

## ABSTRACT

GABRIELSON, DEANNA. (S)he Said: Transient Gender Roles and Sexual Identities in *Wild Seed*, *Middlesex*, "The Two," and *The Color Purple*. (Under the direction of Sheila Smith McKoy).

American society clings to a heteronormative male/female binary identification model. Such definitions, however, leave a significant disparity between social constructs and individual realities. Contrary to societal demands for gender determinants that are based on concrete guidelines, neither gender nor sexuality is stable. In fact, these binary identity constructions can only be opened to honest analysis if they are deconstructed in terms of the full complexity of their fluidity -- including gender, sexuality, and location.

The majority of analyses done on identity constructions pertain to the interplay among race, gender, ethnicity, and sexuality. While the inextricable influence of such factors is undeniable, this project focuses on the disruptive effects of alternative sexualities and on the fictionalized portraits of characters whose gendered identities and desires defy the binary, heteronormative definitions of gender and sexuality. The four texts that comprise this study are Octavia Butler's *Wild Seed*, Jeffrey Eugenides' *Middlesex*, Gloria Naylor's "The Two," and Alice Walker's *The Color Purple*. Each author explodes heteronormative gender identity in particular ways. Butler exposes the intricate power relations between gender and eroticism while reminding the reader how deeply the binary model is entrenched in American society. Eugenides explores the possibility of finding satisfaction in maintaining a dual-sexed identity and subverts the binaries by questioning the tenets used to legitimize them: sexual performativity and biological determinism. Walker and Naylor utilize negotiations of erotic power and sexual desire to undermine the binaries through depictions of lesbianism, female social networks, code-switching, and by exposing heteronormative phallic oppression.

This thesis considers the ways in which these authors defy heterosexual normativity and instead call attention to the fluid gender identities that also define American culture.

(S)he Said: Transient Gender Roles and Sexual Identities in  
*Wild Seed, Middlesex, "The Two," and The Color Purple*

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A thesis submitted to the Graduate Faculty of  
North Carolina State University  
In partial fulfillment of the  
Requirements for the degree of  
Master of Arts

English

Raleigh, NC

2007

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## **BIOGRAPHY**

Deanna Lynn Gabrielson was born on September 20, 1981 in West Palm Beach, Florida to Dean and Linda Brimmer. Moving to Roanoke, Virginia in 1989, Deanna grew up on horseback, indulged in a love for literature, and a fascination with human nature. She entered Roanoke College in Salem, Virginia in the fall of 1999. Pursuing degrees in both English and Psychology, she decided that teaching college literature would be an ideal career choice and set aside Psychology. Deanna married Forrest Gabrielson in May of 2002. She graduated with honors in English, while concentrating on postcolonial Latin American literatures, from Roanoke College one year later in 2003. In the spring of 2005, Deanna entered North Carolina State University in Raleigh, North Carolina in pursuit of a Masters Degree in English and World Literature. She is currently teaching full-time at Fayetteville Technical Community College in Fayetteville, North Carolina and plans to spend time reacquainting herself with friends and family before pursuing a doctoral program in minority literatures within the next few years.

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## INTRODUCTION

Women's personal bounded individuality is always 'compromised by their bodies' troubling talent for making other bodies. Men's dream of self-contained autonomy is always betrayed by their reliance on women's capacity for birth.

From "Identity in Transit"  
Irene Gedalof

Question not just the identity of the individual, but the nature of identity itself ... The self is not dissolved (it has rules, it can negotiate), but neither is it defined by containment or closure.

From "Identity in Transit"  
Irene Gedalof

Long before Donna Haraway's 1991 "A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century" and Judith Butler's 1990 Gender Trouble, both societal and literary tensions demanded attention be paid to gender identity and sexual identity. These tensions evoke numerous tensions regarding gender and sexual identity. Must every biological male emulate Tarzan and seek out Jane to be a man? What if a biological female prefers to be Tarzan?<sup>1</sup> What if one's biological identity is difficult to determine? Contemporary media culture deals with this tension by providing today's consumers with female characterizations that are strong and independent as well as highly sexualized.<sup>2</sup> Unfortunately, such representations do little to assuage the rift between social constructs and individual realities. To truly tackle the problems plaguing gender identity, one must understand that the socialized expectations of masculine and feminine cannot merely be hybridized on command. In this thesis, I argue that only in attempting to

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<sup>1</sup> Tarzan and Jane, from Edgar Rice Burroughs's *Tarzan* books (first published in 1912), were once popular cultural icons of the dominant primal male and submissive female.

<sup>2</sup> Scantily dressed but fiercely combative television characters such as *Xena: Warrior Princess* and *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* along with video game heroine *Lara Croft: Tomb Raider* are regularly cited as proof of today's estrogen enhanced Tarzans.

destabilize these constructions can one move beyond them to honestly analyze identity in terms of gender, sexuality, and location.

The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines sexuality as “a person's sexual identity in relation to the gender to which he or she is typically attracted; the fact of being heterosexual, homosexual, or bisexual; sexual orientation” (par. 6). Gender itself is often defined in binary terms in which one’s identity is based upon the absence of the ‘other.’ American culture generally recognizes two primary gender prototypes: male and female. If an individual is male, then he possesses the culturally accepted characteristics of the masculine model and does not exhibit any feminine traits. Likewise, if an individual is female, then she possesses the expected traits of the feminine model and none of those which constitute masculinity. As can be expected, such binary definitions exclude those persons who fail to fit comfortably within the normative boundaries set forth. Gender theorists often note that such definitions are ideological, not realistic. Consider Riki Wilchins’ definition of these boundaries in *Queer Theory, Gender Theory*:

With gender, we create the meaning of *woman* by excluding everything that is non-Woman, and vice versa for Man. We form idealized templates for what is perfectly masculine or perfectly feminine by excluding whatever doesn’t fit: the queer, the different, the mixed. (36)

Beyond the problems inherent in such binary approaches to gender is the assertion that gender identity – identity being considered “stable” – can be concretely defined per preordained guidelines. Gender identity, contrary to what generalists would like to argue, is not a point of stasis; it is fluid. Judith Butler rightly contends, along with Jacques Lacan, Jacques Derrida, and Michel Foucault, when she states that “gender is simultaneously a

mechanism of constraint (a set of norms that define us as normal/abnormal) and a locus for productive activity ... Gender performativity may be inevitable, but gender identity is always open and incomplete” (Lloyd 127-128).<sup>3</sup> Butler and Christian Flaugh theorize that identity’s social construction relies on one’s interactions with, or exclusion from, a comparative form, i.e., from a normative human being. When an individual’s identity moves beyond the normative gendered and sexual binary, that person is labeled as a deviant. While this fluidity is an improvement over the prior binary model based on stringent chromosomal identification, it maintains the perception that identity is a constant when postmodernists, contemporary feminists, and gender theorists know it to be otherwise. Wilchins explains that

The shift in focus from the regulatory practices of the gender system to our inner ‘gender identities’ conceals gender’s true origins beneath a substitute myth about nature, sex, and what is *inside of us*. Gendered identification is not an integral, independent feature of experience, but two accepted sets of meanings through which we are called to understand ourselves and to be understood by others. (131)

Briefly, the belief that gender identity is an inherent trait is a myth that denies individuals the freedom to develop their unique gender and sexual identity. This myth is employed as a device by which society’s hegemonic structures are reinforced.

A significant amount of analysis may be found on gender studies in literature that incorporate such theoretical perspectives as queer theory, psychoanalytic theory, postcolonial

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<sup>3</sup> Wilchins more clearly distinguishes gender performativity, or expression, from gender identity: “*Gender expression* refers to the manifestation of an individual’s fundamental sense of being masculine or feminine through clothing, behavior, grooming, etc. *Gender identity* refers to the inner sense most of us have of being either male or female” (8).

theory, and feminist theory. Few, however, specifically address the manner in which gender instability (both personal and social) influences contemporary fiction and culture. Race and ethnicity are also inevitable influences on gender identity and sexuality. A racial or ethnic identification lends itself toward additional pressure to conform to the proclaimed majority's conceptualization of the norm. Michael Harper, bell hooks, and Edward Said have all focused on the relationships between gender and the racially eroticized other. These theorists have contextualized the issues that bind race and sexuality; however, it is not my intention to replicate this discussion. I instead choose to focus on Octavia E. Butler's use of the erotic power continuum in *Wild Seed*, Jeffrey Eugenides' deconstruction of biological gender in *Middlesex*, and the examination of heteronormativity's interactions with lesbianism in Gloria Naylor's "The Two" and Alice Walker's *The Color Purple*.

Despite its traditionally limited focus, the science fiction genre provides a fertile landscape from which to approach this gap in theoretical analysis.<sup>4</sup> Gregory Benford defines science fiction as "an integration of the mood and attitude of science ... with the fears and hopes that spring from the unconscious. Anything that turns you and your social context ... inside out" while James E. Gunn explains that science fiction "deals with the effects of change on people in the real world as it can be projected into the past, the future, or to distant places . . . it usually involves matters whose importance is greater than the individual or the community" (Tal 68). Science fiction allows the author to discard present mores and recreate

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<sup>4</sup> Science fiction, or speculative fiction, has long been dominated by white male authors, heroes, and readers with plot lines that reinforce the hegemonic male/female binary. Into the late 1990's, Samuel R. Delany and Octavia E. Butler shared the distinction of being the only recognized African American writers in the genre. Butler's marginalization was two-fold in that she was also a woman in the male dominated field. Gregory Hampton contends that despite African Americans' scarce showing in the genre "the association is a straightforward one; where there is a discussion of alienation, the unknown and 'otherness,' there is an analogous link to the African American experience" (70).

an entirely unique society if he or she so desires. This ability is relevant to any comprehensive study of gender destabilization in that “power relations ultimately determine the construction of identity [and] how we see the world depends on how we are allowed or encouraged to see it” (Helford 270). Accordingly, Octavia E. Butler does not create utopian societies; she utilizes science fiction’s relatively flexible parameters to undercut the behavioral and biological coda used to identify one as male or female.<sup>5</sup>

In chapter one, I discuss Butler’s prelude to her Patternist series *Wild Seed*, which takes Flaugh’s aforementioned fluidity/plurality theory even further with characters who are capable of entirely changing their biological sex at a cellular level. Butler’s text offers continuous exposure to the intricacies of power relations -- how power affects gender identity, and how gender identity is influenced by power. She differentiates between two different types of power, consensual and non-consensual, and provides examples of both in her novel. In Lewis Call’s 2005 “Structures of Desire: Erotic Power in the Speculative Fiction of Octavia Butler and Samuel Delaney,” Call argues that

Delany's work, like Butler's, embodies an attempt to describe the range of ethical power relations. The basic rule for both authors is that these relations must be consensual. In this sense, Butler and Delany represent the culmination of a theoretical tradition which began when Masoch added the concept of consent to the philosophy of erotic power ... Butler and Delany also expand, enhance and renew the theory of erotic power. (292)

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<sup>5</sup> The 1970s and 80s exploded with science fiction utopian novels where technology eliminated the need for men and women to coexist. Instead, writers presented single-sex worlds such as those discussed in Peter Fitting’s “For Men Only: A Guide to Reading Single-Sex Worlds.” See bibliography for additional information.

Butler writes from a point of double marginality and imbues her characters with the same. Not only do her characters exhibit non-normative sexual and behavioral behaviors, these characters are able to alter their genetic makeup and become biologically different in sex. Butler's characters can possess another's body; manipulate themselves into another form, both human and animal; and, perhaps most threatening to the societal construction, procreate in any of these alternate forms.<sup>6</sup> Her decision to utilize preternatural and technological components enables Butler to step outside the pre-conceived restrictions placed on traditional realist literature and discuss the transient and socially constructed gender roles as crumbling and irrelevant constructions used to control the population through stigma and societal conformity.

One of the ways in which Butler demonstrates this deterioration is by showing that the characters are segregated even without the intervention of the larger hegemonic structures. Butler's Patternists disguise their abilities when in the presence of 'norms/mutes' and live in isolated breeding communities. Although the characters accept – and in Anyanwu's case embrace – these delegated communities, “the issue of alienation exists, more profoundly, in the hearts and minds of individual characters”; however, the characters do not consider their otherness to be weakness, rather “these characters possess the innate ability to evolve into beings who celebrate and explore, rather than distance, the ‘Other’” (Hampton 71-72).

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<sup>6</sup> The character, Anyanwu, is capable of bearing young in whatever form she adopts. This means that she is able to birth both human and non-human offspring. She also controls her fertility through bodily manipulation and the fetus' biological sex.

*Wild Seed* allows for a study of gender instability's effect on identity formation by clinging to a familiar North American society; transversing time, space, and ethnicity while subjugating the biological rules that we heed as law. Butler reflects contemporary and long-term concerns in American, and international, civilization about the fragility of such gender mores currently embedded in our institutions. However, despite her attempt to deconstruct the very concept of gender identity, gendered stability remains at the core of the "destabilized" identities she explores.

Butler uses socialization, transexuality, and taboo to thoroughly disrupt the comfortable identity binaries that prevail in Western literatures. Butler's 1980 fabulist novel provides a new take on Christianity's Adam and Eve as the African shape-shifting Anyanwu and psychic vampire Doro are embroiled in Doro's quest to create and build a breed of hypersensitive people. Butler subverts biological sexual determinants when Anyanwu and Doro appear both in male and female forms, capable of producing children regardless of their chosen bodily manifestation. However, contrary to the apparent disregard for physical gender boundaries, Butler clearly casts Doro as a traditional patriarch and Anyanwu as his female counterpart. Doro and Anyanwu exemplify the complete deconstruction of physical and biological sexuality; yet, their adherence to normative roles demonstrates the difficulties faced in escaping from the socially designated gender binaries.

Gender identification, always an explosive topic in contemporary society, is a prime vehicle to expose those very strictures that limit and silence the other. Butler attempts to disrupt the traditionally accepted gender binaries with characters able to exist in both polarities. I argue, however, that rather than succeeding in eliminating these binaries *Wild Seed* reminds the reader of how deeply these mores are entrenched in North American culture

and literature. While their characters may exhibit and manipulate their gender pluralities, these very elements that are meant to empower them are dependent upon the foundations of the male/female construct. These constructs must be confronted and deconstructed before gender and sexuality can exist outside of the binary constructs.

In chapter two, I explore an even more extreme deconstruction of the gender identity binary and engage in an analysis of gender identity destabilization in Jeffrey Eugenides' fictionalized memoir *Middlesex*. Eugenides is allowed a degree of freedom by choosing to relay his message through fiction; however, he restricts himself to a realist portrayal by choosing a memoir format. The memoir requires Eugenides to consider elements such as time specific social, political, and racial concerns that Butler is able to bypass with science fiction. These very same elements are beneficial when one considers that these familiar issues bring the reader into a more intimate connection with *Middlesex*'s protagonist. Issues such as the Americanization of immigrant families, politics, religious tensions, and the medical ethical debates are easily recognized and readily accessible to Eugenides' audience. As a result, the reader's attention is focused on the protagonist Cal Stephanides' negotiations with gender identity and sexual performativity rather than trying to navigate a foreign environment. Eugenides establishes that it is possible to form a secure third gendered identity.

*Middlesex* contributes to the discourse on gender identity negotiation and sexual performativity because it rejects the standard argumentative stance that centers on whether intersexed individuals should undergo corrective genital surgery and hormone therapy from

birth or be given an opportunity to choose a preferred gender (male or female) themselves.<sup>7</sup> Eugenides, instead, uses his novel to explore the possibility of finding satisfaction in maintaining a dual-sexed identity as an intersexual and the socio-cultural ramifications of such an attempt. Contemporary scientific studies, such as those referenced in Sarah Creighton's "Most Vaginal Surgery Should be Deferred," tend to revolve around the process by which individuals choose a male or a female identity, why they choose, and the results of that decision. Literary approaches primarily approach the text, as well as the subject, as a negotiation of otherness, but often overlook the effects of Cal's intersexed status on heteronormativity and society's preferred male / female gender binary. This approach is clearly evident in Max Watson's "Suffer the Children" and is echoed in a significant percentage of the professional journals' articles pertaining to the topic of intersexuality. In this thesis, I instead argue that Eugenides' presents *Middlesex* as a novel of re-negotiation in which the establishment of an independent third gender subverts the social landscape by bringing into question the very tenets that are used to legitimize gender binaries: sexual performativity and biological determinism.

Much like Eugenides', Alice Walker and Gloria Naylor tackle the foundations of heteronormativity and sexuality. Walker and Naylor, however, concentrate on sexual identity as a means of undermining the gender identity structure; more specifically, through erotic power and sexual desire. Adrienne Rich's lesbian continuum and Audre Lorde's concept of the erotic exotic inform chapter three of this thesis as I look at the ways in which Walker and Naylor bring heteronormativity into question as a social institution devised to

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<sup>7</sup> Gender identity negotiation and sexual performativity are popular debate topics in both the soft and hard sciences, as well as literary cultural studies.

control non-conformist behavior. I argue that both Naylor and Walker utilize Simone de Beauvoir's objectifying gaze and Mary Lynne Ellis' cultural / sexual bodies to demonstrate the role of the phallus as an enforcement device of heterosexuality. Heterosexuality, as such, reinforces the aforementioned male / female gender identification structure. Naylor and Walker undermine this structure through depictions of lesbianism, female social networks, code-switching, and by exposing phallic oppression.

Naylor's novel, *The Women of Brewster Place*, is commonly described in literary studies as a celebration of womanhood and female social networks; however, the chapter "The Two" depicts two lesbian women immersed in a neighborhood whose tenants react to the couple's sexual orientation with ostracism, outrage, and violence. The couple, Lorraine and Theresa, is forced into confrontations with one another as they face not only their neighbors' condemnation but also their own fears and prejudices. This demonstrates that even those who step outside the socially demanded heteronormativity fall prey to the internalization of social binary constructions. Neighborhood women, such as Sophie, elect themselves as neighborhood guardians of morality whose job it is to monitor and enforce conformity. Sophie's reactions to dissent among her neighbors over the treatment directed at Lorraine and Theresa is to insinuate that they themselves must be sexual and moral deviants to protect those who would betray the established norms. Women such as Mattie and Etta's defense of the lesbian couple is quelled by just such a threat as they are discomfited by the possibilities that lesbianism opens in their relationships with both the men and the women in their social network. It is also in these insecurities that Lorraine is subjected to violence when a young man, C.C. Baker, attempts to reassert masculinity and heterosexuality by raping the woman who represents to him the vulnerability of masculine

power -- symbolized here by the phallus. Naylor resists the urge to vilify any of these characters, however, as she exposes the external socialization and internalized insecurities that drive their behavior. In doing so, she asserts that the seemingly secure heteronormative erotic continuum is, in reality, a fragile structure that crumbles beneath the very dependency of its most fervent advocates.

Walker's Celie in *The Color Purple* also portrays the deterioration of the heteronormative structure that dictates sexual desire, as well as the male / female gender identity. Celie is forced into a heterosexual lifestyle in which the reader sees her become a perpetuating factor as she advises her stepson to physically dominate his rebellious wife into submission. Yet, through the course of re-evaluating her socialization (sexual and gender role) upon developing a relationship with a bisexual lover, Shug Avery, Celie breaks through the internalized tenets of heteronormativity to re-create herself as an independent individual whose position in life is dictated by neither her gender nor her sexuality. Walker's depiction of this character's evolution successfully undermines the concept that heteronormative binary gender and sexual identification codas are necessary to societal stability. I argue that Walker suggests that adherence to forced heterosexuality inhibits the development of selfhood. These alternative sexualities encourage the growth of an individual and the community that accepts it.

The availability of options outside of the hegemonic model are the key factor in establishing both gender identity and sexual identity in each of the four texts addressed in this thesis. These authors engage in an assault against the contemporary social demands for gender and sexual normativity. In fact, the works that I examine in this thesis consider that there are alternatives to the heteronormative hegemony that define American bodies.

## Chapter One

### Bodily Transformation and Erotic Power in Octavia E. Butler's *Wild Seed*

"... should it be so difficult for a woman who can become a tortoise or a monkey to become a man?"

From *Wild Seed*  
Octavia E. Butler

It was a blending that went on and on, a joining that it seemed to Anyanwu she controlled. Not until she rested, pleasantly weary, did she begin to realize she was losing herself ... [Doro] was absorbing her, consuming her, making her part of his own substance ... he was killing her, little by little, digesting her little by little.

From *Wild Seed*  
Octavia E. Butler

Octavia E. Butler's prelude novel of her *Patternist* series, *Wild Seed*, explores the complexities involved in both gender identity and power within erotic relationships. In this chapter, I will discuss the ways in which Butler portrays her characters in strictly defined male and female roles only to subvert these very roles by giving her characters the ability to change both their physical sex manifestations and their racial appearance. I also look at how Butler employs G.W.F. Hegel's master / slave dialectic and Albert Memmi's co-dependency theory to demonstrate Butler's subversion of the role of "other" in her portraits of the novel's main characters, Anyanwu and Doro. Butler's concept of identity cannot be adequately studied without considering that each character exists outside the "norm" even when living within the psionic communities. As Judith Butler explains, in "Giving an Account of Oneself,"

the very being of the self is dependent not just on the existence of the Other [...] but also on the possibility that the normative horizon within which the Other sees and listens and knows and recognizes is also subject to a critical

opening [...] the Other is recognized and confers recognition through a set of norms that govern recognizability. (22)

Hegemonic society surely considers Octavia E. Butler's characters, Anyanwu and Doro, to be "other." My analysis in this chapter shows that Butler succeeds in destabilizing traditional binaries -- including gendered, racial, and power dialectics -- by allowing her characters to reflect upon one another while simultaneously disrupting traditional relationships.

Butler initially appears to write a novel about entrapment, but instead demonstrates how disruptions in the foundational tenets of gender identification allow for a new space to emerge. A third ground forms in which gender is based, not on biology and pre-determined standards, but on performativity and choice. Butler utilizes Hegel's master / slave dialectic and removes the male and female roles from a familiar social context; as a result, a cursory reading of *Wild Seed* can be misleading as it certainly appears as though Butler intends to thoroughly reinforce the patriarchal gender constructs familiar to a Western audience. The interactions between Anyanwu and Doro remind readers of the gender-based and racial inequalities inherent in industrialized societies while Doro's breeding program brings to mind the commodity driven slave master who employs violence and deception to dominate those unable to defend themselves from him. Butler seems to suggest that Doro is the dominant, male master therefore Anyanwu necessarily becomes the oppressed female slave.

In this novel, as with all of her others, Butler is conscientious of concerns such as those proposed by Lisa Walker in "How to Recognize a Lesbian: The Cultural Politics of Looking Like What You Are." Walker warns that "sensitivity to issues of dominance and subordination does not immunize us against playing out old patterns in our work" (871).

Walker continues by offering a solution to such a trap by suggesting that the key to "breaking

out of those modes of thinking lies precisely in the willingness first to take the risk of revealing our links to them and then to unravel the dense configurations of discourses that form those links to begin with” (871). It is this challenge that Butler undertakes in *Wild Seed*. Butler takes such a course of action by placing her principal characters, Doro and Anyanwu, in seemingly stereotypical roles within both their community and their personal interactions with one another. Then, with these roles in the background, Butler creates a third ground that is reminiscent of Donna Haraway’s cyborg in that gender is entirely mutable as a biological and social entity.

Butler begins *Wild Seed* in West Africa but quickly moves the narrative to colonial North America; this is relevant because it allows her to traverse the spatial aspect of gendered identity and draw attention to her discussion of gender performativity. The tensions inherent in different cultural expectations of gender roles and behavior become the first ground of contention as Butler is aware that her primarily Western audience holds false images of the power dynamics in relationships between African men and women. Thus, Butler immediately presents a third ground to her readership as they must extricate themselves from the comfort of the familiar masculine / feminine and view Anyanwu’s characterization in terms of her upbringing within West African value systems.<sup>8</sup> The Western reader is confronted with a heroine whose socialization values communal survival over individualism and familial allegiance over personal empowerment; yet, despite these allegiances she remains a powerful agent of change.

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<sup>8</sup> While Western society typically expects a clearly defined social structure where one’s value is based upon separate familial, social, and political roles for males and females, West African societies differ from Western culture in that while men and women remain separate they enjoy parallel power structures in both the public and private realms. Work is divided by gender but that work’s value in society is not gender-determined.

Butler deliberately plays with patriarchal gender expectations in *Wild Seed*. While this may seem to undermine her intentions to deconstruct socially prescribed gender roles, in actuality Butler brings to the foreground the very structure that she subsequently subverts. For instance, Doro is positioned as the aggressive predator who resides over his ‘breeder’ society and fathers children only to leave them to their mothers until they may serve his purposes for them. Also, Anyanwu -- despite her ability to shape-shift into biologically male forms -- obeys him to protect her children. She seems to fulfill the role of the subjugated wife and dispossessed woman. In “Computers and the Communications of Gender,” Elizabeth Lane Lawley argues that “The characters' personas exhibit characteristics we associate with traditional gender roles -- Anyanwu as a nurturing and protective being, Doro as calculating and pragmatic” (10). This reading of the protagonists’ roles as static and clearly defined rests easily within the Western conceptualization of traditional gender roles. However, this reading ignores the fact that the West African culture from which Butler draws her characters is much different in its approach to an individual’s social value and influence in both public and private spaces. Western misconceptions of the indigenous pre-colonial male / female African relationships lull readers into viewing Anyanwu’s more “feminine” role as less esteemed or valued than Doro’s “male” role. However, such an interpretation presses Western ideology on a culture that values, rather than disparages, the female role in society. Filomina Chioma Steady explains:

Women’s power to give birth and their role as healers make them awesome figures in a sex-oriented culture. Parallel autonomy, communalism, and cooperation for the preservation of life are more useful concepts in developing an appropriate framework for examining African feminism than the

frameworks of dichotomy, individualism, competition, and opposition, which Western feminism fosters. Men and women in traditional African societies had spheres of autonomy -- in economic, social, ritual, and political terms -- ensured by various mechanisms of checks and balances...[Women] had the added advantage of being intrinsically central to the preservation and continuation of life through their reproductive role. (7)

Butler presents Anyanwu as an intelligent, willful, and intuitive person whose shape-shifting ability should enable her to easily resist incursions on her independence. Her people, after all, know her as “a priestess who spoke with the voice of a god and was feared and obeyed” (9). Yet, she repeatedly submits to Doro’s demands on both her body and on her dignity. One must ask why Butler creates such a strong character only to have her dominated by Doro who, despite both characters’ ability to alter their biological gender, is clearly conceptualized as the male figure in the pair. Anyanwu “always spent her days as a small, muscular man, but somehow, [Doro] could never think of her as masculine” (37). Like the Yoruba deity Yemonja / Olokun, Butler presents Anyanwu as both hyper-feminized but also possessing what is typically described as “masculine” powers.<sup>9</sup>

It is deceptively easy to consider Anyanwu’s submission to Doro as weakness or docility. However, Anyanwu’s decision is not submission but rather survival. Anyanwu submits to Doro’s reign because doing so dissuades him from mortally harming her or her kin. To a culture such as Anyanwu’s, survival is a highly valued strength as it allows for the

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<sup>9</sup> Much like Anyanwu, Yemonja / Olokun possess oppositional attributes; she is capable of both healing and destruction. Yemonja and Olokun are the female and male part of the Yoruba deity of the sea. The female part, Yemonja, is a nurturer and fertility figure while the male counterpart, Olokun, is associated with the sea’s more destructive elements (Dorsey 23).

continuation of the kinship lineage. Maintaining the kinship line is a necessary and honored obligation -- not a weakness. As Steady explains, "Regardless of the forms of social organization, the dominant ideology was group preservation and well-being" (6). Butler herself intimates early in the novel that public influence, while respected, is not as important to Anyanwu's people as is the ability to protect and heal one's community. *Wild Seed's* narrative informs the reader that Anyanwu's patriarchal line was respected in her homeland; however, it was her mother's "highly accurate prophetic dreams" and ability to ensure the population's survival by making "medicine to cure disease and to protect the people from evil" that brought the family true distinction in the village (10). It is this role as healer and protector that Anyanwu has taken upon herself when Doro finds her in Africa and continues to assume in Wheatley and on the plantation she establishes in Louisiana.<sup>10</sup> By positioning Anyanwu within the communities as a core person who provides both strength and guidance, Butler provides Anyanwu with the necessary social understanding and leverage to manipulate Doro's slave structured breeding community in Wheatley and to re-write that structure into the feudal system utilized on her Louisiana plantation.

Butler demonstrates the ways in which Anyanwu works within Doro's framework to undermine his attempts to suppress her independent nature. Doro creates Wheatley to house, breed, and train his breeding stock much as Southern slaveholders gathered their slaves into units based upon convenience rather than nurture. By assuming the slaveholder's role, Doro casts aside the image of the white-skinned slaver but replaces skin-based racism with psychic fascism. While the plantation slave's value is determined by his strength for fieldwork or her

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<sup>10</sup> By naming the town after Phyllis Wheatley, Butler reinscribes female authority within Doro's masculine "plantation" structure.

sexual availability, Doro's breeders are valued for the type and development of their psionic abilities. Both plantation slaves and Wheatley breeders prove their worth by providing the next generation of "stock" through owner-directed breeding. In both systems, the owner controls his people through fear and necessity. The African slave cannot easily hope to escape from deep in the South into a free state, just as Doro's breeders cannot easily hide among the general populace. This becomes even more difficult as racial tensions rise in the region around Wheatley and many of the breeders are of mixed heritage. Doro, like the slave owner, promises pain -- or death -- to those who disobey him. By surviving the episodes of humiliation, intimidation, and violent disenfranchisement set before her, Anyanwu proves to be a strong character. Anyanwu comes from a patrilineal society, "a culture in which wives literally belonged to their husbands," and, in Wheatley, lives in one that isolates children from their parentage (37). In spite of such socialization, however, her longevity maintains a strong matrilineal link that saves her descendants from slave traders on the Gold Coast and continues to protect them when she asserts her value as a breeder and her ability to prolong Isaac's life, thus limiting Doro's interference in her children's lives. "Breeders" usually know the names and psychic abilities of their biological parents, however they are rarely allowed to remain in a familial unit. Regardless of their parentage, these "breeder" children become Doro's and have little to no concept of their ancestry beyond its psychic value to Doro's program. Anyanwu's actions thwart Doro's intentions to dehumanize his "breeders" -- in a manner similar to the way that American slaveholders dehumanized African slaves -- by isolating them within Wheatley's institutions. She determines to convince Doro that the "breeders" cannot be productive members of the community if they are treated as livestock whose sole value is in their genetic and reproductive ability. To assist in her attempts to

impede his segregation attempts Anyanwu decides that the children must be made aware of their connections to humanity beyond the limited experience Wheatley allows for them. As Butler notes, “She resolved to make her homeland live for them...not to let them forget who they were” (114). Butler does not allow the reader to forget Anyanwu’s Igbo heritage as the character insists on maintaining and decorating her home by West African standards rather than those of her white, Dutch neighbors, giving her children African names, and establishing kinship networks based on her homeland’s communal structure.

Butler shows yet another way in which Anyanwu’s relationships with her children help to protect the children from dehumanization and further express her subtly increasing influence over Doro. Contrary to the accepted manner of child rearing in Wheatley, Anyanwu’s children are raised within she and Isaac’s home and her daughters are kept from Doro’s sexual advances. These children are valued because of their maternal connection since Doro hopes that they will inherit Anyanwu’s healing abilities and long lifespan. In essence, Butler creates Anyanwu in the image of what Ruth Salvaggio, in “Octavia Butler and the Black Science-Fiction Heroine,” describes as “the great African ancestress...[who] epitomizes defiance, acceptance, compromise, determination, and courage” (81). In case the reader fails to recognize the importance that the matrilineal ancestry has in *Wild Seed*, Butler gives Anyanwu an English name at the novel’s close when she has finally managed to establish a balance in her relationship with Doro and build a community of her own, “she finally took a European name: Emma. She had heard that it meant grandmother or ancestress, and this amused her” (278). In “Rethinking Modernism: Minority vs. Majority Theories,” Nancy Hartsock declares that “when marginalized Others ‘begin to demand the right to name [themselves], [they are demanding the right] to act as subjects rather than

objects of history” (qtd. in Brown 493). Butler shows Anyanwu claiming possession of her public identity after a century of refusing Doro’s insistence that she adopt a European name; by denying this right to Doro and choosing a European name that means “ancestress,” Butler once more asserts feminine authority and disrupts white authority through her portrait of Anyanwu.

Reinforcing the idea of female empowerment as an agent of revolution, Butler positions Anyanwu within the community in a manner that undermines Doro’s carefully constructed power structure. Doro is unable to succeed in controlling his breeding community’s cultural development to the extent that he would like due to Anyanwu’s socially dominant role as mother and ancestress. She is the intimate socializing influence on the children because it is she who bears them, raises them, heals them, and educates them. Anyanwu, not Doro, is their link to establishing a place for themselves that is not entirely orchestrated by Doro’s breeding program. Anyanwu’s maternal role in the novel may easily be misconstrued as a failure on Butler’s part to deconstruct a feminine role that feminists generally consider to be a highly commodified oppressive tool in patriarchal societies. Procreation is thoroughly institutionalized in Wheatley; each “breeder” knows that their position, or purpose, in the community is to genetically contribute to the psion breeding program. One’s value is determined by his or her worth as breeding stock. As such, Anyanwu’s insight into her body and control over its functions make her incredibly valuable “seed,” as does her ability to assume both male and female forms that are not only capable of reproducing but is also capable of reproducing so that the offspring are not even genetically related to her. While this makes Anyanwu valuable, Butler shows us how her maternity also makes her vulnerable to Doro’s attempts to control her. Much like white slaveholders, Doro

manipulates Anyanwu's allegiance to her children by using threats against their safety and dignity in order to temper her disobedience. Butler emphasizes the consequences that Anyanwu's maternal instincts -- the socialized need to protect those dependent upon her and the obligation to mold one's child into a positive entity -- have on her independence. Her children decrease her mobility because she cannot flee from Doro's influence without risking their survival. As Butler writes, "She had sons and she cared for them, thus she was vulnerable" (19). Pregnancy also weakens Anyanwu because she is unable to shape-shift without endangering the fetus she carries. Shape-shifting is the key physical survival mechanism that Butler provides to her heroine because it allows her to both disguise herself in alien environments, "If I have to be white someday to survive, I will be white. If I have to be a leopard to hunt and kill, I will be a leopard. If I have to travel quickly across land, I'll become a large bird. If I have to cross the ocean, I'll become a fish." and escape Doro in the animal form, in which he cannot track her (164). In animal form, it is "as though [Doro] confront[s] a true animal -- a creature beyond his reach" (89). Anyanwu declares herself to be a survivor who can adapt to overcome obstacles to her continuing existence. Butler's writings often concentrate on her strong female character's adaptability and determination to survive; in *Wild Seed* this is particularly evident as she reinscribes black female authority in the plantation space that is typically dominated by the white male.

Assertions of black female authority and its ability to supplant patriarchal structures continue when Butler uses Anyanwu to challenge associations between motherhood and weakness. First, we are reminded that the mother is necessary for the continuation of the male lineage that patriarchal societies hold in esteem. Nigerian writer Buchi Emecheta comments on this confliction noting that "...did not a woman have to bear the woman-child

who would later bear the sons?" (186). Granted, Anyanwu can assume a patriarch role due to her transformative abilities; however, she chooses to live primarily as a biological female -- the physical form in which she was born. Regardless of whether she is mother or father to a child, she takes on the maternal role through her behavior with the child. Like Anyanwu Doro is able to reproduce in both male and female form. Unlike her, however, while he does "father / mother" children, he does so using the bodies of those whom he has killed and possessed. The resulting children are genetically the children of Doro's victims, not of Doro himself. Butler is creating a third ground in which she separates gender identity from biological sexual identity through performativity. Butler refuses to force either character into a role based on their identity as male or as female; on the contrary, she reinforces the disruption taking place in the gender binary by creating characters who choose their respective roles in the community based on behavioral decisions.

As a part of her discussion on performativity, Butler uses her characters to comment on the differences between a biological parent and a *true* parent (one who behaves in such a way as to promote the child's well-being but may or may not be related by blood). While Doro can bear children, their psychic abilities are inherited from the bodies that he has stolen. He also does not fill a parental role in these children's lives; when he visits Wheatley he comes as master, avenger, protector, or lover whereas at Anyanwu's plantation his presence is that of her lover and a threat to the residents' peaceful lives. His is certainly neither a paternal nor a maternal relationship with his descendants. On the other hand, Anyanwu chooses a maternal role and finds strength in it. She is able to control her own fertility and therefore deny Doro the children he demands from his breeders. Once she chooses to conceive, however, this same ability to master her own body guarantees that the child will

live. These children, her kin, not only provide her with the will necessary to overcome the obstacles she has faced in her long lifetime, but as Juliana Nfah-Abbenyi notes “most African women find empowerment in their children and families. They use their status as mothers to challenge some of the demands their cultures place on them. They even use this status to make demands and obtain tangible concessions for themselves” (24). Anyanwu’s powers as a healer, shape-shifter, and her longevity make her an important addition to Doro’s breeding community; however, Butler does not leave Anyanwu’s value strictly dependent on her position within his plantation system. Butler gives these qualities to Anyanwu, thereby making her vital to Doro’s interests and placing her in a position where, using her innate intellect and her life experience, she becomes his equal rather than yet another victim. Ruth Salvaggio explains that Anyanwu’s “is flexible and dexterous, compared to Doro’s stiffness and dominance. She uses prowess rather than direct, confrontational power” (80-81). As such, her continuing existence, despite repeatedly rebelling against Doro, is evidence that she has reclaimed the power she feared lost when Doro took her away from Africa. Anyanwu’s determination, courage, physical strength, and will all serve her well, but it is the depth of her compassion and character that finally strip Doro’s fearsome exterior bare. Butler exposes Doro’s weakness while simultaneously reinforcing Anyanwu’s central role as a catalyst for change in the traditional power relationship by placing her in the position where she now has the authority to either accept or deny Doro’s desire. Butler notes that Doro looked at Anyanwu “and thought he saw compassion in her eyes -- as though in a moment, she could come to him, hold him not only as a lover, but as one of her children to be comforted. He would have permitted her to do this. He would have welcomed it” (275). This scene, taking place near the novel’s end when Anyanwu decides to shut down her body, is the only

moment when Butler exposes Doro's true powerlessness. At this moment in the novel Anyanwu appears to be beaten down and giving up after years of struggle, yet it is here that Butler reveals the full extent of her heroine's strength. Butler creates Anyanwu as an Abu woman who can disrupt society by changing not only her shape but also her environment in such a way that she does not have to destroy Doro; thereby allowing the possibility for Doro to change as she removes herself and assumes a third identity outside of the shackles of the master / slave dialect.

It is at this juncture that it is useful to read Butler through the lens of theories on erotic power and co-dependency within the relationship between the oppressed and the oppressor. Doro's unexpected dependence on the very woman he thought to dominate and destroy, combined with his other behaviors in regard to psychically gifted "seeds," supports the erotic power structure that I have proposed is active in *Wild Seed*. Such a discussion inevitably brings up racial discourses, particularly resonant due to Butler's position as a Black woman in the science fiction genre, and the evidence of racial discord in *Wild Seed*. Butler emphasizes race throughout the novel, thereby clearly making the inevitable connection between race, power and sexuality. The characters' awareness of race and gender in the dominant power structure is evident in that Doro often possesses a white body to travel safely or brings a white descendant to accompany him. His actions show that Doro recognizes that the race and gender conscious environment in the American colonies make traveling as either a white man or as a white man's servant much less hazardous and more efficient. In this instance, both whiteness and maleness equate power and agency. In a second example, Thomas rejects Anyanwu's decision to come to him and stay as a Black woman. He cannot comprehend her insisting on remaining black when she could travel

much more easily as a white woman. His objections are not only based on incredulity; he is offended that Doro thinks so lowly of him that he would send a black woman to be his lover. Even Anyanwu finds herself posing as a white male landowner in Louisiana and in doing so mimicking the concept of white male power that Doro uses in his travels.<sup>11</sup> Racial identity and gender identity become entwined in a novel whose characters very existence in the world not only separates them from that world but draws them toward it and their only connection is through the communities created by those in whom they see reflections of themselves -- the “other.”

As I have already discussed, race, gender, and sexuality are often intertwined. In “Eccentric Subjects: Feminist Theory and Historical Consciousness,” Teresa de Lauretis argues that “the experience of racism shapes the experience of gender and sexuality” and therefore “the experience of gender is itself shaped by race relations” (par. 51). With de Lauretis’ premise in mind, it is restrictive to ignore the racial context affecting the gender roles in *Wild Seed* particularly in light of the extensive racial treatments in all eleven of Butler’s novels. The 1979 novel *Kindred* may be her most blatant discussion of racial relations and the master / slave dynamic but these complexities are inescapable in *Wild Seed*’s gender constructions because it is necessary to view Anyanwu and Doro’s evolving relationship in terms of the power interactions inherent in the master / slave relationship. The outward nature of their relationship “which includes dependence, exploitation, and threats of

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<sup>11</sup> Thomas is one of the highly sensitive mind readers under Doro’s control and has retreated into madness. Butler uses his interaction with Anyanwu as an example of Doro’s failed attempt to humiliate Anyanwu because he yet again underestimates her compassion for humanity. Thomas is initially disgusted by Anyanwu because of her black skin and cannot understand why she chooses not to shape-shift into a white woman. Despite his insults, she heals him as well as she is able to before Doro murders him in retaliation for what he sees as Anyanwu’s defiance.

violence conjures up a metaphoric representation of the relationship between master and slave” thereby ensuring that the master / slave dialogue is ongoing (Helford 259). The slave trade and race tensions in the novel also serve to emphasize the master / slave presence. As Butler writes, “Like any slave master, Doro regards the children born to his breeders not as people but as his property . . . Doro’s dehumanizing breeding project thus exhibits all the worst features of nineteenth-century American socio-economic slavery” (Call 281). The breeding program, Doro’s purchase of slaves on the Gold Coast, traveling the middle passage route, Anyanwu’s removal from her homeland, the ‘breeders’ ignorance of their heritage beyond their biological parents’ psychic abilities, and the pointed culling of unsuitable ‘seed’ all maintain the master / slave dialectic in the novel. Butler’s positioning within this narrative may at times appear to once again reinforce concepts of the oppressed subject but even this discourse is ruptured by Anyanwu’s behavior within the prescribed role and both she and Doro’s abilities to present themselves in Caucasian skin. It is at this point that Hegel’s master / slave dialectic exhibits a clear disruption in the aforementioned power binaries of gender and race.

In discussing Butler’s treatment of race as it pertains to Doro and Anyanwu’s gender identification and performativity, consider how Butler shows the very subjectivity that is skin color. When the terms slave and master arise, one inevitably pictures the white male master and black slave just as the oppressor / oppressed brings to mind a white man dominating a white woman. Butler strips the color coda from this relationship by providing the reader with character who can change their skin color at will. By doing so, Butler brings the relationship’s power dynamic to the forefront rather than allowing it to be overwhelmed by such an emotionally charged topic as racism. Doro, as I note earlier, often finds it more

convenient and safe to travel as a white man both in North America and in Africa. In this form he is less likely to be accosted in the Americas or captured on the Gold Coast. If he does not take a white body, he travels with one of his white dependents and that person verifies Doro's right to passage wherever they may travel. Yet, Doro does not choose his prey by their skin pigmentation. He becomes white only because it is convenient, just as he selects Black men of a particular body type when he wishes to please Anyanwu later in the novel. Here, Butler presents the master figure whose physical appearance is entirely amorphous; Doro's physical appearance is determined, not by color or biological sex, but by either his victims' convenient proximity to him or the intensity of their psychic talents. As Sandra Govan suggests, "Doro's machinations are raceless. He will take any 'host,' black or white, young or old, male or female" (*Connections* 84). Like Doro, Anyanwu's appearance is usually chosen for a purpose rather than a racial inclination. She protects her growing kinship group in Louisiana by adopting the appearance of a white slave master to appease the societal climate in the South but refuses to do much the same thing when Thomas earlier insists that her life would be easier if she *became* white. Her refusal to change for Thomas is based not on abhorrence to racial change but rather to her resistance to altering herself to accommodate a potential oppressor. Her guise as a white slave master is, like Doro's travel appearance, a shrewd survival method to avoid negative interference from outsiders.

It is thus evident that in a novel such as *Wild Seed*, the master / slave dialectic cannot be ignored because its importance in the novel moves beyond race and into the fluidity of the erotic power relationship between Anyanwu and Doro. It is easy to overlook the influence that Anyanwu possesses and be distracted into categorizing her as yet another of Doro's victims, or slaves. Butler does not allow for such a one-dimensional relationship however.

In “Connections, Links, and Extended Networks: Patterns in Octavia Butler’s Science Fiction,” Govan argues:

Each of Butler’s heroines is a strong protagonist paired with, or matched against, an equally powerful male. This juxtaposition subtly illustrates differences in feminine/masculine values, differences in approaches to or conceptions of power, differences in the capacity to recognize and exercise social or personal responsibility. In each story, a physical, psychic, or attitudinal difference associated with the heroine sets her apart from society and often places her in jeopardy; each survives because her ‘difference’ brings with it a greater faculty for constructive change. (84)

While Govan’s article concerns itself with Butler’s female protagonists, in *Wild Seed* both Anyanwu and Doro experience and manipulate the structures set in place to define value, power, and responsibility. The continuum they traverse is formed within the oppressor / oppressed narrative which, as Lewis Call argues, is inseparable from erotic power relationships such as the one in which Butler’s principals are engaged.

In *Wild Seed*, Butler’s dual fascination with the Other and resistance to the dominating force suggest that she subverts the positions of other and oppressor/ slave and master in the novel from the moment that Butler leads Doro to Anyanwu. Doro is lured to Anyanwu’s West African village because her immense power resonates and catches the attention of what Butler indicates is his intuitive radar system that seeks out “otherness.” She is the strongest and oldest person whom he has encountered other than himself and is therefore thoroughly intrigued by her. Likewise, Anyanwu’s interest in Doro is instigated when she recognizes that he is “other” and may be able to offer her that which her past

husbands could not -- children whom she would not outlive. The couple's unique traits are not the only attractants between them. While their shared otherness does bring about their initial encounter, it is the strength of resistance on both parties to fully relinquish themselves to the other that continues their relationship. Each is accustomed to being feared by those around them and suddenly they appear to have found in each other a possibly equal companion or deadly opponent. Butler demonstrates the way in which fascination with the Other, as well as the characters' own awareness of otherness, lends itself toward the co-dependency stage of colonialism mentioned in Memmi's discussion on power relationships.

Butler shows Anyanwu secure in her independence based on her past experience with predators and therefore she does not initially question her ability to maintain autocracy in Doro's presence: "she heard him, followed him with her ears. Giving no outward sign, she went on tending her garden. As long as she knew where the intruder was, she had no fear of him" (4). However, her attempts to resist Doro, in addition to her unique biological capabilities, encourage, rather than thwart, his desire to dominate her. Her continued resistance -- combined with her unique biological transformativity, healing abilities, and longevity -- draw Doro's attention and he is unable to dismiss her as easily as he would any other, *less valuable*, wild seed. Butler reflects that

[Doro] was not accustomed to people resisting him, not accustomed to their hating him. The woman was a puzzle he had not yet solved -- which was why now, after she had given him eight children, given Isaac five children, she was still alive. She would come to him again, without the coldness. She would make herself young without being told to do so, and she would come to him. Then, satisfied, he would kill her. (139)

Doro is repeatedly tempted to destroy Anyanwu as he recognizes her inaccessibility to him in animal form poses a danger to his control over her, and by example, his people; yet, her unique abilities dissuade him from doing so.

Anyanwu is a challenge for Doro and thus someone whom he must dominate entirely in order to reaffirm his role at the apex of the power hierarchy. To do so, he measures her in terms of gender performativity; her submission to him is qualified as meaning that she will approach him in a manner that acknowledges him as both a social and a sexual superior.

Butler explains Doro's complex reaction to Anyanwu as the result of him not being

accustomed to people resisting him, not accustomed to their hating him. The woman was a puzzle he had not yet solved -- which was why now, after she had given him eight children, given Isaac five children, she was still alive.

She would come to him again, without the coldness. She would make herself young without being told to do so, and she would come to him. Then, satisfied, he would kill her. (139)

Butler, however, does not allow for such a simple answer as the male / female binary and instead, due to Anyanwu's shape-shifting ability, requires that Doro utilize his knowledge of Anyanwu as an individual and not based on her appearance. As a result, he exploits the one aspect of life that Anyanwu cannot fully protect from him, her children. In an effort to protect herself and her kin, she is forced to feign assimilation to such an extent that, in some regards, she becomes thoroughly enslaved: "Doro had reshaped her ... she had formed the habit of submission ... Habits were difficult to break. The habit of living, the habit of fear ... even the habit of love" (196). Through these portraiture, Butler disrupts the master / slave and male / female binaries thereby showing how Anyanwu's modified approach to

Doro's attempt at colonization changes the power dynamics that Doro has struggled to create and to hold.

Butler upsets Anyanwu and Doro's positions within their paired power hierarchy and establishes a co-dependent state. Césaire's boomerang effect describes the colonial relationship as one in which the power may openly *appear* to be entirely one-sided in favor of the colonizer; however, as colonialism develops the colonizers' lives become deeply entrenched, and thus dependent upon, the presence of the colonized. Thus, the power relationship evolves from a one-sided Western dominance to one of co-dependency as the colonized are trapped in an institutional infrastructure imposed upon them by the imperialist society and the colonizer relies on the indigenous population to maintain his political and social status, economic structure, and daily lifestyle. This lifestyle, as many scholars have noted, is dependent upon erotic desire structures to uphold the foundation upon which it is built.

Butler problematizes eroticism when delving into the power relationship between Doro and Anyanwu. It is clear that Anyanwu is conscious of the tensions inherent in the relationship even before she is fully aware of Doro's intentions for her. While still under the impression that Doro intends to take her as his wife, Anyanwu considers the implications of their combined "otherness" in a dependent relationship. These considerations make "her cautious and gentle...She sought to make [Doro] value her and care for her. Thus she might have some leverage with him, some control over him later when she needed it" (31). Thus the groundwork for the erotic power structure is implemented. She "learns to eroticize the power relations existing between her and Doro. By doing so, she alters the basic nature of their relationship" (Call 284). The consequences of the erotic relationship do not become

significantly apparent until after Doro finds Anyanwu in Louisiana where she has rebuilt a community of her own after having fled from him a century prior. Repeating her actions from their first encounter in Africa, Anyanwu does not flee from him despite knowing that he has arrived at her home. Once again she accepts him into her life in order to protect those around her who are dependent upon her for survival. This time, however, Anyanwu is aware of her influence over Doro as well as the threats that he will employ to control her. Rather than allowing him to strip her new family from her or to once again isolate her within his complete control, she reminds Doro of her value to him much as one would a business proposition. Butler has created a disruption that focuses on choice and equality. Anyanwu is no longer oppressed by her gender or her class so Doro is forced to recognize the possibilities of change. Butler's wild seed has changed and taken root, thus allowing for destabilization and reinvention of the binary structure.

Anyanwu's successful escape, self-sufficiency, and her unintentional but productive breeding community impress upon Doro that she is not merely a momentary diversion as his other 'wild seed' have been. Instead, Anyanwu appears to offer him as ideal a partnership as possible. Doro no longer simply requires that Anyanwu submit to his sexual and social dominance; he desires that she welcome him into her home and arms much as would a mother, a wife, and a friend. Lewis Call describes this consequence, noting that Doro "may have enslaved Anyanwu, but he is himself enslaved by his desire for her, by his all-consuming need to dominate the one woman who could possibly be his equal." (284). Butler uses Doro's obsession with Anyanwu to demonstrate the way in which Doro traps himself and upsets the traditional power structure by making Anyanwu a necessity in his own

conception of himself -- in many ways, Doro's identity has become tied to his interactions with Anyanwu.

Butler's treatment of Anyanwu and Doro in *Wild Seed* is clearly an attempt to undermine the conceptualization of male / female roles as biological definitions of gender identity and racial determinations as power structures. Butler manipulates the Western gender binary structure and racially defined power expectations to create a mirror within which is reflected a third ground where race, gender, and social position are not static entities that determine one's self.

## Chapter Two

### Gender Socialization and Heteronormativity in Jeffrey Eugenides' *Middlesex*

Like Tiresias, I was first one thing and then the other. I've been ridiculed by classmates, guinea-pigged by doctors, palpated by specialists, and researched by the March of Dimes. A redheaded girl from Grosse Pointe fell in love with me, not knowing what I was. (Her brother liked me, too.) An army tank led me into urban battle once; a swimming pool turned me into myth; I've left my body in order to occupy others -- and all this happened before I turned sixteen.

From *Middlesex*  
Jeffrey Eugenides

**hermaphrodite** –1. One having the sex organs and many of the secondary sex characteristics of both male and female. 2. Anything comprised of a combination of diverse or contradictory elements. See synonyms at MONSTER.

From *Middlesex*  
Jeffrey Eugenides

Checking to see if anyone was watching, I tried the jacket on. I didn't feel what a boy would feel. It wasn't like putting on your father's jacket and becoming a man. It was like being cold and having your date give you his jacket to wear. As it settled on my shoulders, the jacket felt big, warm, comforting, alien.

From *Middlesex*  
Jeffrey Eugenides

While *Wild Seed* clearly resides in the science fiction / fantasy genre and *Middlesex* is, stylistically, a realistic memoir, the texts share a common awareness of the gendered other. In his 2002 novel *Middlesex*, Eugenides initially presents what seems to be a conventional tale depicting the upbringing of a young girl in Detroit, Michigan. *Middlesex* is a novel ripe with themes of heteronormativity and biological determinism. Octavia E. Butler and Jeffrey Eugenides both recognize the possibilities that transmogrification offer in gender studies and they choose to utilize this vehicle of discourse in their novels. Although Eugenides' intersexed protagonist is clearly different from *Wild Seed*'s shape shifters and psychic vampires in both genre and background, *Middlesex* tackles Western society's structured gender male / female binary through a story of transformation from child to adult

and from single to dual-sexed identity. Eugenides' text utilizes Cal, an adolescent hermaphrodite, struggling to define him/herself as a third gender -- intersexed -- despite living within a social network that clings desperately to its binary foundation. Eugenides' protagonist relies on re-evaluations of sexual desire (heteronormativity in particular) and gender performativity.

Scholarly studies of Butler's *Wild Seed*, as mentioned previously in this thesis, often speculate about Butler's intentions when creating gender complicated characters; however, analyses of *Middlesex* appears to favor approaching the text as Eugenides' attempt to prove that his protagonist is a "normal" adolescent despite his/her dual-gendered state. Max Watson's assertion in his article "Suffer the Children" echoes much of his peers' conclusions: "Cal must figure out who to be and become that person. The obstacles Cal must overcome are idiosyncratic, but so are all of the obstacles of youth. Eugenides normalizes the experiences of a hermaphrodite and turns Cal into something other than a freak" (66). Eugenides, however, complicates an otherwise simplistic memoir by leading Cal to re-negotiate the social landscape and establish him/herself as a complete third gender. Intersexuality is not to be perceived as an obstacle; it is one's legitimate gender identity. In so doing, Eugenides claims that intersexuality is not an obstacle, rather it is a legitimate and viable gender identity.

The protagonist's characterization and sense of identity is defined early on by socialized "proper" behavior. Cal's identity as s/he knows it is stripped from him/her when the young "girl" learns that s/he is not actually a chromosomal female. Through this twist in plot, Eugenides undermines the heteronormative gender structure as Cal navigates the erotic power structure to re-negotiate his/her place in the family and in society. In addition to

disrupting the male / female gender binary by introducing a third gender, Eugenides further complicates the negotiation process by positioning Cal as a Greek-American in 1970s Detroit. Cal's ethnic identity involves him in the immigrant struggle to meld their own traditions with those of their new country. Angela Boukourakis describes the advantages that Greek-American men have over the much more restricted women in ascertaining their newly discovered "American-ness":

Both native and first-generation Greek men have the flexibility to disidentify with their 'Greek-ness' by altering traditional gender roles, as a result of traditional patriarchal Greek culture, which grants them greater possibilities for self-definition. In addition, all of these men have greater flexibility altering the Greek traditional gender roles prescribed to them, because they are male. (63)

Such double standards are clearly present in *Middlesex* as Cal's mother desires a daughter to share in the woman's role in the household while Cal's brother is encouraged to strike out on his own path. Thus, Eugenides challenges Cal with both gender and ethnic identity expectations; consequently, Cal claims the right to choose by casting him/herself outside of the accepted structure.

From the beginning of the novel, Eugenides equates sexuality and desire with shame. Cal is especially susceptible to socialized heteronormativity due to his/her immersion in Detroit's tumultuous social culture while living in a first-generation immigrant family undergoing "Americanization." Cal's grandparents' guilt over their incestuous marriage and his/her parents' very traditional views on sexuality and gender roles form the basis by which

Cal's own self-conceptualization initially develops.<sup>12</sup> His/her family's attitudes determine Cal's beliefs in what is normal and what constitutes deviancy. By showing us Cal's interactions with characters to whom s/he is sexually attracted, Eugenides demonstrates the ways in which Western society uses the fear of sexual otherness to encourage its population to conform to the traditional gender roles of male and female heterosexuality.<sup>13</sup> Raised in a first generation Greek-American home, Cal's childhood behavior is conditioned to rely upon clearly defined concepts of Americanism, patriarchy, capitalism, and familial obligation. Eugenides focuses on the friction created when the familial obligation to procreate (continue the family lineage) and the social and religious stigmas of sexual deviation collides with Cal's own experience of life. His/her adolescent discovery of his/her intersexuality crumbles that which delineates. Eugenides first reveals that Cal's grandparents' incestuous relationship is the cause of his/her sex because hermaphroditism is common in small communities where close relations often intermarry. Cal's grandparents, Desdemona and Eleutherios, are siblings who married and bore children upon emigrating from Greece to the United States. Familial obligation becomes a dubious matter as Cal's infertility changes the obligation from continuing the family line to avoiding embarrassing his/her family by his/his otherness. Finally, Eugenides brings patriarchy into question given Cal's decision to live as a male while retaining much of his/her female personality traits. Patriarchy relies on the conception of male influence and dominance; yet, Cal chooses to re-create him/herself by incorporating male social traits into his/her already familiar female upbringing rather than denouncing

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<sup>12</sup> Fleeing their war torn Greece and relocating to the United States allows Desdemona and Eleutherios to act on their sexual attraction to one another and immigrate as a married couple rather than as siblings. Desdemona, while happy in her marriage, is repeatedly troubled by the "sinful" relationship with her brother.

<sup>13</sup> In deference to the problematic usage of gendered pronouns in regard to Cal, from this point forward s/he will be used to refer to Cal in both his/her male and female identifications.

womanhood as a legitimate position of self. As a result, the patriarchal structure's clear distinction between the male and the female -- the dominant and the submissive -- is dissolved. Eugenides utilizes all of the aforementioned changes to demonstrate how familial structures affect Cal's sexual desire and influence his/her decisions about gender identity.

I argue that Eugenides shows the relationship between heteronormativity, shame, and the process of finding one's sexual identity. Cal's early shame about his/her interest in Clementine Stark is a pivotal factor in Cal's decision to live as a man.<sup>14</sup> Socialized as an adolescent female and raised in a strictly heteronormative family environment, Cal perceives his/her sexual attraction to another female to be homosexual, thus deviant, desire. This fear of deviancy influences his/her decision to refuse medical procedures and maintain a strictly female gender identity. Eugenides utilizes Cal's friendship and pseudo-sexual relationship with Clementine Stark to illustrate how a person is socialized from an early age to follow a hegemonic model that legitimizes heterosexuality, and consequently, distinct male / female gender identification. Cal is at an age when hormone-induced confusion normally leads adolescents to seek advice from family or peers. Unfortunately, Cal's sense of shame in regard to his/her seemingly lesbian feelings for Clementine Stark prevents him/her from exploring the origin of his interests and their implications. S/he muses that "From the beginning I was aware that there was something improper about the way I felt about Clementine Stark, something I shouldn't tell my mother, but I wouldn't have been able to articulate it" (Eugenides 265). At this point in Eugenides' narrative, Cal's concern is not the

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<sup>14</sup> At the time of Cal's relationship with Clementine Stark, Cal still believes himself to be entirely female and responds to the name of Callie. While in Dr. Luce's office, trying to come to terms with the recommended genital modification surgery, Cal's thoughts are drawn to his sexual attraction to female friends – Clementine in particular.

social tensions surrounding homosexuality, but rather his /her family's reaction to what is considered deviant behavior for a proper Greek-American girl. These concerns stem from the often-told story of the debate over the fetal Cal's gender, with his/her father insisting -- or demanding -- that his latest child will be female. Prior to his/her birth, Cal's position in the Stephanides family, and in society, is determined by his/her adherence to a strict gender binary expectation. His/her parents desire a girl -- to balance out their son's presence in the household and to act as a companion for her mother -- demonstrates the family's demand that their child conform to traditional Western social roles. Cal is thus dressed in ribbons and pink, gifted with dolls, and sent to an all-girls school. Cal's father, himself the result of a "deviant" relationship, and mother adhere to the American symbols of femininity in a continuing attempt to overcome their immigrant status. Eugenides thus sets the stage for Cal's later socialized responses to sexual desire and its relationship with gender identity. Through the Stephanides' early categorization of American male and female normativity, Cal's perception of what constitutes masculine and feminine identity is shaped, thereby factoring into his/her later decisions for his/her own life.

One of the ways in which Eugenides demonstrates the various methods used to inscribe sexual normativity is through the novel's early focus on the all-girls school as an example of institutionalized socialization. The school's administration and faculty endeavor to prepare their pupils to enter the world as young ladies well versed in their expected societal roles thereby perpetuating the mythos of the male / female binary. The students contribute to this need for conformity by embracing platonic friendships and closely knit cliques while simultaneously ostracizing anyone whose behavior is deemed different or unacceptable. These standards of behavior are, of course, determined by the rules set forth

by the institution and the family. Eugenides presents Cal in his/her youth as a typically insecure “girl” longing for social acceptance and belonging, yet fully aware of his/her budding suspicion that s/he is different from his/her classmates who

. . . might act cozy during the day, but boys were the number one after-school activity. Any girl suspected of being attracted to girls was gossiped about, victimized, and shunned. I was aware of all this. It scared me. I didn’t know if the way I felt about the Obscure Object was normal or not.<sup>15</sup> (327)

Cal begins calling Clementine Stark his/her “Obscure Object” once s/he realizes that his/her interest in her is one of sexual desire. While s/he has yet to question his/her own gender identity, his/her sexual predilections become an issue of great trepidation because s/he is fully aware that s/he will be isolated from his/her current peer group, one that includes the very object of his/her desire. Eugenides references the post-colonial and feminist theories of the gaze and objectification to show how the transition from Cal’s identifying Clementine as the Obscure Object demonstrates his need to distance himself from his fears of homosexuality by delegating her to an asexual object rather than the intimate female presence. Eugenides offers Cal a defense mechanism against his/her fears of deviancy in such a manner that the action becomes Cal’s conscious choice. Through this a reaction, Eugenides demonstrates Cal’s emotional need to deny his/her supposed sexual deviancy; the inability to do so forces Cal to begin negotiating his/her transformation from a believed single-sexed female to an intersexual identity.

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<sup>15</sup> The Obscure Object is how Cal refers to Clementine Stark throughout the novel once he recognizes his fascination with her as a sexual attraction rather than platonic friendship. By naming Clementine “The Obscure Object,” Eugenides expresses the confusion that Cal experiences in regard to his/her own sexual desire -- and consequently his/her identity – when confronted with his/her attraction to Clementine.

Eugenides uses objectification as a distancing technique to explore the ways in which Cal is able to adapt to his/her ongoing transformation in his/her identification with both mainstream Western and Greek-American ethnic gender expectations and indulge in the sexual desires that torment him/her without actually physically breaching the coda that has been instilled in him/her. Eugenides does this by utilizing the reader's access to Cal's imagination during a turning point in his sexual discoveries. While the protagonist of a narrative novel would normally be expected to be the center of a sexual scene involving the loss of his virginity, Eugenides instead employs empathic involvement as an additional distancing technique by which Cal can immerse him/herself in Clementine Stark's encounter with her brother's friend, Rex:

Because he [Rex] was more experienced than me I let him deal with the shirt buttons, but it was my hands that took hold of her bra and, as if snapping up a window shade, let into the room the pale light of the Object's breasts. I saw them; I touched them; and since it wasn't me who did this but Rex Reese I didn't have to feel guilty, didn't have to ask myself if I was having unnatural desires. How could I be when I was on the other cot fooling around with Jerome? . . . and so, just to be safe, I returned my attention to him. (375)

The only information about Cal's loss of virginity to Jerome that appears important enough to impart to the reader is that it is painful and that Cal fears that Jerome will discover his/her physical deviation from *normal* female genitalia. The emphasis in this moment is one of discovery; although, it is not the one that is expected. Rather, Cal's sexual awakening is here one of re-awakening as, for the first time, Cal consciously engages him/herself in what s/he, at the time, believes to be homosexual voyeurism. This encounter is Cal's first emotional

and psychological projection of him/herself as a male. Despite believing him/herself, at this time, to be biologically female, Cal does not simply observe the sexual interaction between Clementine and Rex; instead, s/he imagines himself as the male partner. The combination of sexual fantasy and voyeurism allows Cal to maintain his/her female identity because he/she is simultaneously engaging in heterosexual intercourse with Jerome. Eugenides creates these instances in which Cal utilizes defensive distancing techniques to separate him/herself from supposedly deviant sexuality to establish Cal's inability to clearly accept his/her sexual self.

Eugenides moves beyond sexual desire and demonstrates the medical community's affects on the role that heteronormativity plays in gender identity within *Middlesex*'s pages. Cal's interactions with the sexologist, Dr. Luce, lead to the climactic point when Cal decides his/her gender identification. As such, it is prudent to examine their conversations and the manner in which their dialogue reflects the social desire for gender binaries clearly defined by preset conditions of performance and sexual desire expectations. Dr. Luce's examinations of Cal often focus on sexual desire. At this point in his/her life, Cal is fully aware of the normative gender expectations and carefully crafts his/her answers to correspond with the responses that s/he knows Dr. Luce will accept as female identifiers. When Dr. Luce interviews Cal about his/her friendships and sexual attractions, Cal knows that if s/he wants to maintain the physician's perception of him/her as female, then s/he must deny his/her attraction to Clementine Stark. Cal not only insists their relationship is strictly a platonic friendship; s/he also informs the sexologist that s/he has engaged in sexual intercourse with Clementine's brother. Another session involves watching a pornography film after which Dr. Luce asks: "Which one turns you on? The woman or the man?" The true answer was neither. But truth would not do. Sticking to my cover story, I managed to get out, very

quietly, ‘The boy.’” (419). Cal’s disinterest in either sexual performer is due to his/her aversion to the film rather than on sexual preference; yet, s/he is so conditioned to a heteronormative response that s/he recognizes that Dr. Luce expects him/her to react to either one or the other of the actors.

Eugenides problematizes the medical diagnosis procedure in three distinct examples of heterosexism. First, Dr. Luce, who is supposedly an expert on non-normative sexuality, allows for only two choices of interest: the man or the woman. Neither bisexuality nor intersexuality are considered to be options. Second, Dr. Luce’s insistent pursuit of discovering the direction that Cal’s sexual desire lays re-emphasizes society’s insistence on heteronormativity. Briefly, if Cal is sexually attracted to a woman, then his/her gender identification must be male. Likewise, if s/he desires a man, his/her gender identification is surely female. In either circumstance, homosexual desire is not considered to be an option. Finally, Luce’s decision to use pornography as a measurement of sexual interest and gender identification lends itself to the highly contested power structure represented by pornography. Jill Dolan’s article, “The Dynamics of Desire: Sexuality and Gender in Pornography and Performance,” considers arguments from Adrienne Rich, Gayle Rubin and Foucault while determining that sexuality is

. . . a tangible currency in the representational exchange. While it is crucial not to conflate sexuality with gender, expressions of sexuality further illustrate the operations of gender codes and constructs in the representation of the female body. Heterosexuality, or male / female coupling, is as culturally imperative as masculine / feminine gender. Sexual role-playing, then, has implications for gender play; the way people perform their sexuality

influences how they “wear” their gender. If desire is the subtext of gender, sexuality and gender are equally motivating forces behind representation.

(160)

Dolan’s final statement in the passage quoted here illuminates the core of the flaw in Luce’s reasoning when using heterosexual pornography to determine one’s gender identification.

This measuring device ignores non-heterosexual desire by juxtaposing dual-sexed individuals with single-sexed. After all, if one is dual-sexed, what defines one’s sexual desire as heterosexual or non-heterosexual? In raising these concerns, Eugenides calls for his audience to open itself to the possibilities that intersexuality offers in dismantling social rejection of nonconformity in regard to gender identity and sexual desire binaries.

While Cal’s situation is complicated by his/her Greek American upbringing and the Stephanides family’s displaced relationship desires, it is equally problematized by the medical misunderstanding of other gender possibilities and by society’s rejection of other gender possibilities. Eugenides moves beyond sexual desire and addresses the biological aspect of gender identity by utilizing the medical community, Dr. Luce in particular, to further explore socialized heteronormativity. Cal’s sessions with Dr. Luce and recollections of his/her childhood interactions with physicians also illustrate a societal desire for a clearly defined dual-gender structure. Hospital birthing wards offer two color options to newborn infants -- pink or blue -- and even in Cal’s situation as a teenager, Dr. Luce refuses to offer the Stephanides an alternative other than male or female:

The chief imperative in cases like mine was to show no doubt as to the gender of the child in question. You did not tell the parents of a newborn, ‘Your baby is a hermaphrodite.’ Instead, you said, ‘Your daughter was born with a

clitoris that is a little larger than a normal girl's. We'll need to do surgery to make it the right size.' Luce felt that parents weren't able to cope with an ambiguous gender assignment. You had to tell them if they had a boy or a girl. Which meant that, before you said anything, you had to be sure what the prevailing gender was. (Eugenides 413)

Fully aware of the biological existence, as well as the genetic and hereditary implications of intersexuality, Dr. Luce still considers Cal's body a defective anomaly that should "have been fixed" at birth (403). Note that Eugenides comments that even science with its reliance on factual representation falls prey to social demands for conformity: "[A home video] was the thirty-five-second segment that, Luce insisted, proved out his theory that gender identity is established early on in life. This was the film Dr. Luce showed to him, to tell me who I was" (226). When presented with repeated cases of hermaphroditism, medical practitioners rush to identify infants as either male or female and refuse to acknowledge intersexuality as a valid identity. Gynecologist Sarah Creighton explains the documented origins of this policy in her editorial "Most Vaginal Surgery Should Be Deferred":

In the 1950s-70s, John Money gained widespread acclaim for work analyzing differentiation of gender identity with intersex subjects. He stated that to achieve a stable gender identity a child must have unambiguous genitalia and unequivocal parental assurance of the chosen gender. Extrapolated into clinical management, the accepted keys to successful outcome were believed to be an active policy of withholding any details of their condition from the child and early genital surgery, before 18 months of age. Hence the current

intervention of genital surgery has focused on early cosmetic appearance of the genitals rather than later sexual function. (1264)

Based upon the vast collection of articles, texts, and conference presentations on the subject, this reaction evidently remains a point of contention today. Dr. Howard Devore's "Eroticism from an Intersexed Point of View" presentation at the 2000 Society for the Scientific Study of Sexuality contrasts sharply with physicians who describe an intersexed individual, "a newborn infant with ambiguous genitalia," as a "medical emergency" in a 2001 article from the Dutch medical journal *Ugeskr Laeger* (Steensberg 1067). Eugenides responds to these contentions and the desire for confirmation of a binary gender structure by commenting on the lengths to which Cal's parents go to avoid acknowledging his/her physical differences as an infant: "I don't remember any direct allusions to my sexual apparatus. All was shrouded in a zone of privacy and fragility, where my mother never scrubbed me too hard. (Chapter Eleven's apparatus was called a 'pitz.' But for what I had there was no word at all.)" (Eugenides 226). In the case of those hermaphrodites whose physical characteristics are too prominent to be ignored, these physicians endeavor to press the patient into pre-conceived binary societal standards of gender identity based on performativity and expressed sexual desire. Consequently, Eugenides strips away the distinctions among biological gender identity, sexual identity, and sexual performativity, thereby negating the American hierarchy that superficially posits that one's physical designation supercedes individual conceptions of selfhood.

Eugenides clearly dismisses the idea that the medical community's conclusion in regard to Cal's gender identity is superior to Cal's own perceptions of him/herself.

Eugenides requires Cal's transformation to be based upon his own negotiations with gender

performativity and social expectations. Dr. Luce decides that Cal must be a girl, reasoning that s/he was raised and educated as a female, fiddles with his/her hair, and exhibits additional feminine mannerisms:

He registered my tenor voice. He noted that I sat with one leg tucked under me. He watched how I examined my nails, curling my fingers into my palm. He paid attention to the way I coughed, laughed, scratched my head, spoke; in sum, all the external manifestations of what he called my gender identity.

(408)

In “Challenging Masculinity and Using Sexuality,” Beverley Skeggs argues that adolescents utilize their knowledge of masculinity / femininity -- learned in the classroom -- to “subvert strategies of masculine regulation” (127). Eugenides likewise demonstrates how institutionalized sexuality equips Cal with an understanding of social gender expectations that enables him/her to manipulate the process by which Dr. Luce arrives at his conclusions. Cal has learned, and continues to learn, the importance that society places on a person’s behaviors when evaluating that person’s position within the communal structure. Dr. Luce’s assumptions about gender performance are based on some of the same behaviors as are noted in Skeggs’ editorial. Luce notes that

Females tend to smile at their interlocutors more than males do. Females pause and look for signs of agreement before continuing. Males just look into the middle distance and hold forth. Women prefer the anecdotal, men the deductive. It was impossible to be in Luce’s line of work without falling back on such stereotypes. He knew their limitations. But they were clinically useful. (Eugenides 417)

Thus, these foundational expectations form the structure by which Cal negotiates his/her position within the family, society, and medical community. Audre Lorde's foundational essay, "Uses of the Erotic as Power," argues that "passion undergirds all vital human endeavor and is the underlying basis for all human motivation [. . .] The erotic is a potential source of power" (Kemp 26). The erotic power in *Middlesex* is that Eugenides demonstrates that sexuality is not a binary; instead, it is a continuum that is fluid rather than fixed.

Eugenides uses this continuum to portray the newly enlightened Cal as one who quickly travels through the journey toward masculinity once s/he identifies him/herself as male rather than female. It is perhaps suitable that this transformation takes place during a road trip away from Dr. Luce's office in New York. Cal realizes that in order to pass as a male, s/he will have to appease the social expectations that identify one as a male. S/he observes men's mannerisms, speech patterns, and habits. For example, "to walk like a boy you let your shoulders sway, not your hips. And you kept your feet farther apart" (Eugenides 441). Appropriately, Cal divests him/herself of the last outwardly apparent vestiges of femininity at the traditional male haven -- the barbershop:

The swearing, the straight razors, the shaving brushes, all these were my welcome to the masculine world. The barber had the football game on the TV. The calendar showed a vodka bottle and a pretty girl in a white fur bikini. (442)

Eugenides depicts Cal attempting to fully embrace the tenets of what s/he perceives as maleness -- suits, short hair, contact sports, and a swaggering gait -- by modeling those around him/her who fit society's mold. Yet, it is a performance rather than thorough transformation. Cal considers him/herself in the mirror and notes that while the face

reflected back “was unquestionably a male face . . . the feelings inside that boy were still a girl’s” (445). Cal’s reaction to his/her transformation -- reinforced by Jacques Lacan’s theory of the mirror image stage of development -- stresses that a single-sex identity will not feel true for Cal as his/her gender identity is one constructed of both male and female social formations. Eugenides insists that “appearance” and “performance” cannot define one’s sexuality. This is even more true given Cal’s position as a third-gendered individual within a society that embraces a binary structure of gender and sexuality.

It is important to observe that Cal does not even become aware of his/her own gender performativity until after intersexuality is forced into his/her awareness. Cal is conscious of a “difference” from his/her peers but only accepts its physical existence when a medical examination identifies his/her intersexuality and brings the “anomaly” into the foreground. It is only after having been informed that s/he is different from the female peer group does Cal contemplate that his/her non-normative state was evident all along. S/he muses,

I began to exude some kind of masculinity, in the way I tossed up and caught my eraser, for instance, or in the way I dive-bombed people’s desserts with my spoon, in the intensity of my knit brow or my eagerness to debate anyone on anything in class; when I was a changeling, before I changed. (304)

Eugenides points out that these activities and mannerisms, which no one takes note of prior to discovering Cal’s hermaphroditism, quickly become the evidence that Cal uses to differentiate him/herself from his/her socialization as a female. Cal refers to him/herself as a “changeling” -- a being who exists in an in-between state -- a third and unidentifiable space outside of the dual-gender structure of male / female.

Here, Eugenides demonstrates the means by which this third gender, intersex, defies the male / female gender binary structure that forms the basis of contemporary social mores. Intersexuality is a naturally occurring, biological, congenital sex; consequently, institutional society's argument that males and females are the only normal sexes due to procreative ability is undermined. Intersexuality also denies that heterosexuality is natural and that homosexuality and / or bisexuality are unnatural. Cal him/herself discovers that heterosexuality becomes a relative entity when faced with the concepts of dual-gendered individuals:

I looked. I looked once again to see how other people were made. As I looked, I didn't take sides. I understood both the urgency of the man and the pleasure of the woman. My mind was no longer blank. It was filling with a dark knowledge. (435)

Society dictates that an individual's sexual desire be termed heterosexual or homosexual depending upon his/her gender performativity; however, based strictly upon biological sex, Cal is neither one nor the other and therefore claims the right to carry *both* desires. S/he is both male and female; yet, at the same time, s/he is neither male nor female. Eugenides brings forward such a circumstance to draw attention to the fragile tenets of institutionalized sexuality when sexual desire is used to determine an individual's gender identity.

However, even Eugenides does not leave gender identity to biological determinants and sexual desire alone. He suggests that an individual's gender identification also builds from his psychological conceptualization of himself and his social interactions with other people. Cal recognizes this when s/he comments that "Already latent inside me, like the future 120 mph serve of a tennis prodigy, was the ability to communicate between the

genders, to see not with the monovision of one sex but in the stereoscope of both” (269).

Likewise, Cal wonders, “Did I see through the male tricks because I was destined to scheme that way myself? Or do girls see through the tricks, too, and just pretend not to notice?”

(371). A significant number of blogs and personal videos may be found on the Internet that suggest that while intersexuality is a conscious challenge in today’s society, intersexed individuals are able to embrace the multiple aspects of their gender and develop identities outside of the normative demands for sex reassignment therapies.<sup>16</sup> Eugenides’ protagonist exists in a similar perceptual field outside of the traditional gender identity binary of male or female.

Eugenides’ memoir asserts that intersexuality is a gender distinctly defined outside of the socially constructed gender binary that insists upon an individual as being either male or female identified; Cal is both male and female. While s/he may choose to live as one or the other, his/her thought processes, communication patterns and emotional responses are hybridized because they are influenced by the socialization s/he encountered growing up as a pre-adolescent female. This hybridization is also influenced by the concept of masculinity that Cal developed while living as a young girl within a Greek family, as well as adolescent re-evaluation of femininity and sexuality. Additional factors include induction into male cultural circles and the changed perspectives caused by living as a man negotiating contemporary dating customs with women who are likely to reject him/her once s/he reveals that s/he is a hermaphrodite.

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<sup>16</sup> One particularly useful blog follows a 26 year old female-identified intersexed individual named Natalie as (s)he experiences delayed puberty and actively negotiates the development of her changing identity. This blog and its accompanying videos may be found at [http://efeminate.dreameryonline.com/?page\\_id=7](http://efeminate.dreameryonline.com/?page_id=7).

Through Cal's fictionalized memoir, Eugenides emphasizes that an intersexed individual cannot find his/her location in society by seeking to identify with either the male or the female gender that sustains society's binary structure. Instead, intersexuality requires one to reject the socialized notion that only two natural genders exist and accept the presence of a dual-gendered identity. Cal him/herself is an example of the ever-present duality as decides to s/he appear as a male yet also embraces the female aspects of his/her personality that remain from being raised as a girl. In short, Eugenides uses Cal's transformation to demonstrate that intersexuality is not deviant due to its dual nature. Rather, it is a third identity in which one is able to find a unique balance of masculinity and femininity. As Quin notes, "Eugenides breathes life into his creation: 'Put yourself in my shoes, reader, and ask yourself what conclusion you would have come to about your sex, if you had what I had, if you look the way I looked.'" (<http://www.bmj.com/cgi/content/full/325/7370/975>). Indeed, Eugenides strips away the constraints that insist on a binary gender structure. He also invites the reader to embrace intersexuality, thereby reconciling the existence of a third gender.

## Chapter Three

### Corrective Desire in Gloria Naylor's "The Two" and Alice Walker's *The Color Purple*

Confronted with the difference that had been thrust into their predictable world, they reached into their imaginations and, using an ancient pattern, weaved themselves a reason for its existence. Out of necessity they stitched all of their secret fears and lingering childhood nightmares into this existence, because even though it was deceptive enough to try and look as they looked, talk as they talked, and do as they did, it had to have some hidden stain to invalidate it -- it was impossible for them both to be right.

From *The Women of Brewster Place*  
Gloria Naylor

[*The Color Purple*] deliberately conflates the pen and the needle, thereby deconstructing the binary oppositions between the masculine and the feminine, the spoken and the silenced, the lexical and the graphic.

From "Philomela Speaks"  
Martha J. Cutter

Sofia and Harpo always try to set me up with some man. They know I love Shug but they think womens love just by accident, anybody handy likely to do.

From *The Color Purple*  
Alice Walker

So it got around that the two in 312 were *that way*. And they had seemed like such nice girls.

From "The Two"  
Gloria Naylor

As I have noted previously, erotic power and sexual desire are integral to the process of sexual identification. Butler's characters navigate G.W.F. Hegel's erotic power continuum while Eugenides' Cal realizes a third gender within a heteronormative society. Gloria Naylor's "The Two" and Alice Walker's *The Color Purple* bring these two facets together, echoing the sentiments expressed in Adrienne Rich's "lesbian continuum." Ultimately, both texts focus on the phallus as a corrective device. In these texts, heterosexuality is implemented as a forced corrective measure to combat the subversive presence that homosexuality -- lesbianism in particular -- has on normative gender

identification. The phallus acts as a restraining measure in *The Color Purple*, whereas Naylor positions it as a punitive device through which deviancy is punished. However, the phallus as a corrective device ultimately fails. Naylor and Walker demonstrate that gender identity is continuously confronted by society's expectation of heterosexual desire. In "The Two," the neighborhood women come into conflict due to a select group's hatred of homosexuality. The conflict brings a private relationship out into the public sphere where it becomes the subject of intense scrutiny and debate. *The Color Purple*'s Celie is encouraged to confront her socialized beliefs and, through a lesbian relationship, is able to find self-acceptance and dignity. Naylor's and Walker's women overcome corrective heteronormativity by exposing it as a problem and by offering an alternative sexuality that destabilizes hegemonic binaries of sexual desire, gender identity, and sexual performativity.

Naylor depicts the manner in which heterosexuality is pressed upon the women of Brewster Place through a web of external and internal strictures. Lorraine and Theresa's relationship often resembles the heterosexual couples' representations of love, partnership, and emotional intimacy. Naylor provides an example of this similarity in shared intimacy when she describes the moment that the neighborhood realizes the pair are actually lovers: "They had seen that -- done that -- with their men. That shared moment of invisible communion reserved for two and hidden from the rest of the world behind laughter or tears or a touch" (131). The similarities between this couple and their heterosexual counterparts threaten the foundation upon which binary gender identities and sexual desire are constructed.<sup>17</sup> Positions of authority, as held by the heterosexual women of Brewster Place,

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<sup>17</sup> Refer to the introductory chapter of this thesis for further explanations of these constructions.

are determined by the woman's role in the neighborhood as a wife, provider, and peer; the lesbian couple undermines this power structure by providing alternatives to the standard heteronormative roles.<sup>18</sup> Consequently, the women react to Lorraine and Theresa in an attempt to maintain the binary structure by clinging to their assertion that lesbianism is unnatural, as well as subduing any detractors with the threat of ostracism.

The neighborhood women first realize that Lorraine and Theresa's relationship is sexual because they recognize the significance of an interaction that is familiar to their own lives.

It outlined the image of the stumbling woman and the one who had broken her fall [. . .] Where had they seen that before? They had often laughed and touched each other -- held each other in joy or its dark twin -- but where had they seen *that* before? It came to them [. . .] They had seen that -- done that -- with their men. (131)

"That," as Naylor refers to the interlude, is uncomfortably similar to the intimacy that the on-looking women share with their own husbands. This shared glance should reassure the heterosexual women that Lorraine and Theresa are non-threatening. Unfortunately, the very fact that it is shared encourages women such as Sophie -- the self-appointed moral guardian of the community -- to insist that a non-heteronormative relationship is an aberration and a menace to Brewster Place. To witness the familiar in an "aberration" exacerbates Sophie's

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<sup>18</sup> The Brewster Place tenants live tenuously in poor economic conditions. These conditions negatively influence their reactions to non-conformity because their economic disenfranchisement causes them to cling to whatever scraps of authority that they can manage in their community. In this instance, this authority focuses on policing the perceived sexual morality of the neighborhood.

hatred because the intimacy of “the two” brings to question the supposed unnaturalness of lesbianism.

Sophie also assumes an air of authority among the neighborhood women because she acts as Brewster Place’s information gatherer. In this tightly enclosed community, Sophie’s control over the gossip gives her a sense of power as the other women listen and witness her calls for normativity. When one woman, Etta, objects to Sophie’s condemnation of Lorraine and Theresa, Sophie responds,

‘any woman who defends that kind of thing just better be watched. That’s all I gotta say -- where there’s smoke, there’s fire, Etta Johnson!’ Etta stopped struggling against the arms that were holding her, and her chest was heaving in rapid spasms as she threw Sophie a look of wilting hate, but she remained silent. And no other woman in the room dared to speak as they moved an extra breath away from each other. (145)

Naylor is fully cognizant of the influence that the desire to belong to a group has on sexual expression and gender performativity. People, especially those in a small community like Brewster Place, which have been adversely impacted by post-slavery racial and gender stereotypes, depend upon their inclusion in social networks. Sophie utilizes this knowledge by threatening anyone who might defend non-heteronormativity with ostracism. Even Lorraine, who has already endured exclusion from previous communities, fears being cast aside. As Naylor notes, “No, it wasn’t her job [Lorraine] feared losing this time, but their approval” (136). In short, inclusion in the social network requires conforming to heterosexuality.

Forced heterosexuality is most destructive when the women internalize the insecurities and beliefs that fuel their antagonistic regard of homosexual desire. Naylor depicts women like Mattie and Etta who appear to want to accept lesbianism as a natural desire, but whose internalized fear of being different prevents them from overcoming their socialization and befriending Lorraine or Theresa. Mattie and Etta ponder the situation in Brewster Place noting,

‘Maybe it’s not so different,’ Mattie said, almost to herself. ‘Maybe that’s why women get so riled up about it, `cause they know deep down it’s not so different after all.’ She looked at Etta. ‘It kinda gives you a funny feeling when you think about it that way, though.’ ‘Yeah, it does,’ Etta said, unable to meet Mattie’s eyes. (141)

Mattie recognizes that the Brewster Place women are likely reacting to the visible proof that lesbian relationships are as legitimate as heterosexuality; she considers that perhaps Sophie’s outcry comes from a need to defend the familiar heteronormative structure. Mattie and Etta both acknowledge this possibility, yet become uncomfortable as this realization causes them to question the nature of their own interactions with each other. Naylor shows the women’s resulting self-consciousness because their response demonstrates that despite their attempted tolerance, they remain uncomfortable with the possibilities that homosexual desire opens and its destabilizing effect on the male/female power structure of Brewster Place.

In addition to affecting the neighborhood’s social hierarchy, Naylor explores how internalized social expectations influence Lorraine and Theresa. Lorraine becomes timid and congenial in her hope to gain her neighbors’ approval and to avoid being “found out.” Theresa, on the other hand, is initially described as assertive and indifferent to her peers’

judgment. However, Theresa is not indifferent. Her repeated experiences with social slights and prejudices have caused her to develop her own expectations. She adopts the derogatory terminology used to describe lesbians and insists on only socializing with friends she meets at the night club which caters to a strictly homosexual client base. Theresa attempts to upset Lorraine's budding independence by reminding her of the majority's concerted efforts to isolate lesbians through not just deeds but also through language. She scolds, "You're a lesbian -- do you understand that word? -- a butch, a dyke, a lesbo" (165). In the neighborhood, however, she refuses to concede to her neighbors' discriminatory actions. Theresa's public demeanor changes when a child's mother questions Theresa's motives for helping to comfort the injured young girl.<sup>19</sup> Up to this point, she has ignored the neighborhood's hostility but the child's mother manages to make Theresa feel tainted by her own sexuality. Naylor shows Theresa internalizing the concept of tainted sexuality as she is driven to cleanse herself from the mother's reaction: "She kept lathering and rinsing them, but they still felt unclean. Son-of-a-bitch, she thought, son-of-a-fucking-bitch! She roughly dried her hands with some paper towels and fought the impulse to wash them again" (157). Theresa knows that she is not a danger to the child, but her immediate response is guilt that is quickly followed by defensiveness. Naylor demonstrates that even in such a defiant individual, there is an adverse effect from the external pressures of heteronormativity.

Naylor introduces the phallus as a corrective device to enforce heterosexuality while showing the process by which the initial tensions escalate into rape, the ultimate violation of

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<sup>19</sup> The societal urge to contain the undesirable is clearly evident here as Naylor depicts an innocent act that turns into a climactic moment for Theresa. Theresa finally succumbs to the external pressure when the child's mother acts as though, by helping the little girl, Theresa might corrupt her.

the sexual self. Theresa's earliest encounter with the phallus as corrective occurs when her grandmother warns her that the boys who tease her are hazardous to her health, future, and acceptance within the social network. Theresa describes her upbringing in regard to sexuality by relating that her grandmother "called me into the smokehouse and told me in this real scary whisper that I could get pregnant from letting little boys pat my butt and that I'd end up like my cousin Willa" (137). What appears to be an innocent game to the pre-pubescent Theresa is turned into a potential sexual act. The expectation of perversion becomes a rationalization to utilize the phallus as a tool to control behavior. While the adult Theresa may joke about the memory, this incident still had a formative influence on her early sexuality. As an adolescent, she is drawn to her cousin for advice and experiments with sexual interactions without finding emotional satisfaction in the encounters. Naylor thus illustrates the punitive effects that forced heterosexuality has on an individual; Theresa is socialized to believe that sexual interactions are emotionally hollow and physically deviant.<sup>20</sup>

Naylor demonstrates how competitiveness and pride also factor into the Brewster Place women's attitude toward homosexuality. Part of a woman's value in this community is her ability to attract and keep a man coveted by her peers. When Lorraine and Theresa first arrive in the neighborhood, the women are suspicious of Theresa because the men find her attractive. As a measuring device of a woman's influence in the neighborhood, the pair's lack of interest in the men whom the Brewster Place women claim as their own is deemed an insult that only further proves the couple's unnatural state: ". . . their friendly indifference to

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<sup>20</sup> This socialized view of sexuality does not appear to be in place for much of the text. It is when Theresa begins to resent Lorraine's growing independence and is forced to communicate with her as a person rather than a sexual object that Theresa's early socialization becomes apparent.

the men on the street was an insult to the women as a brazen flaunting of unnatural ways” (131). The couple’s lack of sexual interest in the men undermines a community which judges women by their ability to attract men who act as both enforcers and protectors in the neighborhood. The men in the neighborhood are positioned as phallic symbols of control. Naylor indicates that the men’s authority is undermined when Lorraine and Theresa prove immune to masculine manipulation through desire.

Note that Naylor also focuses on the ways in which lesbian desire seems to undermine masculine control. The men, particularly the younger generation, are placed in a situation where they may rule over their spouses and companions but are fully aware that their authority -- their masculinity -- is impotent beyond the neighborhood’s physical and social perimeter. Consequently, the men feel the need to exert their authority whenever possible.<sup>21</sup> The most obvious choice is to dominate the women. Sexual assault is a relatively common, and effective, manner by which one may attempt to prove physical and sexual dominance over another. This is the method that C.C. Baker and his friends choose. Naylor foreshadows the coming violence by explaining that

C.C. Baker was greatly disturbed by the thought of a Lorraine. He knew of only one way to deal with women other than his mother. Before he had learned exactly how women gave birth, he knew how to please or punish or extract favors from them by the execution of what lay curled behind his fly. It was his lifeline to that part of his being that sheltered his self-respect. And the

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<sup>21</sup> See Jennifer Sherman’s “Men Without Sawmills: Masculinity, Rural Poverty, and Family Stability” for an in-depth look at the effects that economy and community isolation have on the conception of masculine power.

thought of any woman who lay beyond the length of its power was a threat.  
(161-162)

Naylor carefully chooses her syntax in this passage, especially in the first sentence. By preceding Lorraine's name with the article "a," Naylor removes Lorraine as an individual and re-creates her as a symbol of all that C.C. Baker views as those things denied to him by his station in life. Baker's thought process is consistent with the rapist mentality that researchers have uncovered while interviewing convicted sexual offenders in studies of why men rape. As Sharon Supriya notes:

In one of the interview by the rapists [sic], they say that, 'We rape women who need to be disciplined. They do not want to talk to most people. They think they know better than most of us.' Here the rapists were using sexual assault to punish women who were not being genuinely feminine in their thoughts and work. (<http://living.oneindia.in>)

An article published in the Women Against Rape organization pamphlet argues that "Rape is the most common and threatening act calculated to induce fear in all women [. . .] rape has become an institutionalized necessity developed as an effective means to control all women" (Barry <http://feministezine.com>). Naylor presents a rape in what appears to be the ultimate act of phallic correction. Yet, in this act, phallic authority is challenged because Naylor demonstrates that in C. C. Baker's need to prove his sexual dominance, he exposes his own insecurity.

While Lorraine's rape may easily be construed as the ultimate usage of the penis as a corrective instrument it is also clear that Naylor's treatment of the scene itself shifts the power away from C.C. Baker. In "Reading Rape: Sanctuary and *The Women of Brewster*

*Place*,” Laura Tanner argues that by positioning the reader as victim rather than observer, and emphasizing Lorraine’s attempt to use language as resistance, Naylor deprives the rapist of his supposed power role. Lorraine’s “please,” Tanner reiterates, “emphasizes the brute terrorism of the boys’ act of rape and exposes the desperate means by which they rule” (576). The rape is experienced through the female victim instead of the more commonly stylized male violator and/or detached observer. As such, Naylor undermines phallic authority by disrupting what Simone de Beauvoir refers to as the objectifying male gaze that looms on the fringes of Brewster Place throughout “The Two.” Lorraine’s existence is, for the first and only time, viewed through *her* rather than observed from the outside. This unique view positions the reader -- regardless of his/her gender -- in the victim’s role. By doing so, Naylor turns the power of the gaze inward and forces the reader to “watch powerlessly as the violator steps up to the wall to stare with detached pleasure at an exhibit in which the reader, as well as the victim of violence, is on display” (582). The reader’s secure location as observer is violated because neither gender nor sexual conformativity will protect them. By following the escalation of tension from ostracism to its culmination in rape, Naylor warns that when the penis is used as a corrective instrument socialized heteronormativity leads to physical violence.

Naylor further upsets the power hierarchy when she creates characters that refuse to accept their peers’ demands that they admit to sexual perversion and correct their behavior to conform to heteronormative delineations. Lorraine and Theresa both have moments in “The Two” where they temporarily succumb to frustration and/or shame but these moments do not ultimately cause the women to change their beliefs that lesbianism is natural. Lorraine vehemently rejects Theresa’s accusation that lesbianism changes a woman. She responds to

Theresa's charge by insisting that she remains the same person she was prior to first realizing her homosexuality: "The day before I first fell in love with a woman, I got up, had oatmeal for breakfast, put on a beige bra, and went to school. The day after I fell in love with that woman, I got up, had oatmeal for breakfast, and put on a beige bra. I was no different the day before or after that happened" (Naylor 165). Notice that Naylor uses descriptors and activities (oatmeal and a bra) that are commonplace to women in general, thereby reinforcing the argument that the only true difference between heterosexual and homosexual women is their sexual identity.

Naylor also engages in the debate as to whether homosexuality is a perverse choice or a natural sexual identity.<sup>22</sup> She does this by revealing in an argument between Lorraine and Theresa that prior to the couple's relationship Theresa had engaged in sexual intercourse with a number of men. Lorraine is clearly upset by this but Theresa reassures her that "you can take a chocolate chip cookie [ . . . ] a Frisbee or even a flying saucer, if the mood hits you, and it's still just a cookie [ . . . ] Then all the spinning and pretending and hoopla is over with. And you know what you got?' 'A chocolate chip cookie,' Lorraine said. 'Uh-uh.' Theresa put the cookie in her mouth and winked. 'A lesbian'" (Naylor 138). Theresa is not a lesbian because she fears men, hates heterosexual sex, or is rebelling against society; she is a lesbian because it is an integral part of who she is as an individual. Naylor thus argues that

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<sup>22</sup> Homosexuality was first listed as an illness by Richard von Krafft-Ebing in 1886. Since that time, homosexuality has been classified as a sexual deviance and mental disorder to such a degree as to allow laws that force practicing homosexuals to undergo treatment for their "disorder." In 1974, the American Psychiatric Association re-classed homosexuality as a sexual orientation disturbance and finally removed it altogether in 1986. The World Health Organization followed suit in 1992, the United Kingdom in 1994, the Russian Federation in 1999, and the Chinese Society of Psychiatry in 2001. As of 2007, the United States Department of Defense continues to list homosexuality as a mental disorder ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/homosexuality\\_and\\_psychology](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/homosexuality_and_psychology)).

homosexuality is not an intentional or malicious rejection of the opposite sex but is instead an embracing of one's own sexual desire. By emphasizing Theresa's educated choice, Naylor depicts lesbian desire as a conscious and legitimate sexual identity thereby relieving the penis of its influence as a corrective device in "The Two."

Naylor's women, Lorraine and Theresa, make a conscious and informed choice to love one another. Likewise, Alice Walker's Shug Avery is fully aware of the consequences that may arise from her bisexual lifestyle choices. She embraces this choice as yet another example of her independent nature. In contrast to these three women, Walker offers the reader Celie as the heroine in *The Color Purple*. Celie is forced into heterosexuality by her father, and then, her spouse. When she enters into a relationship with another woman she does so partly out of curiosity about the sexual desire she experiences. In many instances, Walker creates Celie as a character who has control over neither her body nor her sexuality.

Celie is taught early in life to consider her sexuality, and consequently her body, a location of control and shame. Being forced to submit to molestation by her father subjugates her physically. It also becomes an enforced silence of both her will and her developing identity (a development which is hindered) in order to protect Nettie from similar treatment. Her body comes to represent shame and abandonment as well as familial and social servitude. Only through defying social boundaries by loving another woman is Celie able to consider herself as an individual beyond the roles she has been forcibly cast into throughout life. Walker asserts that Celie is able to negotiate her identity as both a woman and as an individual only after breaking away from her community's heteronormative restrictions. Otherwise, the phallic corrective -- in this instance, placed within the institution of marriage -- denies Celie her sovereignty over body, sexuality, and gender identification.

These restrictions, as Walker shows, often force compliance at the threat of severe consequences to a loved one. In fact, forced into heterosexual sex early in life, Celie quickly comes to recognize sexuality as something to protect oneself against. She is unable to defend herself against her father so she determines to protect her sister, Nettie, from him by intercepting his interest in her. Celie writes in her journal, "I see him looking at my little sister. She scared. But I say I'll take care of you. With God help" (Walker 3). Celie is not offered a choice in regard to her father's molestation, nor does Walker attempt to soften the effect that the molestation has on Celie's sexual development. In the beginning, the molestation is clearly about physical dominance as her father rapes her and disposes of the resulting children:

He never had a kine word to say to me. Just say You gonna do what your mammy wouldn't. First he put his thing up gainst my hip and sort of wiggle it around. Then he grab hold my titties. Then he push his thing inside my pussy. When that hurt, I cry. He start to choke me, saying You better shut up and git used to it. But I don't never git used to it." (1)

Celie's initiation into the sexual act is one which exploits her sexual naiveté, financial dependence, and physical vulnerability as a woman-child. From the beginning of the novel, Walker presents the phallus as an instrument of oppression.

Walker suggests that the corrective use of the phallus is not limited to Celie's molestation. In her marriage, Celie's relationship with Albert is strictly defined as one in which she acts as mother, laborer, and sexual orifice. Desire for one another is not a part of their marriage. The pair's only common ground is their shared fascination with Shug Avery, but even then Albert acts as a restraint. In a conversation with Shug, Celie thinks to herself,

“I don’t know nothing bout it. Mr. \_\_\_\_ clam on top of me, do his business, in ten minutes us both sleep. Only time I feel something stirring down there is when I think bout Shug. And that like running to the end of the road and it turn back on itself” (66). Celie does not even expect to experience pleasure because she has been socialized to view sexual intercourse as an obligation rather than an outlet for physical gratification. She cannot explore her reaction to Shug because she believes that sexual desire necessitates a penis. Homosexual desire does not factor into her thoughts as a possible avenue of sexual expression.

Ultimately, it is through Shug’s encouragement that Celie first contemplates exploring her own body, thereby taking control of her sexuality away from the phallus and learning her own body’s desires. This exploration is cut short when the men return and lesbian sexual expression becomes associated with shame. In the presence of men, Walker shows how Celie’s ability to explore her body shifts to shame: “Albert and Harpo coming, she say. And I yank up my drawers and yank down my dress. I feel like us been doing something wrong” (79). The men’s return reminds Celie of the heterosexual expectations to which she has been socialized to adhere. At this moment in *The Color Purple*, there is neither a physical restraint on her sexuality nor does she lack Shug’s support; yet, the male presence remains. Here, Walker shows that when heteronormativity is thoroughly entrenched in a community the presence of a man signals phallic oppression and the repression of lesbian erotic desire.

Walker employs the character of Shug Avery to act as a catalyst that disrupts the male/female gender roles governed by forced heterosexuality in Celie’s home. While Shug affects many of her peers, it is her influence on Celie that is vital to Walker’s theme of sexual

transformation and self-realization. In “Celie’s Search for Identity: A Psychoanalytic Developmental Reading of Alice Walker’s *The Color Purple*,” Charles Proudfit explains that Shug’s “open bisexual behavior and her special blend of masculine and feminine gender identity facilitates Celie’s completion of her own sexual orientation and gender identity” (27). Indeed, this appears to be true as Shug’s arrival coincides with the awakening of Celie’s awareness of her body and of her sexuality. Walker uses Shug to guide Celie through the process of discovering her sexuality, and consequently, claiming authority as an individual free from heteronormative enforcements.

Shug’s bisexuality and behavior threaten the community’s heretofore stable male/female gender roles. In a community where women wear dresses and men rule the family, “Shug talk and act sometimes like a man. Men say stuff like that to women, Girl, you look like a good time. Women always talk bout hair and health” (Walker 82). Celie, the dutiful wife, is drawn from her socialized role to acknowledge, “Shug, I say to her in my mind, Girl, you looks like a real good time, the Good Lord knows you do” (82). Walker depicts Celie’s first conscious rebellion against heteronormative gender identity as she both adopts the male speech pattern and acknowledges another woman’s sexuality. Like Naylor, Walker also makes careful use of language in such a manner as to emphasize the erotic power structure evident in masculine and feminine speech patterns. There is a distinct difference in the speech patterns based on gender identification in *The Color Purple*. The men use raw unfiltered language and few topics are taboo whereas the women often speak in “code” and restrict themselves to topics deemed appropriate for “proper” ladies. Even Celie is hyper-aware of her mannerisms and speech as she tries to prove to the community that she has risen above the poor pregnant girl of her childhood. In stark contrast, Shug refuses to use

the euphemisms employed by the other women to refer to sexual intercourse. “Shug don’t actually say making love. She say something nasty. She say fuck” (113). She makes a clear distinction between love as emotion and intercourse as physical act. For Shug, the body is not owned through sexuality. This concept of sexual ownership is a clear distinction that is unique to Shug and Sofia among the women in the community. Walker’s decision to draw attention to this reiterates the point that the body, like one’s sexuality, is personal property.

Long before the two women even meet, Shug is Celie’s link to an existence outside of submission to phallic dominance. Walker describes Celie’s wedding night as an episode to be tolerated, noting, “I don’t cry. I lay there thinking bout Nettie while he on top of me, wonder if she safe” (12).<sup>23</sup> Celie distances herself emotionally from the interaction because this allows her to rationalize her station in life as serving to protect the younger Nettie from similar abuses. Even from this moment, Shug becomes an image of sexuality that allows Celie to survive. As Celie states, “I think bout Shug Avery. I know what he doing to me he done to Shug Avery and maybe she like it. I put my arm around him” (12). Unlike Celie’s mother or Nettie, Shug does not need protection from the phallus. Instead, Shug’s acceptance of her sexuality encourages Celie to open herself to possibilities other than heterosexuality.

Walker realistically portrays the pair’s relationship as one which continually evolves and matures. Celie’s interest in Shug begins with curiosity; it then develops through physical desire, emotional intimacy, and ultimately becomes a relationship between two equally

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<sup>23</sup> At this point in the novel, Celie’s sexuality has been a tool to defend her sister, Nettie, first from their father’s interest and then from Albert’s courtship. Celie is forced to submit to heteronormativity in both instances as a defensive measure to protect Nettie from their father.

independent women. Celie is confused when she first recognizes her attraction to Shug as sexual in nature: “First time I got the full sight of Shug Avery long black body with it black plum nipples, look like her mouth, I thought I had turned into a man” (49). Her uneasiness is set aside, however, as she touches Shug in a manner that suggests the sacred, “I wash her body, it feel like I’m praying. My hands tremble and my breath short” (49). This interlude is pivotal to *The Color Purple* and Celie’s emerging sexual identification as she experiences the female body as something other than a point of contention. As interpreted by Sarah Chinn, Audre Lorde’s assertions of feminist “struggles over ‘objectification’ and ‘sexual freedom’ with a sexual language that represents lesbian bodies as sacred, communicative, instrumental, textured, [and] difficult” may be applied to this aspect of *The Color Purple* (Chinn 184). Walker demonstrates how phallic dominance weakens when Celie begins to consider her sexuality less as an obligation to Albert and more as a means of personal definition. With Shug, Celie experiences both physical and emotional intimacy without the demand for sexual reciprocation. The body becomes a vehicle of acceptance and comfort rather than merely a repository for masculine desire.

Us sleep like sisters, me and Shug. Much as I still want to be with her, much as I love to look, my titties stay soft, my little button never rise. Now I know I’m dead. But she say, Naw, just being mad, grief, wanting to kill somebody will make you feel this way. Nothing to worry about. Titties gonna perk up, button gonna rise again. I loves to hug up, period, she say. Snuggle. Don’t need nothing else right now. Yeah, I say. Hugging is good. Snuggle. All of it’s good. (Walker 146)

Celie discovers that sexuality can confer intimacy and communion between equals instead of merely being an assertion of power over another. Walker's scene suggests that this realization in itself is a moment of empowerment. This is the first time in the novel that Celie exhibits a recognition that self-sovereignty does not have to be obtained through physical force. Walker shows that in disrupting phallic dominance Celie has, in effect, taken control of her sexuality.

Walker rejects the idea that sexual identity is exclusive to those encounters where physical intercourse is involved. Ownership of her sexual identity allows Celie to surmount the heteronormative socialization forced upon her and re-evaluate her interactions in every aspect of her life. Through the disruptive power of lesbian desire, Celie is able to resist the social demands of heterosexuality and the dominant phallus. Furthermore, Shug also pushes Celie to question the heteronormative gender constructs that define the masculine and feminine identity. Note that Walker makes the key to Celie's financial and sexual freedom is to make pants -- a masculine symbol -- available to women. Shug suggests that Celie cope with Albert's betrayal and Nettie's supposed death by actively making a change in her life.<sup>24</sup>

Let's make you some pants. What I need pants for? I say. I ain't no man.

Don't git uppity, she say. But you don't have a dress do nothing for you. You

not made like no dress pattern, neither. I don't know, I say. Mr. \_\_\_\_\_ not

going to let his wife wear pants. Why not? say Shug. You do all the work

around here. (146)

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<sup>24</sup> Celie learns that Albert has been hiding the letters that Nettie sends to Celie. The only letter that he hands directly to her is one informing them that Nettie, her husband, and their child (actually Celie's child who was adopted out by their father) died at sea. It is not until late in the novel that their death is proven a mistake but this becomes the point at which Celie completely severs her obligations to Albert.

Celie's sewing project evolves into a business venture that allows her to gain financial independence, leave Albert, and tailor clothing to fit the personalities of individual women rather than dressing them to conform to particular gender norms. Celie is finally able to assert her individuality without fear of reprisal. The case study results described in Mary Lynne Ellis' "Sexual Language/Cultural Bodies: Transforming Psychoanalysis" replicate those which Celie experiences in her sewing venture. Ellis' subjects find that

Through the language of their artwork they discovered an embodying language for their ambiguity and uncertainty; and through describing their imagery they found new words, new speech. They were able to begin to acknowledge the importance of the individuality of their own socio-culturally specific sexualities and to consider how they might find the courage to assert these. (406)

Likewise, by sewing pants for herself and her friends, Celie assumes yet another masculine symbol and recreates it into a material representation of the blurred lines between man and woman. Celie is markedly more in control of her sexuality and gender identity as we see the woman, who once advised her step-son to beat his wife, now laughing openly at the male response to the changing gendered and sexual roles that define the novel:

Why any woman give a shit what people think is a mystery to me. Well, say Grady, trying to bring light. A woman can't git a man if peoples talk. Shug look at me and us giggle. Then us laugh sure nuff. Then Squeak start to laugh. Then Sofia. All of us laugh and laugh. Shug say, Ain't they something? Us say um *hum*, and slap the table, wipe the water from our eyes. (Walker 203)

Walker gifts Celie with more than independence from male domination. She creates a character who is free from phallic dominance.

Both Walker's and Naylor's characters successfully overcome forced heterosexuality and gender normativity when they subvert the phallic corrective. This subversion is accomplished by presenting the possibilities that homosexuality offers to an individual in search of his/her sexual and gender identity. The portrayal of supportive and mutually satisfying lesbian relationships undermines mainstream Western ideology which purports that only heterosexuality is a natural option. In fact, *The Color Purple* and "The Two" successfully demonstrate that phallic correction is not viable and that forced heterosexuality ultimately fails.

## CONCLUSION

Gender itself [. . .] is less a matter of (sexual) difference than an instance of that dominance; and the appeal to biology as determining the 'fact' of women's sexual specificity is an ideological by-product of the male way of knowing, whose epistemological stance of objectivity reflects not only the Western subject's habit of control through objectification but also its eroticization of the act of control itself. In this sense, 'the eroticization of dominance and submission creates gender. . . . The erotic is what defines sex as inequality, hence as a meaningful difference. . . . Sexualized objectification is what defines women as sexual and as women under male supremacy.'

From "Eccentric Subjects"  
Teresa de Lauretis

Anna struggled with trying to press her piece of clay into shape, saying afterwards, 'I realize how much I have tried to do this with my sexuality.' Seeing the marks that the clay had left on the paper beneath it, she had drawn into them, excited at the idea that similarly her sexuality could, in her words, 'emerge or happen, without having to be pushed into a definite shape.'

From "Sexual Languages /  
Cultural Bodies"  
Mary Lynne Ellis

Gender identity and erotic power are foundations upon which society depends, yet these same foundations stifle individual choice and societal evolution. Hence, society is irrevocably entwined with gender identity and sexual performativity. Contemporary fiction demonstrates the individual need to establish identities that may not fit comfortably within society's ethnic and racialized heterosexual "fictions." The texts considered in this thesis disrupt traditional Western constructions of gender identity and sexuality. Each author clearly approaches the matter of re-negotiating gender and sexual identity in a different way; however, all of them agree that this renegotiation is necessary.

Octavia E. Butler acknowledges the male / female binary in regard to gender roles, but demonstrates the fluidity that defines the erotic power continuum to such an extent as to eliminate the lines that distinguish biological determination of gender identity. In effect, Butler creates a third ground where the gendered self is fluid rather than fixed. Jeffrey

Eugenides also utilizes this third ground gender fluidity. While depicting the absolute failure of biological determinism in regard to dual-sexed individuals, Eugenides also encourages the rejection of the binary gender structure and the reconciliation of the possibilities that a third gender offers to the deconstruction of binary heterosexuality. Both Naylor and Walker explore how phallic correction has been used to reassert heteronormativity. Naylor focuses on the manner in which alternative sexuality undermines both sexual and gender roles, as well as power dynamics, within an isolated social network. Similarly, Walker requires her characters to confront their own socialized beliefs and, through considerations of the possibilities that alternative sexualities offer, destabilize community binary expectations of sexual desire, gender identity, and sexual performativity. Significantly, each text portrays the destabilizing effects of alternative sexual identities.

It is evident that there is ample room for further explorations into the ramifications that various factors have on the destabilizing of gender identity binaries and sexual heteronormativity. Contemporary Western fiction, as represented by Octavia E. Butler's *Wild Seed*, Jeffrey Eugenides' *Middlesex*, Gloria Naylor's "The Two," and Alice Walker's *The Color Purple*, is aware of the prevailing social foundations of sexual heteronormativity and the male/female gender binary. These texts clearly demonstrate the vulnerable foundations of social expectations in regard to identity. By confronting these expectations and offering alternative possibilities, these authors challenge institutionalized gendered and sexual constructions of identity.

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