (Foucault, pp. 17 - 35) in their consideration of this question, Linda Alcoff and Laura Gray suggest that 'survivor speech' -- by which they mean written and spoken attempts to articulate experiences of 'incestuous violence' from the standpoint of the one who is violated -- can at times constitute discursive ruptures. In these rupturing moments, expressions of "subjugated [bodily] knowledge"14 return to disrupt and call into question dominant discursive frameworks. Alcoff and Gray go on to argue, however, that when these same acts of speech are contextualized and "re-interpreted" by "expert mediators," they often become "normalized" in ways that are non-threatening to, and in fact "re recuperative" of, the very discursive frameworks that women-survivors themselves

14"Subjugated knowledges," according to Foucault, are "knowledges that have been disqualified as inadequate to their task or insufficiently elaborated: naive knowledges, located down on the hierarchy, beneath the required level of cognition or scientificity... popular knowledge though it is far from common sense knowledge, but is on the contrary a particular, local, regional knowledge, a differential knowledge incapable of unanimity and which owes its force only to the harshness with which is opposed by everything surrounding it" (Foucault, p. 82).
attempt to disrupt. As a strategy to maintain the subversive power of survivor speech, then, Alcoff and Gray point to the importance of interrogating the *conditions* in which survivors are "incited to speak" (Foucault, 1978; in Alcoff & Gray, p. 271) of their experiences of sexual trauma. In particular, the researchers are concerned with conditions in which survivor speech is incited and framed as a 'confession' of transgressive subjectivity and experience. Alcoff and Gray suggest that as survivors, 'we' must "[disrupt] the ability of 'experts' to 'police our statements,' to put us in a defensive posture, or to determine the focus and framework of our discourse" (Alcoff & Gray, p. 284).

Vikki Bell, on the other hand, is far more critical of the implications of Foucault's thesis for feminist knowledges of 'incest' and survivor-generated (and generating) discourses, highlighting the ways that feminist practices of (re)telling and listening to stories of 'incest' actually *disrupt* the conditions in which survivor speech is recuperated. She is critical of characterizations of feminist efforts to 'break the silence' as practices that, in and of themselves, support and even *incite* a proliferation of recuperative 'incest talk' in sites such as social work circles, courtrooms, and the media.

Echoing Alcoff and Gray's critique, Bell concedes that women's (re)tellings of 'incest' are often re-worked within child protectionist and charity discourses (Bell, p. 175) — a re-working which, Bell notes, results in an increase in the policing of "'accessible'" families (Bell, pp. 100, 105). At the same time, however, she argues that a fundamental condition of

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15Specifically, Bell is concerned that knowledges formed through the gathering of women's stories and statistics and through feminist efforts to debunk 'un-truths' about 'incest' (Bell, p. 174) are read as feeding into the same bio-political strategies that they purport to undermine (Bell, p. 183). For a feminist critique of the limitations of 'feminist' political strategies involving the gathering of incest-related statistics — and one that does *not* address Foucault's thesis — see McLeod & Saraga, pp. 20 - 22.

16Foucault would argue that both of these effects are indicative of the operation of power/knowledge networks. I take up Foucault's theory of biopower and the deployment of sexuality in more complex ways later in the chapter.
'confessional speech' -- that is, the presence of an "authority who requires the confession, prescribes and appreciates it, and intervenes in order to judge, punish, forgive, console, and reconcile" (Foucault, pp. 61 - 62) -- is (often) disrupted by women-survivors and their advocates, who create an atmosphere of mutuality and respect in which to (re)tell, to listen to, and to remain silent about stories of 'incest' (Bell, pp. 101 - 104). Similar to the work of Alcoff and Gray and Tal, then, Bell sees her work as an effort to consider survivor speech as well as its theorization as both subversive and recuperative.

As an example that illustrates (but curiously does not cite) the central arguments made by both Alcoff and Gray and Bell, Kali Tal, in Worlds of Hurt: Reading the Literatures of Trauma (1996), traces how narratives are contextualized and 'packaged' in ways that shape and constrain their effects for readers. In her analysis of an early American anthology of sexual abuse narratives entitled, Voices in the Night: Women Speaking About Incest, Tal notes that the anthology's introduction addresses readers as women-survivors of sexual abuse and/or as their (feminist) advocates. Such an address, she argues, positions both the readers

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17Bell does concede, however, that given the power differentials between researchers and those who are researched, 'confessional' conditions of communication are inevitably present to some degree within feminist research practices in which survivor stories are solicited (Bell, p. 103). I would add that efforts (such as my own) to interpret these stories must always be interrogated for the ways that they replicate recuperative conditions.

18In drawing upon Tal's work, I am not indicating my concurrence with her conclusions or with her overall approach to examining 'trauma literatures.' I find her work useful in the ways that it approaches survivor stories as forms of cultural production and addresses questions regarding the politics of subversive speech and its recuperation, the construction of 'survivor' identities and communities, and dynamic interplay of testimony and witnessing. At the same time, I find Tal's work extremely problematic because of the confabulations of differences and erasures of specificities that are (re)produced through her methodology of making 'comparisons' across diverse 'trauma literatures.' Most problematic of all, however, is Tal's construction of the 'pastness' of traumatic histories, particularly in relation to her reading of Holocaust literatures. Tal's construction of the genocide of European Jewry during the Second World War as "something that happened in history" (Tal, p. 8) erases not only the reverberating impacts of that 'event,' but also the continued threat of anti-Semitism. Thus, she concludes: "Jews in America are not longer members of a community at risk" (Tal, p. 9).

as well as the writers of sexual abuse narratives as *those who* (collectively) *know* and are therefore authorized to write (and read) about sexual traumatization. Within this context, the stories themselves are readable as individual expressions of a collectively experienced 'reality' of violence that is explicitly (identified as) gendered. The anthology thus constitutes itself as "a work which is aimed at a community struggle to define itself" (Tal, p. 169).

Rather than framing the narratives within its volume as 'confessions' that are in need of absolution and healing, the feminist lens provided in the introduction of *Voices* frames them as having both therapeutic *and* political purposes and effects: as testimonies that create spaces in which women can speak about the impact of male violences on their (early) lives (Tal, p. 170, 173); as efforts to reclaim women's experiences of sexual trauma from prescriptions and statistics produced by 'male experts' (Yarrow, 1982; cited in Tal, p. 172), and ultimately as attempts to end male domination in general and sexual violence against (girl-)children in particular (Tal, p. 173).

Reading another early anthology entitled, *I Never Told Anyone: Writings by Women Survivors of Child Sexual Abuse*, however, Tal notes that this second text positions readers not as women-survivors and/or as feminist activists, but as members of a *general public* who are 'unaware' of 'incest' and for whom these stories constitute "a fascinating, emotionally involving look at the painful lives of other people" (back cover; cited in Tal, p. 181). Tal suggests that in assuming this 'unaware' audience, the anthology produces itself as a composite of the (exoticized and potentially 'unbelievable') stories of (traumatized) 'Others.' This (re)produced 'unawareness' is reflected in close to half of the anthology being dedicated to establishing the authenticity of its stories and, by extrapolation, the very existence and

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prevalence of 'incest' and sexual abuse. Women's narratives of sexual trauma are sandwiched between a lengthy preface and introduction written by sexual abuse 'experts' and an appendix listing 'resources for healing.' Each woman's story is further contextualized and interpreted by the editors in a page-long biographical description (Tal, p. 181).

Tal suggests that despite intentions to contextualize 'incest' and sexual abuse within a history of male domination (Bass, 1983; cited in Tal, p. 187), the anthology's (feminist) editors are "institutionally constrained" (Tal, p. 182) to re-present women's stories of sexual trauma in non-threatening ways so as to be 'consumable' (in the sense of being potentially bought and read) by the general(ly 'unaware') public. The specific gendering of 'who (usually) sexually abuses whom' is elided in a frame produced through therapeutic discourses, to the point that 'sexual abuse' becomes imagined as a "crime against humanity" (Tal, p. 184) or as a universalizing continuum in which "'[w]e were all abused'" (Bass in Tal, p. 188). Tal concludes -- and Alcoff and Gray would likely concur -- that within these discursive conditions, the act of 'telling incest' is no longer constituted as an impetus or method for bringing about an end to incestuous violences, but as a form of individual 'therapy.'

Considering Tal's analysis of the two anthologies with questions of language, representation, and 'truth' in mind, I find myself troubled by the emphasis she places on the 'institutional constraints' and 'political (and economic) agendas' which shape and constrain the ways that these narratives are re-presented. Specifically, I worry about the ease at which discussions of 'constraints' and 'agendas' can slip into considerations of the recuperation of potentially transgressive speech as operating on the level of intention, rather than as an effect of discursive practices. As well, I wonder how the analyses of both Tal and Alcoff and Gray
imply at least the *possibility* of an originary survivor speech: speech which, prior to being co-opted or revised by 'dominant culture' (Tal, p. 11) or re-interpreted by 'experts' (Alcoff & Gray, p. 284), exists as a transparent rendering of the 'truth' -- an unproblematic and inherently subversive telling of women's experiences of living/through 'incest.'

Rather than asking questions about the representational limits of survivor speech, Tal takes Alcoff and Gray's initial question about the political effects of survivor speech in a slightly different direction, asking: "How are survivor stories adapted to fit and then contained within the dominant structure of social, cultural and political discourse?" (Tal, p. 3). In her deliberation of this question, she offers three strategies by which survivor speech is recuperated: "medicalization" (which figures 'incest' as an 'illness' that [victims suffer from and that] can be 'cured' within existing or slightly modified structures of institutionalized medicine and psychiatry"), "disappearance" (by which she refers to strategies of refusing to admit trauma's occurrence, often by undermining the credibility of 'victims')\(^{21}\); and "mythologization" -- that is, strategies that effectively contain trauma and its impacts within predictable and standardized narratives (Tal, p. 6). Although the first two strategies deserve much more careful theorization,\(^{22}\) I turn my attention here to further exploring Tal's third strategy: the mythologizing standardization of narratives of 'incest.'

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\(^{21}\)An example *par excellence* of this recuperative strategy is, of course, the "False Memory Syndrome Foundation," which Williamson refers to as "a growing reactionary movement of sceptics who dismiss adult survivor's memories and narratives out of hand as mere self-interest and father-uncle-brother-neighbor-male bashing" (Williamson, 1994, p. 201).

\(^{22}\)I will discuss strategies of 'medicalization' at length in Chapter Two.
Standardization

As narratives of 'incest' are repeatedly told and re-told within courtrooms, social service agencies, and mental health institutions -- and as private/public acts of (re)telling 'incest' narratives become a predominant (and perhaps prescribed) means of 'doing' both therapy and political resistance -- repetitions of once-unfamiliar images, metaphors, and expressions begin to gel together in recognizable patterns. These well-worn patterns begin to emerge as standardized notions of what constitutes 'survivor' experiences, identities, and narratives. These 'standardized' scripts represent what Roger Simon refers to as "cultural technologies": "dominant modes of semiotic production [that] often attempt to normalize 'truthful' or 'useful' textual practices and image repertoires as well as what counts as their adequate display and mediation" (Simon, p. 38). As 'normalizing' notions of what a 'true' and 'useful' narrative of 'incest' might look like, these standardized narratives serve as what Smith refers to as "proto-narratives" (Smith, 1993, p. 3) -- that is, they provide a framework through which narratives become re-cognizable as 'narratives of incest.'

Ellen Bass and Laura Davis's *The Courage to Heal: A Guide For Women Survivors of Child Sexual Abuse* (1988) serves as an example of what I regard as a standardized narrative that serves as a form of cultural technology. As a textual composite of thousands of survivor narratives, *The Courage to Heal* (re)writes individual survivor stories into a series of chapters outlining discrete 'stages of healing.' By doing so, it produces a proto-narrative delineating what an identifiable story of sexual abuse survival might look like. This proto-narrative is mapped out in the text's introduction, and is then re-produced within and by each of the 'real life' narratives compiled in its final chapter.
The Courage to Heal's proto-narrative works very much like the Twelve Steps in Alcoholics Anonymous. Just as a recovering alcoholic might rise to recount her experiences as an 'abuser' of alcohol and draw upon the standardized twelve steps to structure her narrative, a woman who lives/through incest might 'compose' her personal story of incest survival -- and thereby compose her self as a 'survivor' -- by following the guiding exercises at the end of each chapter and corolling her experiences accordingly. Like the narrative of recovery in Alcoholics Anonymous, the survivor proto-narrative thus constitutes:

a powerful master narrative that shapes the life story of each [survivor], an autobiography-in-common that comes to constitute a collective identity for [people who live through and with experiences of sexual abuse] (adapted from Warhol and Michie, p. 328).

Thinking back to Tal's reading of Thornton and Bass's anthology, I become suspicious of the connection between this 'master narrative' of 'incest survival' and notions of (re)telling 'incest' as a therapeutic project. Again, Tal critiques the ways that such a project can be implicated in practices that individualize and thereby de-politicize potentially explosive experiences of '(surviving) incest.' Drawing once again upon Foucault's notion of confessional speech, I suggest further that the very intelligibility of an 'incest master narrative' might also be read as an effect of a forceful 'imperative to tell' stories of living/through 'incest' -- and to tell them in particular ways. Women-survivors are often positioned, even by feminist activists and theorists, as 'silenced' subjects who must speak about their experiences of trauma in order to 'recover.' This (albeit feminist) 'imperative to tell' can inadvertently (re)produce women as objects of disciplinary 'gazes' which are produced by and productive of the fields of education, medicine, mental health, criminal

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23This 'analogy' bears some weight in that the Twelve Step philosophy of recovery has been adapted and used to establish 'Survivor Anonymous' groups for survivors of child sexual abuse. For an example, see Sanders, 1991.
justice, and social welfare (Rattansi, p. 25). In this way, feminist political strategies at times feed into "biopower strategies of governance" (Foucault summarized in Bell, p. 134): strategies of producing and re-circulating knowledges of ab/normal sexualities that position women-survivors as objects of regulatory gazes and interventions.

Again, Bell strongly contests the ways that Foucaultian theorists characterize feminist work in relation to 'incest' and sexual abuse as "reactionary" (Bell, p. 105). Bell argues instead that rather than simply adding to the "discursive noise" around 'the family' (Bell, pp. 105 - 106), feminist theorist/activists who write and speak about 'incest' direct their critique — as Foucault himself did — towards the normative constitution of 'the family.' Other feminist survivor/activists, on the other hand, advocate for a position that is much more in keeping with Foucault's concept of power/knowledge networks. Louise Armstrong, for example, laments that women's efforts to enter their experiences and knowledges of sexual abuse and 'incest' into public discourse (such as her own (re)telling of 'incest') have not resulted in a decrease in the number of children who are 'incested.' She argues that instead, these efforts have "resulted in the 'medicalization' of incest and the 'creation' of an incest industry" (Armstrong, 1994; cited in Tal, p. 195): an industry, with its cast of thousands of 'incest experts,' that (re)produces and regulates 'incest talk' within various institutional and cultural sites. Armstrong, reflecting back a decade after her ground-breaking narrative of 'incest' first hit the market, remarks poignantly on those early efforts to write- and speak-out about 'incest':

it was not our intention merely to start a long conversation. Nor did we intend simply to offer up one more topic for talk shows, or one more plot option for ongoing dramatic series. We hoped to raise hell. What we raised, it would seem, was discourse. And a sizeable problem-management industry. Apart from protective service workers, we have researchers, family treatment programs, incest offender programs, prevention experts, incest educators...It was not in our minds, either, ten
years ago, that incest would become a career option (Armstrong, 1994; cited in Tal, p. 195; emphasis added).

Given the myriad possibilities of its recuperation, then, 'survivor speech' in general -- and autobiographical narratives of 'incest' in particular -- must be viewed critically for the contradictory effects that they inevitably produce. But this critique must not be limited to an interrogation of the context in which these forms of speech are uttered; they must also be examined critically according to what they say, what they fail to say, and what they unsay. Autobiographical 'incest' narratives do disrupt silencing practices and create images to fill absences in the representation of what 'incestuous violation' is and means from the standpoint of the one violated. Their circulation in standardized forms, however, can reiterate other silences and create new representational taboos. As normative and normativizing "'movement[s] against forgetting'" (Bociurkiw in Williamson, 1994, p. 223), these narratives can serve a new means of regulating memory: a feminist regime of truth.

At the same time, it is important to note that survivor proto-narratives are by no means totalizing in their re-production of individual and collective 'incested' subjectivities and identities. Paul Smith suggests that "a person is not simply an actor who follows ideological scripts, but is also an agent who reads them in order to insert him/herself into them - or not" (Smith, P., 1988; cited in Smith, 1993, p. 22; emphasis added). Some women living/through 'incest' may take up proto-narratives as a means of structuring (in part) the telling of their lives; others may not incorporate them at all into their narrativizing practices. And even when women do rely upon these structuring proto-narratives, their 're-tellings' are never perfect replications of those scripts. Individual experiences and life circumstances are never fully contained or expressed within or through them. It is perhaps more elucidating, then, to think through the ways that women-survivors write and speak about their lived
experiences within, through, and against proto-narratives as products and producers of 'survivor discourse.' Some women, and particularly women who identify as 'other than' white, heterosexual, middle class, and able-bodied, take up these proto-narratives specifically to re-work them: to root out new 'silences' that are inevitably (re)constituted within efforts to speak the unspeakable, in order to solder together narratives that are capable of translating the complexity of their experiences of trauma(s). In this way, these women "work against self-evidently homogeneous conceptions of identity" so as to figure the category of 'incest survivor' as "something other than a 'totalizing identification'"(Martin, p. 82).

As well, Tal rightly notes that even within an anthology that tightly frames sexual abuse narratives in individualizing and de-politicizing ways, 'institutional constraints' -- and I would add recuperative discursive practices -- are not able to fully contain women's "drive to testify" about their experiences of living/through 'incest' (Tal, p. 189). Inevitably, the rage, terror, pain, and resistance written into and through these narratives seep past their discursive wrappings.

**Normalizing Narratives and the Erasure of Differences**

In an article entitled, "feminist politicization: a comment," bell hooks warns against the production of normative narratives of female experience:

> We must...be careful not to promote the construction of narratives of female experience that become so normative that all experience that does not fit the model is

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As an example of what I mean here, Louise Karch opens her poem entitled "Pages 202-203" -- a poem which critiques the 'standardizing' and constraining effects of *The Courage to Heal* -- with the words (Karch, p. 43):

> Fuck. I'm a textbook case.
> I can close my eyes and fan the pages,
> stop to find my feelings exposed in
> rows and columns
> highlighted, boxed, bolded, underlined.
deemed illegitimate or unworthy of investigation (hooks, 1989, p. 110).

Although hooks is writing here specifically about an over-emphasis upon (white) women's narratives of victimization within feminist theory, her concern about the erasures of experience through the construction of normative narratives is well-taken. I am left wondering: what rests outside of the frames that 'we' construct around 'our' experiences of sexual traumatization? What gets lost is efforts to translate those experiences? And even more poignantly, who is this 'we' that is speaking? These thoughts set my mind spinning anew with troubling paradoxes: which parts of 'us' must be elided in order that 'we, the survivors of incest' might be intelligible, and politically useful, as a category of identity? But again, what are the risks of calling into question essentialized constructions of 'survivor identity' when that identity is continually under siege? Still, if essentialism must be taken up as a strategy to maintain this precarious social collectivity in the face of public backlash, what happens to 'differences' among -- or even within -- different women's experiences and knowledges of 'incest'?

Tal considers some of these questions in a section in which she addresses the "'whitinizing' or deracializing of the 'normative' sexual abuse narrative" (Tal, p. 156). Turning once again to early American anthologies of "sexual abuse survivor testimony," Tal traces the displacement of race and racism within women's stories of surviving 'incest.' Specifically, she considers the ways that narratives produced by women of colour are variously "ignored, decontextualized or appropriated" (Tal, p. 156) within these early anthologies. In her critique of I Never Told Anyone, for example, Tal notes that the anthology editors lifted narrative segments from autobiographies of well-known African American women (namely, Maja Angelou and Billie Holiday) and represented these
segments as 'sexual abuse narratives.' She also traces the ways that these same editors expressly leave out parts of the larger autobiographies that might flag these 'sexual abuse stories' as narratives of Black women: references to the personal and communal risks that the authors faced in telling white authorities; the 'double-bind' that they negotiated in appealing (or not appealing) for justice within racist institutions of law; and struggles that the authors faced in attempting to tell 'believable' sexual abuse stories from sexually racialized standpoints. Tal concludes, and I concur, that by removing these 'stories' from their social and historical (let alone literary) context, and by erasing the ways in which they are 'raced,' the anthology renders invisible the specificity of what it meant for the two authors to live/through childhood sexual trauma as black women.25

Once again, then, it appears that early American anthologies -- illustrative of white, middle class feminist representational practices -- construct issues of race and racism as tangential to what 'incest' and sexual abuse are really all about: namely, gender. At the same time, Tal re-cognizes the ways that women of colour have contested such limited and limiting constructions of sexual trauma:

Women of color [sic] suffer under the conditions of both sexism and racism, and for that reason they may not view sexual assault as the traumatic event which shaped their lives. The sexual assault of a woman of color [sic] is inextricable from her assault as a black woman, a latina, or an Asian woman. The refusal of women of [sic] color to focus solely, or even primarily, on sexual assault reflects an awareness of the complex and interrelated character of race, gender, and class oppression (Tal, p. 159; final emphasis added).

In relation to early anthologies survivor testimonies, then, Tal concludes:

25This erasure of race is so complete that there is not even a mention within the biographical sketches that frame the excerpts that the two authors are African American women (Tal, p. 190). Even when the racial identities of narrators are rendered explicit (as in titles such as "Black Girl Learns the Holiness of Motherhood," for example), narratives of women of colour are still approached as "variations on a [white] theme" (Tal, p. 179).
their exclusion of women of colour as speaking voices served to reinscribe patterns of discrimination already present in the culture, marginalizing or 'disappearing' the testimonies of these women at the same time they contributed to a 'whitinizing' or deracializing of the 'normative' sexual abuse narrative" (Tal, p. 156; original emphasis).

Although I agree with most of Tal's analysis of the 'deracializing work' of these anthologies, I quote her work at length in a desire to push her analysis further concerning her notion of the 'whitinizing' of normative sexual abuse narratives. Tal's analysis frames this 'whitinizing' as a problem not only of the exclusion of stories of women of colour, but also of the de-contextualizing conditions in which these stories are included. She also suggests that this 'whitinizing' is an effect of the erasure of the interplay of race, gender, and class from narratives of women of colour. What makes this framing problematic is its inadvertent suggestion that the narratives of women of colour are the only narratives that are informed by this interplay of differencing practices -- as if to imply that white women's experiences of living/through 'incest' are comprehensible without reference to the specific racialization, sexualization and class-ing (let alone dis/able-ing) of their bodies or those of their abusers. By focusing her discussion of de-racialization solely on how narratives of women of colour are either included in or excluded from the category of 'incest survivor testimony' -- rather than on how white women's experiences and narratives come to constitute the actual frame itself -- Tal seems to leave uninterrogated the very notions that she attempts to unsettle: that is, the construction of white women and their stories of 'incest' as 'unraced,' as well as 'unmarked' with regards to class, sexuality, and ability.

Interestingly enough, the categories that Tal constructs in and through her work replicate the very 'deracializing' phenomena that she is critiquing. She refers throughout her chapters to 'sexual abuse and incest survival testimonials,' by which she means narratives in
which "the authors have taken as their primary subject the specific incident(s) of sexual assault that traumatized them, and then attempted to describe and contextualize the assault for the reader" (Tal, pp. 155 - 156; emphasis added). In an earlier chapter, she constructs the writings of trauma survivors as a separate genre of literature that is "defined by the identity of its author" (Tal, p. 17). Under this schema, the writings of women living/through 'incest' would be readable as a distinct subgenre of trauma literature reflecting the experiences of 'incest survivors' as a distinct community of trauma survivors. Rather than simply supplanting her definition with a more correct or 'useful' wording, I wish here to consider the (re)productivity of this notion of 'incest survivor testimony' as a genre, as well as my own reiterations of the category 'incest survivor autobiography.' Specifically, I consider how the (re)production of these (so-called) 'genres' might be tied to the (un)marking of narratives of 'incest' as 'white,' 'middle class,' 'heterosexual,' and 'able-bodied.'

Tal herself ties the normalizing of white, middle class women's narratives of living/through 'incest' to the historical conditions in which these narratives came to constitute a distinct subgenre of trauma literature. She argues that as North American feminist presses began to publish (white) women's autobiographies of 'incest' in the early 1970's, and as the readership of these presses (predominantly white, middle class, and 'woman-oriented' women, many of whom were themselves 'survivors') began to engage with them in workshops, support groups, and feminist writing classes (Tal, p. 160), a new 'community' of writers and readers came into being. Later narratives of 'incest' were written by and for and circulated among members of this newly constituted 'community of (reading and writing) survivors.' Tal concludes, then, that the formation of this predominantly white and middle
class\textsuperscript{26} 'incest survivor community' was produced as a replicating effect of the "thoughtless racism and ethnocentrism" that produced 'the women's movement' as largely white and middle class during the period (Tal. p. 156, 160). Such an analysis, although it is not altogether 'false,' does not account for how the whiteness and middle class-ness of the genre is continually re-produced -- even through the narratives of women who are 'marked' according to race, (homo)sexuality, class, and dis/ability. What is at question here is how such a 'genre' becomes intelligible, and what that intelligibility produces and secures.

Basing a subgenre of either testimony or autobiography upon 'the identity of its authors' is problematic from the get-go. Beginning with my own category of 'incest survivor autobiography' and extrapolating from Biddy Martin's contemplation of the im/possibilities of 'lesbian autobiography,' I note that the very placement of the words 'incest survivor' before the word 'autobiography' (given the latter's implication in modernist projects) appears to reinforce a taken-for-granted "transparency" of who an 'incest survivor' is -- and who she is not (Martin, p. 78). From another perspective, the placement of the word 'autobiography' after the words 'incest survivor' implies that this identity "essentially defines a life, providing it with predictable content and an identity possessing continuity and universality" (Martin, p. 79). Martin's work suggests that together, the words 'incest survivor autobiography' effectively define narrativizing practices of women living/through 'incest' as somehow separate from -- and in fact marginal to -- the larger category of 'women's autobiography.'

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\textsuperscript{26}Tal argues that 'incest and sexual abuse survivor testimony' is actually a white, middle class lesbian genre. This view of 'incest and sexual abuse survivor testimony' as a specifically lesbian genre is not held up by my reading of bookstore shelves that are predominantly stocked with 'incest autobiographies' by white, middle class, heterosexual women (this difference might be attributable to a difference between autobiography and testimony -- although Tal does not spell out such a difference). As well, recent efforts on the part of lesbian and gay 'incest survivors' to write about 'incest' and the difficulties of 'telling' from their specific location suggest such tellings are generally written over with assumptions of heteronormativity (See Allisen, 1992; Queer Collective, 1991; Strega, 1992).
Rather than representing "a position from which to read against the grain of narratives of normal [female] life" (Martin, p. 79), then, the identity 'incest survivor' becomes its own proverbial -- and autobiographical -- island.27

Similarly, to construct the category 'sexual abuse and incest testimony' as the narratives of a 'distinct community' of 'women-survivors' also depends upon assumptions of the stability, coherence, and discernible 'distinctiveness' of that community. The loose-knit collectivity of women who live/through and give voice to ('our') experiences of 'incest' -- this 'community' based, as Erikson would suggest, upon a mutual recognition of a "common language" or "spiritual kinship" that comes from being "marked" and somehow "set apart" through a 'similar' experience of trauma (Erikson, p. 186) -- is itself an accomplishment made possible through exclusions and erasures. Constructions of this community privilege 'incest survivor' identity above all other identities, while at the same time privileging 'incestuous trauma' above of all other traumas. Further, as Warhol and Michie have argued in relation to Alcoholics Anonymous, the normalizing 'master narrative' of 'incest' -- a narrative produced by and productive of therapeutic discourses of 'recovery' -- makes (the elision of) points of identification across categories of difference not only possible but necessary (Warhol and Michie, p. 336):

Ostensibly cutting across lines of...sexual preference, ethnicity, race, social class, religion, and nationality, [this master narrative of incest survival] elides social and cultural differences to construct a diverse yet unified speaking position: 'we, the [survivors of incest]' (adapted from Warhol and Michie, p. 328).

27In considering 'incest survivor identity,' it is not my intention to erase the multiplicities of meaning inscribed within the word 'survivor' itself. Laura Levitt reminds me: "To speak out is, at least for me, a cry for acknowledgement. I want to be seen, not as a brave woman, not as courageous, not as a victim. I want to be seen in my multiple identities. I am all of these things as a survivor: frightened, angry, strong, vulnerable, and brave" (Levitt, p. 25). My desire instead is to render explicit how the ways in which 'survivor identity' is mobilized elides other multiplicities: those related to race, sexuality, ability, and class.
Assumptions of a relatively stable and knowable 'survivor identity' inevitably displace the multiple identities of individual 'survivors' as well as their (identificatory) shifts within and between different (traumatized as well as traumatizing) communities.

More significant here, however, is the fact that the act of re-naming, re-cognizing, and marketing these 'autobiographical incest narratives' as being primarily about 'incest' repeats the very erasures and de-contextualizations that both Tal and I were initially concerned about. Once again, such a re-naming enacts the exact effects that Tal herself intends to critique: it fragments narratives of multiply marginalized women who refuse to centre their autobiographies/testimonies around 'incest' as the defining moment(s) of their lives. Framed as focusing primarily upon 'incest,' 'incest survivor autobiographies' or 'incest survivor testimony' as subgenres become de facto marked as (primarily) white, middle class, heterosexual, and able-bodied subgenres. Any conjuring of these categories -- even this effort to name them in order to deconstruct them -- is tied up in practices that re-produce women's experiences of familial sexual trauma as separable from larger histories of racist violence, classism, colonization, homophobia, and ableism.

In Thunder in My Soul: A Mohawk Woman Speaks, Patricia Monture-Angus makes a similar arguments in relation to the specificities of Aboriginal women's experiences of rape, wife assault, sexual abuse, and incest. Highlighting the findings of the Task Force on Federally Sentenced Women (1990), Monture-Angus notes that Aboriginal women's experiences of sexual violence are non-incidental: that is, unlike those of non-aboriginal women, Aboriginal women's experiences cannot be traced and isolated as "one rape or one

\[\text{\textsuperscript{28}}\text{Karen Jacobsen McClenan's Nature's Ban: Women's Incest Literature (1996) represents another example of this 'de-contextualization.' Although Jacobsen McClenan does include a wide variety of authors and provides 'contextualizing' information before each narrative segment, she -- like Bass and Thorton -- pulls these segments from larger narratives and re-frames them as 'primarily about incest.'}\]
battering partner or incest" (Task Force, 1990; cited in Monture-Angus, p. 170). She powerfully concludes:

Violence is not just a mere incident in the lives of Aboriginal women. Violence does not just span a given number of years. It is our lives. And it is in our histories. For most Aboriginal women, violence has not been escapable (Monture-Angus, p. 170; emphasis added).

Aboriginal women's tellings of childhood sexual violation\(^{29}\) unsettle dominant constructions of 'survivor narratives.' These dominant narratives borrow codes from therapeutic discourses and follow a linear trajectory of 'recovery': beginning with a stage of 'innocence before trauma,' followed next by a stage of (multiple) violence(s) and then by various stages of 'healing,' and ending in a final stage of 'recovery,' a stage which is itself often framed as a 'return to innocence.' Given the impossibility of extracting Aboriginal women's experiences of 'incest' from the other textures of racialized and classed forms of sexual violence that are woven into their lives and histories, dominant constructions of the stages 'before trauma' and 'after recovery' become unintelligible within their narratives of 'survival.' Within a society that is built upon and sustained by interlocking practices of racialization, sexualization, and class-ing, Aboriginal women are never able to fully occupy a position of (sexual) innocence, even as small children; nor will they fully 'recover' until the continuing practices of colonization finally end.

Noting this 'difference' in no way denies the fact that the lives of many women living/through 'incest' -- Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal alike -- have been sculpted by trauma and betrayal to such an extent as to constitute a series of repetitions of that trauma: in

\(^{29}\)It is important to note here that there is no singular perspective regarding the politics of telling 'incest' stories that is shared among all Aboriginal communities or among all Aboriginal women. Rather, whether and how to 'break the silence(s) concerning rape, sexual abuse, wife assault, and 'incest' remain hotly contested issues among Aboriginal women.
the form of violently abusive relationships, prostitution, addictions, mental illness, eating disorders, institutionalization, self-abuse, and suicide. What Monture-Angus does call into question, however, is the very impossibility of pointing to 'incest' as an 'originary moment' of trauma in the lives of Aboriginal women-survivors. Her argument eloquently speaks to the necessity of contextualizing Aboriginal women's experiences of 'survival,' as well as their efforts to 'break the silence' about 'incest,' within larger post-contact histories of colonization: histories of families being 'disrupted' and 're-ordered' through the establishment of residential schools and reserves; histories of state-engineered efforts to annihilate languages, spiritualities, and traditional life-ways; histories of the violent imposition of white patriarchal structures of government and the removal of land rights; and on-going histories of institutionalized poverty and racism (Monture-Angus, pp. 174 - 183).

Read within and against these interconnected histories of trauma, then, autobiographical narratives of Aboriginal women who are living/through 'incest' complicate what it means to be a 'survivor.' For these women, being a 'survivor of incest' is entirely inseparable from being a 'survivor of colonialism and systemic racism' (Monture-Angus, p. 169). At the same time, by disrupting taken-for-granted assumptions of 'survivor identity' and 'survivor community,' these narratives also call into question the terms on which 'the survivor movement' becomes knowably distinct from 'other' movements to end the on-going reverberations of slavery, colonization, and systemic racism. It is little wonder, then, that

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30 Once again, Monture-Angus notes that historically, (white) women's organization such as the National Indian Association have been implicated in colonizing and 'civilizing' practices — practices that in and of themselves have precipitated high levels of sexual assault, wife assault, and 'incest' in those communities (Monture-Angus, p. 176).

31 Tal makes an interesting connection between the de-historicized nature of 'the survivor movement' and its dependence upon a politics of telling:
First Nation writers often frame their stories of 'incest' and sexual abuse as part of a living legacy of the racist violences of colonization (Williamson, 1994, p. 206). It is also little wonder that erasures of racial, sexual, class, and dis/ability specificities that are produced by and productive of normative constructions of what it means to live/through 'incest' can be experienced as another painful form of violation and betrayal.

**Possibilities for a Heterogeneous Consciousness**

In response to feminist (life)story-telling practices that (re)produce essentialized categories of experience and identity, many post-structuralist feminists have been advocating for practices of *fragmentation* that highlight the 'staging' of speech as well as the 'constructedness' of experience. Such representational strategies also disrupt cohering and totalizing narratives of experience and pull at the contradictions within identity categories. Inderpal Grewal speaks of the necessity of such strategies, particularly in relation to autobiographical practices:

> Instead of a female collective identity, there is a heterogeneous consciousness; instead of an identity consolidated in the practice of autobiographical writing, there is a self that is always revised, always in the process of becoming (Grewal, p. 251).

Such strategies warrant that experiences such as 'incest' are spoken and written about in continually shifting ways so as to keep the (potentially) transgressive effects of such speech from being recuperated and co-opted, either through the circulation of normative scripts or through the normalizing operations of social problem-solving machinery. Trinh T.

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*If these sexual abuse survivors had looked to the precedent set, for example, by African American testimonial literature, they might have realized that testimony signals the beginning of a long process of struggle towards change, rather than effecting the change by itself. Instead of making connections between their own drive to testify to atrocity and the long tradition of antiracist and anti-sexist testimonial literatures that preceded their movement, they fell into the trap that some survivor communities cannot seem to escape: They insisted that their oppression was at once unique and universal (Tai, p. 160; original emphasis).*
Minh-ha describes this strategy as one of continually displacing and unsettling constructions of knowledge, experience, truth, and identity as "a means of survival": "an impossible, truthful story of living in-between regimens of truth" (Trinh, 1990, p. 332).

Janet Walker, in an article in which she considers the limitations of documentary-style film-making practices for re-presenting (memories of) traumatic events, argues in favour of taking up strategies of fragmentation. She does so on the basis of what she terms the "traumatic paradox": the defiant fact that external trauma itself can produce the very modifications in remembered detail that cultural conventions invalidate in determinations of truth" (Walker, p. 806). Rather than using 'realist' representational strategies that lock articulations of 'incest' and 'incest survival' into "a reductive true/false regime" (Walker, p. 813), Walker calls for film-making practices that represent a "simultaneous refusal of the realist mode and insistence on a naked truth" (Walker, p. 14). Contemplating the viewing effects of a variety of films such as First Person Plural (Hershman, 1990; cited in Walker, p. 222) that take up strategies of fragmentation in an effort to re-present unspeakable 'truths' about 'incest,' Walker concludes that "the laceration of conventionality embodied in these incest images allows for the location of memories as impossible but nonetheless true" (Walker, p. 222).

But again, what do feminist post-structuralist strategies of fragmentation and displacement do to women's (re)tellings of 'incest'? In a context in which proponents of False Memory Syndrome backlash against the increased public belief in stories told by sexual abuse survivors, re/framing memories of abuse as unreliable fictions conjured by the/rapists, what are the effects of interrogating constructions of 'truth' and pulling at contradictions
written into narratives of 'incest'?\textsuperscript{32} As well, what do post-structuralist impulses that romanticize notions of 'split' subjectivities, permeable boundaries, and a sense of "homelessness in the skin" (Smith, 1993, p. 143) mean in relation to subjects for whom the inability to establish a coherent sense of self, firm boundaries, or a sense of being 'at home' in their bodies remains a source of extreme pain and anguish?

**Reading Danica**

These troubling questions come to mind as I read two texts written by Elly Danica alongside of and against one another. Danica's first ground-breaking (re)telling of 'incest,' *Don't: A Woman's Word,* was published in the late 1980's and received unprecedented circulation and media attention in Canada. Using terse and powerful snip-its of poetry-like prose marked off in numbered paragraphs, Danica articulates her experiences of living through and with 'incest' in a way that is both visceral and immediate. As a work that Danica herself describes as "autofiction," (Williamson, 1992, p. 137), *Don't* is not a straight-forward or linear narrative. Rather, Danica's narrative shuttles back and forth in time, circling through levels of memory and back to the present as a means of mapping out the 'truth' of her journey of 'coming to know' herself as an incest survivor in a way that mirrors how she experiences it. Danica, as the autobiographical 'I' in her narrative, continually shifts in location, speaking in one moment as a brutalized child who 'knows' but cannot yet tell, then as an young, isolated adolescent longing but unable to forget, and in the next moment as an adult struggling (not) to remember. In reading myself into the various 'I's of Danica's text, I

\textsuperscript{32}Of course, Walker might well argue that she is not calling into question the 'truth-value' of women's stories so much as she is interrogating the very terms and conditions in which 'truths' are established and recognized. Although I agree with this strategy, I would also argue that in the short term, the risks posed by such a nuanced critique of the 'truths' produced within and through 'incest films' remains considerable.
find my-self racing through contradictory positions, sometimes within a single paragraph: from the position of the body experiencing and re-membering excruciating violation, to the position of a detached observer surveying that violated body, and even to the position of the violator of that body -- the one who degrades and humiliates the body and who uses (his) words to 'mark' it as a suitable receptacle for violence. Given this representational strategy, Danica's 'I' is "difficult to keep an eye on" for the would-be voyeuristic spectator (Williamson, 1994, p. 217).³³

Knitting together a text of fragmented sentences, Danica re/constructs fragments of memory, of experience, and of 'self' as a means of articulating an impossible subjectivity: "The woman made out of potshards. Pieces. Not herself. Never herself" (Danica, 1988, p. 13). As well, Danica does not contain what she/her body knows of trauma within one cohering or coherent script. Instead, as Williamson so aptly notes, "this embodied tortured knowledge is unmediated by a comfortable framing narrative that would provide the reader with a safe critical distance" (Williamson, 1992, p. 139).³⁴ Don't, as an 'autobiographical manifesto,' then, specifies how Danica lives and negotiates the splitness of her traumatized body and observing mind in ways that complicate and point to the limitations of traditional autobiographical forms.

Nearly a decade after Don't was first published, Danica revisits her experiences of writing and publicly presenting autofiction in Beyond Don't: Dreaming Past the Dark. Referring to what her early work made of her, Danica writes:

The problem was that I was no longer seen as a person separate and apart from the

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³³Janice Williamson originally makes this point in relation to Betsy Warland's The Bat Had Blue Eyes (Williamson, 1994, p. 217).

³⁴I will discuss Williamson's comment at greater length in Chapter Three.
book. The sum total of my identity seemed to be the experience that I had described. I began to feel erased by this unbearably narrow view of who I was... By virtue of those ninety-six pages, I had become my childhood, period (Danica, 1996, p. 12).

Danica describes how she is continually essentialized during talk shows, radio interviews, and public speaking engagements as a 'survivor of incest and child sexual abuse,' an identity which effectively eclipses all other aspects of her subjectivity. She observes that as her words and her body were read by audiences, the complexities and contradictions within her lived experience were edited out of, or perhaps rendered inaudible within, her 'incest story.' Thus, in the minds of audience members and interviewers, the name 'Elly Danica' and the body that carries that name seemed to become synonymous with the words 'incest survivor.' In that moment, Danica shifted from being a (historically specific) survivor to being the (ahistorical) survivor and became a fetishized as an icon of the survivor movement.

At the same time, however, 'Danica' was also rendered an object for scrutiny by inter/viewers who continually searched for 'proof' of the authenticity of her experiences and identity. In her various public appearances and media engagements, Danica's body was (and is) continually re-produced as an object inciting voyeuristic and commodifying gazes, as well as empathic (mis)identifications that elide the specificity of her experience and (bodily) knowledge. Danica is thus positioned in multiple and contradictory ways: as essentialized victim and as 'incest expert;' as deranged madwoman and as therapist; as man-hater and as feminist activist; as both speaker of and audience to countless confessions of sexual

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35 Danica writes: "Why did they have to ask me for the details? So that I could relive in front of the interviewers all that horror and they could watch it connect with my body, discover if it was true, perhaps?" (Danica, 1996, p. 48).
violation. She is rarely read, however, in the way that she desires to be read: first as a writer and an artist, then as a 'survivor of incest.'

The ways in which Danica re-presents her experience of 'incest' in Beyond Don't also gesture toward the shifting uses and effects of survivor discourse. In her first chapter entitled, "Beginning the Journey," Danica takes what was represented in Don't as a circular display of fragmented and non-cohering memory and re-orders it according to normative 'survivor proto-narratives,' thus creating a coherent and linear narrative of 'healing' and 'recovery.' She frames this process of recovery as "a journey from here to there; a quest for a healthy, whole self; for contentment; for a sure sense of my life's path" (Danica, 1996, p. 28).36 Mobilizing a survivor discourse which combines codes from feminist counter-discourses with codes from therapeutic discourses (which, as Peck argues, are constitutive of liberal humanist notions of 'universal subjectivity,' pp. 94-95), Danica re-interprets her experience as 'the woman made out of potshards' and constructs for herself a consolidated and unified subjectivity: as one whose "single-minded determination to walk through the hell of the past, to face all those abusers and demons" allows her to "walk tall and strong into the sunlight" (Danica, p. 1996, p. 40).

From one perspective, this mobilization of tropes of progress, unitary subjectivity, and rugged individualism can be read as indicative of a shift in Danica's autobiographical strategy. Instead of writing in the form of a 'manifesto' that disrupts normative cultural templates and contests the assignment of identities in relation to a mythical 'universal subject' (Smith, 1993, pp. 157 - 158), Danica takes up in Beyond Don't what Smith refers to as a

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36In my description of Danica's re-presentation of her experiences within normative scripts of 'recovery,' I do not mean to suggest that the 'trope' of recovery -- in particular, the recovery of selfhood -- is not written into her earlier auto-fiction, especially in its ending. I take up the discursive production of normative scripts of 'recovery' within this earlier work in Chapter Three.
"mimetic" autobiographical strategy: a strategy in which she articulates her experiences within discursive scripts of 'the universal subject' in order to gain legitimacy and authenticity as a speaking subject (Smith, 1993, p. 155). This representational strategy, falling in line with the more didactic style in which Danica writes Beyond Don't, allows her to establish a position (particularly among other 'survivors of incest') as an 'expert' with something of significance to say about the overall problem of child sexual abuse. As Smith warns, however, a mimetic strategy of autobiography, when it is "[u]nselfconsciously embraced,...invites recuperation as well as the promises of power, the maintenance of subjection to the self-definitions that bind" (Smith, 1993, p. 155). For Danica, the price exacted for a representational strategy aimed at establishing herself as an authentic and legitimate 'expert/survivor' might be the reiteration of constraining notions of 'incest survivor' identity and experience.

Even as she once again takes up the strategy of telling her personal story of 'incest,' however, Danica gestures towards the limitations of 'incest' story-telling. In later chapters of Beyond Don't, Danica notes that "the entire dialogue around child sexual abuse has stayed focused on individual horror stories, on the problems of individuals and how well they do or do not cope" (Danica, 1996, p. 145). She also points to the recuperative effects of survivor speech, remarking that she and other women-survivors "have been breaking the silence over and over again, only to have it subsequently swallow us up again after we speak" (Danica, 1996, p. 141). Almost in the same breath, however, Danica -- as a product and producer of forms of survivor discourse that privilege the public articulation of women's experiences of 'incest' as a preferred political strategy -- argues forcefully for continued efforts to tell silence-breaking 'incest' stories:
For this is how child abuse continues to exist: by not telling our stories when it is finally safe to do so, we allow child abuse to continue in our families and in our communities... Our silence protects, not ourselves, but the abusers. I dream of a time when every woman will have a healthy enough sense of self and her safety that she can tell her story (Danica, 1996, p. 137; emphasis added).

Here, Danica's text reiterates therapeutic as well as political 'imperatives' for women-survivors to speak publicly of their traumatic experiences. In this way, she inadvertently (re)positions women-survivors as objects of blame: for her text implies that it is the continued reticence of survivors -- and not an interlocking system of racial, sexual, class, ability, and gender domination -- that perpetuates the sexual traumatization of girl-children. Unasked within Danica's text are questions of how this 'dream' of having every story of incest revealed might actually be an effect of the very relations of power that make 'incest' a social possibility in the first place.

**Historicizing Incest**

Throughout both of Danica's (re)tellings of 'incest,' she refers again and again to the ways in which her body is 'marked' by gendering and (hetero)sexualizing discursive practices. She also takes pains to draw connections between those marking practices and the 'violate-ability' of her body:

*Dreams. Dreams of a future. A different future than they all have sentenced me to. They all say, my father, the nuns, the priest and my mother, that I will be a breeder, sentenced to provide whatever services the man who owns me demands. All I must do is obey. My father trains me to obey. Obey in silence. Who asked for your opinion. Who said you were supposed to like it? Who told you it would be any different? (Danica, 1988, p. 74).*

By contrast, she refers to the specific (unmarked) racialization of her body only once, in connection with her description of the innocent child that she was before being sexually abused by her father: "Blond child. Blue eyes. Satin skin. Beautiful child. Trust before fear."
(Danica, 1988, p. 22). The only other reference to the specific race-ing of bodies -- hers or anyone else's -- is included in a harrowing passage in which she describes her experience of being a nine-year-old girl pimped by her father and groped by strangers in the back seat of a car:

I spend the afternoon in the car. When I am allowed out there is only one man left waiting. He is Chinese. He is the only one daddy says no to. Daddy says it might rub off. The Chinese man might make me yellow (Danica, 1988, p. 18).

Within a context of such unspeakable violence, humiliation and betrayal, to read Danica's 'whiteness' as privilege -- let alone as 'protection' -- feels like sacrilege. For what kind of protection did Danica's white skin ever offer her? And yet, at the same time, it is this same hesitation to trace the differences that race and racialization make in racially 'unmarked' women's stories that perpetuates notions of 'incest' as an essentialized gender story. I wonder, then, about the possibilities of reading this 'whiteness' in another way. What would be opened up, for example, by reading Danica's text as a history of how white men use the bodies of white women to shore up the boundaries between 'white purity' and 'black depravity' -- those discursively-produced boundaries so necessary for the smooth operation of 'colonizing' practices? How is 'racialized protection' readable not as a benefit or privilege that Danica enJoys so much as a means by which her body is established and maintained as an "unsullied commodity" -- a commodity that her white, working class immigrant father can circulate among other, more powerful white men ("A judge, a lawyer, a doctor" – Danica, 1988, p. 50), in exchange for a shinier, more middle class version of white masculinity (based upon Irigaray; cited in Haug, p. 147)? And what might be possible if Danica's experience of 'incest' as itself were re-imagined as a 'sexualizing' and 'racializing' process --
one that marks her body as dirty, damaged, filthy, and 'Other' to clean, white, heteronormative versions of feminine goodness?

In other words, what might it mean to attempt to historicize Danica's telling of incest, as a re-telling of a particular history of whiteness, middle-classness, heteronormativity, and able-bodiedness that is reiterated through an abused daughter's body -- as yet another legacy of on-going histories of 'colonization'? By such a question, I am not suggesting that the specific violences enacted against Aboriginal peoples could or should be used as analogies for communicating the violences enacted against white, middle class (girl-) children; rather, my point is almost entirely the opposite. It is that the 'incesting' of white (girl-children) is not only reiterative of, but dependent upon, historically specific practices of racializing, colonizing, sexualizing, classing, and dis/able-ing bodies -- and vice versa. My desire is to push for a set of reading and representational practices that render explicit the trace of these 'marked' histories within 'unmarked' autobiographical narratives of 'incest' -- practices that insist upon connecting the violences done to one body to the violences done to (an)other.
CHAPTER TWO:
UNSETTLING GENDER TALES: 'INCEST' AS A STORY OF DEGENERACY

arms tied along the horizontal bar, i was salvation,
the bride of christ in white veil and wedding dress,
blood a black-red stain thrown across the front
and then the knife cut away the white and i became
the whore of babylon, slave of the flesh, abomination
that must be nailed to the tree. this whore must die,
a white robe intoned. she must carry your sin
to the grave. which man among you has sin to nail
to this cross? which man among you is without sin?
no man was ever without sin, since the beginning
god had seen to that, each man mounted
and saved himself as the congregation praised god
for my sacrifice: blest be the ties that bind.
the old rugged cross.
(From "the star girl," goobie, p. 55; original emphasis)

In Chapter One, I considered the politics of 'incest survivor speech,' tracing the
multiple risks that differently positioned women face in attempting to articulate their
experiences of 'incest' and considering how such speech is often recuperated in and through
the (re)production of normative narratives. In this chapter, I investigate questions concerning
the discursive conditions of 'incest survivor speech,' attempting to map out the discursive
terrain that (different) women living/through 'incest' must negotiate in order to articulate their
experiences of childhood sexual trauma. Specifically, I am interested in tracking the
historically specific discursive practices that women's (re)tellings of 'incest' attempt to
disrupt, which practices these (re)tellings (inevitably) reiterate, and what effects these
disruptions and reiterations have for differently located women-survivors. Again, my
intention is to pay close attention to the language that women-survivors are constrained to
use in attempting to translate their experiences of violation: the codes, grammars, and
categories that populate 'incest survivor speech,' as well as the constructions of gender,
sexuality, race, and ability are "smuggled along" (Nash, 1989; cited in Rattansi, p. 53) within these codes and grammars. Ultimately, my aim is to pose questions about the ways that particular discourses shape and constrains what is sayable or even imaginable about 'incest' and what it means to live/through it.

To think further about feminist efforts to open up discursive spaces in which women's experiences of incest can be articulated and heard, I turn to Vikki Bell's insightful work, Interrogating Incest: Feminism, Foucault, and the Law. Bell gives Tal's notion of 'mythologization' a different but equally informative spin. Although she does not specifically examine autobiographical narratives produced by women-survivors, Bell does concern herself with the ways that ['incest'] survivor speech is theorized and utilized by feminists/activists. Her use of the term 'mythologization' refers not to the standardization of narratives of 'incest' and to the recuperation of survivor speech, but rather to the production of various and competing forms of 'incest talk.' She echoes many theorists of 'incest' in her assertion that rather than being shrouded in secrecy, 'incest' (like other forms of sexual assault) is a topic of multiple and incessant conversations. In other words, she suggests that 'incest' is continually spoken of in a variety of "mythologised [sic]" ways (Kelly, 1989; cited in Bell, p. 80). Like Michel Foucault, and unlike many feminist activists who understand themselves to be dispelling 'incest myths' by telling 'the (feminist) truth' about 'incest,' Bell argues that these 'mythologized' ways of talking about 'incest' are more than simply myths:

[Instead,] they constitute knowledges [which have different origins and different targets, and which are] often institutionalised [sic] as truths with practices informed by and informing them (Bell, p. 88; emphasis added).

Bell's aim in interrogating the (re)production of knowledges of 'incest' within and by legal, medical, psychological, and social welfarist discourses is similar to my own: to historically trace the various ways in which 'incest' is articulated in language, in order "to
expose interconnections, to investigate historical tactics and mechanisms, and to use the
points of conflict to question the wider issue of making truth claims about incest" (Bell, p. 38). Bell suggests that "[t]he silence of women survivors ... should be placed within the
context of the ways in which incest has been spoken about and analysed in relation to them" (Bell, p. 80; original emphasis). I would add that not only women's 'silences' but also what
they manage to say about childhood sexual trauma must also be examined as working within,
through, and against historically specific forms of 'incest talk.'

In considering Bell's historicization of 'incest talk,' then, my intention is not to reify a
conclusive and containable history of antiquated forms of 'incest' knowledge; rather, I
consider Bell's reading of early and later twentieth-century discursive constructions of 'incest'
precisely to ask questions about how these constructions might be rehearsed -- if only to be
refuted -- within more current debates about what constitutes the 'wrong' of 'incest' (Bell, p. 13). In particular, I share Bell's interest in delineating how these discursive repertoires might
be reiterated in the "mythologised" (Kelly, 1989; cited in Bell, p. 80) ways of talking about
'incest' that women-survivors, their advocates, and feminist theorist/activists work to unsettle.

In the following sections, I spend an inordinate amount of time summarizing Bell's
text -- a work that is itself an exhaustive review of 'incest'-related research, feminist and
otherwise -- in order to provoke a more complex reading of often-cited mainstream feminist
theorizings of 'incest' that have been in circulation for the past fifteen years. Specifically, I
aim to re-frame the discursive repertoires and conditions that Bell outlines in order to

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1 Bell's work focuses specifically upon the social construction of 'incest' in Britain. To extrapolate her
conclusions to North American contexts, then, is in some ways problematic. Bell's work is useful, however, in
evoking a reading of the social construction of 'incest' as part and parcel of a nineteenth century deployment of
sexuality. As well, Linda Gordon's efforts to historicize shifts in the social construction of 'incest' in the United
States during this period suggests that Bell's analysis might be useful in considering 'incest talk' as constitutive of
'the West' more generally (Gordon, pp. 56 - 60).
complicate what she refers to as the "one message" (Bell, p. 58) offered by feminist theorists and activists: that is, the story of 'incest' as essentially a story of what men do to (their young) women. Borrowing a methodology from Ann Stoler's outstanding work, Race and the Education of Desire: Foucault's History of Sexuality and the Colonial Order of Things, I intend to re-read Bell's categories of 'incest talk' in relation to nineteenth century practices of imperialism, colonization, and racialization, paying close attention to their implication in the (re)production of notions of 'whiteness' and 'European-ness.'

'Incest' as (Sexual) Ab/normality

To begin, then, I turn my attention to Bell's analysis of the clashes, conflations, and contradictory effects of 'common sense' (including feminist) notions of 'incest' as they circulate and are contested within institutions of law. Her analysis of legal battles concerning what 'incest' is and means, as well as her simultaneous critique and defense of feminist practices of 'breaking the silence,' depend heavily upon Michel Foucault's History of Sexuality. In fact, her work is centrally concerned with questions of how Foucault's notion of the deployment of sexuality coincides with, contradicts, and informs feminist attempts to theorize and disrupt mythologized forms of 'incest talk.' Bell directly addresses feminist dismissals of Foucault's work, arguing that Foucaultian insights concerning the mutual constitution of 'normal sexualities' and 'sexual deviances' both echo and extend feminist theorizations of 'incest.' In her view, for example, Foucault argues similarly to feminist activists and theorists that normalized constructions of sexuality draw upon and inevitably reproduce constraining notions of what 'normal' sexual development must look like. She adds that (many) feminist theorist/activists would also agree with Foucault that the re-circulation of knowledges of ab/normal sexual development inevitably position women-
survivors as objects of supposedly 'therapeutic' but ultimately disciplining gazes and interventions. Summarizing her analysis of the tensions between Foucault and feminism, then, Bell writes:

Whatever one might think of the place of emancipatory politics in Foucault's thesis, his depiction of power/knowledge strategies strengthens the feminist approach to incest by shining a light on how these knowledges create personages that, held up as perverse and abnormal, can protect the 'normality' of other practices: normal masculine sexuality, the normal protective head of the household, the normal caring mother, the normal functioning family, and so on (Bell, p. 178).

As I mentioned in the previous chapter, however, Bell does not accept Foucaultian critiques that suggest that feminist knowledges of 'incest' -- specifically, knowledges formed through women-survivors' story-telling practices and the gathering of statistics (Bell, p. 174) -- actually feed into bio-political strategies (Bell, p. 183). Again, Bell argues that rather than feeding into bio-political strategies (Bell, p. 183) by increasing the 'discursive noise' around 'the family,' feminist theorist/activists\(^2\) who write and speak publicly about 'incest' direct their critique towards its normative constitution.

*The Problem(s) of 'Incest'*

Keeping in mind Bell's complex readings of Foucault's historicization of sexuality and biopower, then, I consider her analysis of the discursive production of debates in Britain (1908) and in Scotland (early 1980's) concerning the criminalization of 'incest.' Specifically, I am interested in how she uses these debates as a means of considering the "problematisation" [sic] of 'incest:' its introduction "into the play of true and false and [its constitution] as an object of thought" (Foucault, 1988; cited in Bell, p. 148). She approaches

\(^2\) Despite her recognition and theorization of multiple 'incests,' Bell continues to represent 'feminism' as a singular entity, thereby eliding the differences in perspectives among differently positioned 'feminists' and
these debates as "site[s] at which various knowledges, each presenting its 'truth' of incest, meet and map out a space for incest as a specific crime" (Bell, p. 129). 3

In a chapter entitled, "What's the problem? The construction and criminalisation [sic] of incest," Bell analyses legislative debates concerning the criminalization of 'incest' that took place in the early twentieth century in Britain and the later twentieth century in Scotland. Borrowing a methodology developed by Margaret Wetherall and Jonathan Potter for mapping 'everyday' discourse, Bell traces the "interpretive repertoires"4 that were circulated (and/or contested) during these early debates by scientists, psychologists, theologians, and other 'incest experts.' In her readings, Bell addresses five specific discursive repertoires and considers how each articulates the "wrong" of incest (Bell, p. 127 - 129) in specific ways, with specific effects.5 Within and through these repertoires, 'incest' is variously constructed:

1) as a threat to public health. Bell notes that within this discursive framework, 'incest' is readable as a problem of inbreeding: as a sexual transgression -- ostensibly limited to fathers and their 'fertile' daughters -- that ultimately leads to contaminated bloodlines, tainted gene pools, and generations of "children with weak intellects, idiots, and imbeciles" (1908 Debates; cited in Bell, p. 130);

3Bell argues that by examining these criminalization debates before the formal constitution of coherent (and hegemonic) legal constructions of 'incest' as 'criminal,' she is able to more clearly trace other popular constructions of the 'wrong' of incest (Bell, pp. 128 - 129).

4An "interpretive repertoire...at its most general can be thought of as a way of talking and of understanding something" (Bell, p. 128).

5In actuality, Bell identifies only three of the five discursive frameworks listed below as distinct repertoires: 'incest' as "a problem of health" (Bell, p. 130), "a problem of abuse" (Bell, p. 135), and "a problem of the family" (Bell, p. 141). I have subdivided the repertoire that constructs 'incest' as psychological harm and abuse in order to facilitate a more careful delineation of this repertoire and its multiple effects. Although Bell did not group together discursive frameworks producing 'incest' as rare and 'primitive' behaviour as a distinct repertoire, she does briefly refer to this argument in the discussion at the end of the chapter.
2) as psychological 'harm' suffered by individuals (Bell, p. 135). This repertoire, produced by and productive of psychological discourses, constructs 'incest' as 'wrong' in that it disrupts the "normal [sexual] development" (Bell, p. 137) of female bodies and psyches. 'Incest' becomes readable as a form of interference that causes 'normal' girl-children to slide (further) into sexual promiscuity, drug abuse, immorality, and anti-social behavior, eventually rendering them incapable of carrying out their responsibilities as "good mothers" (Bell, p. 137). The 'incest taboo' is figured within and by this repertoire as a "gateway which, once passed, takes [its victims] into a world of deviancy and illusions" (Benward & Densen-Gerber, 1997; cited in Bell, p. 137; emphasis added);

3) as being caused by specific medical or psychological deviances on the part of either the victim or her victimizer. This repertoire is a corollary to the repertoire specifying 'incest' as psychological harm;

4) as a "sexual danger" that poses a threat -- not to the 'purity' of hereditary links (as in earlier 'inbreeding' arguments), but to the viability of the institution of 'family' (Bell, pp. 141-142). Within this framing, the criminalization of 'incest' is justified as a means of containing sexual dangers in order to protect 'the family' -- and hence, 'the nation' -- from the perils of "potentially disruptive cross-sex attractions and rivalries" within families (Memorandum, 1980; cited in Bell, p. 141); and finally,

5) as a rare and "primitive behaviour" that is already "fading away," at least in areas where "civilizing influences" were assumed to be in operation (Bell, p. 145).

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6This repertoire, in some ways, gestures towards the damaging impacts that sexual victimization has upon the lives of girls and women. Rather than considering the 'harm' of 'incest' from the perspective of those who live/through it, however, this repertoire constructs 'incestuous harm' in relation to regulatory notions of (sexual) 'ab/normality.'
Again, central to Bell's concerns regarding these repertoires — and central as well to my own concerns regarding the multiple effects of 'survivor discourse' — is the notion that discourses do not simply die out. Rather than becoming 'obsolete' or completely supplanted by more 'modern' ways of talking and thinking, discursive repertoires are continually re-worked and re-mobilized in ways that inform and lend weight to current meaning-making practices. In the case of 'incest talk,' Bell considers the 'work' that various discursive repertoires accomplish at different historical moments, tracing the ways that these same repertoires are reworked, recirculated, and in fact contested by the autobiographies/testimonies of women-survivors, as well as by feminist activism and scholarship.

**Feminist Re-visionings of 'Incest Talk'**

Using Foucaultian concepts of bio-political power/knowledge networks, for example, Bell argues that the preoccupation with the perils of 'inbreeding' — on the part of early twentieth century legislators in Britain, as well as medical experts, social and charity workers of that period — can be read as an instantiation of what Foucault refers to as "biopower strategies of governance:" strategies of rule which operate through the monitoring of, and the (re)production of knowledges specific to, the health of a population or nation, as determined by a continual scrutiny of "its life and sex" (Foucault, 1981; cited in Bell, p. 134). Bell notes that inbreeding arguments construct 'incest' as an inherently heterosexual relation of violence (Bell, p. 132). As well, by dwelling on the purity of blood lines rather than the nature of familial relationships (let alone the subjective experiences of 'victims'), inbreeding arguments

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7In the 1986 debates in Scotland, this 'threat to the family' was broadened to include threats to social as well as hereditary links; this 'broadening' of notion of 'incest as familial threat led to the inclusion of references to
de-centre daughters' experiences of violation and trauma and posit "future generations" as the 
true victims of 'incest' (Bell, p. 132).

This imagining of the problem of 'incest' as a problem of 'inbreeding' has been one of the central repertoires that women-survivors and their feminist advocates attempt to write and speak against. Rosaria Champagne, in The Politics of Survivorship: Incest, Women's Literature, and Feminist Theory, suggests that the "feminist recovery movement" has contested constructions of 'incest' that privilege 'biology;' constructions that not only erase the "most common form of child molestation" -- forced oral sex -- but also render unintelligible any and all forms of abuse that fall outside the range of "reproductive possibilities" (Champagne, pp. 18 - 19). This 'movement,' which is produced by and productive of feminist self-help literature (most notably Bass and Davis's The Courage to Heal), has been reflected in definitional struggles, legal and otherwise, to "remov[e 'incest'] from the realm of the biological" (Champagne, p. 18 - 19). Such struggles are attempts to place women-survivors' subjective experiences of violation at the centre of discussions of what 'incest' is and means (Kelly, 1988; cited in McLeod & Saraga, p. 19).

Feminist activists also attempt to shift attention away from the physical 'acts' of childhood sexual violation, highlighting instead the lasting 'after-effects' that these forms of violence have on the lives of girls and women (see Champagne, p. 18). Such struggles to make room for women's complexly lived experiences of sexual traumatization have expanded definitions of 'sexual abuse' to include forcible (vaginal-penile) rape along with other offenses, such as child pornography, fondling, oral rape, sexual objectification and ridicule, sexualized talk, ritual abuse, and even kissing or holding children in ways that make

adoptive parents and children within the legislative prohibition against 'incest' (Bell, p. 142).
them feel uncomfortable (Bass & Davis, p. 21). As Kai Erikson would argue, "it is the
damage done that defines and gives shape to the initial [sexually traumatic] event, the
damage done that gives it its name" (Erikson, pp. 184 - 185; original emphasis). Bass and
Davis reiterate this point in relation to women-survivors: "[t]he severity of abuse should not
be defined in terms of male genitals. Violation is determined by your experience as a child --
your body, your feelings, your spirit" (Bass & Davis, p. 21).8

To consider the repertoire that constructs 'incest' as originating in specific medical or
psychological deviances, Bell once again draws upon Foucault's theorizing of
power/knowledge strategies. Tracing these repertoires within criminalization debates in
Scotland in the 1980's, Bell notes that these mythologized forms of knowledge constitute --
and are continually (re)constituted by -- the creation and continual surveillance of various
'abnormal personages:' 'deviant' fathers whose perverted desires arise from being
"'undersexed, oversexed, unconscious homosexuals, [or] uninhibited heterosexuals,'" and
whose deviance is further manifested in a propensity towards alcoholism and imbecility
resulting from "'atrophy of the frontal lobe'" (Nelson, 1982; cited in Bell, p. 82); collusive
"incest mothers" whose "frigidity" and general "unattractiveness" offer their husbands no
option but to turn to their daughters for sexual satisfaction, or whose maternal
"incompetence" renders them unable or unwilling to protect their children (Armstrong, 1987;
cited in Bell, p. 84); and seductive daughters who passively submit to or actively incite the

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8Despite these efforts to re-define 'incest' in ways that de-emphasize its 'biological' aspects, seemingly
antiquated ways of talking about 'incest' as inbreeding continue to reverberate and recirculate within public
discourse. As recently as 1992, for example, the Vancouver Sun published an article entitled, "Experts say
incest is dangerous, cannot be defended," to accompany its coverage of a legal challenge to the constitutionality
of the charter prohibiting incest. The article consisted primarily of comments from a noted evolutionary
biologist who offered a variety of genetic and socio-biological explications of the dangers of inbreeding
(Vancouver Sun, November 21, 1992, B1). This article also serves as a testimony to the ways that notions of
'the wrong of incest' continue to depend upon re-circulations of discourses of disability and, specifically, of
eugenics. I will further discuss this discursive dependency later on in the chapter.
sexual attentions of their (unwitting) fathers -- "degenerate daughters" who "[act] out incestuous desires which would normally be at this point repressed" (Bell, p. 85; emphasis added) and thus cause the downfall of their entire families (Ward, 1984; cited in Bell, p. 86).

Once again, women living/through 'incest' and their advocates speak and write in ways that pull apart constructions of these 'abnormal' personages. Instead of reiterating notions of 'incestuous fathers' as perverted and deviantly sexualized, for example, feminist efforts to re-imagine 'incest' focus attention on the practices that constitute categories of 'normal' masculinity and male (hetero)sexuality, outlining the implicatedness of such constructions in the continuation of 'incestuous' violences. Elizabeth Ward writes:

These Fathers are not aberrant males: they are acting within the mainstream of masculine sexual behaviour which sees women as sexual commodities and believes men have a right to use/abuse these commodities how and whenever they can (Ward, 1984; cited in Bell, p. 73). 9

As well, feminist practices call into question the normative category of "the all-seeing Mother whose biological-moral responsibility is to protect her children," insisting that such constructions focus blame upon mothers (who are deemed "either negligent or incapable of [their] 'duty'") and thus absolve abusive fathers of responsibility (Bell, p. 84, 138). 10

Again, feminist re-workings of these mythologized knowledges tend to counter constructions of 'incest' as rare or abnormal, positing instead the ubiquitous normality of 'incest' as a gendered form of violence that is produced by and productive of normative gendered subjectivities (Bell, p. 176).

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9Herman and Hirschman suggest that father-daughter 'incest' is particularly socially acceptable because in these forms of violence, "no other man's property is offended" (summarized in Bell, p. 78). The meanings attached to this straightforward notion of a girl-child as 'property of the Father' are further complicated, however, when histories of 'incestuous' abuse were read along with and against histories of slavery and colonization.

10In a chapter entitled "Mother's Fault," Louise Armstrong devotes a great deal of attention to dispelling constructions of mothers of 'incest survivors' as "'inadequate'... 'passive,' 'cowardly,' 'domineering,' and 'manipulative'" (Armstrong; cited in Tal, p. 165).
Feminist re-imaginings of 'incest' -- based, again, to a large extent upon theorized engagements with narratives that women tell and write of their re-membered experiences of sexual traumatization -- also disrupt discursive repertoires that position 'incested' girl-children and women as objects of 'blame:' as "'Lolita[s]'" (Nelson, 1987; cited in Kitzinger, p. 79) or "'nymphetamine[s]'" (Rush, 1980; cited in Kitzinger, p. 79) who actively participate in and perhaps even incite their own violation.\footnote{One of the means by which feminists contest constructions of 'incested' daughters as 'seductive' is through a critique and re-interpretation of Freud's retraction of seduction theory and his substitution of incestuous fantasies for actual sexual contact in his etiology of female hysteria (Bell, p. 8).} By attempting to translate (continually re-lived) pain and terror, women who write and speak publicly about their experiences of 'incest' pull apart discourses that either deny or pathologize the damaging re-percussions of sexual violation. These efforts to write and speak about sexual violation have contributed to an unsettling of medico-psychological discourses that define 'trauma' as "infrequent, unusual, or outside of a mythical human [read: unmarked male] norm of experience" (Brown, p. 111).

At the same time, and (partly) in response to feminist-inspired arguments about the prevalence of 'incest' as a traumatic event in the lives of girls and women, such definitions of trauma as 'outside the norm' reframe 'incest' as statistically 'normal' and therefore 'non-traumatic.' Such definitions also "create a social discourse on 'normal' life that then imputes psychopathology to the everyday lives of those who cannot protect themselves from ...high base-rate events [such as 'incest'] and who respond to these events with evidence of psychic pain" (Brown, p. 103).

By telling and theorizing autobiographical narratives of 'incest,' then, women-survivors and their advocates poke holes in (previously) dominant views that consider sexual contact between children and (male) family members as 'non-traumatic' or 'harmless'
(McLeod & Saraga, pp. 24 - 26). In a contradictory fashion, however, these same efforts to highlight the devastating psychic and emotional impacts of 'incest' are re-worked within and by psychological and sociological discursive frameworks to (re)position 'incested' girl-children and women as (inherently) 'damaged.' Given these complicated effects, then, women who write and speak of their experiences of living/through 'incest' must walk a very precarious line: while they attempt to translate the specific 'damage done' to them through 'incestuous' violences, and while they simultaneously gesture towards the normality of 'incest' as a trauma of the everyday, they must also fight off the ways that they are continually re-marked upon as 'damaged' and 'abnormal.'

Bell notes as well that sociological discursive frameworks render the 'problem' of 'incest' as an effect -- or, in fact, a cause -- of "disorganized families" (Bell, p. 87; emphasis added). According to this framework, such incest-prone families require close state-sponsored surveillance and therapeutic re-orderings in order to protect their 'vulnerable' members from the ravages of 'incest.' Once again, feminist activists and theorists attempt to call these discursive constructions into question, focusing their critiques upon normative (ie. heterosexual, assumedly white and middle class) constructions of 'the family.' Specifically, these critiques re-position 'the family' as a male-dominated system of alliance that is both (re)produced through and (re)productive of the sexual violation of girl-children

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12 Narratives that testify to the reverberating impacts of 'incest' also pose a challenge to what McLeod and Saraga characterized as the 'Libertarian' view: the view that the 'harm' of 'incest' is an effect of both family 'intervention' and repressive social constructions of childhood sexuality (McLeod and Saraga, pp. 24 -26). Richard Wexler characterizes this anti-intervention perspective, arguing that "The Real Victims of the War Against Child Abuse" are those "innocent families [that] are disrupted...and [the] thousands of children [who] are needlessly torn away from their parents and thrown into foster care -- even as children in real danger are ignored" (Wexler, book cover).

13McLeod and Saraga note that the predominance of this form of 'incest talk' is evinced by the establishment and wide-spread circulation of family dysfunction theory within both lay and professional discourses pertaining to 'incest' (McLeod & Saraga, p. 17).
by their Fathers (Herman with Hirschman, 1981, and Ward, 1984; cited in Bell, p. 111). In fact, many feminist theorists whose analyses of gender are informed by analyses of (hetero)sexuality see the sexual assault and traumatization of girl-children as a primary means of enforcing normative constructions of both femininity and compulsory heterosexuality: constructions that are essential for the (re)production of 'the family' and its requisite relations of male domination (see Rush, 1974; Herman with Hirschman, 1981; summarized in Bell, pp. 67 - 69). Susan Strega, in "Breaking the Ties that Bind: Healing as a Political Process," writes:

Father-daughter rape is a basic building block of patriarchy. It teaches us to be silent, to not react to the outrageous violence of the patriarchy, to sacrifice ourselves rather than break this silence. It teaches us heterosexuality, and an understanding and acceptance of sex as dominance and submission (Strega, p. 5).

Ward, although appearing initially to reiterate discursive repertoires that construct 'the incest taboo' as essential to the viability of 'the family,' re-mobilizes these repertoires in a different way in order to highlight gender oppression. From her perspective, it is 'incest' between mothers and their children that is taboo because of its potential to disrupt male-dominated systems of alliance. The raping of daughters by their fathers, in her view, is not disruptive of these systems of alliance and lines of power, and thus poses no 'threat' to "the 'male-dominated family'"(Ward, 1984; cited in Bell, pp. 110 -112).

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14Ward uses the term 'Father' to represent not only biological fathers, but "the role of [a male] adult who would generally be expected to be caring and responsible towards the child" (Bell, p. 192). Essentialized notions of the 'power and authority of the Father' must be complicated, of course, to take into account the varying degrees of power that men are able to conjure, based upon their location with regards to categories of race, sexuality, class and disability.
Incest as a Gender Story

It appears, then, that feminist theorizings of 'incest,' which both inform and are informed by women's practices of telling and writing 'incest,' have been shaped largely in relation to various mythologized notions of 'incest.' In order to contest knowledges that construct 'incest' as rare, as both an effect and a cause of psychological or medical deviance, or as an unfortunate consequence or precipitant of 'familial disorganization' -- and in order to disrupt the regulatory and re-violating effects that such 'knowledges' have upon the lives of women living/through 'incest' -- mainstream feminist theorists and activists construct variations of an alternative version of "what incest is really 'about'' (Bell, p. 88). The 'story' that these theorists have generally told is one that constructs 'incest' as being primarily about gender oppression.15 This new feminist story of 'incest' attempts to render explicit the gendered specificity of who (usually) violates whom. It opposes individualizing and pathologizing discursive repertoires that figure 'incest' as having to do with the sexual 'damage' that disturbed individuals -- or, more precisely, improperly gendered and sexualized family members -- do to other 'innocent' individuals.16 Instead, this new gender story re-configures 'incest' as an instantiation of the ways that men dominate (their young) women through violence. Within this feminist re-framing, then, 'incestuous violences' converge with sexual assault, battery, and harassment to "convey the one message: 'you are merely women'"(Bell, p. 58; emphasis added).17

15McLeod and Saraga demonstrate this 'imagining' of 'incest' as a gender story: "The first step in establishing a theory [about why 'incest' and child sexual abuse occur] is, then, a recognition of gender as a centrally important feature: the gender of the perpetrator, rather than the victim" (McLeod & Saraga, p. 23).

16My thanks to Sherene Razack for clarifying how these individualizing discourses operate, particularly in the context of law, and for offering this particular phrasing (S. Razack, personal conversation, April, 1997).

17It is important to note, as Bell herself does, that the inclusion of 'incest' into the category of 'male violences against women' is not a taken-for-granted assumption within all ('unmarked') feminist theorizing. For
One form of 'incest talk' that cannot be fully accounted for within this framing of 'incest' as a form of gender oppression -- and one that Bell addresses only cursorily, deeming it unworthy of analysis as a distinct discursive repertoire -- is the notion of 'incest' as a sign of primitivism. Bell does allude to this form of 'incest talk' in a discussion section at the end of the chapter, however, where she outlines and then dismisses seemingly antiquated arguments made against the criminalization of 'incest' that circulated in early twentieth century legislative debates in Britain: arguments that constructed 'incest' as a rare and geographically contained cultural practice (Bell, p. 81).

In her passing commentary on references to 'primitivism' within criminalization debates, Bell gestures towards some of the contradictory ways that 'incest' figured in the popular imagination of turn-of-the-century Britain. On the one hand, 'incest' was considered a non-existent and effectively tabooed behaviour, or at the very least, a transient phenomenon that was fading fast into obscurity. On the other hand, 'incestuous behaviour' was also being sought out with new vigor, but only in certain locations. Bell notes that medical personnel, social reformers, charity workers, and state housing commissions of this period busied themselves by chasing down and rooting out 'incestuous relations' within the families that -- oddly enough -- were positioned most directly under their careful gazes: that

example, some feminist theorists express the concern that this categorization of the sexual traumatization of girl-children as 'violence' might elide the (implicitly violent) tactics of power that a man might draw upon in violating his daughter: tactics such as threatening her or those she loves with violence, "telling her that it is an education for later life, that it is normal, that he loves her, she is special, promising and giving gifts, using her confusion to make her feel like the one at fault" (Herman with Hirschman, 1981; and Ward, 1984; cited in Bell, p. 59).

One of the few references to 'primitivism' in Bell's discussion of discursive repertoires comes in relation to one legislator's argument against criminalizing 'incest': "There was no suggestion that this offence was on the increase; indeed, it was far less known now than it was twenty or thirty years ago in parts of England... Was there the slightest reason to doubt that the spread of education and of civilising influences was doing away with this evil?" (Rawlinson, 1908; cited in Bell, p. 145; emphasis added).
is, families from isolated rural communities and those living in 'over-crowded,' working class homes in large urban centres (Bell, pp. 145 - 146).

Rather than exploring the ramifications of such contradictions, Bell concludes her discussion by remarking that by the mid-1980's, attempts within Scottish legislative debates to place geographical boundaries around 'incestuous abuses' were "explicitly rejected" (Bell, p. 146). She implies that as a result of feminist theoretical and political action aimed at raising public awareness of 'incestuous abuse,' and specifically due to efforts to re-imagine 'incest' as criminal 'abuse,' the once-dominant construction of 'incest' as a 'universal taboo' no longer held sway within legislative debates. Rather, it had been flipped on its head, with new universalizing discourses taking precedence in its stead. These feminist-informed discourses constructed 'incest' as a universal practice -- that is, as a gendered form of violence that is not containable within or by sexual, cultural, national, educational, and class boundaries.

**The Differentiating Taboo**

In an earlier chapter of her text, Bell does in fact reference how 'incest' came to be understood, on the one hand, as a primitive behaviour rapidly fading into obscurity, and, on the other, as an act that must be hunted down and forcibly eradicated. She does so in relation to her reading of Foucault's theorization of the 'incest taboo.' Foucault himself locates 'incest,' which he argues became identified as a social problem near the end of the nineteenth century (Foucault, 1988; cited in Bell, p. 98), as the "indispensable pivot" (Foucault, p. 109) between two deployments of power. According to Foucault, the deployment of alliance -- "a

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19Linda Gordon's efforts to historicize shifts in 'incest discourse' from the late nineteenth century to middle twentieth century in the United States indicates that this 'geographical' construction of 'incest' also held currency outside of Europe. Among members of child-saving agencies in Boston in the 1880's, for example, 'incest' was "believed to occur exclusively among the Catholic immigrant poor, whom they perceived as 'inferior stock,' crowded 'like animals' into urban ghettos" (Gordon, p. 56).
system of marriage, of fixation and development of kinship ties, of transmission of names and possessions" (Foucault, p. 106) -- began to lose importance at end of eighteenth century. At that time, it became 'superimposed' with a deployment of sexuality, which extended a new form of power and control by "proliferating, innovating, annexing, creating, and penetrating bodies" (Foucault, p. 107). This new deployment of sexuality superimposes rather than supplants the system of marriage and blood alliances, and 'the family' figures as the "site of convergence" between these two systems: "not as a structure of alliance that restrains sexuality, as the conventional account would have it, but that which provides its most crucial support" (Stoler, p. 38; emphasis added).

Given his view that 'the family' provides an anchor for new and old systems of power, then, Foucault argues that 'incest' -- and in particular the Western creation of and preoccupation with a "transcultural theory of the 'incest taboo"' (Foucault, pp. 109 - 110) -- reflects and reifies the tensions between these two deployments:

[1]incest...is being constantly solicited and refused; it is an object of obsession and attraction, a dreadful secret and an indispensable pivot. It is manifested as a thing that is strictly forbidden in the family insofar as the latter functions as a deployment of alliance; but it is also a thing that is continuously demanded in order for the family to be a hotbed of constant sexual excitement (Foucault, p. 109; emphasis added).

But this 'universal taboo' accomplishes more, according to Freud, than simply instantiating a vacillating point of tension between these two systems of power. The establishment of this taboo, "or at least the manner in which [it] was applied and the rigor with which it was imposed," also constituted a means of differentiating bourgeois sexualities

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20 Foucault attributes this diminishing importance of the deployment of alliance to (vague) "economic process and political structures [that] could no longer rely on it as an adequate instrument or sufficient support" (Foucault, p. 106). Stoler, on the other hand, reads such a shift in relation to the rise of liberalism, as well as a decline in absolutism and monarchy -- social conditions of modernity which combine to demand new ways of differentiating among (only apparently) 'equal' human beings. Stoler draws upon this historicization of the fading importance of deployments of alliance as evidence for her argument that the superimposition of the deployment of sexuality historically coincides with the emergence of racism (Stoler, p. 37).
from 'other' classed sexualities (Foucault, p. 128). Foucault notes that as notions of 'sexuality' became adopted to such an extent as to no longer prove useful in distinguishing 'bourgeois' subjects from subjects of lower class background, Freud's theory of psychoanalysis rose to the fore as a means of shoring up threatened boundaries.

Psychoanalysis, according to Foucault, accomplished this boundary reinforcement by positing class differences with regards to levels of sexual repression -- and specifically, with regards to differences in the repression of 'incestuous' impulses. Although psychoanalysis constructed these desires as common to all 'sexualities,' it also framed such impulses as posing the greatest danger to bourgeois sexualities and subjects, precisely because of the fury with which bourgeois subjects (supposedly) repressed them (Foucault, pp. 128 - 130).

According to Foucault, then, the 'talking cure' appears to be bound up historically with the work of class differentiation:

> For the bourgeoisie, psychoanalysis was the answer, enabling liberation from this repression: within psychoanalysis individuals were encouraged to express their incestuous desires. At the same time, there was a concern for the practice of incest among working class people; *their sexual desires were not repressed but acted upon* (Foucault summarized in Bell, p. 100; emphasis added).

So, as psychoanalytic theory and practice were being developed as means of unearthing deeply and dangerously repressed incestuous longings within bourgeois psyches, disciplinary mechanisms of surveillance and policing were being mobilized as means of tracking down and eradicating 'incest' as a conduct among working class families and other so-called 'primitive' populations (Bell, pp. 99 - 100). Such mechanisms included the withdrawal of "'endangered' minors" from "families that were suspected -- through lack of space, dubious proximity, a history of debauchery, antisocial 'primitiveness,' or degenerescence -- of practicing incest" (Foucault, p. 129). By tracing the implication of
constructions of 'incest' in the (re)production of specifically classed sexualities and
subjectivities, then, Foucault complicates feminist re-visionings of 'incest' as a story of
gender (and sexual) domination. But even Foucault does not account for the routinized
discursive connections between 'incest' and 'primitivism.'

To further consider these connections, I turn to a methodology developed by Ann
Stoler in Race and the Education of Desire. Specifically, I use Stoler's work as a
springboard to raise questions about the grammars and repertoires that undergird and cross-cut
mythologized forms of 'incest talk,' including those forms of talk that are taken up and re-worked within feminist theorizings of 'incest.'

Sexual Ab/normality Within an Imperial Frame

Part of Stoler's immense project is to recast Foucault's chronologies of sexuality
within an imperial frame. She does so in an effort to track how the production of
"distinctive" nineteenth-century bourgeois sexualities and subjectivities depended upon a
"politics and language of race" (Stoler, p. 5). Referring to the four objects of knowledge that
Foucault describes as "targets and anchorage points" for the proliferation and deployment of
sexual knowledges and power networks -- that is, "the hysterical woman, the masturbating
child, the Malthusian couple, and the perverse adult"(Foucault, 1981, p. 105), Stoler
provokingly asks:

Did any of these figures exist as objects of knowledge and discourse in the nineteenth
century without a racially erotic counterpoint, without reference to the libidinal
energies of the savage, the primitive, the colonized -- reference points of difference,
critique, and desire? (Stoler, pp. 6 - 7; emphasis added).

Drawing upon the tradition within post-colonial studies of tracing how Western
subjectivities are dependent upon and produced through practices of imagining "externalized
Others" (Stoler, p. 5), Stoler traces the racialized (and racializing) "counterpoints" for "healthy, vigorous, bourgeois bod[ies]" (Stoler, p. 7). She then ties the (re)production of these referential bodies to discursive practices constitutive of empire. In this way, Stoler demonstrates how articulations of bourgeois sexualities depend upon a racial grammar (Stoler, p. 12): a racial code that serves to distinguish "between normality and abnormality, between bourgeois respectability and sexual deviance" (Mosse, 1985; cited in Stoler, p. 34).

Such (sexually) racialized codes, Stoler argues, were useful during the period of empire -- for more than merely differentiating bourgeois subjectivities and sexualities from lower class and aristocratic subjectivities and sexualities. These same codes were 'borrowed' and mobilized whenever there was a need to draw lines to separate those capable of ruling from those who were destined to be ruled, whether to shore up class differences at the heart of the European metropole or as a means of consolidating European rule in distant colonies.

Stoler notes that these codes were particularly useful when the lines of distinction threatened to become too blurry to be effective. She notes that:

> the distinctions defining bourgeois sexuality were played out against not only the bodies of an immoral European working class and native Other, but against those of destitute whites in the colonies and in dubious contrast to an ambiguous population of mixed-blood origin (Stoler, p. 100).

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21 In a related way, David Goldberg refers to a 'grammar' that underlies, forms relations among, and renders 'intelligible' more overt forms of racist expression. This 'grammar,' according to Goldberg, is comprised of a set of "preconceptual elements" including "classification, order, value, and hierarchy; differentiation and identity, discrimination and identification; exclusion, domination, subjection, and subjugation;" as well as entitlement and restriction." (Goldberg, pp. 46 - 49). Although Stoler tracks the mobilization of most of these elements, her work is centrally concerned with the racializing effects of differentiation and identity.

22 It is important to note -- as Sander Gilman refers to in his consideration of the ways that Jews were associated with prostitutes in the nineteenth century European imagination -- that it is the notion of disease that "links the racial with the sexual" (Gilman, pp. 163 - 164). Thus, it would appear that both racial and sexual grammars depend upon another grammar: that is, a grammar of dis/ability that differentiates subjects with 'healthy' (and hence 'valuable') bodies and minds from those whose bodies and minds are sickly, mal-formed, feeble, impotent, useless, and ultimately, expendable.
Thus, Stoler argues that discourses of sexuality, dependent as they were/are upon this racial code, "do more than define the distinctions of the bourgeois self; cited in identifying marginal members of the body politic, they have mapped the moral parameters of European nations" (Stoler, p. 7).

As a means of tracing the ways that discourses of sexuality borrow from and reiterate racializing and imperialist discourses, then, Stoler considers the health manuals and housekeeping guides that circulated among nineteenth century Dutch colonial homes in the Indies. She traces the ways that notions of "character," "good breeding," and "proper rearing" are produced as implicitly gendered and raced categories within and by discourses of child sexuality, parenting, and hygiene. Drawing from and extending Foucault's theorizing of bio-political strategies of rule that depend upon the (re)production of self-monitoring subjects, Stoler argues that notions of proper conduct, "self-control," and "self-discipline" -- notions that were re-circulated within and by these manuals -- constituted the "defining features of bourgeois selves in the colonies" (Stoler, p. 8).

Stoler goes on to argue that "it was in the domestic domain, not in the public sphere, where essential dispositions of manliness, bourgeois morality, and racial attribute could be dangerously undone or securely made" (Stoler, p. 108; emphasis added). Thus, an extraordinary amount of anxiety was written into domestic manuals concerning (racialized) sexual transgressions within the confines of bourgeois colonial homes. Such manuals delineate a myriad of 'tabooed' forms of cross-racial sexual contact, including 'unsupervised' and potentially contaminating contact between European children and their native nursemaids. As such, these manuals serve as evidence to Stoler's conclusion: that 'being bourgeois' was inextricably "tied to notions of being 'European' and being 'white,' and [that]
sexual prescriptions [for conduct, particularly within the confines of bourgeois homes,] served to secure and delineate the authentic, first-class citizens of the nation state" (Stoler, p. 11). Thus, Stoler concludes that the 'invention' and deployment of (bourgeois) sexuality not only produced (male) bourgeois subjectivities as *knowably separate* from both lower class and debased 'aristocratic' subjectivities, as Foucault and Bell would suggest; it also delineated the boundaries constitutive of categories of 'whiteness' and 'Europeanness,' and ultimately determined which bodies were deemed 'fit to rule.'

*Sliding From Grace*

Central to Foucault's thesis concerning the production and deployment of ab/normal sexualities, and central as well to Stoler's re-reading of that thesis, is the notion of *degeneracy*. Foucault suggests that new technologies of sex operating during the second half of the nineteenth century were best articulated in the "theory of 'degenerescence'": a pseudo-scientific theory that "explained how a heredity that was burdened with maladies...ended by producing a sexual pervert...[and in turn,] how a sexual perversion resulted in a depletion in one's line of descent" (Foucault, p. 118). According to Foucault, this "perversion-heredity-degenerescence" system -- a system that circulated (and continues to re-circulate) widely within sites of psychiatry, law, and social welfare -- played a fundamental role in discursively securing 'bourgeois difference.' At the same time, it also undergirded practices for regulating populations of "dangerous or endangered children" (Foucault, p. 119).

Stoler also concerns herself with notions of degeneracy, but she does so from another perspective. She notes the all-absorbing preoccupation with threats of "white

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23Again, given the way that racial, sexual, and class grammars interlock with grammars of dis/ability, it is perhaps more precise to say that the deployment of sexuality is, ultimately, implicated in practices of determining
degenerescence" among colonials, as evinced in the multitude of health manuals and housekeeping guides that promise ill-health, ruin, and even death to those whose 'moral' conduct is not (sexually) up to snuff (Stoler, p. 102). She notes as well the pervasive anxiety around 'miscegenation' (Stoler, pp. 45 - 46) and the imagined proliferation of "fictive [i.e. 'white-but-not-quite'] Europeans" (Stoler, p. 120 - 121). Rather than emphasizing, as Foucault might (Foucault, p. 123), the ways that notions of degeneracy bolster and 'affirm' bourgeois subjectivity, Stoler draws upon the work of Daniel Pick to consider the preoccupation with the perils of degeneracy as an expression of "social anxiety," 'internal disorder,' and political fear" (Pick, 1989; cited in Stoler, p. 32). The theory of degenerescence, according to Stoler's reading, constitutes both a reflection of and a means of negotiating the pervasive anxiety among 'European' colonists concerning the threat of slipping from (European) 'respectability.' Considering how discourses of degeneracy seemed to target in particular those who were dubiously positioned as poor white colonials and racially-mixed people, Stoler suggests:

Degeneracy characterized those who were seen to veer off bourgeois course in their choice of language, domestic arrangement, and cultural affiliation. Notions of degeneracy registered dissension among Europeans and basic uncertainties about who would be granted that privileged status (Stoler, p. 32; emphasis added).

Stoler thus re-configures Foucault's notions of 'degeneracy' on a racially- and sexually-charged colonial field, depicting it as a "mobile discourse of empire that designated eligibility for citizenship, class membership, and gendered assignments to race" (Stoler, p. 32).

which bodies are 'fit' to "inhabit the world" (Hubbard, p. 187) and which bodies are not.

24Stoler cites the establishment of 'kindergarten' in the Dutch Indies as a telling example of how a preoccupation with 'white degenerescence' and racial mixing was reflected in efforts to separate mixed-race children from the influence of their native mothers, as well as to survey and interrupt the moral influence of native nursemams and nannies upon European-born children (Stoler, p. 123).
It is important to note here that the concept of degeneracy conjured notions of a 'slide' in a particular direction: it was a slide from respectability into depravity, a fall from an initially graced position, performed only by bodies that were deemed to have the potential to perform themselves 'respectably' in the first place. In other words, notions of degeneracy specifically articulate the slide performed by bodies whose grasp of shiny, middle class categories of whiteness was tenuous at best. The linchpin of this slide was individual (sexual mis)conduct and (lack of) self-control, particularly in the domestic realm. Notions of degeneracy refer specifically, then, to the 'slipping' of (potential) European subjects into questionable states of 'fictive European-ness,' caused by their lack of household organization\textsuperscript{25} or their propensity for sexually stepping out of line.

At the same time, notions of what constituted 'proper conduct,' and particularly what constituted proper sexual conduct, were by no means straightforward or stable. Stoler notes, for example, that while nineteenth century European men might marry Asian women and still maintain their 'respectable' status as 'Europeans,' European women who made parallel conjugal choices were understood as sliding irretrievably into 'nativeness' (Stoler, p. 115) -- a slide that caused them to be "not only stripped of the European community's protection of their womanhood, but disavowed as good mothers and as true Europeans" (Stoler, p. 183). And, of course, 'proper conduct' could make a difference only for those whose "assignments to racialized class and gender categories" (Stoler, p. 115) allowed them some kind of grip on 'respectability' to begin with. In other words, bodies that were simultaneously 'marked' as sexually-, racially-, and class-inferior were always already deemed 'promiscuous' and 'sexually deviant,' regardless as to how 'virtuously' they might behave.

\textsuperscript{25}A corollary to this notion that 'true European-ness' was made (or undone) through household (dis)organization is the belief that racially hybrid people or people of lower and working class background might be
'Incest' as a Mark of Degeneracy

Given Stoler's emphasis upon the deployment of sexuality and its constitutive preoccupation with sexual (mis)conduct within bourgeois (colonial) homes, it seems a glaring oversight that she makes only fleeting reference to 'incest.' As a 'tabooed relation,' 'incest' was practically synonymous with sexual degeneracy in the nineteenth century European imagination. It figured during the period of empire as a 'universal' prohibition serving as a key to the "development of civilization" (Gordon, p. 60) and as the "threshold of all culture" (Foucault, p. 109). 'Incest' inspired the production of countless volumes of anthropological studies and at the same time served as "the principle of [psychoanalytic theory's] formation and the key to its intelligibility" (Foucault, p. 113). Foucault himself refers to 'incest' as an "indispensable pivot" between the deployment of alliance and the superimposing deployment of sexuality.

Unfortunately, it is beyond the scope of this study to trace historical shifts in how 'incest' is constructed within and by nineteenth century anthropological studies, or to map their re-working within and through psychoanalytic theory. Both of these lines of inquiry would further address questions of whether and how notions of 'incest' as a form of sexual (mis)conduct might have differentiated colonizers from the colonized. Such studies might also clarify if and how the construction of 'incest' as a 'taboo' might have been constituted (first) in the colonies and then imported back to) the metropole (based on Stoler, p. 15).

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26 Foucault writes: "By devoting so much effort to an endless reworking of the transcultural theory of the incest taboo, anthropology has proved worthy of the whole modern deployment of sexuality and the theoretical discourses it generates" (Foucault, pp. 109 - 110).

27 Stoler alludes to "the desires of pederast pedagogues and of perverse parents for children" as one of the pervasive 'sexual dangers' facing bourgeois children. She also mentions Foucault's description of the "perpetual
Rather than pursuing these questions directly, however, I propose here to consider the epistemic and political possibilities that are opened up by efforts to imaginatively (re)situate 'incest' — as a discursive as well as a social practice — within an imperial landscape. What might be thinkable about 'incest,' for example, if incitements and stimulations to scrutinize, define, and monitor 'incest' were re-read as gendering, race-ing, classing, and dis/able-ing deployments of sexuality? What knowledges of 'incest' might be produced by re-visioning the strategies of defining this 'universal taboo' — strategies of monitoring its adherence and mapping its transgression — as central technologies for constituting the borders around 'respectable' European-ness? And how might such knowledges dis/inform current feminist political practices for unsettling 'incestuous' violences?

If one accepts Stoler's argument that the very ability of nineteenth century bodies to establish themselves as 'true' and 'respectable' Europeans (Stoler, p. 8) was contingent upon their proper conduct, (sexual) self-control, and self-discipline within domestic spaces, then the possibility of 'incestuous activity' within these spaces can be read as an ever-present threat of sexual 'contamination' within bourgeois homes. Such a contamination would have the potential to call into question the markers of respectability (ie. whiteness, middle class income, heterosexual marriage, fit-mindedness) and thus to undo a tenuous system of power-infused boundaries. It makes sense, then, that the very possibility of such a blurring and collapsing of boundaries might fire furious efforts to track down and eradicate 'incestuous relations' among those families of 'borderline' European status: those 'internal enemies' of

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incitement to incest in the bourgeois family'' in a footnote concerning parental surveillance and child masturbation. Outside of these elusive references, however, Stoler does not address 'incest' (Stoler, p. 145).
bourgeois orders (Stoler, p. 10) who threaten to take 'respectable' (white) families with them in their slide into degenerative states of 'disorganization' (Bell, p. 138).28

It also follows that a re-drawing of the lines constituting 'properly repressed' desire might be necessary to take account for and contain the threat as well as the fascination that 'incest' represents within bourgeois homes and minds. Once again, notions of repression and the 'universal taboo' against 'incest' prove useful in shoring up beleaguered boundaries. For while even the most civilized middle class (white) men with altogether 'respectable' (hetero)sexual inclinations and 'normal' capacities for moral and intellectual reasoning might harbour deeply repressed 'incestuous' fantasies, only 'barbaric savages,' 'primitives' existing outside of 'culture,' 'deviants,' and 'degenerates' would actually act on such illicit desires.29

Re-viewing Mythologized Knowledges of 'Incest'

Returning to the forms of 'incest talk' that Bell identifies within late nineteenth and early- to middle- twentieth century legislative debates, it is worthy of note that each of these knowledges construct 'the wrong of incest' in a language of biological or cultural 'slippage.'

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28 The intensity of this scrutinizing of 'borderline' European homes for signs of 'incest' accounts for some of the ways that 'incest' represents a source of fascination in both nineteenth and twentieth century bourgeois imaginations. Considering a similar scrutinizing of prostitutes, Razack notes that "the zeal for reform...[was] 'often accompanied by a prolonged, fascinated gaze'...In seeking to mark off the high from the low, bourgeois subjects oscillated between the twin poles of repugnance and desire, an ambivalence that was constitutive of bourgeois subjectivity" (Stallybrass and White, 1986; summarized in Razack, forthcoming, p. 17).

29 While many feminist theorists have rightly critiqued Freud's retraction of seduction theory, arguing that his substitution of 'incestuous' fantasies for actual sexual contact in his etiology of female hysteria (Bell, p. 85) absolves abusive Fathers of accountability, it must also be acknowledged that such a retraction did not absolve all intrafamilial caregivers from responsibility. In fact, only white, middle class, heterosexual, male caregivers were released from blame. Jeffrey Masson argues:

In the end, Freud embraced a common trope of nineteenth-century bourgeois society, a folk theory of seduction and adult pathology that attributed the few 'real' abuses of children, not to middle-class [fathers], but to the promptings and imaginings of the desiring child on the one hand and to the immorality of [racialized, classed, and gendered] servants on the other" (Masson, 1984; summarized in Stoler, p. 138).
When viewed through a lens of respectability and degeneracy, these knowledges appear as well to be tied in with the project of empire.

Consider, for example, the discursive repertoire that frames 'incest' as a problem of health, and specifically as a problem of 'inbreeding.' According to Foucault's conception of bio-power, the very notions of (sexual) 'normalcy' and 'health' are part and parcel of strategies for demarcating 'respectable' (white, hetero, middle class, able-bodied, male) subjectivities and sexualities. If, as Stoler suggests, this re-production of respectable bodies and sexualities is implicated in the consolidation of European rule, then, 'incestuous inbreeding' puts at risk far more that simply the health of individual offspring and family lineages. Figured in this way, 'incest' also represents a threat the purity of the (white) race, the stability of the (European) nation, and even the viability of (human) species.

Figurations of 'incest' as dangerous inbreeding help to differentiate 'healthy' bodies, families, races, and nations from what they are not: 'incestuous' nations, primitive and licentious races, degenerate families, and 'sickly' and grotesque minds and bodies. At the same time, this repertoire displaces the violence done to (girl-)children and positions as the true 'victims of incest' those future generations of (male) offspring -- degenerate children whose impaired genetics hamper their 'ability' to reason, to control their sexual impulses, and

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30Notions of 'in-breeding' are dependent upon constructions of "breeding populations" and "gene pools," both of which are referred to by Goldberg as "masks" for notions of racist and racializing forms of expression (Goldberg, p. 65).

31Stoler echoes George Mosse, arguing that:

the distinction between normality and abnormality, between bourgeois respectability and sexual deviance, and between moral degeneracy and eugenic cleansing were the elements of a discourse that made unconventional sex a national threat and thus put a premium on managed sexuality for the health of the state" (Mosse, 1985; summarized in Stoler, p. 34).
thus to secure their 'whiteness,' to establish their 'respectability,' and to claim their 'rights' as 'full human beings' and their membership in the ruling elite.  

Discursive constructions of 'incest' as a rare and geographically contained phenomena are also clearly implicated in colonial practices of differentiating civilized subjects from more primitive others. This repertoire locates 'incest' both spatially and temporally, figuring it as a problem fixed firmly in the primitive past of human development and confined to anachronistic spaces. According to the logic of this repertoire, urban working class families - that is, those families that were positioned by this discursive economy as being 'most susceptible' to the 'sexual dangers' posed by 'incest' (Bell, p. 146) -- were deemed at risk of nothing less than reverting to a(n even more) primitive state. Here, 'incest' represents a form of degeneracy that lurks in those few and far away spaces (and one might add bodies) where 'civilizing influences' still wage war against more primitive tendencies. Similarly, references to 'incest' as "an offense not only against morality and decency but against every instinct of human nature" (1908 debate; cited in Bell, p. 128; emphasis added) conjure 'incest' as a contravention of the boundary separating human beings from those whose natures are 'less-than-human.' In the context of modernity in which all human beings were to be considered 'equal,' then, 'incest' figured as an 'offense against human nature' that differentiated ostensibly 'equal' human beings from monstrously inferior 'sub-humans.'

Even within more modern forms of 'incest talk' that dismiss altogether ideas of tainted blood and botched gene pools, the 'incest prohibition' often continues to be imagined as a boundary, or more precisely, as a gateway. When re-viewed within a colonial frame, this 'gateway' can be read as a boundary marking the limits of 'respectability' and true 'European-

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32 Attempts to track these intersecting discursive practices might also clarify how "social purity" (i.e. racist eugenics) campaigners came to be heavily invested in efforts to establish 'the problem of incest' as part of the social
ness.' To 'slip' across this threshold -- even if one is forcibly dragged across it -- is to be ushered into a degenerate 'world of deviancy and illusions.' Within discursive repertoires that construct 'incest' as a form of 'psychological harm,' this 'atavistic slide' is not an effect of contaminated bloodlines and tainted gene pools so much as the result of cultural forms of degeneration. Incest,' as it is figured within and by this repertoire, continues to constitute a threat to the viability of 'future generations,' the stability of European nations, even the purity of the 'race' -- and that threat continues to be (imagined as) lodged within the 'unfit' minds and bodies of 'incested' girls and women. Rather than being a problem of menacing biologies, however, 'incest' is considered dangerous in that it results in 'psychologically damaged' mothers. These mothers, in turn, re-produce generations of children who, over generations of neglect, become 'feebleminded' and are no longer able to conduct themselves properly. Incest' as a problem of 'psychological harm,' then, re-configures and re-circulates earlier notions of 'incest' as an illicit sexual relation that eventually produces dis-respectable children who are incapable of rule.

Constructions of 'incestuous' family members as effects of medical or psychological anomalies -- depictions of abusive fathers as irrational, 'feeble-minded,' imbecilic, or perverse, for example -- are clearly steeped in a racially- and sexually-inflected languages of degeneracy that constitute categories of both class and dis/ability. These constructions, as agenda in turn-of-the-century Britain (Bell, p. 139).

33 This shift parallels what Razack refers to as the "culturalization of racism": the notion that modern forms of overt racism, "which [rest] on the notion of biologically based inferiority, [coexist] with a more covert practice of domination encoded in the assumption of cultural or acquired inferiority" (Razack, 1994, p. 897).

34 Fellows and Razack note that according to the "Enlightenment idea of the rational man" -- a concept that they refer to as "a central idea required to rationalize the rule of the bourgeoisie, and thus the cornerstone of liberalism" -- "[a] man was defined by his capacity to reason." Further, according to this idea, "all men were equal by virtue of possessing this trait, hence equally entitled to participate in governance" (Golberg, 1993; summarized in Fellows & Razack, p. 342). Thus, to be constructed as a male subject whose reason is 'in-capacitated' by
well as discursive repertoires that figure 'incest' as an effect of 'family disorganization,' are also tied up historically with a larger imperial project of delineating the boundaries around a 'respectable' European citizenry. When considered in relation to histories of imperialism, categories of 'incompetent' or 'collusive mothers,' for example, echo earlier constructions of colonial women who 'fail' to live up to their "imperial and class duty" (Stoler, p. 35) as the "custodians of morality, of their vulnerable men, and of national character"(Stoler, p. 135). Such 'unnatural mothers' are to blame for the scourge of 'incest' that taints their homes in that they fail to sexually satisfy their husbands or to restrain them from giving in to their baser instincts. Of course, as the experiences of working class, Black, and Aboriginal families attest, questions of which families are deemed 'disorganized' and targeted for 'interventions' is hardly left up to chance.

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In re-reading Bell's categories of 'incest talk' through a framework constituted by discourses of respectability and degeneracy, I am not intending simply to supplant the story of 'incest' as essentialized gender domination with yet another totalizing story: this time, the story of 'incest' as a sign of degeneracy. Rather, I am formulating this second story as a means of complicating the first, with the specific aim of attempting to articulate what 'incest' might have to do with discursive practices that racialize, sexualize, dis/able as well as gender bodies. Instead of positing a comprehensive narrative of 'what incest is about,' then, I am interested in tracking how discourses of 'respectability' and 'degeneracy' might undergird mythologized notions of 'incest' and constitute one of its 'grids of intelligibility.' Several questions preoccupy my mind: how, for example, might this 'grid,' which is itself produced uncontrolled 'incestuous' impulses (note the dis/ability code here), then, is to simultaneously constructed outside of the ruling elite citizenry.
by and productive of interlocking grammars of race, gender, sexuality, class, and ability, be useful in discerning the terms and conditions in which 'incest' becomes 'knowable' as a mark of deviancy, ab/normalcy, and de/formation? How might 'survivor discourse' come into being in opposition to this grid and its (re)production of 'incest' as a sign of degeneracy? Most significantly, how might such an interlocking of grammars shape and constrain the dangerous labyrinth(s) that different women-survivors must negotiate in their efforts to tell, write, and live/through their experiences of 'incest?'

As a means of considering how 'survivor discourse' might take up and re-work the discursive terms set out by this grid of respectability and degeneracy, I turn to one of the central tropes of that discourse: the notion of 'innocence.' One of the primary motivations behind efforts on the part of women (particularly in North American in the early 1980's) to tell, write, and theorize their experiences of 'incest' was to disrupt socially constructed notions of women-survivors as 'blameworthy' and 'culpable' for the violences done to them. Many of these writings narrate 'incest' as a 'loss' or a 'destruction' of (childhood/sexual) innocence, as well its 'reclamation' or 'recovery.' Thorton and Bass, for example, characterize the sexual abuse narratives in their anthology as the mechanisms through which survivors (re)establish their (lost) innocence:

In this telling [a woman living/through 'incest'] can reclaim innocence. She is innocent. She has always been innocent. Both the burden of the crime and the crime itself are lifted from her shoulders. She can tell (Bass and Thorton, 1985; cited in Tal, p. 186).36

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35 The prevalence of this trope of (sexual) innocence within 'incest'-related literature -- feminist and otherwise -- is apparent from a scanning of the titles listed in self-help sections of most bookstores. See Forward & Buck, 1981; and Janus, 1981.

36 Several theorists have been critical of the emphasis placed upon 'innocence' within feminist discussions of 'incest.' Jenny Kitzinger, for example, argues that "[i]n a society where innocence is a fetish and where men are excited by the idea of defiling the pure and deflowering the virgin, focusing on children's presumed innocence only reinforces men's desire for them as sexual objects" (Kitzinger, p. 80).
These efforts to tell and theorize in ways that absolve 'incested' girl-children and women from blame also served as means of re-directing blame towards the 'true culprits' of 'incest:' sexually abusive men. In order to flip dichotomous constructions of 'wrongly-accused' father-victims and 'perpetrating' sex-delinquent daughters, and particularly to do so within courts of law, women living/through 'incest' and their advocates were and are constrained to grapple with various and contradictory constructions of guilt and (childhood sexual) innocence. 'Survivor discourse' is constituted in part, then, through a re-working and thus a re-circulation of dichotomies of (sexual) 'victims' and 'perpetrators' and of 'guilt' and 'innocence.'

I wonder, then, how women-survivors make claims regarding their (sexual) innocence and how a discursive grid of respectability and degeneracy might partly set the conditions in which such claims are rendered un/believable. In pursuing such a line of inquiry, I want in no way to discredit or undermine the efforts of women-survivors to throw off blame and to declare their innocence. Indeed, tellings of 'incest' in which victims do not present themselves as pristine and sexually innocent have a not-so-mysterious way of being pulled apart within legal courtrooms, condemned within churches, silenced within therapeutic contexts, and zealously repeated by abusive fathers. It is my intention, however, to consider questions of how discursive conditions dictate who can -- and who cannot -- make claims to 'innocence,' how such claims must be made, as well as what effects they inevitably reproduce.

To begin this process of tracking how bodies are rendered intelligible as (sexually) 'innocent victims,' I pay close attention to the ways that bodies slide in and (mainly) out of that category. To begin with, all women -- including even the most 'proper' and 'respectable'
lady who "represses the body, erasing her sexual desire and individual identity while embracing encumbering identities in service to family, community, and country" (Smith, 1996, p. 16) -- have only a tenuous grasp upon sexual innocence as a result of the social construction of female sexuality. Mary Poovey historicizes this phenomenon, describing what she sees as "the fundamental paradox that pervades all discussion of women' in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries: 'At the heart of the explicit description of 'feminine,' Angelic women, superior to all physical appetite, resides the 'female' sexuality that was automatically assumed to be the defining characteristic of female nature" (Poovey; cited in Smith, 1993, p. 16). Despite the inherent impossibility of any woman ever fully escaping her construction as a 'sexual' being, however, different women are differently able to perform themselves 'angelically.' If such performances are dependent upon women disavowing (as much as possible) any connection with or concealing any evidence of their sexual embodiment, then 'incest' as an explicitly sexual marking tends to under-cut their ability to do so. Options for claiming innocence within discursive frameworks that are produced by and productive of constructions of 'angelic femininity' are extremely limited. Such frameworks are epitomized by the concept of "the virginal martyr:" the beautiful, chaste young woman who, through her death, establishes her 'angelic' status as one who does not desire, participate in, comply with, or even live through her own defilement.\(^{37}\) This altogether unattainable standard places women-survivors in an impossibly difficult position: for within this framework, the very act of surviving 'incest' calls a girl-child's 'innocence' into question. Thus, to live/through 'incest,' let alone to talk about it, is to mark oneself as somehow

\(^{37}\)A much-touted and remarkably recent example of this fetishized notion of 'virginal martyrdom' is the canonization of Maria Goretti in 1950. In 1902, Goretti, a twelve-year-old Italian girl, was stabbed to death after refusing to "have sex" with her assailant. Immediately upon her death, Goretti was publicly held up for her
'culpable.' It follows, then, that one of the primary risks in breathing the word 'incest' from the standpoint of the one violated is the very real possibility of reifying perceptions of that culpability. As Rush notes, this gendered standard of sexual 'purity' has devastating effects for 'incested' girls:

If [a girl] is violated the culturally imposed concept of her sexuality renders her culpable. Any attempt on the part of the child to expose her violator also exposes her own alleged inferiority and sexual motives and shames her rather than the offender. Concealment is her only alternative (Rush, 1983; cited in Tal, pp. 13 - 14).

Of course, the ability of different women who live/through 'incest' to claim innocence is further complicated by other practices of discursively 'marking' bodies. Sexually racializing discursive practices, for example, render non-white girl-children as always already sexually primitive and deviant. As such, they are not altogether intelligible as 'violable' in the first place. 'Incestuous' violences enacted upon them are deemed less 'damaging' and therefore less important than violences committed against other, more remarkably 'innocent' (i.e. white) bodies. At the same time, these same non-white girls are constructed within these racializing frameworks as 'believably vulnerable' to incest, given the discursive (re)production of non-white men as sexual deviants. Within a discursive economy of respectability and degeneracy, non-white men are positioned as savage-like and sexually rapacious (as in the myth of the Black male rapist) or as licentious, inordinately passive, and feminine. Either way, they are rendered infinitely 'believable' -- within white and, at times,
within non-white imaginations -- as perverts and rapists of their own children. Thus, non-white (girl-) children are understood to be extremely 'vulnerable' to the deviant whims of their non-white 'fathers' and male relatives, who are themselves imagined as particularly 'vulnerable' to the urging of their own baser instincts.

As scholars such as Monture-Angus and Wilson attest, the act of taking up the autobiographical 'I' in relation to 'incest' and from the standpoint of racialized other-ness, given these social and discursive conditions, is risky on a number of levels. Trudier Harris, referring to these risks, describes 'incest talk' as a representational taboo among African American writers:

In a country where blackness is maligned even in its purest, most innocent states, imagine how much more viciously it would be maligned if the writers chose to show something as debased as incest...How could black writers talk of nationbuilding if they had presented evidence of the nation being destroyed from within its own ranks, and especially from within its own families? (Harris, pp. 495 - 496; emphasis added).

'Incest survivor' speech on the part of African American women, then, appears to risk more than simply the undermining of whatever "toehold on respectability" (Fellows &

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40 Some feminist theorists have complicated this notion of sexual 'vulnerability.' Sharon Marcus, for example, challenges the seemingly common sense notion of women's inherent 'vulnerability' to male sexual assault, arguing that such a notion suggests that women's bodies are "marked" as "already assaultable" and constructs feminist practices as efforts to lessen women's vulnerability, rather than as attempts to interrupt the marking systems altogether (Marcus, p. 388). In a similar way, the notion that "any child is vulnerable [to 'incest' and sexual abuse]" (Thornton and Bass, 1983; cited in Tal, p. 186) can be problematic in that it can combine with racial, sexual, class, and dis/ability codes to locate -- and ultimately to contain -- 'incest vulnerability' within specific bodies.

41 Such discursive practices appear to underlie and reiterate the demonizing and pathologizing of families of colour, particularly in legal courtrooms. In these contexts, racialized constructions of 'sexual abusers, especially constructions couched in 'cultural' terms, (re)circulate in extremely problematic ways. Margo Nightingale, in her study of the sentencing of Aboriginal males accused of sexual assault, notes that 'cultural considerations' are often used to downplay the violation and damage of sexual assaults against Aboriginal girls and women. As an example, Nightingale cites a case in which three Inuit men were sentenced to only seven days for sexually assaulting a fourteen year old girl. The judge in the case attributed his decision to his 'knowledge' that 'Aboriginal culture' deems women ready for intercourse upon menstruation (Razack, 1994, pp. 900 - 901). It goes almost without saying that such an explanation, and such a lenient sentencing, would be unthinkable if this same set of violations were enacted by Aboriginal men against a non-Aboriginal (white) girl. Thus, while Aboriginal girls might be 'believably' vulnerable to sexual abuse because of the ways that their perpetrators are (culturally) racialized, the violence committed against them are disregarded and rendered in-actionable by virtue their own (cultural) racialization.
Razack, p. 336) they can manage to muster by way of their class position, ability, language, nationality, and (hetero)sexuality; it also threatens to undermine the very project of representing disparaged Black communities as 'respectable.' Within a discursive economy based upon mutually constituting categories of respectability and (sexual) degeneracy, (some) projects of 'respectable' Black nation-building become dependent upon mobilizations of constructions of Black innocence and purity — constructions that are complicated by Black women's efforts to articulate and put an end to the specific ravages of incest in their lives.

Of course, a female subject's ability to claim sexual 'innocence' is not secured through her 'whiteness' alone; again, that claim is further complicated and cross-cut by the circulation of discursive grammars of class, dis/ability, and (hetero)sexuality. As I have noted earlier, Foucault argues that notions of '(un)believable victims' are constituted by and constitutive of classed sexualities. He adds that within an economy of 'respectability' and 'degenerescence,' only members of the working classes (as well as members of a debauched aristocracy) are believably vulnerable to acting on rather than repressing 'incestuous' impulses. Foucault's insights provide a useful perspective from which to consider Danica's experiences of speaking in public forums and being interviewed by television and radio personalities after the publication of Don't: A Woman's Word. Describing the incredulity of her interviewers, Danica aptly narrates how her body — marked in such instances as 'middle class' — slips out of the category of 'believable victim.'

42 Fellows and Razack use the term "toehold on respectability" to reference the paradoxical ways that women — in social context in which "systems of domination...position white, middle-class, heterosexual, nondisabled men at the [sic] center" — are constrained to make claims of subordination by securing their positioning as dominant in relation to other women. According to this process, an individual woman, "[f]eeling only the ways that she is positioned as subordinate,...strives to maintain her dominant positions. Paradoxically, each woman asserts her dominance in this way because she feels like it is the only way in which she can win respect for her claim of subordination" (Fellows & Razack, p. 336).

43 Similar arguments have been made about the ways in which other forms of 'deviant' sexuality, such as homosexuality, are constructed as threats to Black communities and nationhood (Crichlow, 1997).
Dressed as I was, in a business attire, with eyes that were not cast down and a clear agenda, how could I be a victim of anything? And even if I once was a victim, it obviously had done me no significant harm (Danica, 1996, p. 46).

Further on in the same passage, Danica also traces how her ability to perform herself as a 'believable incest victim' is also dependent upon the ways that her body is marked -- or, indeed, how it is un-marked -- by discursive grammars of dis/ability:

To be credible, it seems I should have looked more like a victim of child abuse. I presume this means I should have been pale, badly dressed, fragile, half carried to interviews, with a therapist on either side of me; with matted hair or in blood-stained clothing, perhaps like the victim of a car accident or a bomb blast -- above all, with visible scars... The other side of the story is that if I had looked more like the prevailing notion of a victim, I would have had even less credibility because I would have been dismissed as crazed and unbelievable (Danica, 1996, p. 46; emphases added).

Here, Danica's (re)telling points to the paradoxical ways that 'incested' bodies are constituted by re-circulating grammars as signs of disability (and specifically, of 'feeblemindedness'), as well as how testimonies uttered from such disreputable position can be dismissed as 'in-credible.'

For women-survivors who are always already marked 'dis-abled,' notions of 'sexual innocence' have specific implications and effects. Although these women are in some ways intelligible as 'sexually innocent' (in the sense of being asexual or somehow outside of sexuality), they are still not altogether believable as 'innocent victims' of 'incestuous' violences. For example, when girl-children with disabilities are sexually violated by their male care-givers, as they so often are, the violences that these girls endure often get re-

44 The False Memory Syndrome (FMS) Foundation has a similarly 'classed' set of ideas about who is 'un/believable' as 'incest survivor,' as well as who can be named as a 'perpetrator.' According to the Foundation's own statistics, "92.2 percent of false accusations are made by thirty-something daughters against middle-and upper-class families" (FMS as cited in Champagne, p. 171). This foundation -- the organization that is primarily responsible for the current climate of backlash that women-survivors face in attempting to bring their abusers to accountability and justice -- has an explicit mission of discrediting middle- and upper-class 'respectable' daughters who speak of 'incest' as liars and dupes. It doesn't get much clearer than that.
framed and dismissed as "misconduct" (Soobsey, 1994; cited in L'Institut Roeher Institute, p. 9). As well, given the discursive connections between notions of innocence and vulnerability, dis'abled female bodies -- and again, particularly female bodies that are constructed as 'feebleminded' -- are deemed incapable of protecting their own sexual virtue, and are thus understood to be excessively vulnerable to sexual abuses. Notions of this 'excessive vulnerability' are often conjured as justifications for subjecting disabled women to virulent forms of (sexual) 'protection' that are themselves explicitly tied to practices of "negative eugenics" (Hubbard, p. 189). One such 'protection' is forced sterilization. Sherene Razack notes, for example, that the eugenic practice of sterilizing girls with developmental disabilities was often justified by "the fear that a child or woman with a developmental disability is unusually vulnerable to either rape or to an unrestrained sexuality" (Razack, 1995, p. 902; emphasis added). According to the logic of respectability and degeneracy, either of these 'vulnerabilities,' if left unaddressed, might result in more 'damaged' offspring and a further-degenerated family lineage. Thus, sterilization can be construed as a means of 'protecting' a girl's virtue and thus securing her family's (waveri~ng)
respectability.

Discursive practices that (homo)sexualize bodies are also implicated in the production of un/believable victims of 'incest.' 'Lesbian' bodies, for example, can be understood within some frameworks as causing 'incest,' as well as constituting some of its more unfortunate

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45Ruth Hubbard refers to "negative eugenics" as the 'preventing the 'unfit' (defined to include people suffering from so-called insanity, epilepsy, alcoholism, pauperism, criminality, sexual perversion, drug abuse, and especially feeble-mindedness) from having [children]" (Hubbard, p. 189; emphasis added).

46Gordon describes how 'institutionalization' was conceived of and justified as yet another form of 'protection' from sexual violation. She traces how grammars of dis/ability interlocked with racial, class, and sexual grammars to position nineteenth century (working class, Catholic, and immigrant) girl-children who spoke publicly of their experiences of 'incestuous' trauma as "'feebleminded' liars"-- a naming that "justified the incarceration of victims [as 'sexual delinquents']" (Gordon, 1988; cited in Champagne, pp. 15 - 16; emphasis added).
effects. Again, within a discursive economy of respectability and degeneracy, 'lesbian bodies' are readable as signs of pollution and embodiments of an already deviant and excessive sexuality. As such, they are intelligible as powerfully and inordinately seductive. Such bodies are deemed to have the power to incite otherwise innocent and respectable (needless to say, white and bourgeois) Fathers to cause their own undoing by acting on incestuous desires that they would otherwise repress. From another seemingly contradictory standpoint, however, these same 'lesbian bodies' are intelligible as once-upon-a-time 'normal' heterosexuals who have been ruinously trained by their perverted fathers and irresponsible mothers to be repelled by men and/or to desire women. The raping of daughters by their fathers, when viewed through a framework that disparages lesbian sexualities as signs of 'taint' and 'pollution,' can even be read as a means of preventing deviant desires. From this perspective, 'incest' figures as a therapeutic intervention -- a benevolent means of re-educating waywardly gendered bodies and ensuring that desires do not stray from the straight and narrow path. Understood as either the precipitant or the results of 'incestuous relations,' then, bodies marked as 'lesbian' are constructed as already violated -- or perhaps as already violating -- and thus slide out of the category constituting (sexually) innocent victims of 'incest.' In a similar vein, discursive connections between pedophilic perversions and homosexuality render bodies that exceed normative categories of (white) male.

47 Through these same discursive practices, 'incested' sons are 'feminized,' (homo)sexualized, and constructed as either as a cause or an effect of incestuous abuse, while 'gay' boy-children are deemed in-credible sexual victms.

48 Again, some feminist theorist/activists have contested this framing by re-presenting 'incest' as a form of heteronormative education (see Rush, 1974; Herman with Hirschman, 1981; summarized in Bell, pp. 67 - 69; Strega, p. 5). As Allisen argues, "the stated motivation and justification of many adults (male and female) who abuse female children, aside from the satisfaction of their immediate sexual needs, is to train and prepare females to be heterosexual, that is, not lesbians" (Allisen, p. 22; emphasis added).
heterosexuality as degenerate and 'believably' prone to pedophilic and incestuous offenses, particularly against boy-children.  

**Impossible Abusers, Improbable Victims**

Considering how constructions of 'respectability' and 'degenerescence' might underwrite competing forms of 'incest talk' and the un/believable subjects that such diverse ways of speaking produce, I return to questions of self-representation. In a discursive and social context in which 'incest' is so often constructed as a mark of (sexual) abnormality and degeneracy, women living/through 'incest' appear to be constrained to re-present their experiences in ways that unsettle such constructions. One strategy for doing so is to make a case, as many women-testifiers did in the early 1970's, for 'incest' as a violating practice that can and does happen within *every* type of home, at the hands of *every* (type of) man (Ward, 1984; cited in Bell, p. 83). What's more, the ability of these women-survivors to establish 'every man' as a potential sexual abuser was -- and is -- contingent upon their ability to establish respectable men as believable abusers.

And herein lies a fundamental conundrum. For within a discursive economy that figures 'incest' as a mark of deviance and degeneracy, *any* body that receives such a 'mark' --

49Discursive connections between homosexuality, pedophilia, and child sexual abuse underwrote the recent "sex scandal" at Maple Leaf Gardens. Two months after NHLer Sheldon Kennedy 'came out' as a victim of sexual abuse at the hands of his coach (NHLer tells horror of sex abuse, 1997, January 6); Martin Kruze publicly accused two Gardens employees, Gordon Stuckless and John Roby, of sexual abuse and molestation. His accusation resulted in a flood of reported cases of sexual assault and abuse at the Gardens (Brown, p. 17) as well as the "biggest media push in Metro since the Bernardo case" (Bogdanovic, p. 17).

Newspaper articles covering the two stories were densely populated with allusions to homosexuality: references to abusers who "never married or been known to have serious girlfriends"(Gray, p. A8); confessions of parents "racked by guilt" for missing signs of homosexual inclinations among their trusted coaches; and community members chastising themselves for being "broad-minded enough not to assume that a gay man also had a taste for the youths under his control" (Mitchell, p. A8). As if to make these connections crystal clear, Stuckless and Roby were charged (under old legal statutes) with 'gross indecency' -- "almost a legal synonym for homosexuality," one used historically to charge gay men "for everything from blowing each other in parks, washrooms and bathhouses to -- in the 1950's -- dancing together" (Ledger, p. 17).
even a 'healthy' body that has (recognizably) white skin, a middle class economy, a European upbringing, (hetero)normative sexual inclinations, and a sound mind -- inevitably slides out of the fetishized category of 'respectability.' A 'respectable man,' then, appears to be a Teflon man: nothing seems to stick to him.\(^5^0\) A body so constituted cannot be sullied, marked, or otherwise degraded; for if it is, such a body 'degenerates' into a less-than-respectable position. Thus, despite so many testimonies of 'incest' by middle class women-survivors, the abuses committed by truly respectable Fathers seem to be continually re-produced as un-nameable, unbelievable, utterly impossible.\(^5^1\)

In a similar way, the discursive grid held in place by shifting discourses of respectability and degeneracy also positions respectable (European) daughters in a deeply contradictory position. On the one hand, the ability of these daughters to claim 'respectability' on the basis of their assignment to categories of race, sexuality, class, and ability renders them most able among women to claim (sexual) innocence. Their stories might be believed, in which case their Fathers and thus their families are positioned as not-so-respectable after all; if their (re)tellings are 'disbelieved,' their own 'respectable' status is called into question rather than that of the men they accuse. In either case, the narratives of 'incest' that these women tell -- stories that are continually incited, particularly in the popular

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\(^{50}\) My thanks to Nancy Chater for offering this particular way of thinking of 'respectable men' (N. Chater, personal conversation, September, 1997).

\(^{51}\) Danica notes how (re)circulations of codes of degeneracy (in this case, codes of class and disability) construct "fathers who rape their daughters...[as] cretinous monsters who can be easily recognized as such" (Danica, 1996, p. 47). She goes on to suggest that these same codes position 'respectable' men as unbelievable abusers:

If the accused is a teacher, a doctor, a judge -- if he appears to be well off or simply attends church regularly -- it is believed that he is too upright and educated to participate in what is seen as something only the poorest and least educated would do, and then only as an adjunct to alcoholism and bad moral fibre (Danica, 1996, p. 47).
media -- appear to 'break' and then to strangely reify a particular silence about 'incest:' the reality that it can and does happen in respectable homes, at the hands of upstanding men.\textsuperscript{52}

\textbf{The Struggle for Respectability}

Just as the discursive conditions within courtrooms often dictate that women must prove that they are not prostitutes in order to be credible as rape victims (Razack, 1995), so too re-circulations of nineteenth century discourses of respectability and degeneracy appear to warrant that women living/through 'incest' take up a similar defense: that is, to speak and be believed as blameless 'survivors' of sexual violence, women must prove that they and their families are \textit{not degenerates}. To make such an claim, individual women-survivors are constrained to grab hold of whatever useful 'toehold of respectability' is available to them in order to deflect the mark of degeneracy away from their own bodies. Ironically, though, such a disavowal is enacted through a re-mobilization of the very racial, sexual, class, and disability codes that constituted the grid of respectability and degeneracy that had positioned them as 'culpable' in the first place.\textsuperscript{53}

\textsuperscript{52}Gordon argues that the shift that took place in the social construction of 'child sexual assault' in early twentieth century Boston -- a shift in which violences read understood as 'incest' against 'innocent (girl-)children' were re-read as sexual activity between "perverted strangers" and inadequately supervised, soon-to-be-sexually-delinquent "tempresses" -- was attributable to the waning influence of 'the feminist movement of that period (Gordon, pp. 57 - 58). I wonder, though, about the grammars that those early child savers mobilized in order to (re)construct 'incest' as a problem of "male brutality and lack of self control" -- grammars that simultaneously located 'incest' as a problem "exclusively among the Catholic immigrant poor, whom they perceived as 'inferior stock,' crowded 'like animals' into ghettos" (Gordon, p. 56). How might this re-circulation of grammars have simply \textit{reconfigured} a system of respectablebility and degenerescence that continues to render 'incest' as unspeakable within 'normal' (i.e. respectable) homes?

\textsuperscript{53}Again, the controversy around Martin Kruze and his telling of sexual abuse serves as a good example of how interlocking relations of domination shape and constrain the conditions in which 'innocent' stories of sexual trauma can be told and heard. Given a dominant framework that discursively connects sexual abuse, perversion, and homosexuality, Sheldon and Kruze (both white men) must demonstrate that they are not 'gay' in order to be credible as 'innocent victims' of sexual abuse (NHLer tells of horror of sex abuse, 1997, January 6; Brazao, 1997, March 2). This feat proves far more complicated for Kruze. Without a longstanding heterosexual marriage or a career in NHL to draw upon as collateral, Kruze must defend his hetero-masculinity
And it also might be argued that discursive practices of marking bodies as 'disrespectable' may indeed do far more than simply setting the terms by which bodies can be understood as 'innocent victims' or 'believable perpetrators.' Rather, these discursive practices might in part establish the social conditions for -- perhaps even incite -- 'incestuous' violences to occur in the first place.54 When one considers the namings that repeat like a harrowing refrain within stories that women tell of living/through 'incest' (Crazy whore. Dirty bitch. Slut. Liar.), it seems plausible that the very perpetration of 'incestuous' violences might in part depend upon, as well as result in, this discursive marking of girl-children: as 'sexual primitives,' as dirty, as whorish, as sexually insatiable and titillating, as tainted and potentially tainting.

by continually reiterating at every turn that he is not gay. He is also constrained to self-represent alternately as a 'normal' (that is, not homosexual) 'hockey-crazed kid' and 'an innocent child of God.'

Given his continual disavowal of his past 'gay lifestyle,' Kruze’s (re)telling of sexual abuse has been a point of contentious debate, particularly within lesbian and gay news media. George Wheeler, for example, raises questions about Kruze's story of being "dragged...into sexual territory that he wouldn't have ventured into otherwise," noting that Kruze's story has "a resonance unfamiliar in the straight world." Quoting Rachel Giese, Wheeler offers a provocative and troubling re-reading of Kruze's story: "Maybe [Kruze and the other] teenagers weren't victims...It appears they used the Gardens employees for attention and access, just as the employees may have used them for sex. And maybe (for some) homophobia -- not abuse -- is behind their shame and grief" (Giese in Wheeler, p. 16). I am interested here not in questioning Kruze's identity as 'sexual abuse survivor' so much as in highlighting the discursive terms by which he is constrained to construct that identity: that is, terms of heteronormativity and sexual innocence.

54 Foucault argues that the deployment of sexuality:

had the effect of sexually exciting the bodies of children while at the same time fixing the parental gaze and vigilance on the perils of infantile sexuality. The result was the sexualizing of the infantile body, a sexualizing of the relationship between parent and child, a sexualizing of the familial domain (Foucault, 1980; cited in Bell, p. 96).

Bell notes that the Foucaultian critique of 'incest talk' as inciting 'incest' is echoed by some feminist theorists. Catherine MacKinnon, for example, argues that legal and social condemnations of sexual violences actually increase the "excitement potential" that such acts have for men, and thus incite their continued enactment (Bell, p. 106).

Stoler re-reads Foucault's notion of the 'sexualized' infantile body within an imperial frame, adding that the sexualization of European colonial children came hand in hand with their primitivization. To elucidate this connection, Stoler notes that such children were deemed in need of 'protection' against the debased sexual influences of racialized and lower class domestic workers and nannies -- "not because their sexuality [was] so different, but because it [was] 'savage,' unrestrained, and very much the same" (Stoler, p. 141; emphasis added).
It is through such discursive namings that a (soon-to-be-incested) girl-body can be imagined and positioned as an exotic (and therefore terrifying) virginal territory. Once the girl-child is positioned in this way, 'incest' itself becomes imaginable as a form of conquest -- one in which a fatherly 'wayfarer,' like the conquistadors before him, 'enters' tabooed (sexual) zones that are infused with panic, anxiety, and terror, but that also promise untold and untamed pleasures. Through this "controlled excursion" (Razack, forthcoming, p. 17) into blackness (an 'excursion,' one might note, that takes place within the safe confines of his own home), the 'respectable' father risks un-doing his own respectable status and sliding irretrievably into degenerate states of primitiveness; he also comes face to face with his own fears of becoming "engulfed" and overrun by more 'primitive others' (McClintock, p. 24). And yet, it is precisely in entering into and 'emerging unscathed' (Razack, forthcoming, p. 18) from these 'tabooed territories' -- that is, in exerting control over and mastering his daughter's 'primitive' body -- that he ultimately secures, confirms, indeed comes to know his own superiority.  

Thus, it would seem that discursive practices of marking girl-bodies as 'primitive,' 'deviant,' or 'degenerate' -- markings that are experienced in and of themselves as violations of psyche and spirit -- might enable and perpetuate (more material) sexual violences that, in turn, sustain constructions of 'respectable' masculinity.

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55Once again, Razack's insights regarding practices of 'marking' certain bodies as 'prostitutes' and certain spaces as 'prostitute zones' and relation that these bodies and spaces had to the constitution of bourgeois, white, male subjectivities are useful in thinking through 'incest.' Razack writes:

'[Respectable] men's] temporary abandonment of societal norms [through prostitution], rather than weakening [their] claims of respectability, puts the mark of degeneracy on the women in prostitution, thus reaffirming the men's position within the dominant group" (Razack, forthcoming, p. 31).

Razack also argues that this process of making oneself 'respectable' in relation to 'degenerate others' is similar for non-elite men, who "could secure for themselves a small portion of respectability, a corner of what it means to be white, bourgeois and male, when they turned to prostitutes" (Razack, forthcoming, p. 26). And if, as Razack so forcefully argues, the "fear of disorder, the ambivalence and anxiety associated with boundary loss" that plagued bourgeois subjectivity were "enacted on the body of a prostitute as they were on the colonized" (Razack, forthcoming, p. 23), why would they not also be enacted upon the bodies of so-called 'primitive' daughters?
Ending this chapter as it began, then, I return to Beth Goobie's torturous depiction of living through ritual abuse. In re-presenting the ways that she is ritually constructed by her church Fathers -- first as virginal, pure, and white, and then as tainted, whorish, and black -- Goobie intuitively traces the (sexually racializing) discursive markings that are laid across her body, rendering apparent in excruciating detail the forms of domination that such markings ultimately secure:

arms tied along the horizontal bar, i was salvation,  
the bride of Christ in white veil and wedding dress,  
blood a black-red stain thrown across the front  
and then the knife cut away the white and i became  
the whore of babylon, slave of the flesh, abomination  
that must be nailed to the tree. this whore must die,  
a white robe intoned. she must carry your sin  
to the grave. which man among you is without sin?  
no man was ever without sin, since the beginning  
god had seen to that, each man mounted  
and saved himself as the congregation praised god  
for my sacrifice: blest be the ties that bind.  
the old rugged cross.

in this church i learned god wanted  
to see the world coming down my throat,  
shoved between my legs; he would use animal,  
vegetable or mineral to do it; he would do it to me  
because i was. he had created me virgin  
to be raped anywhere, anyhow, anytime; for anyman  
i became the doorway unto himself.

(goobie, p. 55; final emphasis added)
CHAPTER THREE:

ARTICULATING THE 'MARK' OF 'INCEST'

She is writing lies again, creating new childhood fictions to somehow get closer to her version of 'truth.' As she writes, dangerous memory flows unbidden out the end of her fingers and rushes onto the page, pulsing against the resonating rhythm of her mother's words of dismissal: "But how do you know it was abuse? You've just misinterpreted everything. Your filthy mind has made all of those good memories into something ugly. Dirty."

The difference between (her) 'truth' and (their) 'lies,' between parental affection and abuse that shatters souls: reduced, in the end, to a matter of interpretation.

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To interrogate (unmarked) women's (re)tellings of 'incest' -- to ask questions about what might be rendered invisible, perhaps even forgotten, in the ways that 'we' re-member and articulate these experiences -- is to walk tentatively upon rather unsteady ground. Again, in highlighting the 'constructed-ness' and 'non-innocence' of women's efforts to 'write incest,' I risk adding fire to False Memory Syndrome advocates who attempt to undermine the credibility of women-survivors precisely by dismissing their 'accusatory' memories as false fabrications.

What's more, in attempting to re-read women's (re)tellings through framework that specifically constructs 'incest' as a discursively-produced 'mark' of degeneracy, I am leery of producing yet another tight-knit and totalizing analysis of women's narratives of 'incest' -- one that once again hems in the bursting seams and ragged (and raging) edges of women's experiences and stories of sexual trauma. Indeed, such a 'totalizing' analysis would edit out the very 'unknowability' that constitutes 'incest' as a traumatic event. Cathy Caruth writes:

Central to the very immediacy of this experience [of trauma]...is a gap that carries the force of the event and does so precisely at the expense of simple knowledge and memory. The force of this experience would appear to arise precisely, in other words, in the collapse of its understanding (Caruth, p. 7).
With these cautions in mind, then, I attempt in this chapter to raise questions about some of the (feminist) frames through which we come to know, interpret, and articulate experiences of 'incest.' In so doing, my aim is not to further undermine women's memories of childhood sexual trauma, but to mine them: that is, to re-view women's (seemingly transparent) memories of 'incest' with the specific purpose of considering how these memories, as well as the experiences that they reference, are socially produced. In contemplating how a dichotomy of 'respectability' and 'degeneracy' might serve as one of the discursive 'grids of intelligibility' for 'incest' through which 'incest' comes to be known and articulated, then, I am not attempting to present a means of crossing once and for all 'the gap' of understanding 'incest.' What I am offering, however, is a specific and partial lens through which to (re)view women's experiences, memories, and knowledges of 'incest' -- one that might allow us to re-imagine 'incest' as connected to other practices of controlling, territorializing, and dominating bodies.

As I read the (re)tellings of Liza Potvin and Elly Danica through this lens, I am attempting to trace how these women come to know and to articulate their experiences of being discursively 'marked' for and by 'incest.' Specifically, I consider how they draw upon racialized, sexualized, classed, and dis/abled bodies, figurations, and narratives to understand and to represent the ways that they have been positioned by their abusers as degenerate: as 'blackened,'

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1These "guilty readings" (Britzman in Williams, p. 215) arise, in part, from my own investment in complicating feminist constructions of 'incest' that exclude complexities of experiences and (relational) identities. Specifically, I refer here to my investments in complicating the category 'incest survivor' to include 'borderline' experiences, such as covertly sexualized relationships.

As well, I share Williamson's desire to unsettle reductive and relativizing discourses that erode specificities of 'incested bodies' within feminist discourse. Williamson, however, is concerned with the "figuration" that happens when 'sexual abuse' is put on a continuum of male domination of women (Williamson, 1992, p. 136). My own concern is with the ways that (normative) feminist practices of representing 'incest' as male domination might elide differences related to race, sexuality, class, and disability.

2In a sense, I am reading women's experiences and memories with the self-conscious (and non-innocent) intention of complicating normalized versions of 'incest' as a gender story by formulating a second story -- the story of living/through 'incest' as a loss and subsequent reclamation of 'respectability.' Trinh T. Minh-Ha more
'tainted,' 'crippled,' 'deviant.' In evaluating the multiple political effects of Potvin's and Danica's practices of representing 'incest,' I raise questions about the problems of conflation and appropriation, as well as the insidious way that efforts to name and to 'throw off' one form of domination so often come at the expense of eliding (or indeed, reiterating) other relations of domination. I consider as well how these (re)tellings of 'incest' might offer up (as well as constrain) possibilities for imagining 'incestuous violences' in new ways: as violences that produced by and productive of interlocking systems of domination.

Reading WHITE LIES

Lisa Potvin's WHITE LIES (for my mother) was published in 1992, at a time when feminist-informed self-help texts, as well as a variety of 'incest survivor testimonies,' were in wide circulation. Following in the tradition of women-survivors who had published full-length autobiographical narratives of 'incest' in the late 1980's, Potvin takes up an autobiographical strategy of fragmentation. She constructs her (re)telling as a disjointed series of journal entries, each of which conjures specific re-membered moments from Potvin's distant or more recent past. As a montage of memory images, Potvin's narrative slips back and forth in time and space, weaving together nightmarish dream fragments that are as unknown and ominously foreboding to the reader as they are to Potvin herself. She (re)traces the ways that these remembered flashes of image, sound, smell, and texture -- the fixed stare of glass eyes in a polar bear rug, the sound of ice cubes clinking in a tumbler of scotch, the odour of a moldy couch -- resurface again and again in her dreams, each time shifting and merging together to form a new configuration.

elegantly describes this strategy of complicating 'normative' narratives to ensure that they do not re-circulate domination: as "[t]he necessity of re-naming so as to un-name" (Trinh, 1990, p. 329).

Examples of such narratives are Danica (1988) and Wisechild (1988).
Eventually, these image fragments take shape as Potvin's discrete memories of being sexually assaulted by her father and grandfather.

Throughout Potvin's (re)telling, there are echoes of the work of North American feminist theorists and activists, particularly of feminist theorizings of 'incest' that were published in the late 1980's. Following the lead of these feminist theorists, Potvin re-presents her experiences of 'incest' as part of on-going histories of male domination of women. Within her narrative, she addresses her father only in the third person, initially as 'He/Him' and later as 'he/him.' Potvin's use of this capitalized third person address serves a means of highlighting and critiquing the patriarchal system of male power that lends her father the authority and legitimating power of the 'Father.' She incorporates a similar address when referring to her doctor, to her psychiatrist, and to God:

_Forgive me, Father, for I have sinned..._ God the Father, and my Father, what is the difference? Both of them want to save my soul. Both of them do nothing when I pray for it to stop" (Potvin, p. 11).  

Using this strategy of representation, Potvin traces the discourses of male authority that her father draws upon in order to silence and ab/use her body, connecting these gendered (and gendering) discourses to those that are produced by and productive of institutions of medicine, psychiatry, and Christianity (specifically, Catholicism). She notes how these discourses position her Father as the 'rightful judge' of her body and its ability to perform as a 'proper'

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4Near the end of her (re)telling, for example, Potvin quotes almost verbatim Armstrong's insights regarding the 'incest taboo' (Armstrong; cited in Tal, p. 162). She also re-iterates constructions of 'incest' as effect and means of heteronormative training:

Freud was wrong: there is nothing taboo about incest. The only taboo is public discussion of incest. All I ever repressed was trauma, not desire; I never desired for any of this to happen, but my inner child did not know how to resist, was taught not to hurt people's feelings (Potvin, p. 195).

5Here, Potvin reiterates Ward's earlier insight that "[incestuous] Fathers are not aberrant males: they are acting within the mainstream of masculine sexual behaviour which sees women as sexual commodities and believes men have a right to use/abuse these commodities how and whenever they can" (Ward, 1984; in Bell, p. 73).
(heteronormative) female. She then traces how these same discourses authorize other 'men in white' -- doctors, psychiatrists, 'men of the church' -- to be the judges of 'abnormal,' 'unfit,' and 'deranged' women.

Potvin does not straightforwardly adhere to (dominant) feminist analyses of 'incest,' however. While there are moments in her (re)telling in which she directly defends feminism in general and feminist theorizing and activism related 'incest' in particular, there are other moments in which she 'bucks' what she sees as the constraints that are produced by and (re)productive of feminist-informed therapeutic discourses. In these segments of her (re)telling, Potvin seems to play at the borders of 'survivor discourse,' self-consciously taking up some of their central tenets in order to complicate them. In fact, she at times goes so far as to characterize feminist discourses as adding to a cacophony of voices that limit her ability to name or even to know the complexity of her experiences. The key point of tension for Potvin in this regard, and the central pivot around which she organizes her narrative of 'incest,' is her relationship with her mother. In fact, Potvin's entire narrative is structured as a(n answered) letter to her mother. Potvin renders the emotional complexity of that mother-daughter

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6 Potvin constructs 'incestuous rape' as a central form of the 'benevolent' training that (re)produces properly sexualized 'good little girls': "I only have your health and welfare in mind. Daddy knows what is best for you. This hurts me more than it hurts you. I am doing it for your own good, because I love you" (Potvin, p. 61). She also gestures towards 'incest' as one instantiation of a myriad of (unspeakable) violences that constitute heteronormative notions of ('angelic') feminine beauty: "Il faut souffrir pour etre belle...I do not mind that it hurts because I remember your message that it takes great pain to be beautiful, and I want to be beautiful like you are" (Potvin, p. 36, 56).

7 For example, Potvin represents the reaction of a trusted male colleague to her revelation of sexual abuse as an instance of anti-feminist backlash:

Now I understand why you are such a rabid feminist. If none of this had happened to you, you would have nothing to complain about. Why do you blame men? Look around you, most women are very content with their lot in life. That kind of trauma rarely happens. Why can't you just forget about it and enjoy being a woman? (Potvin, p. 173; original emphasis).

8 Nowhere in Potvin's text does she directly address her father/Father, referring to him/Him only in the third person. By contrast, she directs her (re)telling, as well as her rage, pain, and condemnation, towards her mother. Potvin also describes how the anger that she feels in relation to her father begins to dissipate when she contemplates the possibility that he himself had been victimized by her grandfather: "Now the focus shifts, faint
relationship in great detail, measuring memories of intense pain against moments of warmth and pleasure, weighing her unfulfilled desire for connection against the wrath that she feels in response to her mother's willful disregard and refusal to protect her.

As Potvin reconsiders that mother-daughter relationship through a framework informed by feminist discourses regarding male violences against women, she gestures towards her mother's 'trappedness' as an immigrant woman who struggles with her own legacy of violence:

How can you let Him take me away? Yet how can you save me either, you who were twice-born, twice raped, your strength and thunder stolen by Zeus and then Poseidon when you crossed the sea to this country, a small baby in your arms (Potvin, p. 101).

She also reiterates feminist discourses that construct the in/actions of mothers as the painful effects of gendered forms of economic oppression:

We were poor at first, until He made His way up the company ladder, salesman of the year twice over. You could not work, stuck at home with three young children. Where could you have run to, how could you have supported me?" (Potvin, p. 110).

And yet together with and despite these gestures, Potvin continues to point to her mother's 'complicity,' calling into question what she sees as the "velvet illusion" of her mother's constrained (economic) choices:

*A mother always loves her child.* Somewhere you must be hiding your love for me, your heart wrapped under furs. You are a victim, you are excused, you give excuses, but nothing rings true" (Potvin, p. 110).

By refusing to read her mother's in/actions (solely) as effects of (gendered forms of class) victimization, Potvin complicates feminist discourses that *work against* the positioning of mothers as 'collusive' or 'blameworthy.' In this way, she points to social complexities that might be (re)erased by (dominant) feminist discourses regarding 'incest.' Potvin also articulates the glimmering of forgiveness, sorrow. I feel released. Conversely, my anger towards you, Maman, explodes" (Potvin, p. 184). Although Potvin eventually denies the possibility of ever forgiving her father, her choice to position her mother as the sole 'addressee' of her (re)telling inadvertently (and ironically) feeds into discursive frameworks that absolve abusive Fathers and that blame Mothers for 'incest.'
bind that she experiences as a subject caught at a discursive crossroads — one who struggles to maintain her perceptions and knowledges in the face of what she sees as feminist 'regime of truth':

Where are you, Maman? Can you hear me anymore? A good feminist never blames her mother, understands that all mothers are victims of male oppression. It is misguided to hate your mother, there is enough mother-bashing out there (Potvin, p. 31; original emphasis).

Potvin extends these questions regarding complicity to a consideration of her own in/actions. In re-writing her family script as a sexually abusive one, Potvin refuses to re-create herself as an essentialized victim, remaining all the while suspicious of the "irresistible solace of victimization, its seductive pull" (Potvin, p. 212). Instead, she struggles to come to terms with what she understands to be her own "complicity": the ways in which she "allowed all those people to humiliate" her (Potvin, p. 212), the fact that she had witnessed and at times participated in her sisters' (self-)abuse (Potvin, p. 108), the ways in which she abused her own body as a young adult (Potvin, p. 108). Again, Potvin's re-circulations of notions of 'complicity' and victim 'participation' cross a feminist taboo with regards to practices of re-presenting 'incest.' Such suggestions, even when they are made from the position of an ('incest') survivor, risk re-mobilizing discourses that pathologize women living/through 'incest' and position them as objects of blame.

At the same time, however, Potvin's emphasis on 'choices' also opens up possibilities for re-cognizing women's agency. Alongside questions of complicity, Potvin writes-in her own

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Laura Levitt, in "Speaking Out of the Silence around Rape: A Personal Account," describes the ways in which many women (including herself) are constrained to borrow from a language of 'compliance' in order to articulate their experiences of rape. Levitt argues that such constraints point to the paucity of language available for women to think through or talk about their experiences of sexual violence. She reads this lack of language in relation to what she sees as the proliferation of languages available to men for articulating misogynist aggression and hatred: "While there are whole vocabularies for men to abuse women, I have to talk about 'complying' with my attacker. The word signifies some kind of consent. There was none. My life was at stake. Thus, part of the whole
efforts (however constrained or unsuccessful) to resist repeated violation: as a young woman who studies self-defense and has her tubes tied as protections against further occupations of her body; as an adolescent who refuses to "co-operate" sexually, who gets out of her father's car and walks the long journey back into town alone, "a glorious freedom and the taste of highway grit" (Potvin, p. 137) forever mingled in her memory; as a defiant "little girl who once stood up in her bed and wet the sheets each night in protest, trying to ward off the devil with [her] foul human smell" (Potvin, p. 137). By writing instances of (attempted) resistance into her telling of living/through 'incest,' Potvin contests discursive frameworks that position survivors as 'passive victims.' In doing so, she creates a space in which 'incested' daughters can re-imagine their experiences of victimization as histories of survival and resistance and thus re-claim some form of agency — no matter how constrained. ¹⁰

In tracing complicated moments of agency, however, Potvin does not go so far as to paint an idyllic portrait of girl-children resisting their sexually abusive Fathers. Instead, she spells out precisely the trap that she is in, noting the limitations as well as the costs of utilizing individual(izing) resistance strategies within a broader social context of male domination.

Recalling the triumph she felt when she believed that by cutting her hair, gaining weight, and wearing baggy clothes she had successfully warded off her father's advances, Potvin painfully admits: "Like thunder on a hot August evening, the truth cracks the stillness of the moment. He merely shifted his attention to my little sister" (Potvin, p. 166). ¹¹

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¹⁰ In the following section concerning Danica's work, I will consider briefly how (re)tellings of 'incest' that emphasize individual 'choices' might displace more collective struggles to live/through sexual trauma.

¹¹ In complicating notions of 'complicity,' Potvin also unsettles neat constructions of 'innocence.' She does so while simultaneously calling into question discourses that position women living/through 'incest' as objects of blame, and without losing sight of the (discursive) 'traps' that these women must negotiate both to survive and to
**Potvin: Delineating the 'mark' of abnormality**

Another way that Potvin draws upon and reiterates feminist discourses in relation to 'incest' is by interrogating and re-working her early childhood and adolescent experiences of feeling 'abnormal.' For example, Potvin re-con structs the violent process through which she learns to 'vacate' her child-body, figuring this learned bodily disavowal as both a *mechanism* by which she survives extreme terror as well as one of the most excruciating *costs* of that 'survival.' She traces how such evacuations cause her to be cut off from her own bodily knowledges, and thus, from her capacity to act other than in re-action to the violence of others.¹²

I am a clumsy girl, always breaking bones, never at one with my body. My body seems to have a will of its own, falling over things, I have not control over its movement, except as a delayed reaction to the pain of having made a mistake, misjudged the curb height. I can only react, never act (Potvin, p. 52).

In pulling apart the process through which she comes to know, and ultimately to disavow, her (female) body as a site and sign of betrayal, shame, and de/formation, Potvin creates a textual map of the various and contradictory ways that she was discursively positioned as a child.

The (re)telling that she constructs, then, is a composite of competing and contrasting 'voices' that together (re)produce her as a subject shifting through multiple positions. The text's narrator 'voices' -- assumedly the voices of Potvin's child and adult 'selves' -- are continually
tell of their experiences. Again, by playing with and attempting to complicate constructions of 'innocence,' Potvin also troubles discursive re-circulations of notions of 'respectability' and 'degeneracy.'

¹²My analysis is informed by a taped lecture by Clarissa Chandler, entitled, "Reweaving the Story" (1997b). Chandler argues that terror underlies and serves a primary function in traumas resulting from sexual as well as racial violences. According to Chandler, both of these forms of traumatization force bodily 'evacuations' on the part of survivors. As well, in both cases, (immediate) 'survival' often necessitates that survivors disavow their own bodily knowledges and pleasures and instead become hyper-aware of the needs and rhythms of the bodies of their oppressors.

For both forms of trauma (and, of course, these traumas are interdependent), Chandler suggests that 'healing' demands that survivors privately and publicly name the ways in which their bodies have been
undercut and informed by other (remembered) voices: those of her mother, her father, her
psychiatrist, condemning colleagues, even the voice of 'God' speaking through the biblical texts
that she heard preached from the pulpit as a child. Italicized to set them apart, these 'voices'
represent more than simply the abusive words of significant figures in Potvin's life; they also
read as instantiations of various discourses that position Potvin as damaged, blameworthy, and
sexually deviant. It is to contest these very positionings that Potvin writes her experiences of
living/through 'incest.'

By delineating her negotiation of the discursive landscape constituted by these
competing voices, then, Potvin attempts to translate what it means to occupy the position of
being 'marked' by and for incest. She also demonstrates, with poignant clarity, how these
various discursive re-constructions of her body work in tandem to ensure her continued abuse
and silence. It is through her specific mappings of these discursive (re)productions of her body -
- (re)productions that inevitably draw upon and re-circulate grammars of gender as well as race,
class, sexuality, and dis/ability -- that Potvin gestures (perhaps inadvertently) towards realities
that are eclipsed by essentialized constructions of 'incest' as male domination.

**Potvin: A Story Told in Black and White**

One of the central frameworks through which Potvin comes to know her (child-)self as
'marked,' and one that she depends heavily upon in order to represent her experiences of
living/through 'incest,' is a black/white dichotomy. From just a quick glance at the stark half-
black-half-white cover of Potvin's text, it becomes apparent that tropes of 'blackness' and

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'occupied' in order to begin to reclaim their disavowed bodily spaces. These acts of naming bodily occupations,
Chandler adds, are far "more dangerous than [acts of] mourning" (Chandler, 1997b).
'whiteness' figure prominently in Potvin's (re)telling.\textsuperscript{13} Images connoting 'blackness' and 'whiteness,' not to mention the adjectives 'black' and 'white' themselves, literally pepper the text.\textsuperscript{14}

Toni Morrison's work might suggest that Potvin's dependence upon black-and-white dichotomies reflects a broader set of representational practices that she sees operating within early (North) American literatures. In \textit{Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination}, Morrison refers to the proliferative use of images and figurations of blackness and whiteness within these literatures as 'Africanism,' by which she means:

the denotative and connotative blackness that African peoples have come to signify, as well as the entire range of view, assumptions, readings, and misreadings that accompany Eurocentric learning about these people" (Morrison, pp. 6 - 7).

Morrison's project of tracing literary 'Africanism' is similar to that of Edward Said, whose work on 'Orientalism' delineates the myriad ways that 'the West' comes to know and constitute itself as superior in relation to an imagined, inferior 'Orient' (Said, p. 3). Using a similar methodology, Morrison elegantly argues that 'America' -- with all of its connotations of newness, autonomy, civility, and freedom -- is imagined in opposition to both a "fabricated, mythological Africanism" (Morrison, p. 47), as well as to its 'real' enslaved African population.

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{13} I chose Potvin's narrative, in part, because of its clear and prolific use of tropes of 'blackness' and 'whiteness.' However, I would argue that just as an economy of 'whiteness' and 'blackness' underlies the intelligibility of early American literature (as Toni Morrison suggests in her work concerning 'literary whiteness'), such an economy also serves as a central organizing trope within women's (re)tellings of 'incest' -- for racially 'marked' as well as racially 'unmarked' women.

\textsuperscript{14} This economy of expression is visually replicated in the ways that the text itself is organized, with its boldly typed black script surrounded and seemingly overwhelmed by expansive white spaces. The text's 'white spaces' can be read in several ways. Marilyn Iwama, in her review of \textit{WHITE LIES}, suggests that this representational strategy "accentuates the horror of the telling while imaging the conspiratorial silence of the narrator's mother, priest, and doctor...[as well as allowing] the reader an interactive space -- for reflecting, a telling of one's own, or respite" (Iwama, p. 125). Potvin herself refers to these spaces as weavings of secrets and silences: "The blankness of the page is my message that invites your gaze, your speculation. I have woven secrets into the white spaces of nothingness, from rags once torn and then bonded together, waiting for you to unravel them" (Potvin, p. 1). Thus, Potvin textually and visually figures 'incest' as something that cannot be completely encoded within written language, but must instead be read in the silences and in 'the blankness of the page.'
\end{footnotesize}
Morrison traces the ways in which "conveniently bound and violently silenced black bodies" (Morrison, p. 38), as well as figurations of blackness, appear throughout the works of early American (white) writers, serving as a sort of 'primitive' backdrop. It is against this "blank darkness," Morrison argues, that the disquieting fears, insecurities, and desires which threaten to undermine the very project of nation building are fancifully played out and resolved (Morrison, p. 38). It is also against this backdrop that a new American (male) subject is imagined in opposition to what he is not: not savage, not backward, not powerless, and not black. Morrison concludes:

Africanism is the vehicle in which the American self knows itself as not enslaved, but free; not repulsive, but desirable; not helpless, but licensed and powerful; not history-less, but historical; not damned, but innocent; not a blind accident of evolution, but a progressive fulfillment of destiny (Morrison, p. 52).

As she traces this pervasive Africanist presence within early American literatures, Morrison outright refuses to categorize or to dismiss these literatures as the workings of racist imaginations. Instead, she differentiates overtly racist language from the well-worn racial codes that (particularly white) writers habitually fall back upon -- a "sometimes sinister, frequently lazy, almost always predictable" form of "short-hand," used to capture and communicate the fears, desires, and anxieties (Morrison, pp. x - xii) of early (white) America. Rather than engaging in discussions of the disparaging effects that these representational codes have upon non-white subjectivities and identities, Morrison directs her attention towards what racial codes and shorthands secure for white subjectivities and identities.15

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15Morrison elucidates the rationale for developing strategies to trace both the reproduction and disruption of racializing codes within literature, arguing that:
Considering Morrison's notions of 'Africanism' in relation to Potvin's (re)telling of 'incest,' then, some important questions arise: How are re-circulations of this well-worn modernist dichotomy of blackness and whiteness useful to Potvin in her attempts to articulate her own sexually traumatic history, and specifically in her efforts to forge a new 'survivor' identity? What does such a representational strategy make possible for Potvin and other (otherwise 'unmarked') women-survivors, and what are the potential costs of adopting such a strategy?

To begin, Potvin invokes codes of 'whiteness' and 'blackness' primarily as a means of articulating her experience of being 'trapped' between two essentialized and essentially unoccupiable subject positions: that of the dutiful, unblemished, and sexually pure daughter (of God), and that of the dirty, damaged, and deviant seductress who incites and thus deserves the abuse that she receives. In re-membering her childhood, Potvin describes the ways in which her ability to know herself and her experience are shaped and constrained by this 'black and white' dichotomy:

I remember only in black and white. Everything can be reduced to this; no distortions; it is simpler that way. One is either good or bad, nothing in between. My soul is pitch black, my room is white, white pages stretch out before me, waiting for the stain of black ink (Potvin, p. 26).

In representing this discursively-produced 'trap' that she finds herself (placed) in, Potvin also re-members how her abusers (as well as others who colluded with and supported her abuse) drew upon racializing grammars of 'blackness' and 'whiteness,' both to 'mark' her body as incest-able and to (re)position her as blameworthy.

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for both black and white American writers, in a wholly racialized society, there is no escape from racially inflected language, and the work writers do to unhobble the imagination from the demands of that language is complicated, interested, and definitive (Morrison, p. 13).
Potvin writes, for example, of the way in which she comes to know herself (and her body) as 'evil' through black-and-white discourses which are co-constitutive of Catholicism:

The priest explains to us that we are all born with a white soul, unblemished. To sin is to blacken the soul, an indelible muddy mark, a gradually accumulated patchwork of past errors visible only to God and the sinner. I envision a dirty lung, choking on its own filth... Soon there will be no more white spaces [in my soul], and I will be lost to the place of flames" (Potvin, p. 9).

In this passage, Potvin refers to her body and soul as becoming increasingly 'blackened' through 'incest.' Indeed, 'incest' itself becomes figured within Potvin's text as a loss of whiteness: that is, as a loss of purity and innocence brought about by an infiltrating 'blackness' (figured at one point as an 'ebony serpent') that enters and contaminates her (white, middle class, female) body, leading to its (further) degeneration into sinful depravity and disease. At another point in her (re)telling, Potvin describes her experience of being transfixed by the vacuous 'whiteness' of her room in the psychiatric ward. Here, Potvin figuratively re-members her experience of childhood sexual trauma as a destruction of whiteness, using the image of sullied white sheets to represent her desecrated childhood (sexual) innocence and purity:

So often I have tried to lie still, here in the white sheets. But always there are stains, traces of former lives, like the bleeding Sacred Heart hanging over my bed, dripping down methodically on my forehead in the middle of the night, destroying the whiteness of the sheets (Potvin, p. 9).

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16 It is important to note that the 'whiteness' that Potvin conjures here cannot be read only as a racial or racializing category. Instead, this 'shiny' version of 'whiteness' is an effect of racializing as well as (hetero)sexualizing, classing, and dis/able-ing discursive practices. Bodies must perform themselves in ways that are deemed 'respectable' along each of these axes in order to occupy such a position of (pure) 'whiteness.' All other performances of 'whiteness' are 'sullied' and 'degenerate' by comparison — not quite 'white' enough. Thus, while Potvin figures 'incest' as a loss of 'whiteness,' it is perhaps more useful to think about this loss of 'whiteness' as a loss of 'respectability.'

Potvin's use of figurations of 'whiteness' also falls into what Morrison refers to as one of the central 'uses' of these racial and racializing codes and figurations: that is, she uses codes of 'whiteness' and 'blackness' to differentiate 'civility' from 'primitivism.'

17 The blood that 'marks' the (respectable) sparkling white sheets also functions as a testimonial sign of sexual violence — a sign that has at least the potential to unsettle the white, middle class, and heteronormative facades of goodness, cleanliness, and purity.
Again, Potvin's dependence upon this heavily-imbued dichotomy of 'whiteness' and 'blackness' raises troubling questions about the costs attached to recirculating languages that are implicated in (racial) domination. In figuring (her memories of) 'incest' as a contaminating 'blackness,' for example, Potvin reiterates one of the 'shorthands' that Morrison describes as characterizing early American literatures: namely, she uses idioms of blackness to "serve as a marker and a vehicle for illegal sexuality, fear of madness, exploitation, self-loathing" (Morrison, p. 52). In so doing, Potvin draws upon the 'weight' of notions of 'blackness' and 'whiteness' both to (re)produce her-self as a(n initially pure white) 'victim' and to translate the immensity of the devastation (of being 'blackened') that she experiences. She also draws upon well-established narratives of enslaved and despised black bodies to articulate her experiences of living/through childhood sexual trauma. Thus, Potvin appropriates 'Africanist' narratives, using them as opportunities to think through the implications of own experiences of suffering and resistance.\(^\text{18}\) One potential cost of using such 'shorthands' might be a naturalizing of racial (and racializing) narratives that equate 'being black' -- or perhaps 'being blackened' -- with being rejected and reject-able. As well, recirculations of these 'shorthands' can reiterate (sexually) racializing constructions of both 'incest victims' and 'incestuous abusers.' The effects of these representational practices are perhaps exacerbated in that Potvin uses them without referencing or grappling with the ways in which discourses constitutive of categories 'blackness' and 'whiteness' are implicated in the (re)production of racism as well as (her own) white privilege.

Of course, figurations and narratives of 'blackness' are not the only codes upon which Potvin's (re)telling of 'incest' depends. As she dredges through her childhood memory in order

\(^{18}\text{Again, in reference to the re-production of 'literary whiteness' within early American literatures, Morrison describes the ways in which (white) authors appropriate "the story of a black person, the experience of being bound and/or rejected" in order to "contemplate limitation, suffering, rebellion, and to speculate upon fate and destiny." (Morrison, p. 53).}
to identify and pull apart the words used by others against her, Potvin recalls other ways in which she was discursively (re)positioned: as the trouble-maker who causes her father's alcoholism (Potvin, p. 63); as the 'problem child' who is "just born rebellious" (Potvin, p. 87); as the "Maudite putain" whose excessive and unrestrained sexuality brings her family "nothing but shame since the day [she] was born" (Potvin, p. 125); and as the delinquent daughter who is eventually exiled to "the house on the hill for wayward girls" (Potvin, p. 120). These discursive (re)productions of Potvin's (girl-)body as (sexually) 'wayward,' 'shameful,' 'delinquent,' or 'damaged' depend not only upon grammars of gender -- or of race, for that matter -- but also upon a re-mobilization of codes of (homo)sexuality and dis/ability. And it is in translating the ways in which her abusers made use of these pre-existing codes to 'mark' her body and set her up for (continued) violence that Potvin moves beyond a (strictly) metaphorical use of these 'differencing' grammars. In these moments, Potvin's representational practices call attention to material violences: the violences that are visited upon any (female) body that is constructed as somehow less than respectable. It is precisely here, then, that Potvin's (re)telling opens up new possibilities for imagining 'incest' as being connected to other forms of domination.

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Re-reading Don't: A Woman's Word

Dreams. Dreams of a future. A different future than they have all sentenced me to. They all say, my father, the nuns, the priest and my mother, that I will be a breeder, sentenced to provide whatever services the man who owns me demands. All I must do is obey. Obey in silence. (Danica, 1988, p. 74; emphasis added).

Similar in some ways to Potvin's (re)telling, Danica's 'autofiction' and her later work are centrally concerned with mapping how social and discursive constructions of 'femininity'

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19 In the following chapter, I will examine how Potvin takes up and re-works narratives of
underlie and legitimate the (ab)use of her body, first by her father and then by her husband.

Like Potvin, she pays close particularly close attention to the processes through which she learns to disavow her 'femaleness.' Referring to the impact that her father's first 'incestuous' assault had on the ways in which she viewed and related to her four-year-old girl-body, Danica writes:

> The world doesn't look the same. I don't know who to ask about this. Don't understand why. *I blame whatever is between my legs.* I'm not curious. I never look there. I decide now that I know how much it can hurt I will make a point of ignoring it. I decide then, for the first time, that I want to be a boy (Danica, 1988, p. 29; emphasis added).20

Similar again to Potvin, Danica also maps how her father uses the authority bestowed upon him by virtue of his positioning as Father to survey, judge as 'ab/normal,' and ultimately to abuse her child-body: "Lift your shirt. I want to see if you're normal. Normal? He pinches the area around my nipples. He seems disappointed. Get out of my sight" (Danica, 1988, p. 39).21

Danica then traces the production of her father's authority back to discursive practices that constitute and are re-produced by institutions of Christianity, and specifically, of Catholicism.

Echoing the admonishment that she receives from a nun to whom she confides the 'secret' of her father's abuses, Danica writes:

> You are subject to your father in all things. He is your lord as jesus is your lord. He

20In *Beyond Don't*, Danica articulates this same disavowal of 'woman-ness' through the re-interpretation that she offers of her abdominal surgeries. Rather than figuring these surgeries as the removal of dis-easing memory, as I suggest Potvin does, Danica re-interprets them as (desperate) strategies for resisting the ways in which she is constructed as 'woman' and therefore as subordinate: "Each [surgery], I think now, was an attempt on my part to remove anything that related to my woman self. If my reproductive system could be excised, I would not have to be a woman, have a woman's life" (Danica, 1996, p. 134).

21In her later work, Danica re-views her experiences of being 'marked' as 'abnormal' through a feminist-informed frame and in so doing, re-constructs 'incest' as a 'normal' component of the training that women receive in (heteronormative) femininity: "I was rigorously trained in the 1950's by parents, nuns and Catholicism to be an always smiling, polite, self-effacing, obedient breeder" (Danica, 1996, p. 20). Similarly, one of the central desires that animates Danica's (re)telling appears to be a desire to highlight and re-name what her abusers call the 'normal' experiences of being a woman as 'normalizing' forms of gendered violence:

> Why am I always trapped? Because you are a woman. It is not a trap, that's just your silliness or your sickness talking. It is a normal woman's life, there's nothing wrong with that, there's a lot wrong with you (Danica, 1988, p. 80).
would do no harm or no wrong. He is right in all things. If you are punished or hurt it is for your own good" (Danica, 1988, p. 15).

Although her (re)telling draws upon and reiterates (dominant) feminist theory, Danica's work also adds complexity to feminist understandings of 'incest,' particularly in relation to notions of 'resistance.' In Don't: A Woman's Word, Danica writes-in her own attempts to resist 'incest' as a means of disrupting discursive repertoires that position 'incested' daughters as 'passive victims.' In the same moment, however, she also gestures towards the limits of such resistance:

Each time is a battle. I resist as much as I dare. I don't want to earn a harder beating. He will beat me whatever I do. If he doesn't like what I do he will be even more vicious. All I can to is try to keep him from killing me. Eleven. I know every move he makes and what it means for me. I know everything he likes and how not to give in to him. I make him force me. I will not give him anything he doesn't force or hit out of me first. I make it as difficult as I can (Danica, 1988, p. 48).

In her later work, Danica re-presents this same 'resistance' in ways that (re)position her as a 'heroic victim' with a 'rugged' personality: "As a child, there was never a time I didn't fight him, didn't know he was wrong or didn't hate him for what he did" (Danica, 1996, p. 30).22

Danica's (re)telling also complicates feminist (re)constructions of 'incest' as gender domination by witnessing to discursive re-circulations of power that cannot be altogether reduced to (essentialized) notions of male authority. In creatively re-membering her attempts as a child to 'make sense' of her father's violence, for example, Danica delineates the various and

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22Danica attributes her ability to 'know' that the abuse that she suffered was 'wrong' and that her abuser was at fault -- as well as her ability to survive at all -- to the fact that her grandmother unequivocally believed her initial attempt to tell 'incest' (Danica, 1996, p. 30). My intention here is not to undermine how essential that her grandmother's belief and her own ability to (eventually) maintain her perceptions were to her survival. Rather, I want to highlight that many of Danica's 'crazy-making' struggles and experiences are elided in her later re-presentation of this 'sure' and unswerving knowledge. My questions in this regard echo those raised by Janice Stacey in her examination of cancer survivor narratives:

But what remains untold in these heroic narratives? What does linearity exclude? What can not be restored with closure? Where is the continued chaos and disorder in such accounts? Where is the forgotten pain? (Stacey, p. 14 - 15; emphasis added).
conflicting explanatory frameworks available to her at the time, including ones that discursively connect her experiences of 'incest' to her father's liminal positioning as a working class, white immigrant: "I know that Canadian kids would never have to live with a father like mine. My father is the way he is because he comes from a stupid foreign country" (Danica, 1988, p. 19). Here, Danica's testimony references how discursive grammars of race, class, and gender intersect to co-constitute the boundaries of notions of 'citizenship,' 'respectable masculinity,' and 'incest.' Thus, Danica's narrative of coming to know herself as a victim of abuse tells another tale: one that positions 'incestuous abusers' at the outer edge of the Canadian nation state, as 'foreigners' or fictive-Canadians.

Danica also gestures towards the realities eclipsed by gender-based explanations for 'incest' when she describes her experiences of being (re)positioned as a 'bad and dirty child.' Referring to her attempts to 'break the silence' concerning her father's abuse, Danica writes:

But what does it mean aunt, when a man touches you between your legs? It means you are a bad and dirty child and I don't want you in my house ever again. But aunt, it hurts. What does it mean? Don't you come here ever again. Filthy kid. Rotten kid. Ugly kid. Your mind is in the garbage, that's what it means. Don't come here again (Danica, 1988, p. 20).

Here, Danica's experiences of telling and being dismissed serve as a poignant echo Rush's earlier insight: that given the social construction of female sexuality, "any attempt on the part of [a girl]-child to expose her violator also exposes her own alleged inferiority and sexual motives and shames her rather than the offender" (Rush, 1983; in Tal, pp. 13 - 14). These experiences, as they are re-membered by Danica, also hint at the ways in which historically specific discursive practices of racializing, classing, sexualizing, and dis/able-ing bodies might interlock with gendering practices to produce bodies as 'incest-able.' For Danica's (re)positioning as 'the bad and dirty girl' -- similar to her (re)construction as "the trouble maker," the filthy "liar," "the sullen one," and the "evil and obnoxious bitch" (Danica, 1988, pp. 30 - 33)
depends upon re-circulations of grammars of gender in conjunction with grammars of race, sexuality, class, and ability.

As a result of this 'marking' of her body, Danica is understood not simply as a 'girl-child,' but as a certain kind of girl-child: a degenerate daughter, one who has slid from (her father's) grace into (sexual) depravity, or perhaps was simply 'born' to perversity, and one whose speech is inherently untrustworthy and dis-believable. Ultimately, of course, such a dis-respectable 'marking' of Danica's body secures father's ability to continue to abuse her with impunity.

Furthermore, by marking one of his (girl-)children as a 'degenerate daughter,' Danica's father places her siblings in an impossible bind: they must 'choose' either to publicly disavow their sister and (potentially) save themselves from (further) violation, or to refuse such a disavowal and risk incurring a similar marking, as well as the violence that such a marking inevitably entails:

He turns to the others. Do you..., he screams at them. Do you want to grow up..., he bellows. Do you want to grow up like her? At the top of his lungs in a small room and me not more than three feet away. He spits. All the little faces round me wide-eyed terror and tears. No, they whimper (Danica, 1988, p. 32).23

Danica also references the ways in which her father re-frames her body and her life as worthless, useless, and thus expendable:

Hands around my throat. I'll do the world a favour he says. I'll get rid of this piece of shit. That's what you are. Shit. Garbage. Useless. Crazy. I can't breathe. He won't let me live. I might as well die. I am no longer afraid to live. There is nothing to live for (Danica, 1988, p. 73).

Here, Danica (re)tells how her father re-circulates codes of dis/ability to render her body intelligible as one of those 'freakish,' 'aberrant,' and 'useless' bodies that contradict nature and must, where possible, be eliminated to 'do the world a favour.' In a similar vein, Danica shows

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23Here, Danica's remembered experiences serve as a snap shot of the ways that 'differencing' practices position (girl-)bodies in relation to each other and thus perpetuate domination.
how her father's references to 'locked up' and 'crazy' bodies serves as a powerful means of both enforcing his will and reinforcing her silence:

Who will you tell? Do you think anybody will believe you? Do you know what they do to kids who tell lies? I'll see you locked up. I'll make sure they throw away the key. I'll see you never get out. You're not going to put me in jail, I don't believe you. Not jail stupid. A place for crazy women. A place where they'll keep you forever if I tell them you're crazy. I'm your father, they'll believe me. They'll never believe you (Danica, 1988, p. 45; emphasis added).

Again, Danica spells out how on-going practices of 'incesting' and silencing daughters are made possible, and how the impunity of ('respectable') Fathers is in part secured, through the establishment of 'places for crazy women': institutions where 'feeble-minded,' 'lying,' and 'hysterical' daughters -- those who manage to tell what they know of 'incest,' or those whose decimated lives serve as a testimony to its impact -- can be locked up for their own protection.

Tying her father's threats back to the process by which she learns 'to be a woman,' Danica also draws direct connections between her Father's authority to name her as 'mad' and the compulsion that she feels to perform herself according to heteronormative assumptions of femininity:

I fight him with everything I have and know. When he tells me I am crazy I no longer have anything left to fight with. I become sweet. I become willing. I try to please. That's better he says. It took you long enough to learn. I vow to do anything he wants from now on. I will not be locked up. Oh no. I want to live. I don't want to be locked away from my life and dreams (Danica, 1988, p. 48).\(^\text{24}\)

As Danica's remembered experiences attest, then, (her father's) practices of discursively marking bodies as 'crazy' carry considerable weight, given a social environment in which the lives of 'deranged' bodies, and particularly deranged female bodies, are reviled and despised as "lives not worth living" (Hubbard, p. 193). History attests to the fact that such bodies can be

\(^{24}\text{This segment of Danica's (re)telling spells out how discursive grammars of dis/ability -- that is, grammars that constitute 'insane' and 'demented' bodies -- and those that construct notions of heteronormative femininity might underwrite and mutually reinforce each other.}\)
'locked up,' stripped of subjectivity and agency, tortured, forcibly medicated, lobotomized, sterilized, raped, even exterminated. 'Crazy' institutionalized bodies linger in the background of Danica's narrative (much as they did in her child-consciousness), lending credibility to her father's threats and rendering intelligible the inescapable trap in which she finds herself.

Finally, Danica's (re)telling hints at some of the most disturbing ways in which women are positioned in relation to each other in and through violence, particularly when she wrestles with questions of forgiveness and betrayal in relation to her mother. Remembering the moment when her mother left her in the basement to be pornographically photographed and then raped by her father and three other men, Danica writes:

Years of searching for the woman who could not help me that night in the basement. The woman who walked away because that was the only choice she had. Either watch them rape your eleven-year-old daughter or make coffee. I can forgive that. I have more trouble forgiving her this: she said he told her I liked it and she believed him. Again. She believes still that I was born liking rape. I was born female. I was born a prostitute. Some women were born like that he said (Danica, 1988, p. 71; emphasis added).

Here, Danica attempts (unsuccessfully) to make sense of her mother's in/actions by way of a feminist-informed framework that constructs her mother as an inagentic 'victim' of both gender and class domination.25 At the same time, Danica also gestures towards the limits of such feminist frameworks. By admitting her own inability to completely forgive her mother, Danica hints at what might be unthinkable within frameworks that straight-forwardly absolve mothers and that position 'incest' as an instantiation of the ways in which men violate their (young) women.

In the passage above, Danica intimates that different women might be positioned differently in relation to sexual violence in general, and in relation to 'incest' in particular. Her

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25 In Beyond Don't, Danica makes this point even more clearly, re-framing (and absolving) her mother's failure to protect her and her siblings as "battered-wife behaviour" and "the result of a long attrition of her will and
experiences suggest that within a discursive economy of respectability and degeneracy, some women -- not *all* women, but *some* -- are understood as being 'born to be prostitutes,' born as degenerate misfirings of 'respectable' bourgeois genes. *These* women are always already 'marked' as filthy, as diseased (and diseasing), as sexually unrestrained, excessive, and deviant. Acts that would be considered outrageous 'sexual violations' when enacted upon un-prostituted women take on different meanings when they are enacted upon these (more) degenerate female bodies. Once Danica is constructed by her father and then reified by her mother as one of 'those women,' Danica becomes expendable: *free game*. Perhaps Danica's body also becomes 'useful,' providing a means for her father to transgress momentarily into 'black depravity' and thus to secure his (respectable) masculinity. By discrediting his (dis-respectable) daughter's speech and by threatening to do her further violence, Danica's father keeps his 'discursions' under wraps and *in the family*, thus sparing himself the threat of (committing) miscegenation, the terrors of disease ("she's only ever been used by her father," Danica, 1988, p. 74), and the unsettling possibility of public scandal.

Danica's (re)telling, by intimating how women's bodies might be complexly set up in relation to one another, also opens up a tentative space in which to ask a seemingly traitorous question: What solace -- indeed, what *benefit* -- might a mother stand to gain from the discursive practices that 'mark' her daughter's body for and by 'incest'? More specifically, what might it mean to imagine that a (liminally) respectable mother might disavow her daughter as a 'degenerate' -- might perhaps participate in re-positioning her daughter as one of 'those unnatural women' who like rape, who were born for it, and on whose bodies 'rape' loses it meaning -- to 'make sense' of her husband's violence, to justify it, and to ensure that she is not mistaken for

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spirit: he blackmailed, bribed, threatened and occasionally beat her. He broke her as surely as he broke me" (Danica, 1996, p. 30, 31).
one of 'those dis-respectable women' herself? These questions remain unspeakable, even unthinkable, within feminist frameworks that construct 'incest' as only about gender.

The nuanced (re)tellings of both Danica and Potvin offer us the possibility of pushing past these limits: both to 'see' how the violences enacted upon one (female) body might be connected to violences done to other bodies, and to imagine how interlocking systems that privilege some bodies and dominate others might position us in relation to each other. From a broader perspective, it is only through such a painstaking examination of the multiple ways that we might be set up to be implicated in each other's violation that we can begin to unravel the complex systems that 'mark' and violate us as 'women.'
CHAPTER FOUR:
NARRATIVES OF HEALING AND THE RE-COVERING OF VIOLENCES

Jackie Stacey, in her study of cultural representations of cancer, considers how 'cancer survivors,' as well as narratives of 'cancer survival,' are 'heroized' in ways that foreclose possibilities for translating what it means to live/through that illness. At the end of the introduction to her study, Stacey offers the following caveat concerning the narratives of cancer that she relays in and through her text:

The stones in this book carry a health warning: beware the certainties they promise; beware the subjects they construct; beware the truths they guarantee; and beware the closures that seem inevitable (Stacey, p. 21).

In this chapter, I offer a similar set of cautions with regard to autobiographical (re)tellings of 'incest': beware the kinds of 'recovered' subjects that such narratives construct; beware as well their re-presentations of 'wholeness,' of 'health,' the forms of 'healing' that they promise, the nuances of experiences that they inevitably eclipse. Most importantly, I want to caution the reader to consider how and at what cost these notions of 'healing' and 'recovery' are constructed.

In arguing for such cautions, I want to distinguish (otherwise unmarked) women's practices of re-presenting their experiences and subjectivities as 'incest victims' -- that is, their efforts to piece together and translate how they come to be (known to themselves as) 'marked' for and by sexual trauma -- from their strategies for translating what it means to 'heal' and 'recover' from that victimization. As I consider these 'strategies,' I am ever-mindful of one of the central dilemmas that informs this text: that is, the problem of how to represent 'incest' in ways that critique the de-contextualizing and de-politicizing effects of ('master') narratives of
'incest recovery' and that disrupt 'normalizing' therapeutic projects, but that also offer 'hope' to women living/through sexual trauma and somehow alleviate their pain.

With these tensions in mind, then, I turn once again to the narratives of Potvin and Danica, paying close attention to the processes through which they re-construct themselves -- or refuse to reconstruct themselves -- as 'recovered' subjects. Specifically, I consider the ways in which they narrate (and thus bring about) their own 'healing,' noting how they (are constrained to) draw upon, re-circulate, and contest discursive 'markings' of race, sexuality, class, and disability in order to do so. Again, my questions have to do with the ways in which (otherwise 'unmarked') women's practices of re-presenting themselves as 'healing' and 'recovering' subjects might reiterate constructions of 'incest' and 'incest survivor' as an 'unmarked' category of identity and experience.

**Potvin: Unsettling the 'Mark' of Gender**

Potvin represents her own 'recovery' as a process that is contingent upon an unsettling of relations of male authority and domination, at least on an individual level. As a means of articulating her changing relationship to male authority, she shifts from using capitals (He/Him) to using lower case letters (her/him) to refer to her father and to other male authority figures. Later on in her text (and, we are to assume, later on in her 'recovery'), Potvin writes:

- He is no longer my god.
- He is no longer my grandfather.
- He is no longer my father.
- He is no longer my doctor.

Those rights have been forfeited.
With no one above me, I am stronger (Potvin, p. 172).¹

Potvin goes about deconstructing notions of male authority by pulling apart her experiences of being 'marked' (by men) as 'abnormal.' Through her journal entries, Potvin reviews these experiences, tracing their social (re)production and tracking the ways in which such markings continue to structure her adult life. In particular, Potvin attempts to undermine the ways in which, as a child, she was (discursively) positioned as violate-able, and as an adult, her testimony to that violation was simultaneously rendered 'unbelievable.'

One of the most effective ways in which Potvin unsettles such marking practices is through her contestation of the various ways in which her (relationship to her) body is pathologized. Piecing together her complex relationship with food, for example, Potvin interrogates her (adult) habit of stuffing herself with food, redefining that 'unhealthy' behaviour as her attempt to contain terror, anger, and overwhelming memory: "I eat compulsively for hours, tasting nothing, filling my mouth, blocking my throat so that the screams will not emerge" (Potvin, p. 130). At a later point in her (re)telling, Potvin reconfigures these same eating patterns as acts of subversion -- acts that are inextricably connected to the return of her disavowed memories, and thus acts that are ultimately tied to the very possibility of her witnessing and testifying to her own history of violation: "Eating seems the most forbidden, dangerous activity I can indulge in, as if by eating through layers and layers of memory, I can somehow get closer to you, Maman" (Potvin, p. 151).

Indeed, it is by gorging herself on the foods that were given to her as 'rewards' for 'submitting' to the sexual demands of her father and grandfather that Potvin literally eats her way

¹The final line in this segment of Potvin's text -- 'With no one above me, I am stronger' -- also suggests a possible limit to the representational possibilities of a narrative that constructs 'incest' as a story of gender domination. A narrative with this trajectory appears to speak most directly to the experiences of (otherwise)
to a re-membering of forgotten memories of 'incest.' While she reads her compulsion to eat as a(n 'unhealthy') method of containing trauma, then, she also re-imagines that compulsion as an internal drive to testify to the violent trauma that precipitated it. In a similar way, Potvin re-reads her (seemingly pathological) impulse to repeatedly apply wart-removing acid to her arm. Again, Potvin describes this compulsion to 'mark' herself as her (only) means of taking some measure of control over the violences that 'scar' her mind, body, and soul. In effect, then, this self-scarring can be read as Potvin's attempt to leave upon her body some visible -- and thus, trace-able -- evidence of (invisible) sexual trauma.

In another rather evocative segment of her text, Potvin re-views her 'abnormal' experiences of being 'split off' from her (adult) body in relation to so-called 'normal' assumptions of what it means to occupy one's bodily space:

I let my mind hover near the ceiling and watch my numbed body lying on a bed, limp, helpless and stupid while I float above it, a flying spectator. I have always looked at myself this way. In New Delhi I watched the fakirs sleep on nails to induce detachment, while I alone among the watchers remain unimpressed. After all, it is normal to feel nothing, watch passively while things happen to your outer body, as if they are

'unmarked' women who live/through 'incest:' that is, women for whom an unsettling of relations of male domination might conceivably translate into a social system in which 'no one was above' them.

Potvin writes: "There are so many scars on my body that I cannot explain. But this one I remember vividly" (Potvin, p. 42).

Within this framework, Potvin's scarred and seeping arm represents a bodily testimony to the on-going impact of her sexually traumatic history. In a similar way, Potvin's multiple gynecological surgeries (as responses to what is diagnosed as 'hysteria,' Potvin, p. 148) are also re-cognizable as attempts to literally cut out parts of her body that testify to 'unacceptable' and dis-easing knowledges of 'incest.' Potvin gestures most directly towards her 'testifying body' when she describes an annoyingly persistent tick that flickers at the edge of her eyelid:

Just before waking one morning, I dream of a belt buckle stinging the corner of my eye. When I get up that morning, the tick has disappeared. She is there again, inside me. She sends my signals, my body's encoded messages, even when my mind is not willing to listen to Her (Potvin, p. 169).

Potvin mobilizes codes of therapeutic discourses to (re)construct her experience of this disappearing tick as a re-emergence of her 'inner child.' What interests me here are the possibilities opened up by reframing this 'tick' as a bodily (re)telling of incest -- a (re)telling that produces a bodily sign of a (deep) memory of trauma in order to push for its "testimonial resolution" (Felman and Laub, p. xvii) into narrative form.
happening to someone else. *My body is not really mine.* It only looks like me. Maybe I am just luckier than most; nothing can really touch me (Potvin, p. 22; emphases added).

Here, Potvin powerfully captures what it means to be forcibly dis-associated from one's own body (and hence, from one's power and agency) through sexual terror, humiliation, and excruciating pain.\(^4\) In this way, she posits a *new* 'normalcy' -- one that reflects her experiences of trauma-induced dis-embodiment.\(^5\)

At other moments in her (re)telling, Potvin calls the very notion of 'normalcy' itself into question. She articulates, for example, the ways that her sense of 'normalcy' is continually undercut by the return of destabilizing memories of sexual trauma:

My ordinary life is only the lit room, the visible surface, of the real and mysterious life which is the other place where I dwell. More and more I sense that my ordinary life is extraneous, irrelevant, that the precarious balancing act that I have always maintained between those twin lives is shifting. The cracks are widening, the centre of gravity has moved to an unknown place (Potvin, p. 13).

For Potvin, memories of being sexually assaulted by her father and grandfather constitute that 'real and mysterious life' which lurks just beneath the surface of her 'ordinary life.'

Pointing to these 'widening cracks' between her 'ordinary life' and the 'mysterious' and disruptive realm of traumatic memory, Potvin highlights the *provisionality* of facades of 'ordinariness' and

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\(^4\)Paradoxically, disassociation provides Potvin with more than simply a mechanism for psychological survival. It is the 'splitting off' of this 'flying spectator' self, as well as its 'unconscious witness' (based on Laub, 1992b, p. 83) of the atrocities committed against Potvin's (evacuated) child-body, that creates the conditions necessary for a future witnessing of Potvin's abusive history. Such a split, Williamson suggest, also provides the basis for a (normalizing) narrative strategy:

This fracturing into observer/narrator and victim creates an ambiguous effect. It is both the psychological defense which liberates the child from the pain of betrayal and abuse, and it provides a narrative strategy, a precursor to the liberatory process of narrating one's own story and imaginatively restoring the split (Williamson, 1992, p. 215).

\(^5\)Potvin's narrative of bodily dis-association resonates with the work of therapist and anti-violence educator Clarissa Chandler. Chandler describes how she and other women living/through 'incest' continually tally up the costs of occupying their bodies in ways that echo Potvin's (re)telling:

[My body] is not mine. It is too abused. It is too mismamed. It has been run-down much too long. This is something that I do not want to take home and lay down with, and wake up with, and walk around in the world with. Because it is hated (Chandler, 1997a).
normalcy. She references as well how dominant constructions of 'normalcy' produce — in fact, depend upon — the erasure of trauma-related experiences, memories, and subjectivities. In drawing attention to these facades, Potvin joins other feminist theorists/activists in critiquing discursive practices that frame 'incest' as a degenerative slip from 'normalcy,' re-presenting it instead as a 'normalizing' violation.6

Once again, it is important to consider Potvin's representational strategies in relation to the (discursive) trap that she finds herself in. Her choices are limited in many ways. To graft together an intelligible and believable story of living/through 'incest' — one that allows her to throw off disparaging 'marks' of culpability, deviance, and (inherent and permanent) damage — Potvin is constrained to take up the very discursive codes that were (and are) used to position her body as degenerate in order to contest and re-work them.7 In interrogating the effects of Potvin's attempts to 'throw off the mark,' I wish not to call into question the necessity of undermining 'degenerative' marking systems. Rather, my intention is to consider some of the costs incurred when women-survivors re-circulate racial, sexual, class, and dis-ability codes, grammars, and narratives within and through their efforts to narrate their own 'recovery.' It is, more precisely, to trace how this discursively-produced necessity to unsettle the mark of incest might underlie the (re)production of yet another master narrative of 'incest recovery': the story of 'surviving incest' as a loss and subsequent reclamation of (sexual) innocence, purity, and

6Potvin also figures 'incest,' as well as the process of its remembrance, as a loss of normalcy: "My room is littered with the debris of normality, smashed and robbed" (Potvin, p. 13). Such a figuring of 'incest' has the inadvertent effect of (re)positioning those who live with and through (memories of) sexual trauma as 'abnormal.' Later on, I will consider questions of how practices of representing incest as a 'loss of normality' inadvertently elide the experiences of girls and women who are always already marked as abnormal.

7An example of the ways that Potvin takes up and re-works codes of degeneracy is her re-working of discursive repertoires that construct 'incest' as a sign and cause of 'contamination.' She takes up this strategy as a means of re-presenting the devastating and reverberating impact that her father's brutality has upon her body and her life: "This disease I have contracted is incapacitating, permanent in its devastation, and has destroyed my immune system, my ability to resist being continually attacked, reliving the pain as each raw wound is opened, or
respectability. Most importantly, it is an effort to consider how the re-circulation of codes and the reiteration of this 'master narrative' lead not to an undermining of interlocking discursive systems that degenerately 'mark' bodies for and by violence, so much as to a deflecting of that mark -- from one (female) body to another.

*Potvin: A Black-and-White Recovery Story*

As a means of structuring her narrative of 'recovery,' Potvin takes up (a re-worked version of) the black/white dichotomy that served as a central framework through which she came to know and to articulate her/self as a 'victim of incest.' Potvin's process of 'healing' begins as she re-views and attempts to un-do some of the disparaging effects that restrictive (black-and-white) dichotomies have upon her life as a (girl-)child. As part of this (re)viewing process, then, she re-presents notions of 'whiteness' in more complicated and ambiguous ways. Potvin does not valorize 'whiteness' within her narrative; nor does she straightforwardly mourn its 'loss.' While references to the ruined white sheets of her childhood bed clearly express some sense of this 'loss,' other images of 'whiteness' seem to suggest alternative readings. When conjuring notions of 'whiteness,' Potvin draws upon images of the "blank whitewashed walls" in her psychiatric ward, of a "man in white [who] decides that [she] cannot be a good mother right now" (Potvin, p. 15), of the "whitish bubbles" of pus arising from her self-inflicted wounds (Potvin, p. 42), and of "[a]mnnesia as white as the Holy Ghost, as cold as breath in winter" (Potvin, p. 33). Thus, 'whiteness' is figured in Potvin's text in very complex and contradictory ways: as cleanliness, purity and innocence, but also as sterility; as absence; as violating authority reactivated by hypersensitivity" (Potvin, p. 177). In the same move, Potvin translates how these discursive repertoires limit the ways in which she is able to know herself and her experience.
and control; as an impossible trap; as a sign of putrescence and disease; and as a deadening 'normalcy' that masks the evidence of violent histories.  

As a strategy for pulling at the black/white dichotomy (which Potvin experiences as) confining her sense of self, Potvin uses 'colours' to refer to those parts of her body, memory, and subjectivity that she has been forced to disavow. She also describes the ways in which these 'colourful (subjugated) voices' undermine her ability to interpret her experiences within cut-and-dried dichotomies of innocence and guilt, goodness and badness, purity and contamination.

Potvin uses 'Red,' for example, to represent the parts of her 'self' that rage against her male abusers. This raging self continually disrupts Potvin's ability to perform herself as a "good girl" (Potvin, p. 54). 'Green' represents her "ugly inner self, the one no one is ever allowed to see," who is "shy and awkward" and "impossible to love" (Potvin, p. 116). She refers to the "naive and innocent, open and vulnerable" parts of herself as "The Blue Lady" who "radiates blue tranquility, waves of tenderness that sometimes nauseate [Potvin] with their sweetness" (Potvin, p. 54).

As she attempts to piece together her warring (childhood) subjectivities, Potvin remembers her repeated attempts to relegate threatening emotions, sensations, and memories outside of the boundaries of her 'self,' to render them 'other' -- not her. At the same time, she

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8 Potvin's complex rendering of 'whiteness' as a contradictory category does not unsettle her constructions of 'blackness;' rather, such a rendering seems to depend upon, as well as to reify, essentialized notions of 'blackness.' While her reference to the sterility and mind-numbing emptiness of the 'blank whitewashed walls' in her psychiatric ward may in some ways suggest the 'white lies' that covers over the 'marks' of sexual violence, for example, this reference itself reiterates figurations of 'incest' as filth, as degenerative blotch, as 'dark' stain.

9 Potvin describes how this submerged 'child voice' re-emerges to disrupt ability to perform herself as a properly gendered and (hetero)sexualized subject in relation to her (male) psychiatrist:

Nothing I do pleases Him anymore, I do not tell him what He needs to know. I have lost the magic formula. I look ugly in institutional blue. There is a little girl inside my head who talks back to Him while my outer voice remains mute (Potvin, p. 6).

10 Given Potvin's extensive use of Catholic imagery, 'the Blue Lady' would appear to be a reference to the Virgin Mary.
describes her inability to fully contain these 'colourful voices,' which she experiences as wreaking havoc upon her ability to make sense of her experience within a black-and-white discursive economy:

Where, as a child, I only saw in black and white, but I dreamed in colour, secretly indulging myself in all that I was denied. Sometimes colours try to seep into my body, but I do not allow them entrance (Potvin, p. 26).

Within Potvin's (re)telling, then, 'colours' come to represent exiled emotions and painful memories, as well as vitality, contradiction, warmth, and complexity -- that terrifying yet exciting life beyond both the condemned depravity of 'blackness' and the vacuous sterility of 'whiteness.'

As she narrates her 'recovery,' then, Potvin does not represent 'healing' as a straightforward restoration of an original 'white' purity and innocence. Instead, she figures healing as a breaking free from the discursively-produced traps of both 'blackness' and 'whiteness' -- indeed, as a process of re-claiming of disparaged parts of her body, mind, and subjectivity in order to re-create a more 'colourful' and complex sense of self. Her use of metaphors of reclaiming 'colourful' and submerged voices parallels the way in which she uses images of rending and re-constructing old garments: that is, both strategies constitute Potvin's efforts to represent the process through which she pulls apart old subjectivities ('evil seductress,' 'clumsy and stupid girl,' 'slut') and then grafts the remnants together into new identities ('incest survivor,' 'mother').

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11 For the most part, Potvin's (re)telling does not construct 'healing' as a process of (re)consolidating a singular and unified subjectivity. Instead, she describes 'healing' as the process of establishing a new 'wholeness' through "dialogue with all the separate parts of [her] body" -- a dialogue that results in "[n]ot severed limbs and parts, but a complete image" (Potvin, p. 197). She does, however, refer to the re-unification of her adult and child 'selves' as a powerful imperative: "The paradox must be reduced, all the voices singled into one, or I will be mired in cacophony" (Potvin, p. 211).
In some ways, then, Potvin's use of 'black' and 'white' codes might be viewed as an attempt to disrupt the ways in which discursively-produced dichotomies of 'blackness' and 'whiteness' constrain and violate subjects positioned on either side of the divide. Morrison's work on the (re)production of 'literary whiteness,' however, suggests another reading. Within Potvin's schema, 'black' is not a 'colour;' rather, both 'blackness' and 'whiteness' constitute the absence of colour. However, when Potvin's references to 'colour' are read together with references to 'blackness' as jointly constituting Africanist figurations (i.e. those of 'people of colour'), and when these figurations are read in opposition to Potvin's references to 'whiteness,' another pattern of meaning emerges -- one in which 'blackness':

can be evil and protective, rebellious and forgiving, fearful and desirable -- all of the self-contradictory features of the self. Whiteness, alone, is mute, meaningless, unfathomable, pointless, frozen, veiled, curtained, dreaded, senseless, implacable (Morrison, p. 59; original emphases).

When they are read within Morrison's framework, then, Potvin's use of this narrative of overcoming 'blackness' and complicating 'whiteness' in her depiction of healing has the (inadvertent) effect of recirculating colonial tropes that figure 'blackness' as sign of both danger and desire.

Further, the very notion of 'healing' as a re-incorporation of 'the colourful' draws upon and reifies yet another familiar narrative: a colonial narrative, one that references an overcoming of (internal) 'blackness' and a "cultural taming of the colorful" (Smith, 1996, p. 139). Potvin's once-disruptive 'colourful voices,' once they are 're-voiced' within the framework of this colonial narrative, cease to pose a threat to her (white) subjectivity; instead, they come to be experienced as a pleasurable diversity that can "liven up the bland dish that is mainstream white culture"

\[12\] Later in her narrative, Potvin writes: "All of the colours are melting into pastel shades, losing their intensity" (Potvin, p. 197).
(hooks, 1992, p. 21). What is left unexplored within this narrative of 'healing,' then, is the troubling question of how colonial tropes themselves might be part and parcel of the interlocking discursive practices that produce 'incest' as a social possibility. Potvin's narration of 'recovery' -- unlike her re-presentations of her experiences and subjectivity as the one marked by discursive grammars of 'whiteness' and 'blackness' -- uses codes of 'whiteness' and 'blackness' predominantly as metaphors. As such, her narration of 'recovery' does not reference in the same way the violences that such discursive codes inevitably entail for those whose bodies are 'marked' by them. The danger of taking up such a 'black and white' representational strategies to translate experiences of living/through 'incest,' then, comes precisely when such strategies are divorced from analyses of the material effects of racism, white privilege, and other practices of racializing bodies -- one of which might be 'incest' itself.¹⁴

¹³Potvin refers on occasion to her 'pale skin,' which she imagines as a cover that hides "all the dirty memories in darkness" (Potvin, p. 8). Smith argues that such references to skin tend to lack a sense of materiality, and instead "neutraliz[e] the body into a metaphorical language of consciousness" (Smith, 1993, p. 135).

¹⁴One of the central questions that this work does not take up, and one that warrants further research, is the question of how the (re)tellings of (racially) 'marked' women-survivors engage with, reiterate, and disrupt this same dichotomy of 'blackness' and 'whiteness.' At the risk of making generalizations about the work of (all) women of colour, I wonder about the ways that references to 'blackness' and 'whiteness' within these works might attach themselves to material bodies in ways that articulate the interconnectedness of racial and sexual violence. Sapphire, for example, in her fictional work entitled PUSH, gestures towards these interconnections. At one point, the novel's central character, a young black woman named Princess, considers her experiences of 'incest' in relation to other experiences of being racially marginalized:

My father don't see me really. If he did he would know I was like a white girl, a real person, inside. He would not climb on me forever and stick his dick in me 'n get me inside on fire, bleed, then he slap me. Can't be see I am a girl for flowers and thin straw legs and a place in the picture. I been out of the picture so long I am used to it. But that don't mean it don't hurt. Sometimes I pass by store window and somebody fat dark skin, old looking someone look like my mudder look back at me (Sapphire, p. 34; emphasis in original).

Princess' analysis of her experience suggests that 'incest' is visited only upon those 'un-real' subjects who fall outside of the dominant (pure)'white' category. In other words, she suggests that 'incest' itself might be connected to, or in fact depend upon, practices of 'racializing' (girl-)bodies.
This same 'covering over' of interconnected violences occurs as Potvin translates her 'recovery' as a process of disrupting the ways in which she has been 'closeted' or 'crippled.'

Reflecting again her journey of recovery, Potvin writes:

Confronting all of my fractured characters has brought me to the world behind the closet door... My contempt for those straight ones on the normal side gave me a sense of power, defiance, rebellious glory. But now I understand that everyone over there is crippled, incomplete. We are all looking for Oz to give us new hearts (Potvin, p. 197).

Again, this passage is born out of Potvin's view that her 'recovery from incest' necessitates a contestation of the discursive practices that categorize(d) and constitute(d) her (child-)body as 'abnormal.' As a means of disputing the specific ways in which she is marked, however, Potvin again draws upon and re-works narratives of other degenerate ('closeted' and 'crippled') bodies. In re-configuring 'straightness' for the purposes of highlighting her experiences of marginalization, Potvin's narrative of recovery risks eliding the 'unmarked' specificity of her own story as a 'straight' woman living/through 'incest.' Such an ('unmarked') narrative of 'incest recovery' might in fact re-cover what it means to live/through 'incest' from the standpoint of lesbian-survivors -- women for whom 'healing' might also necessitate an undermining of heterosexual privilege and homophobia. Similarly, Potvin's eventual construction of a universalizing continuum ('we are all incomplete, crippled') collapses across nuances of ('survivor') experience and subjectivity that are specific to disabled women. Indeed, such a collapse renders invisible some of the social relations that produce 'closets' and that mark bodies as 'dis-abled,' specifically social and discursive practices that are (re)productive of heterosexism and able-ism.

More difficult to trace, however, are the subtle ways in which Potvin's efforts to deflect the 'mark' of degeneracy away from her body inadvertently re-circulate that same mark onto
other bodies, specifically those of her father, her grandfather, and her mother. At several points in her narrative, Potvin re-presents her father (specifically, her father's penis) as a 'blackness' that infiltrates her (innocent, white) child-body.\(^{15}\) By figuring her father as a tainting and diseasing 'blackness,' Potvin inadvertently reiterates a discursive economy that connects notions of 'deviant sexuality' to (visibly) racialized bodies. In a similar vein, Potvin narrates her recovery against a backdrop of other 'damaged' and 'inadequate' bodies. Re-working familiar passages from *The Wizard of Oz*, Potvin writes: "Dorothy is singing again, recognizing at last that she never needed all these inadequate men, damaged goods, to help her on her journey" (Potvin, p. 207; emphasis added). In this example, Potvin establishes her claim to (respectable) 'wholeness' by deflecting the mark of degeneracy away from her own body and re-directing it onto the bodies of her abusers -- those 'inadequate men, damaged goods.' Her attempt to 'reverse' (normative) constructions of who is 'whole' and who is 'damaged' is perhaps most evident in the rather troubling way in which she represents her 'real' relationship with her mother:

I am St. Christopher, carrying the heavy burden of my mother, the wounded child, the slow learner, the disfigured baby. You are my damaged child, Maman, the deformed creature I gave birth to, the unwanted and unloved baby in white sheets that rises from an unbaptized grave to accuse me in my dreams (Potvin, p. 189).

Once again, Potvin attempts to refute the ways in which she has been discursively marked as 'damaged' or 'freakish' by stitching together codes of disability so as to re-position her mother as the truly 'unnatural' one. The codes that she re-mobilizes to that end, ironically enough, are the same ones that her father and mother had used to 'mark' her own (child-)body. Rather than disrupting notions of 'in-valid,' 'mal-formed,' 'damaged,' and altogether 'abandon-

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\(^{15}\)At one point, Potvin represents her Father as a (violating) god with "an ebony serpent with silver studs" snaking around his neck (Potvin, p. 8). Here, the serpent also serves as a metonymic sign of the Phallus, or the power of Father.
able' bodies, Potvin re-circulates these constructions in order to (re)establish that her body is not like that.

Thus, Potvin's re-mobilization of codes serves two purposes: it allows her to deflect the mark of degeneracy away from her own body to that of her abusers; it also provides her with a means of shoring up the ways in which she is 'respectable.' In (re)writing herself as a 'recovered' subject, Potvin constructs her own 'healing' as a process of evolving from ('black') ugliness to ('white') beauty: "In spite of your neglect, the ugly duckling has turned into a white swan" (Potvin, p. 211). She also refers to her 'recovery' as a process that enables her to reclaim disavowed aspects of her femininity: openness, softness, "all the things I have detested about being a woman, that gentleness especially" (Potvin, p. 208). In reclaiming these aspects of herself, Potvin re-establishes her identity as a (white, middle class, heterosexual) gentle woman.

Most significantly, she imagines her 'healing' as being contingent upon the creation of her own (respectable) nuclear family and home: "I have made a new family, created a new history, I will invent a family crest and motto. I may have six children, start my own dynasty. I will collect rare china for my daughter, tell her it has been in my family for generations" (Potvin, p. 204). Potvin points to her increased desire and ability to sew, to cook, and to be a ‘good mother’ as signs of her ‘healing.’ In this way, she takes up a normalizing strategy of embedding her

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16 At the same time, Potvin also re-imagines ‘family’ in ways that unsettle heteronormative assumptions. For example, she posits as her “real family” those cousins and extended family members who were also abused by her grandfather and who join with her in re-writing their family history (Potvin, p. 214). My concern, however, is in the way that Potvin's (re)telling of ‘incest’ repeatedly reinscribes heteronormativity by pointing to the establishment of a new nuclear family and the increased capacity to be a ‘good mother’ as signs of ‘healing.’

17 Potvin establishes herself as a ‘good mother’ by differentiating herself from her own mother. Specifically, Potvin refers to her ‘instinct’ to protect her own daughter -- a ‘natural’ impulse that she suggests that her (unnatural) mother does not have:

If I thought someone were trying to harm her, I would kill without hesitation, *mother bear instinct*. I would flee the city with her wrapped in my arms, endure welfare offices and humiliation all over again. There are no exemptions (Potvin, p. 162).
narrative of 'incest recovery' within "another important cultural master narrative: the marriage and reproduction plot, which depicts maturity, sanity, and normalcy as coterminous with marriage and parenthood" (Warhol and Michie, p. 344).

In re-presenting herself as a 'recovered' (white, middle class, heteronormative) female subject, Potvin recirculates codes of race, sexuality, disability, and class. Given a discursive environment in which these grammars interlock with and underlie grammars of gender, then, Potvin's ability to 'throw off the mark (of gender)' appears to come at the risk of reifying the discursive marking of other, less respectable women: lesbians, child-less women, poor women, visibly racialized women -- those who are deemed 'unnatural,' 'incapable,' perhaps 'insane.'

Danica: Recovery as a Return to Innocence

As I argued in the previous chapter, Danica represents her own story of living/through 'incest' as a story of gender-based domination, figuring 'healing' as a process of getting out from under the (violent) thumb of men: "Dreams of a life: free. No father, no husband, no man. Free to be who I am" (Danica, p. 74). Danica differs from Potvin, however, in that she refuses to re-write her experiences within a master narrative of heteronormativity. In fact, Danica does just the opposite: she represents her experiences of 'healing' -- experiences of taking ownership of her own body, controlling her own life -- as running completely counter to this narrative.

Further, Danica explicitly delineates the ways in which her adult body and desires fail to 'fit' into heteronormative categories of (white, middle class) femininity, mapping as well the ways in which her family members (continue to) vilify her for being 'un-fit': as an 'unnatural' woman.

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Earlier in her narrative, however, Potvin also writes of the incredible guilt that she felt when the child that resulted from her father's rape and that she subsequently 'abandoned' was accidentally killed: "I am a lousy mother. I am no good; she would never have died if it were not for me. If I had been there, it would never have happened. If. If" (Potvin, p. 144). Ironically, then, Potvin re-presents the regulatory 'trap' that constructions of 'the good mother' can mean for women, particularly women living/through 'incest.'
who does not want to have a child ("Every woman wants to have a baby. It's natural. You can't not want a baby, unless you're sick" (Danica, 1988, p. 77); as a "dangerous and cold-blooded...monster" who refuses to mother the child to whom she eventually gives birth against her will (Danica, 1988, p. 88); and as a man-hating bitch who will "never find a man" and who "can't smile, can't even be polite" (Danica, 1988, p. 83).18

Danica constructs (her experiences of) 'incest,' then, as an instantiation of on-going practices of heteronormative training. In so doing, she also re-presents 'incest' as a continuing condition. Up until the final epilogue at the end of Don't: A Woman's Word, Danica stubbornly refuses to wrap up and subsume her (re)telling of 'incest' within normative (and normalizing) frameworks that promise (complete) 'recovery.' Instead, she figures 'survival' as an on-going, contingent, and creative process, one that is constantly under re-vision, and one that requires (in fact, demands) a witnessing community -- without ever promising a resolution: "Survival. Dreaming with a pen in my hand. Writing. Writing. Writing. Who will hear me?" (Danica, 1988, p. 92).

It is through her (initial) refusal of (complete) 'recovery,' together with her use of non-linear and non-cohering representational practices, that Danica avoids some of the "dangers of narrative trajectories which promise closures of certainty...[and the] disappointments and pain they may bring" (Stacey, p. 21).19 At the same time, however, Danica's representational

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18In her later work, however, Danica does (partially) reinscribe discursive connections between notions of heteronormativity and 'healing' by focusing a great deal of attention on her reconciliation with her son, and specifically on her efforts to become a 'good mother.'

19Even in Danica's later work, when she re-presents her process of 'healing' as a more linear and progress-ive evolution, Danica continues to gesture towards inherent 'un-pastness' of 'incestuous trauma.' She writes against social pressures to 'get over' (Danica, 1996, p. 18) 'incest, testifying instead to its continual reverberation into the present:

Several lifetimes of keening and weeping could not express my sorrow. It is boundless and will resound, with my accusations, into eternity. And from its depths, I say: I have been terribly betrayed.
practices are not altogether invulnerable to the on-going recuperation of normative (and 
normalizing) master narratives of 'incest recovery,' particularly of those narratives that 
(re)produce 'incest' as separable from other violences. This 'recuperation' is accomplished, I 
suggest, in the ways that Danica depends upon familiar codes and figurations in constructing her 
narrative.

Like Potvin, Danica relies upon colonialist tropes of (shiny) 'whiteness' and 'blackness' 
to construct an intelligible account of what it means for her to live/through 'incest.' She re-
constructs the time 'before violation,' for example, through specific references to her 'beauty' and 
to the ways in which her body is identifiably marked as 'shiny' white: "Blond child. Blue eyes. 
Satin skin. Beautiful child. Trust before fear" (Danica, 1988, p. 22).20 Recounting that 
horrifying evening on which she was pornographically photographed and then gang-raped, for 
example, Danica begins by conjuring this 'beauty,' as well as her (class) 'potential': "This is the 
night of my death. Eleven. Beautiful girlchild. A bright and charming elf. She wants to be an 
archeologist. She dreams of a life of her own. She wants to be a writer" (Danica, 1988, p. 51).21 
Despite the non-linear trajectory of Danica's (re)telling, then, such a re-circulation of codes 
(re)produces constructions of 'innocence before trauma' that in some ways reiterate normative 
('unmarked') narratives of living/through 'incest.'

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20 Here, I interpret Danica's references to the 'satiny' quality of her child-skin as a marker of (proper) 
heterosexualization and gendering. Read in opposition to notions of 'grubby' or 'rough' skin, such a reference 
might also be read as a marker of (potential) class positioning.

21 As it is constructed here, 'incest' comes to represent the destruction of present beauty as well as dreams 
for future 'success.'
Danica also figures 'incest' as an imposing and suffocating 'darkness' and uses
figurations of 'blackness' to conjure and express 'incest' as a sexual transgression that results in
series of losses -- the erasure of (intolerable) memory, the strangulation of feeling and the loss of speech, the loss of hope and the inflooding of despair, and the annihilation of subjectivity: "The world is dark. There is no memory. Only his hands around my throat. Blocking. Memory gone. Speech gone. Feeling gone. No I. Nothing left" (Danica, 1988, p. 8).

Similar once again to Potvin, Danica uses 'blackness' to "evoke the tension between speech and speechlessness" and to "serve as a marker and vehicle for illegal sexuality, fear of madness, expulsion, self-loathing" (Morrison, p. 52), and despair:

I no longer have the courage to speak about anything. Darkness. She is so bad she won't do anything that Daddy says. Darkness. Daddy's face. Daddy's hands. Daddy's mouth. Daddy's penis. Goodnight daddy. Goodnight (Danica, 1988, p. 49).22

Conversely, Danica figures as 'light' the innocent, pure, and unblemished parts of her self that are untouchable by the imposing 'darkness' of 'incest': "Soul. A tiny light. If he doesn't know about it I can keep it. My secret. My soul. A self. A star. Millions of light years away" (Danica, 1988, p. 9).

Perhaps more problematic is the way in which these codes and figurations (re)produce notions of 'recovery' as a 'return to innocence,' particularly within the epilogue that Danica

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22In other parts of her 'auto-fiction,' Danica more directly appropriates and re-work(s) Africanist narratives -- those of bodies bound and chained -- in order to translate her experiences of being held 'captive' by (memories of) sexual trauma: "Hate as a promise. Never forget. Don't remember. Just never forget. Hate. Chains of hate. At least you won't forget to hate. The chains help you to remember. Bound to him. Bound to remember sooner or later" (Danica, 1988, p. 10). Danica also uses references to 'chains' to represent the constraints of (heterosexual) marriage and motherhood (Danica, 1988, p. 75).

While Danica's references to being 'bound' to her father (and later to her husband) can be read as instantiations of appropriation, this 'slave narrative' has resonances for Danica that extend beyond the metaphorical. After she is gang-raped, her father attempts to 'give' her as a domestic and sexual servant to one of her rapists -- a judge -- first for four hundred dollars, then for two hundred, and finally for free (Danica, 1988, pp. 60 - 61).
includes at the end of Don't. This two-page epilogue reads almost as an after-thought. Its language is markedly more poetic and beautiful, less concrete and visceral than that of earlier chapters; it is further separated from the rest of Danica's (re)telling by the fact that its paragraphs are no longer numbered and that it is not structured as a distinct chapter. Most significantly, however, Danica's epilogue breaks with the rest of her text in its emphatic declaration of (the possibilities of) 'healing' and 'recovery' -- a 'recovery' that Danica (re)presents as: "Light. A crack in the wall of darkness. A single moonbeam of understanding. Waxing. New. Brilliant. White gold promise" (Danica, 1988, p. 93). The final paragraph of the epilogue (re)establishes even more clearly Danica's identity as a 'recovered' subject: "Woman. Dreaming. The mind. Free. Freedom. Bestowed from within. Self. This night. No longer dark. Star messages. Silver and gold. Blessings. I dream. I love. I am" (Danica, 1988, p. 94).

In some ways, of course, such an epilogue seems 'necessary.' It allows Danica to imagine herself moving past the confines of her story of victimization and, in so doing, to claim and declare her subjectivity as a 'survivor.' For women-readers whose lives have been decimated by 'incest' and who continue to reel from its after-effects, such an epilogue offers hope of healing as well as "a structure for an imagined future" (Stacey, p. 10). However, one must look carefully at what is secured by such a proclamation of healing, well-being, wholeness, and selfhood. In particular, it is important to raise questions regarding what 'healing' futures such an epilogue promises, and to whom, and at what cost.

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23Williamson refers to this epilogue as being analogous to what she sees as the co-optive 're-packaging' of Don't by McClelland and Stewart: "Danica's own 'Afterward' reinforces [Peter] Gzowski's assertion [in the texts 'Forward'] of a happy ending to the story in the writer's new-found joyful health. This revision not only eliminates any reference to the body, but psychologizes Danica's recovery. No longer 'victim,' she is a 'woman with her eyes and her heart open, strong, hopeful and more determined than ever'" (Williamson, 1992, pp. 146 - 147).

24As Rockhill reminds me, it is important as well not to underestimate the social constraints faced by women-survivors who attempt to write as well as to publish their narratives of living through 'incest' (K. Rockhill, personal communication, December, 1997). In what ways might Danica's hasty epilogue gesture towards the conditions under which such stories can be (widely) circulated and read?
Danica's references to 'light that cracks the wall of darkness,' to 'new-ness,' and to 'white gold promise' remobilizes grammars of race, class, and sexuality in ways that construct 'healing' as a restoration of (temporarily lost) 'whiteness,' 'potential,' and (sexual) 'innocence.' Furthermore, she represents her process of remembering (and ultimately recovering from) 'incest' as a descent into and a return from the 'dark swamp' of memory—a descent that ultimately results in her discovery of her true ('light') self. In constructing her 'recovery' in this way, Danica borrows from well-established colonial narratives in order to re-fashion her own 'healing journey': as a story of a 'respectable (incested) subject who journeys into and returns from the 'unexplored' and terrifying terrain of memory. This narrative culminates in Danica's epilogue, where 'freedom' is figured as a final and triumphant overcoming of (internal) 'darkness,' accomplished through a psychological (and inherently autobiographical) journey that has as its end the consolidation of a unitary subjectivity. Danica, as the heroic ('incested') female subject who takes on and is successful in this journey, is thus 'restored' as an autonomous (and masculinized) individual, 'freed' from the 'weighty drag' of her body and able to exist at last as 'the (pure) mind.'

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25 Danica’s references to 'dark swamps' constitute more than simply her 'choice' to use (racializing) metaphors to articulate her memories of 'incest.' Such references also reflect the way that her process of remembering—as well as her memories themselves—have been shaped and constrained by (sexually) racializing discursive economies. She refers to this 'dark swamp,' for example, in her recounting of one of her recurring nightmares:

I am being swallowed up by a hole in the dining room floor. First somebody touches me, then I am swallowed up. I land in a swamp. Everything I touch is sticky. Darkness. There is no place to put my feet. I slide into ooze. I am surrounded by black slime hanging from trees. I am sucked further and further into the swamp. I hear howling. I wake and hear myself screaming. Now I know that I am not even safe at night (Danica, 1988, p. 21).

Again, my intent is not to undermine Danica's memories, but to mine them for what they might have to say about 'incest' and the practices that produce it as a social possibility: namely, the ways that 'incestuous violences' depend upon racializing discursive practices.

26 Ironically, despite her continual efforts to track the ways that her violation is produced by and (re)productive of social constructions of gender, Danica is ultimately transformed "from feminized victim to masculinized hero in [her] narrative retelling of individual triumph" (Stacey, p. 11).
Thus, Danica, like Potvin, draws upon powerful cultural scripts -- narratives of 'self-discovery' and of 'conquering evil' that are heavily invested with social meanings and significance -- to open up an autobiographical space in which to translate what it means to live/through and to recover from 'incest.' Such cultural scripts are also constitutive of notions of 'universal subjectivity.' These borrowed and re-worked narratives lend intelligibility to her experiences of sexual trauma, allowing her to valorize her previously disparaged subjectivity and to declare her existence in ways that demand a (feminist) reorganization of social life.

At the same time, however, one must be cautious of the inadvertent effects of drawing upon such narratives to represent 'incest recovery.' For if 'incest' itself is accomplished (in part) through practices of discursively 'marking' bodies as other than 'universal' (i.e. white, male, middle class, hetero, able-bodied) subjects, then representations of 'healing' that depend upon such narratives for their intelligibility entail certain risks: namely, the reiteration and re-circulation of the very discursive practices that produce (child-)bodies as 'violable' and 'culpable' in the first place.

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27 Danica's depiction of self-discovery through the resolution of trauma(tic memory) reiterates what Stacey refers to as a "common formula in popular culture," in which:

the stasis of a character, a community or a nation is threatened by corruption or invasion from outside (or from an enemy within); this produces chaos and yet offers the chance to explore the threat to its limits before it is eradicated; the reassuring narrative reestablishes order; this is often a new and better order than that disrupted in the first place (Stacey, p. 8).

Stacey concludes: "This is the true value of the trauma: the chance to find oneself" (Stacey, p. 9).
CONCLUSION

I feel my small, painful, lifelong struggle with incest played out on a much larger social scale. (Rockhill, p. 41)

The challenge is thus: how can one re-create without re-circulating domination? (Trinh, 1990, p. 329)

[T]he panties come off. He doesn't notice that my skin comes off with them. I peel myself out of my own skin. I am no longer myself. I am someone else. Someone I don't want to be. Someone I don't want even to remember having been. Someone I used to know sits on a white brocaded bench, under photo lamps, in front of a camera. A body sits here naked. The body tries to cover itself. Its hands move automatically. It clenches its thighs...The body is no longer capable of response. The voice was peeled away with the skin (Danica, 1988, p. 53-54).

As I read once again Danica's description of being gang-raped by her father and three other men, I find myself ruminating on a comment made in a review by Janice Williamson of Elly Danica's Don't: A Woman's Word. Williamson contrasts the reading effects of Danica's 'auto-fiction' with those of Sylvia Fraser's My Father's House (1987), a (re)telling of 'incest' that, in Williamson's view, recuperates dominant narratives of 'the family' (Williamson, 1992, p. 138). Williamson writes of Danica's work: "[H]er embodied tortured language is unmediated by a comfortable framing narrative that would provide the reader with a safe critical distance" (Williamson, 1992, p. 139).

Viscerally, I have a sense of what Williamson is referring to here. Despite my countless re-readings of Danica's (re)telling -- as researcher, as (feminist) reader, and perhaps even at times as voyeur -- I have yet to 'read through' the above segment of Danica's text without having a powerful body reaction of my own: without feeling overpowered by the sense of repulsion that surges through my body, without feeling my own chest constrict, my own thighs begin to clench. Again and again, I find myself having to choke back tears, to put
the book down and to breathe myself back into the room, to guard against the rage
burgeoning within me. Such representations take apart any sense that I have that I know
what 'incest' is about. Each time I approach this text, I am left grappling with the
unfathomable-ness of what it means that such a small, defenseless child-body can be stripped
of its clothes, its rights, its integrity, its agency, and ultimately its humanity. I am left trying
to make sense of a world in which such bodies can be subjected to (and through) vicious
assault, without recourse, for the 'pleasure' and edification -- literally, the building up -- of
men. It is in relation to these scenes that I agree with Williamson: No "compensatory
narratives" (Williamson, 1992, p. 138) -- not even post-modern theoretical perspectives
concerning the 'abjectification' of the body and the 'splitting off' of subjectivity -- provide me
with a way to distance myself from this horror (based on Lanzmann, p. 207). Hence, these
segments of Danica's (re)telling seem to leave me with no other option but to bear their
weight.

This 'experience' of running up against the limits of my own ability to comprehend
the traumatic histories of other women reminds me again: that every framework, even one
born out of an analysis of interlocking oppressions, is necessarily partial and therefore
insufficient as a means of fully understanding or representing 'incest.' It reminds me as well
that 'we' as feminist theorists have concentrated little on what it means to read or hear (each
other's) stories of 'incest,' and even less on what it means to 'listen' to and theorize such
stories across other categories of 'difference.' Donna Haraway, in her consideration of
practices of reading women's fictions, offers an insight that speaks to the political
possibilities of reading their 'truth-tellings' as well. She writes:

Fictions may be mobilized to provoke identifications as well as oppositions,
divergences, and convergences in maps of consciousness. Fictions may also be read
to produce connections without identifications (Haraway, 1991a, p. 114; emphasis added).

Haraway's notion of 'connections without identifications' is particularly thought provoking for me. What, indeed, might constitute such a 'connection,' and what conditions and practices of listening and reading might make one possible? In relation to my own practices of reading women's (re)tellings of 'incest,' and given my own positioning as an (otherwise) 'unmarked' woman who struggles with the on-going effects of a (covertly) 'incestuous' history, I have more specific questions: How might it be possible to engage with the (sexually) traumatic stories of other (marked) women in ways that do not negate or minimize my own experiences and knowledges of violation, and yet do not collapse or subsume their narratives of victimization and survival into my own? How might it be possible to read such narratives in ways that unsettle and complicate what I think I already know about 'incest,' about myself as a (gender) 'victim' and as a 'survivor'? And what new emancipatory knowledges might result from such readings? These questions are, of course, tied to a larger one: How might such strategies of reading add to what Haraway refers to as on-going feminist efforts to "negotiate the very fine line between appropriation of another's (never innocent) experience and the delicate construction of just-barely-possible affinities" (Haraway, 1991a, p. 113)?

In re-visiting my practices of reading the narratives of Potvin and Danica, I am struck by the extent to which my readings are informed by a lingering desire to search for my own experience, for my own body, within their texts. And there were indeed moments, as I poured over their narratives, when -- to my horror, but also to my great relief -- I 'recognized' myself in and through their writings. At these points of readerly identification, I was 'hailed' (at times willingly, at other times unwillingly) into memories of my own; I read
their stories as 'my story,' and was, for that moment at least, unable to tell us apart. This identificatory pull was particularly strong as I read segments in which the two authors referred to themselves as 'Daddy's little girls.' Such passages resonated strongly with my own experiences, conjuring for me the familiar humiliations of feeling 'owned,' as well as the pain and betrayal of being dis-owned. And yet, it was also precisely at these moments that I crashed head-on with my own conflative (mis)identifications. It was precisely here, in other words, that I came face-to-face with the irreconcilable otherness of their traumatic histories.

Danica, in a passage in which she articulates the impossibly painful trap of being 'Daddy's girl,' writes:

Daddy's girl. Wanna be daddy's girl? No. Just think that. Don't say no. Say nothing. I said don't you want to be daddy's girl? I expect a yes. Say yes. Say thank you daddy. That's what he wants. Don't say it. Don't say anything. Don't be part of his evil...He wants a yes. He'll get a yes. He'll use his hands to get a yes. He'll rip the hair from your head. He'll get a yes. Now it is your sin. Now it is your fault (Danica, 1988, p. 11).

As I read this passage, I cannot help but think again the violations that are (re)enacted through feminist discourses that position my body in the same categorical framework as Danica's -- as 'Daddy's girls'? How could I even imagine a 'connection' between what I have experienced and the incredible violences that Danica has lived/through, the onslaught of traumatic memory that she continues to endure? The act of conjuring such a connection seems to be in itself another form of betrayal. And yet, there is something in the very vacillations of my (mis)identifications with Danica -- the way in which these moments work as pivot points around which I name, un-name, and then re-name my own experience -- that seems to suggest the possibility of partial and contingent 'connections without identification.'

Furthermore, it is from this vacillating standpoint of 'Daddy's little (white, middle class, heterosexual, able-bodied) girl' that I am able to view my own history of subjection
most clearly in relation to the subjection of others. It is from this precarious position that I can 'see,' for example, the privilege of being prized as 'the respectable daughter' -- one who is set apart, valued, and 'protected' from violences that are designated for women of (more) questionable status. Viewing this same 'privilege' from a slightly different perspective, however, I can also see the costs that such a position exacts: the necessary dissociation from my body; the disavowal of my sexuality; the ownership, regulation, and control of my female body. And it is this fleeting and partial awareness of the utter lies of dichotomies of 'respectability' and 'degeneracy' -- it is my awareness of the violations that such 'splits' enact upon my body, upon every (female) body -- that fires my desire to interrogate and dismantle (my own) 'respectability.'

After all, is not the force that pins her 'respectable' knees together in a vice of propriety and protection dependent upon and constituted through an opposing force -- one that systematically and violently pries apart the thighs of so-called 'degenerate' women?

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At the end of WHITE LIES (for my mother), Potvin notes how, for the first time, she is able to 'see' her experiences of 'incest' as one thread entangled in a larger web of sexually abusive history -- a web that encompasses two generations of her family. Potvin describes how she joins together with other family members who were also abused to (re)tell and to hear each other's experiences of sexual trauma. According to Potvin, these practices of mutual testimony and witnessing create a space in which she and some of her family

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1Fellows and Razack make this same point, but in a different way:

Seeing respectability as dominance through difference also suggests that the goal of any antisubordination strategy cannot be the pursuit of respectability. Respectability is a claim for membership in the dominant group; attaining it, even one aspect of it, requires the subordination of Others. Moreover, because subordinate groups that gain a measure of respectability do not by definition possess all of the attributes of respectability, they are in an inherently unstable position.
members begin to pull apart that web of violence. Summing up the power of this collective testimonial process, as well its possibilities for individual and familial 'healing,' Potvin concludes: "My personal history begins to make sense in a wider context" (Potvin, p. 214).

This effort to write has been, in part, an effort to make new sense of my own private history of (covert) 'incest' by viewing it within a wider social and historical context -- one that stretches far beyond histories of individual women-survivors, beyond family histories, wider even than histories of gender domination. Looking back to earlier re-visions of my family history, I can point to the moment I first re-cognized my relationship with my father as a (covertly) sexualized one. Since that moment, I have understood that relationship as a primary site in which I learned, and continue to learn, what it means to 'be a woman.' Now, as I attempt to look once again past the limits of my own seeing, I re-imagine that sexualized relationship, this time as a battleground on which I learned not only what it means to 'be a woman,' but also what it means to 'be white,' to 'be middle class,' to 'be heterosexual,' to 'be able-bodied.'

Reviewing my childhood memories within this broader social framework, I can see that my struggles to 'avert' incest -- my attempts, however magical and ultimately futile, to deflect my father's attentions and to disrupt his sexualization of my body and our relationship -- constituted one of the primary contexts in which I learned to perform myself as 'respectable.' It was in the context of this struggle to 'protect' myself against his advances, for example, that I learned to hide (as best I could) evidence of my 'womanliness,' to re-present myself as one of those 'angelic' women who are somehow 'above' sexuality and above

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Those attributes that remain classified as degenerate will always threaten their toeholds on respectability (Fellows & Razack, p. 352; emphasis added).
reproach. To pull at this learned impulse, then -- to deconstruct my own 'escape into the Mind' as a performance that is itself implicated in re-circulations of grammars that construct other (more) 'contaminated' female bodies as thoroughly 'inescapable' -- is to tug at the shame that I have about the means and fact of my own survival.

This shame arises from re-cognizing how my childhood strategies for psychologically surviving (the threat of) 'incest' were caught up in discursive practices that effect the domination of others -- indeed, that effect(ed) my own domination. At times, it holds me hostage in my experience, compelling conflative identifications and provoking continual (re)tellings of my own experiences of victimization. Such (re)tellings at times serve as justifications for my 'choice' to use whatever resources I could muster, including the resources of my 'respectable' and shiny-white middle class positioning, to (re)establish my 'innocence' and 'goodness' and to protect myself from further (threatened) violence. This shame can also impede my ability to take responsibility for ways in which I continue to lay claim to the 'protection' of respectability: as I travel unimpeded in and out of graduate classrooms and banks, past police stations and immigration offices, through 'good' neighbourhoods and across national borders (except, of course, at night -- when no woman-

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2It is important to note here that in referring to these strategies, I am in no way implying that girl-children are able to prevent 'incest' simply by 'performing' themselves in particular ways. The testimonies of Potvin and Danica attest to the fact that incestuous Fathers discursively position their daughters in multiple and contradictory ways (as 'good girls' and as 'deviants,' as 'sluts' and as 'prudes' in need of sexual instruction) in order to justify and perpetuate their abuses.

It is also clear that my own so-called 'performances of bodilessness' would not have been enough to protect me from more physical forms of violation, should my father have chosen to 'cross that line.' What I am suggesting, however, is that my (covertly sexualized) relationship with my father constituted one of the terrains on which I first learned to recognize, then to disavow, my 'femaleness' as a source and sign of pollution, taint, danger, and shame. It was also one of the grounds on which I attempted to disrupt the ways that I had been 'marked,' by claiming 'respectable' privilege.

3Clarissa Chandler poses a thought-provoking question that points to the possibility that strategies of 'survival' might be unmarked. Paraphrasing Chandler, then, I wonder: Where do those who are constructed as 'essentially body' go when they are forced through sexual traumatization to evacuate their Bodies but cannot escape into their Minds? (Chandler, 1997b).
traveler is safe). And yet, as Thompson suggests, this same (shameful) recognition can also facilitate my commitment to undermining (my own) 'respectable' privilege.

Returning full-circle to the questions that initially sparked this inquiry, then, I wonder: might part of what locks (otherwise) 'unmarked' women-survivors into essentialized scripts of (gender) victimization be the fact that an interrogation of how one 'lays claim' to privilege inevitably calls into question one's own survival? In a discursive environment in which any inkling of (sexual) non-innocence might translate as a sign of (inherent) 'badness' and thus threaten one's ability to claim (sexual) victimization, then, it 'makes sense' that women living/through 'incest' might have much invested in disavowing their implicatedness in other histories and structures of domination. For to be constructed as 'non-innocent' or 'bad' in any way is to be understood as having brought on one's own violation and suffering. And it is in this 'threat' of having one's claim to victimization pulled apart that the 'risk' of acknowledging 'non-innocence' in relations of domination (and particularly in the domination of other women) may constitute more than just an emotional or psychological risk. As Fellows and Razack argue,

[t]o acknowledge that we oppress other women not only feels like a risk; it is a risk. Our own claim for justice is likely to be undermined if we acknowledged the claims of Others -- competing claims that would position us as dominant (Fellows & Razack, p. 340).

At the same time, however, Rockhill forcefully asserts that women(-survivors) must hold up for scrutiny the 'shame of complicity' that 'we' experience in relation to both our own violation and to the violation of others. It is this regulatory shame, she suggests, that

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4 I am indebted to Kathleen Rockhill for assisting me in thinking through this insight. In a similar yet inverted way, however, Thompson argues that the shame that many women experience concerning their histories of sexual trauma and survival -- that is, the deep convictions that they feel regarding what they perceive to be their own inherent 'badness' -- can feed into their willingness to acknowledge their own (racial) privilege (Thompson, p. 106).
constrains and limits what we are able to see, to know, and eventually to say about how women are positioned in relation to each other:

It is difficult to move beyond thinking of ourselves as good or bad, to see the ideological practices at work in the construction of our subjectivities, in the production of subjection...Ironically, our difficulty in distancing ourselves enough to see how regulation works in privitizing and individualizing domination practices as our singular badness/shame (Rockhill, p. 41).

Potvin's (re)telling gestures towards one way of re-framing what she refers to the "irony of [her] survival" -- that is, the ironic way in which she 'benefits' from some of the 'skills' that her father 'taught' her, the qualities that she developed by and for 'surviving incest.' Referring to these dubious 'gains,' Potvin writes: "This is not gratitude, this is making the best of circumstances. Surviving by any means possible (Potvin, p. 187; emphasis added). What might it mean, then, to re-frame the ways in which (otherwise 'unmarked') women-survivors (might be constrained to) claim whatever 'respectability' they can muster while simultaneously disavowing their implicatedness in systems of domination - - as their means to 'survive by any means possible'? Such a re-framing does not 'blame' women-survivors for mobilizing whatever resources they could in order to 'survive' violence and terror; nor does it exonerate them of the responsibility of grappling with the ways in which they continue to participate in the domination of 'others.' Rather, it points to the broader discursive and social systems that demand such performances -- those systems that necessitate such a learning of the 'skills' of 'respectability' -- re-naming them as the very systems that position (female) bodies as 'violate-able' in the first place.

Within such a re-framing, the 'tools for survival' that (otherwise 'unmarked') women-survivors are forced to depend upon to (re)establish themselves as 'respectable' and 'normal' - - the 'tools' of white, heterosexual, middle class-ness, and/or able-bodied privilege -- are
readable as 'the master's tools' of domination. And, as Audre Lorde so elegantly notes, *the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house* (Lorde, p. 287). It is in tracking the operations of these interlocking systems of domination and in articulating the *contingencies* among violences that we begin to render visible the stakes that we have in pulling apart *every* marking of abnormality and in rooting out *all* of the ways in which we perpetuate each other's subjugation. Such a re-imagining both honours and spells out the limits of 'survival by any means,' showing that ultimately, the (long-term) survival of one (woman) is intricately tied up with the survival of everyone else.

*Unmasking the 'White Lies' of Respectability*

When I read Potvin's (re)telling in light of this perspective, then, new and (potentially) subversive readings of 'incest' are made possible. *WHITE LIES* becomes imaginable as a testimony to, and an unmasking of, *precisely that*: the lies of 'whiteness' and 'respectability.' I re-imagine these 'white lies' as discursive constructions that mask practices of (middle class, white, heterosexual, able-bodied) male domination. These 'white lies' cover over relations of power and privilege, protecting them from being (potentially) disrupted by the articulation of women's experiences and subjugated knowledges of violence. I read Potvin's *black lies*, then, as (constructions of) truths that *expose* the lies of respectability -- indeed, as 'truth-tellings' that name (respectable) Fathers as the rapists of their own children. Viewed from this perspective, Potvin's "unobtrusive-looking" white collar, church-going father (Potvin, p. 60) becomes re-cognizable as a man who uses whatever means are available to him to maintain his tenuous grasp on 'respectable' masculinity: by disparaging racialized 'others'; by disavowing his mother/tongue and distancing himself from the
'assbackward parts' of his cultural, class, and family histories;\(^5\) by using, controlling, and 'educating' his daughter's 'primitive' and 'dis-respectable' body.

Potvin's (re)telling also serves as an effort to reveal the 'little white lies' that mask the violences that so often 'hold together' respectable, bourgeois families:

*What you are doing is holding the family together. I am proud of you for keeping our secret, for doing what I tell you. And your mother would be too. But it is better not to look for praise, to keep it our secret* (Potvin, p. 101).

Her narrative points to the instability inherent within that 'respectable' family -- a family constituted and at the same time fundamentally threatened by its silenced-yet-knowing (incested) daughters. Potvin's (re)telling also gestures towards the ways in which such a daughter, for the purposes of preserving 'family,' must be stripped of her subjectivity. It points to ways in which she is marked as a 'degenerate' and exiled to the constitutive outside of that gleaming portrait of 'family,' becoming instead a "mistake in the family slide show, a character who slipped into the edges of the frame at the beginning of a chronology long since altered, the illusion of the happy group complete except for one pair of frantic eyes" (Potvin, p. 109).\(^6\) And yet, Potvin's (re)telling also attests to the fact that these

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\(^5\)Potvin re-presents her father's struggle for 'respectability' in the following way:

How will I ever succeed in business with the damned anglais and their tightass control of the market. The Jews and the English, they are no good. My English must be better. When Meme and Pepe come to visit next time, there will be no French under my roof, do you hear? It is all assbackwards, their patois. Stupid peasoupistes, mes parents. And here I thought I had moved away from all that, goddamnit. In our house, we speak English only (Potvin, p. 60; original emphasis).

\(^6\)This disavowal of the 'incested' (and 'knowing') daughter is, in some ways, similar to the middle class disavowal of domestic workers in nineteenth century Europe. Commenting on the essential role that the 'dirty' labour of working class domestic workers played in establishing the 'gentility' and 'respectability' of the middle class, Fellows and Razack note:

It was not possible to achieve respectability without domestic workers. Yet, the domestic worker represented the very degradation that the respectable home was by definition not supposed to contain. The domestic worker knew the truth that middle-class life was designed to eradicate — she knew its dirtiness. To make it not matter that she saw and knew intimately middle-class dirt, she had to be stripped of her ability to know. *She had to be stripped of her subjectivity.* By degrading her and her
constitutive 'traumas of the everyday' are never fully silence-able. Instead, she describes these traumas as re-surfacing again and again, in the most unsuspecting forms: as the "thudding" and "sighing" of dishwashers, as fire logs that crackle like "the thin snap of fine leather whacking the air" (Potvin, p. 7), as counterposing rhythms that, if recognized, might disrupt a family's thin veneer of respectability:

Listen carefully to your suburban nights, Maman, when you feel protected from the whiteness of the snow falling all around you. Insisting always on quality, you have paid dearly for such tranquility. Listen to the counterpoint to your rhythms, that nearly undetectable current, running just below the surface, as the machine comes to the end of its cycle. A small chant, not quite in harmony with the rest (Potvin, p. 7).

Here, finally, I 'see' Potvin's WHITE LIES as an unveiling of the lies that are told, quite literally, 'for her mother.' Potvin's (re)telling offers a standpoint from which to imagine the ways in which constructions of (shiny white) 'respectability' might serve as a protective shroud -- one that might insulate her mother from (the knowledge of) her daughter's pain and terror, but one that also exacts costs of its own: a continual denial and deadening of (embodied) sentience, a renunciation of human connection, and a banishment to "the cold empty splendour of the Snow Queen's palace" (Potvin, p. 7). At the same time, Potvin's complex depiction of her own contradictory experiences points to a possible limit to the 'protection' of respectability. In the end, her (re)telling suggests that the only 'guarantee' offered by such a discursive system is that more and worse violence will be meted out against work, the middle-class family transformed her from a knowing subject into an invisible object and in the process made the reality of its dirt a nonreality (Fellows & Razack, p. 348; emphasis added).

7 According to Potvin's (re)telling, her father at times justifies his abuse of her body by referring to her alleged excessive sexuality ("You made me do it, you little whore" -- Potvin, p. 38). In other moments, he makes similar justification based upon his estimation of her 'frigidity' and her need for (sexual) 'education:' "This is for nothing, take off your pants, imagine what you get if you really do something! That's funny. Tabernacle! You are supposed to laugh, you stupid bitch. Don't you ever listen to me? Maudite femme, you have your mother's cold blood in your veins" (Potvin, p. 11). Thus, Potvin's story testifies to the impossible trap that women face in attempting to occupy 'angelic' positions of femininity: you're damned if you do, and still damned (although perhaps more so) if you don't.
those who are positioned on the 'marked' side of the divide. 'White lies,' can also represent those taken-for-granted 'truths' that cover over the painful ways in which women are connected to each other -- connections based upon the fact that "the violence directed at some of us enables others to live lives of lesser violence" (Razack, forthcoming, p. 11; emphasis added).

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In attempting to gesture towards what is rendered unintelligible, inadmissible, and unspeakable within normative (re)tellings of 'incest,' I have used what Valerie Walkerdine refers to as a "double-strategy": "one which recognizes and examines the effects of normative models [of (re)telling 'incest'], whilst producing the possibility of other accounts and other sites of identification" (Walkerdine, 1985; in Razack, 1993, p. 60). My task has been to hold up to critical scrutiny the normative and normalizing frames through which 'incest' is (re)told and understood as an 'unmarked' gender story, with the hope of opening up new possibilities for hearing what might be missed -- or, more precisely, what might be re-covered -- within taken-for-granted categories and standardized narratives. It has been to trace what has been 'forgotten' about 'incestuous violence' even through the very process of re-membering (out loud) our experiences as 'incest' and ourselves as 'incest survivors.' Ultimately, by attempting to read-in, highlight, and disrupt codes of degeneracy as they are re-circulated within (unmarked) women's re)tellings of 'incest,' my aim has been to 'unhobble' the social imaginary\(^8\) in relation to 'incest' in order to make room for new ways to think about 'incest,' as well as new strategies for bringing about its end.

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\(^8\)Simon refers to the 'social imaginary' as "the way of naming, ordering and representing the social and physical reality whose effects simultaneously enable and constrain a set of options for practical action in the world" (Simon, p. 37).
Healing as an Un-covering of Interconnected Violences

A final question: What might it mean to re-imagine 'healing' in ways that might open up possibilities for tracing the interconnectedness of 'survival'? Based upon his 'therapeutic' work with Holocaust survivors, Laub suggests that memories of trauma continue to resurface in disruptive and life-limiting ways until such memories can be spoken and heard in their specific totality (Laub, 1992a, p. 57). Insofar as Laub’s insights concerning Holocaust survivors have 'truth-value' for women who live/through 'incest,' then, I suggest that possibilities for new 'healings' from 'incest' might be dependent upon what Bell refers to as practices of particularized listening (Bell, 1993; cited in Williamson, 1994, p. 227). These practices constitute efforts to radically and continually call into question the categories through which we hear and come to 'know' each other's experiences of 'incest' -- as well as our own -- in order to discern the unspeakable 'truths' that are written into silences. To listen in 'particularized' ways to stories of childhood sexual trauma, and especially to do so across categories of 'difference,' then, is to (attempt to) withstand two powerful and opposing impulses: the impulse to conflate differences through uninterrogated (mis)identifications and by collapsing all stories of 'incest' into a larger 'gender story,' and the impulse to hear 'different' stories as irreducibly and (therefore containably) 'other.'

Strategies of displacing

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In a section in which he outlines the 'hazards of listening,' Laub writes: "We endow the survivor with a kind of sanctity, both to pay our tribute to [her] and to keep [her] at a distance, to avoid the intimacy entailed in knowing" (Laub, 1992a, pp. 72 - 73). Re-viewing my own 'hesitations' to critically engage with women's (re)tellings of 'incest,' I wonder how my own strategies of distancing -- my impulse to construct 'incest survivors' such as Danica and Potvin as altogether (containably) 'other' -- serve as a means for me to re-establish myself as 'respectable': This is not me. This did not happen in my family. I am not that badly damaged. Respecting and paying 'tribute' to the specific experiences and survival of 'others,' then, can sometimes be tied to a denial of resonances, as well as to an undermining of shared investments and of possibilities for 'connections without identifications.'
knowledge through a continual making, un-making, and re-making of categories of 'victim' and 'survivor' make room for new healings: for those partial and contingent stitchings-together of painfully fragmented histories, bodies, and subjectivities that are not dependent on illusory and dangerous reclamations of 'wholeness,' 'innocence,' 'respectability,' even 'home.'

I imagine this strategy of particularized listening as a means of what Judith Butler refers to as "politicizing disidentification" -- a means of fostering that "uneasy sense of standing under a sign to which one does and does not belong" (Butler, p. 219; original emphasis) in order to undermine the 'stickiness' of (gender) victim scripts. It is a strategy for re-configuring 'incest survivor' identity, not as a fixed end point of feminist struggle, but as a "way of re-departing...that allows one to start again with different re-departures, different pauses, different arrivals" (Trinh, 1990, p. 328). Such a strategy of dis-identification constructs 'incest survivor' knowledges and identities that are provisional and based upon "shared but not identical" experiences, histories, and positions (Martin, p. 92). This strategy also provides a way for (unmarked) women-survivors to continually re-read their 'experiences' in multiple ways, and thus, to imaginatively move out from behind (essentialized) barricades of (sexual) victimhood. The (ever-shifting) knowledges produced through this continual re-reading of (re)tellings of childhood sexual trauma are essential for new 'healings' to occur. For, as Cathy Caruth so eloquently puts it, "[t]his speaking and this listening [that bring about 'healing'] -- a speaking and a listening from the site of trauma -- does not rely...on what we simply know of each other, but on what we don't yet know of our own traumatic pasts" (Caruth, p. 11; emphasis added).
Elly Bulkin, in her 'autobiography' that traces the complex inter-weavings of her multiple experiences of 'survival,' offers an example of what I am thinking of as a representation of 'healing' that does not re-cover interconnected violences. The title of her work refers to an incident in which Bulkin tries to access the confidential files in which she had stored written memories of 'incest' and finds that her password is no longer operative. In that moment of frustration, she was left to contemplate the meaning of the message blinking on the screen before her:

Enter Password: Recovery
Re-Enter Password:

Here, Bulkin constructs 'recovery' as an act of "getting past something (a door, a block, silence, loss of memory)"; at the same time, she acknowledges that "it isn't enough to [get past this block] once and be done with it" (Bulkin, p. 39). Bulkin uses this incident of the 'inoperative password' as a metaphor for how she feels compelled to continually 're-enter' her own process of 'recovery': as a Jew, as a lesbian, as a feminist, as a writer, and finally, as an 'incest survivor.'

Bulkin's (re)telling, and specifically her title, reiterates some of central notions that have informed this work: that the act of 'getting past' trauma is never fully accomplished, and that the 'password' that opens up possibilities for 'knowing' and 'healing' from traumatic histories continually shifts. These shifts call 'us' as women who live/through 'incest' to set aside previous knowledges of violation, to re-consider our past 'experiences' from new perspectives, and indeed, to 're-enter' these experiences from different (subject) locations.

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