Reflections, a peer reviewed journal, provides a forum for scholarship on writing, service-learning and community literacy. Originally founded as a venue for teachers, researchers, students and community partners to share research and discuss the theoretical, political and ethical implications of community-based writing and writing instruction, Reflections publishes a lively collection of essays, empirical studies, community writing, student work, interviews and reviews in a format that brings together emerging scholars and leaders in the fields of community-based writing and civic engagement. We welcome materials that: report on research; showcase community-based and student writing and/or artwork; investigate and represent literacy practices in diverse community settings; discuss theoretical, political and ethical implications of community-based writing; explore connections between service-learning, civic engagement, and current scholarship in composition studies and related fields.

Submissions Electronic submissions are preferred. Manuscripts (10–25 double-spaced pages) should conform to current MLA guidelines for format and documentation and should include an abstract (about 100 words). Attach the manuscript as a Word or WordPerfect file to an email message addressed to Steve Parks (sjparks@syr.edu). The email message will serve as a cover letter and should include your name(s) and contact information, the title of the manuscript, and a brief biographical statement. Your name should not appear in the manuscript itself or in accompanying materials such as syllabi. All submissions deemed appropriate for Reflections are sent to external reviewers for blind review. You should receive prompt acknowledgement of receipt of your piece, followed by a report on its status within six to eight weeks.

Contributors interested in submitting a book review (about 1000 words) or recommending a book for review are encouraged to contact the editors. We invite announcements and abstracts (200-500 words) describing current research projects and Classroom Sampler submissions (1000–2000 words) describing exemplary course designs, assignments and activities and the theoretical perspectives that inform them. Articles published in Reflections are indexed in ERIC and in the MLA Bibliography.
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Introduction
Public/Sex: Connecting Sexuality and Service Learning

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Jonathan Alexander, University of California, Irvine
Janell Haynes, Syracuse University
Jacqueline Rhodes, California State University, San Bernardino

We know the drill: service learning is good. It’s good for you, it’s good for your students, and it’s good for the community partners and the communities they serve. We know the drill but we still want to hear it, and we want to hear why.

[But, oooh, baby, tell me how good it is...]

That discussion, we admit, is a harder one to have, although several leading practitioners of service learning in the field of Composition Studies attempt, admirably, to capture the positive benefits—pedagogically and communally—of service learning projects. In “Community Service Writing: Problems, Challenges, Questions,” for example, Nora Bacon summarizes well the benefits that students gain in terms of their writing abilities and skills: “Like WAC [Writing Across the Curriculum], community service writing demonstrates the enormous variety in written discourse and the degree to which the forms, processes, and purposes of writing are embedded in particular contexts” (53). More broadly, thinking of relations among scholarly and the non-profit service sector, Thomas Deans maintains that

service-learning is not volunteerism or community service; nor is it simply an academic internship or field placement. While service-
learning may draw on these practices, it is at heart a pedagogy of action and reflection, one that centers on a dialectic between community outreach and academic inquiry. (2)

Both Bacon and Deans suggest how service-learning projects in writing courses might be ideally situated to address (and perhaps, finally, to satisfy) both of composition's masters: the necessity of teaching literacy strategies so students can survive as thoughtful writers beyond the first year of college and the desire to prepare students for literate participation in complex public spheres and multicultural democracies. Both are demanding masters, and worthy desires. Satisfying either one requires patience, skill, and dedication. Fulfilling both remains, perhaps, our discipline's central fantasy.

Those of us who have practiced service-learning with our students (for it is most often a practice with students, not for them) understand in our bones, in our flesh, that service-learning comes damn close to satisfying both pedagogical itches. On one hand, students who write for community agencies (composing pamphlets, websites, grants, etc.) learn much about audience and the need to be rhetorically flexible, adapting ideas and information to different genres; we hope that they take such "rhetorical know-how" with them into other courses, other writing environments, other challenges of textual production. On the other hand, offering students experiences of how writing moves in the "real world," in actual communities (again, through pamphlets, websites, grants, etc.) shows them writing at work, composition as a form of rhetorical agency, textual production as part of larger processes of potential social change. In many ways, fantasy fulfilled.

Those of us who work specifically with issues of gender, sex, and sexuality are increasingly aware of what remains unspoken and disarticulated in many service-learning experiences. We speak here not just of the problem of students going out into the community and figuring themselves as the heroic saviors of the downtrodden and the
dispossessed. We also speak here *beyond* the necessity of alerting students to classed conditions and systemic racism—as important as both of those are to students’ intellectual and literate development. We speak—or perhaps it would be more accurate to say that we *attempt* to speak—a political unconscious of service learning. That is, what gendered, sexed, sexualized, and even eroticized frameworks form the contexts in which much service-learning takes place, even as such frameworks remain often unacknowledged, perhaps even barely perceivable?

Jackie’s first experience with service learning ten years ago was in an upper-division expository writing class—ENG 306. 306 is a required WAC/WID course at California State University, San Bernardino, offered in each of the five colleges with the idea that humanities majors will take the humanities sections, natural science majors will take the natural sciences sections, etc. At the same time, there is a prevailing mythology that the English sections are the “real” sections and so English 306 courses tend to consist of a hodgepodge of majors. In Jackie’s Spring 2000 course, she had more Criminal Justice majors than English majors, an equal number of Liberal Studies majors and science majors, bulky readings on language and knowledge, and an overly anxious graduate assistant/team-teacher who wanted to use the experience as a springboard for her thesis project.

Service learning was new at Jackie’s campus. The CSUSB office of Community/ University Partnerships graciously granted her department money to fund a team-taught class. There were frequent email calls for proposals for service-learning and community-based projects. At the same time, the overall organization of the campus service-learning infrastructure (if there is such a thing) was quite loose.

Jackie and her colleague had arranged placements in area high schools and middle schools for 25 ENG 306 students, who would tutor students individually, lead discussions on shared readings, and then reflect on
their experience in those classrooms in the context of the class readings and discussions. It sounds fairly straightforward, and on paper, it was. However, the mixed majors in the class made the initial placements difficult; Liberal Studies students, many having already worked in local schools, were current on things like TB tests, criminal background checks, and fingerprinting. Their bodies, in other words, had already been made subject to the panopticon that is the public school. The majority of the students, however, had never been fingerprinted, didn’t necessarily want to be, and weren’t particularly thrilled about the cost of the TB test. There was no mechanism on campus to easily get these “body checks” done.

Eventually, all the checks were done, fingers printed, classes serviced. The 306 class ended successfully, judging from the students’ profound reflections and their evaluations of teacherly performance. However, the particularly embodied problems getting it set up steered Jackie away from ever doing that sort of class again. She now works with students individually, placing them as interns with journals or non-profit organizations; she even structures her “expository writing” and “writing in the public sphere” classes to include “field experience” as is called for by the California Commission on Teacher Credentialing (CCTC) standards. However, ten years ago, as she cajoled her students into their placements and bemoaned the lack of body-check infrastructure on campus, she became deeply troubled. Why on earth would she want such infrastructure? Shouldn’t she be more concerned about the fact that the public classroom makes us all presumptuous intruders, offenders, TB-carrying predators? What are the unspoken assumptions about sex and sexuality (particularly on the part of new teachers) that necessitate such preemptive surveillance? What was it about service learning that made it possible to set aside concerns about students’ bodies and/or privacy in order to push the pedagogy through?

Our work in queer theory primarily inspires such questions, particularly since it has focused such attention on not just giving voice to gay
and lesbian narratives but also to demonstrating the essentially erotic nature of most narrative. Numerous queer theorists and scholars in sexuality studies underscore the extent to which the erotic structures multiple social situations, even when such structuring remains hidden or "unspoken." Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, following Michel Foucault, famously noted in *The Epistemology of the Closet* that the Western socio-cultural and political (and originally medical) distinction between heterosexuality and homosexuality structured numerous ways of thinking and knowing that continue to be relevant today, most notably in terms of what kinds of citizens are legitimated and what kinds aren’t. Sedgwick and other queer theorists see the homo/hetero binary as not just an issue of gay or minority rights. Rather, in Sedgwick’s words, the critical work of queer theory lies in the difference between seeing homo/heterosexual definition on the one hand as an issue of active importance primarily for a small, distinct, relatively fixed homosexual minority ... [and] seeing it on the other hand as an issue of continuing, determinative importance in the lives of people across the spectrum of sexualities” (1).

Again, we can easily see how the homo/hetero divide structures questions of citizenship in “big ticket” issues, such as the right to marry and the right to serve openly in the military. However, given service-learning’s investment in promoting an active and literate citizenry, we might ask ourselves what kinds of sexualized divides structure students’ experience of service-learning. More importantly, what might be gained—pedagogically, intellectually, and politically—by making such structuration conscious?

*[Oooh, baby, tell me how good it is...]*

Jonathan remembers distinctly how he was first drawn into service-learning. In the late 1990s, he was a new Assistant Professor at the University of Cincinnati, working in the open-access college, serving
primarily first-generation, lower-income, and minority students. Since the University of Cincinnati offered two-year degrees, it was eligible for grant funding from the American Association of Community Colleges, and the academic staff serving as liaison with community and grant-giving organizations urged Jonathan to apply for a special AACC project called “Bridges to Healthy Communities.” Bridges grantees were expected to develop educational programming about HIV and AIDS awareness, primarily through implementing service-learning. The liaison knew her audience well: Jonathan was pretty openly queer, and the Bridges project addressed a complex nexus of education, community outreach, and sex education. No current Bridges project used English or composition courses; most grantees were in nursing, community health, and the sciences. But Jonathan was hooked, wanting both to experiment with service learning and to attempt to connect his interests in sexuality studies with his disciplinary home: composition and rhetoric.

Jonathan has recounted in much detail his service-learning project, “YOUth & AIDS,” in an article for Dialogue and in the last chapter of his book, Digital Youth: Emerging Literacies on the World Wide Web. Suffice it to say here that the project spanned a year-long sequence of first-year composition courses (English 101, 102, and 103, on the quarter system). Working in consultation with a panel of local health and HIV experts, Jonathan constructed a series of assignments focusing on research about HIV and AIDS. The writing projects clustered around both an active service-learning component in which students wrote pamphlets, educational material, grants, and other documents for several local AIDS Service Organizations and wrote academic papers and analyses, including film, television, and book reviews as well as research papers, for potential web publication. Specifically, the YOUth and AIDS Web Project allowed students to create and regularly update a Website—written by college-aged youth for college-

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1 I have included my sequence of assignments in an appendix to this introduction, on pg. 231. –JA
aged youth. Students contributed articles, artwork, and technical skills, including composing FLASH sites. After carefully writing and researching their pieces, students had the opportunity to edit one another’s work and suggest particular pieces for publication on the Website in one of several categories, including basic information about AIDS, information about testing, profiles of students or youth with HIV, AIDS and Art, and youth and sexuality. Students also contributed ideas about additional links to other sites on the Web, including a FAST FACT about HIV. Students regularly reviewed the site for appeal and accuracy, and it was also reviewed by a local panel of HIV and health experts. At its height, total hits per month for the site were frequently in excess of 3000.

From a writing teacher’s perspective, the project offered benefits on a number of levels. Students knew that their work would be considered for publication, and thus their writing effort generally increased. Moreover, students’ insights about site design and content helped to make the site more appealing to other college-age students, so Jonathan believed they developed a sense of rhetorical efficacy.

But more provocatively, Jonathan believed that students were developing a sense of how to “talk” to one another about sexuality and sexual health issues. At the time, he didn’t count this as a significant course component; he was too wrapped up in the community service and web building projects to see how students were engaging and experimenting discourses of sex and sexuality. Indeed, Jonathan’s self-evaluation statement about his teaching, composed as he was seeking tenure and promotion to Associate Professor, reflects his immediate concerns:

I think a good example of how I am designing curricula that implement my philosophy of teaching and utilize my interest in technology to teach writing can be found in the work I am doing with service learning. I am proud of my work in developing a
writing-intensive service-learning curriculum investigating AIDS/ HIV as a social, cultural, political, and personal issue, and I include in these materials a sequence of assignments for English 101, 102, and 103, as well as text from the grant that I wrote about this project, which is being funded by the American Association of Community Colleges. You will note that the work I am undertaking combines my interests in student publishing, the use of the Web, and my sense of writing as community action. Students will not only contribute to the development of a publicly-accessible Website alerting youth to the dangers of AIDS/HIV, but they are also constructing pamphlets, curricula, and other materials that will then be directly passed into the hands of other students or teachers for use in their courses. Such audience- and community-driven writing exemplifies, I think, my sense of writing as both investigative and engaged with the community.

As Jonathan reflects on this statement now, he notices mostly what’s missing: any explicit or overt mention of sex or sexuality. While he might forgive himself for not “throwing sex in the faces” of those sitting in judgment over me, he realizes now the extent to which he may have been complicit—complicit with systems of education and our larger puritanical culture—in failing to recognize how important it was that students were thinking and writing regularly about sex. Granted, the site and students’ textual projects were never graphic; but they were frequently about sex and sexuality. Students analyzed representations of sexual identity and sexual acts in a variety of media, primarily as a way to help them figure out how to reach other young people effectively in talking to them, their peers, about HIV and AIDS. Such was crucial in helping the class to think about HIV, not just as a problem for “gay” people, but for all sexually-active young people.

In some ways, a service-learning course about HIV and AIDS is necessarily also going to be about sex and sexuality. Jonathan was surprised to discover, on looking back at the course and course
materials, how much sex and sexuality were a significant part of the course, and how much his reflections on the course, and the documents he composed about it, failed to articulate that awareness. This dual sensibility, this nearly double consciousness—the presence of sex and the refusal to acknowledge or offer strong articulation about its presence—seems to us a central problematic in many service-learning situations. Sex and sexuality, not to mention gender and its varied erotics, are present, but infrequently acknowledged, even when one would expect them to be most noticeable.

Such a nexus of presence and refusal became clear, though, when Jonathan and his students would receive comments from visitors to the site. One comment in particular stands out as cutting to the contradictory heart of what the class was trying to do:

Hello all,

Your website is very informative. I can only hope it is making a difference. Unfortunately I have an issue with it...I get the feeling you are not about stopping the epidemic of AIDS. Why do I say this...I never once saw the stand against indulgent [sic] sex. Condoms have been out long before AIDS...so, guess what, that can't be the answer to this problem. The only answer to getting a start on ending this problem is bringing to a close (hah...never happen!!!) this sexual revolution that started somewhere in the 60's and has been gaining followers ever since. Sex is abused by pretty much every single person, here in the US & overseas, aside from where Religion is the major staple in the society.

My point to all this, it is very disappointing to see those that claim to be advocates for something but avoid saying what nobody wants to hear (i.e. DON'T HAVE SEX!!!!!!). Well, anyway, that was just my 2 pennies. I do like the site, espically [sic] the quiz's...hehe.
What’s simultaneously wonderful and infuriating about this comment is that it “outs” precisely what is at stake in the discussion of HIV and AIDS—what we do with our bodies, our pursuits of varied pleasures, our acknowledgement, and enjoyment, of our sexual selves—while at the same time wanting to foreclose upon consideration of bodies, pleasures, and sexual selves. At such moments, Jonathan’s entire project was being called into question; the class had the opportunity to think critically about its rhetorical purpose, but also about the intersections among rhetorics, bodies, pleasures, cultural values, and pedagogies. The class considered with Michael Warner, writing in The Trouble with Normal, the difficulties of talking about HIV and AIDS without also talking about sex and sexuality:

Rather than specifying the form that other people’s sex should take, or reinforcing hierarchies of shame and stigma, or pretending that those hierarchies do not exist, the best work in HIV prevention begins by acknowledging the unpredictability of sexual variance and working toward a world in which people could live sexual lives as part of a shared world. Prevention activism of this kind attempts to do the one thing that public policy has always tried to ban, even when policy makers have known that lives would be lost in the process: promote queer sexual culture. (218)

At such moments, Jonathan’s students realized that they were not just offering a service to local communities, and that they were not just developing skills in rhetorical efficacy, but that they were also understanding how rhetoric and ideology combine to make some discussions possible, others nearly impossible. But more importantly, they were learning that rhetorics of sexuality were among the most constrained in our culture, and that participating actively and effectively in preventing something like HIV and other sexually transmitted infections from spreading might require a more nuanced, sophisticated, and capacious sexual vocabulary. Jonathan would later expand on such ideas, calling for the development of “sexual literacy,”
in his next book, Literacy, Sexuality, Pedagogy; he even contemplated (before grant funding on the project ran out) a series of writing assignments on pleasure in our culture—all in the name of exploring and expanding his emerging notion of “sexual literacy.” In the moment of teaching, though, just being able to talk about sex and sexuality as a necessary first step in serving larger populations and communities seemed somewhat liberating.

Let us return for a moment to two earlier italicized words: unspoken and dis-articulated. At the heart of the queer theoretical project is necessarily, we believe, a desire to uncover the kinds of sexualized and even eroticized structures that define—and hence limit—our own self-understanding. Such limitation occurs often through a limiting of understanding not just of the self, but of the self in relation to the other. I know I’m straight because I am not gay. Assumptions about straightness and gayness, much less maleness and femaleness and masculinity and femininity, not only limit self and other understanding, but potentially damage our ability to remain open to the needs, and desires, of the other. In the process, our relations become distorted, disfigured—caught up in what we call the dis-articulations often surrounding sex and sexuality when they actually become spoken. This becomes especially true in the classroom, whether it is a service-learning course or not, where discussions of sexuality can heighten our awareness of the multiple relationships (to our students, to our institution, to our imagined sense of an ‘ideal’ educator) which influence what we consider to be acceptable speech.

As a graduate student teaching a first-year composition course at a state university in the Midwest, Janell was leading a discussion on the contextual nature of language use. The conversation quickly turned to examples that students had first-hand knowledge of or experience with, including the popular expression “That’s so gay!” to describe anything distasteful. A rather intense discussion broke out since both local and national organizations had launched campaigns against the
phrase as offensive and perpetuating homophobia. Some students stated that they could understand why it would be offensive to others, though they had difficulty not saying the phrase. Others claimed that recent campaigns were offensive themselves because it labeled the students as homophobic, even though they did not perceive themselves that way. Still others just thought it was all nonsense because, after all, they’re just words. As Janell pushed the students to consider why members of the LGBT community might find the phrase offensive, one student exclaimed loudly, “They’ve just got their panties in a wad!” This statement elicited a laugh from the class and a smirk from the speaker, confident in his belief that he had gotten the last word and won the argument.

Janell waited for another student to respond, to counter his obviously flippant comment, but the students remained silent, seemingly satisfied to let the remark stand. She was infuriated by the comment on multiple levels: as a woman and a feminist, by the clearly gendered nature of his comment; as a new teacher, by the disregard for the serious discussion in the classroom; and most importantly, as a lesbian who did not take the constant belittling of the LGBT community lightly. She wanted to ask the student if he would have said that comment if he knew that she was a lesbian. She wanted to shout at him that comments like his were exactly the reason why she felt so offended by the “that’s so gay” phrase in the first place. But she hadn’t announced her sexuality to the class, or even her department, because the university administration had publicly fought against including sexual orientation in its nondiscrimination policy, and previous incidents led Janell to believe that revealing her orientation could lead to further harassment or even termination, given her already tenuous position as a graduate assistant. Janell told the student firmly that his comment was not appropriate language for the classroom, and she silenced the discussion by briefly lecturing about why someone else (i.e., not Janell) might find “that’s so gay” to be discriminatory. She left the classroom that day knowing that she had missed an opportunity, a “teachable moment” as we say,
in which discussion about sexuality, identity, politics, and language had been genuine and honest. She felt so trapped by her own silenced position that she had no way of articulating a response.

As we reflect on our experiences with sexuality, literacy, and service learning, we see many dimensions in which a failure to acknowledge the sex, sexual, and erotic realities of others limits—and, yes, can even damage—our understanding of others and of their particular situations and needs. In the process, we can fail to communicate effectively, or recognize the complexity of rhetorical efficacy (as with Jonathan’s students). We can also fail to see how erotics and sexualities are at play but often hidden in socio-political dimensions of community work (as with Jackie’s students). We can also fail to see how our own sexualized, authoritative, but sometimes silent bodies are implicated in such discussions (as in Janell’s example).

When engaging communities, we need to be cognizant of fully embodied individuals and groups. We also need greater critical cognizance of the various values and norms that often prevent clear articulation of our needs, no matter how seemingly personal. Most importantly perhaps for us as educators, we should bear in mind that our students may themselves push the boundaries of discussion and consideration, reaching beyond the pristine limits of our courses into the messy realities of real lives. Zita Grover, writing in “AIDS, Keywords, and Cultural Work,” notes that “people’s interests are not bounded by course outlines; they will consistently ‘refuse to limit their questions to the boundaries of the set course’” (231). We should refuse the refusal of the sexual, or the erotic, just because it is messy or uncomfortable or even disturbing. In refusing the refusal, we critically re-invigorate the site of service learning, making it not only more personal, but also more humane in its fuller conceptualization—and imagination—of the needs, wants, and desires of others in complex communities.
With such thoughts in mind, this issue of Reflections: A Journal of Writing, Service-Learning, and Community Literacy explores the interplay between sexuality and literacy, asking us to reconsider the normative structures that position us as particular kinds of sexed/sexualized/gendered people, with certain trajectories of desire and intimacy. We have invited our authors to reflect with us on community work (broadly conceived) that challenges our normative understanding of “service,” “learning,” “community,” and “citizenship,” particularly with regard to the multiple and intersecting discourses of gender and sexuality. We ask, with them, what are the different ways in which we approach these issues? What are the different ways in which these issues are already gendered, already sexualized? What are the political implications of these discourses, since these often-unrecognized literacy events open spaces for discrimination or lack of awareness? How can service learning and community engagement actively work towards positive social change and securing rights for individuals who may be denied them on the basis of sex/uality? And finally, what roles do academic/community partnerships play in current political battles over sexual issues such as battles over sex education, marriage initiatives, emergency contraceptives, funding for clinics, and others? The essays that follow speak to the diverse connections between sexuality, community engagement, and literacy.

Presenting case studies of the literacy practices of two Turkish college students, Serkan Gorkemli’s “Legato and Sexual Literacy in Turkey” complicates sexual literacy as it spans place, identity, and media, exploring the ways that online literacy can function as a gateway to social activism. However, he cautions that coming to sexual literacy through such media saturated and potentially consumerists modes “will shape sexual literacy; therefore, researchers of sexual literacy need to construct alternative narratives that approach sexual literacy not only as social activist narratives of coming out, but also those of erotic practice
and affect” (40). By contextualizing these students’ sexual literacy practices in terms of place and use, Gorkemli’s essay opens the door for more critical studies of sexual literacy practices.

Carrie Jo Coaplen-Anderson’s “A Stripped Classroom: Exotic Dancers, Sexuality, University Teaching, and Community Engagement,” argues that we need to open space for sharing the narratives of those in sexually marginalized communities, specifically strippers and other sex workers, in our scholarship and our classroom. These narratives not only provide scholars with a better understanding of the diverse experiences, motives, needs, and desires within these communities but can also empower the sex worker community through the telling of their narrative. Further, Coaplen-Anderson challenges assumptions that sex work is always a traumatic experience by revealing her own positive narrative of stripping and suggesting that the literacy practices she learned during her 8-year career as a stripper have had a profound and productive impact on her teaching and her students’ learning.

Brenda Glascott’s “An (Em)Bodied Workshop: When Service Learning Gets Bawdy,” brings to light a further dimension of the erotic dimension of teacher-student relationships by reflecting on the expectations that students may bring to service learning sites about the dis-embodied nature of community work. Using her own experience as a graduate student working with senior citizens as part of a service-learning course, Glascott suggests that students are likely to initially view themselves as “teachers” and the community members that they work with as “students,” causing them to hold on to assumptions and expectations that these interactions will be purely mental, or dis-embodied. However, these expectations may not only result in surprise when issues of sexuality arise, but may cause students to ignore potentially fruitful discussions because they do not fit within the mind/body split so often assumed within the academy.
As we return to the central fantasy of service learning, preparing students to succeed academically AND preparing them to participate as literate citizens in the civic sphere, it is important to consider the ways that understanding of the erotic/sexual structurations can lead students to action, to participate in communities beyond the classroom, to have an effect on the larger public policies and discussions. The next three essays all consider the implications of teaching service-learning courses with a main emphasis on sexuality. All three pedagogies worked to resist the possible temptation to simply transfer the “classic” service learning model—one in which students descend upon a middle school to do fifteen hours of afterschool tutoring—to a “sexualized” space such as an LGBT youth center. Rather, McCracken, Bateman, and Mountz and Tweedy utilized service-learning components to engage more deeply with questions and issues affecting sexually marginalized communities: how do heteronormative assumptions about gender and sexuality affect often overlooked communities such as sex workers? How can we resist the monolithic representation of LGBT people as portrayed in the media to better understand the more complex and intersecting needs of a local LGBT community? How do we understand, define, and interact with queer spaces? By seeking the advice of community members about the types of projects that their classes should undertake, as well as inviting guest speakers and incorporating interactive community projects, McCracken, Bateman, and Mountz and Tweedy’s pedagogies sought to engage with communities not by teaching them, but by learning from them.

Geoffrey Bateman poignantly describes the difficulties and rewards of working with the multiple intersections of LGBT communities when teaching a service-learning course on queer rhetorics. Bateman’s “Queer Rhetorics and Service-Learning: Reflection as Critical Engagement” correctly insists on the productivity of “learn[ing] how to access worlds that are in the process of being created,” even when that process is messy or seems, upon first sight, to be a failure (110). The course fostered the sense of students as sexual citizens, connecting
personal identities to larger social and political narratives, drawing out the “complexities of queer rhetorical situations” by demonstrating the situatedness, rather than universality, of a queer experience. In doing so, Bateman sought to “undermine[e] our unspoken assumption that service-learning necessarily manifests itself as a form of charity, but can instead lead to a more mutually enriching interaction among civic agents” (92).

In “Serving the Public: Gender, Sexuality, and Race at the Margins,” Jill McCracken argues that service-learning and community engagement pedagogies encourage an understanding of sexuality and gender as more than theoretical concepts to be debated in classrooms and forgotten at the door, but as pervasive social structures that have an impact on people’s everyday lives, from the marginalized communities that they studied in the course to the students themselves. Through a series of community engagement activities, McCracken’s pedagogy encouraged her students to view sexual minority status as one element in a matrix of oppression and to investigate the ways that social structures of gender, sexuality, and race created marginalizing practices toward specific communities. As the semester progressed, students went from learning about these oppressions to using that knowledge to actively work against them in a final project that invested knowledge back into the community via publicly visible artwork, posters, or presentations.

The final essay in this issue focuses on a community engagement course in geography on “Sexuality and Space: Queering Syracuse” co-taught by Alison Mountz and Amy Tweedy. Their essay aptly articulates the tensions that often exist when partnering theoretical academic materials with the often politically charged nature of community engagement when reflecting on their struggles over how to represent a queer city. Mountz and Tweedy express “a desire for something we could articulate as queer politics and queer community; at the same time, we fought to maintain the very political elusiveness that the term
elicits" (212). They pushed their students consider methods of queering the city that moved beyond demarcating the "safe spaces," while at the same time being respectful of the real need for LGBT history, lives, and spaces to be recognized and recorded.

We hope that the articles--and art--in this special issue of Reflections will stimulate and provoke your thinking about the varied intersections among sexuality, civic discourse, community service, and service learning. As we have worked with our authors on this collection, we are more convinced than ever of the importance, even the urgency, of understanding how gendered, sexed, and even eroticized figurations of communities, notions of service, and public spheres influence and shape the work we do in service learning courses. We desire healthy, vibrant communities, with healthy, vibrant citizens. Thinking more critically about our varied definitions of health, vibrancy, and community will allow us to have a more robust and meaningful conversation about what we desire and how we enact those desires in both more inclusive and critical ways. In sum, recognizing our needs and naming our desires--and bringing our often unacknowledged but desiring assumptions into critical discourse—will enhance both our service and our learning.
Works Cited


Legato and the Practices of “Sexual Literacy” in Turkey

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This article discusses the practices of sexual literacy by two members of Legato (the collegiate Lesbian and Gay Association) in Istanbul, Turkey, through the perspectives of gateways, sponsors, and the accumulation of literacies. The discussion reveals that sexual literacy is community-based. Therefore, the complex and conflicting notions of community, as inflected by the politics of place and use, are essential for theorizing present and future configurations of sexual literacy in different ways. The conclusion provides suggestions for further research and some thoughts about ways of incorporating pedagogical understandings of how literacies are (self) initiated and acquired, in community-based literacy education.

In *Literacy, Sexuality, and Pedagogy*, Jonathan Alexander defines “sexual literacy” as being “much more than just knowledge about sex and sexuality; it should also be an intimate understanding of the ways in which sexuality is constructed in language and the ways in which our language and meaning-making systems are always already sexualized” (18; emphasis in original). Starting from this definition, I pose this main question: which practices constitute sexual literacy; in other words, how does it manifest itself in practice? I attempt to answer this question in the context of Legato in Turkey. LEGATO, the acronym for LEzbiyen GAy TOplulugu (Lesbian and Gay Association), a collegiate student group that organized through the Internet, mainly using Yahoo! mailing lists,1 was established to connect lesbian and

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1 To provide a brief background, the first two LGBT advocacy organizations
gay college students and promote the establishment of lesbian and gay student clubs in Turkish colleges and universities. In this essay, I focus on individual practices of sexual literacy in the context of Legato through qualitative, interview-based case studies of two Legato members’ literacy practices in Istanbul, Turkey. I present their narratives of sexual literacy and discuss the findings through three established perspectives from literacy studies: gateways, sponsors, and the accumulation of literacies. This discussion reveals that sexual literacy is community-based. Therefore, the complex and conflicting notions of community (e.g., on/offline, familial, local/regional, inter/national, religious, and gender and sexuality-based), as inflected by the politics of place and use, are essential for theorizing present and future configurations of sexual literacy in different ways. I conclude with suggestions for further research and some thoughts about ways of incorporating resultant pedagogical understandings of how literacies are (self) initiated and acquired, in service and other community-based literacy learning endeavors.

Two Legato Members’ Narratives of Sexual Literacy
In my study of Legato members’ literacy practices, I interviewed individual Legato members about their practices. Eleven people, seven males and four females, aged 20 to 27 participated in this study. At the time of the interviews in 2003, they were living in Istanbul and were current or former students who were involved with Legato during their

were established in the largest cities in Turkey: Lambda Istanbul in Istanbul in 1993 and Kaos GL in 1994 in Ankara. By the middle of the 1990s, Kaos GL had helped college students organize on two university campuses in Ankara. Despite these efforts, the Turkish LGBT movement struggled to broaden its scope to include larger populations, since these organizations could not connect to lesbian and gay students across the nation due to the lack of channels to convey the knowledge and political position they had accumulated. In the late 1990s, with the advent of computer technologies in Turkey, a few local lesbian and gay student groups began using Yahoo! Groups to spread the word about forming similar groups in other Turkish universities and organized under the name Legato. Widening the scope of the Turkish LGBT cause, this development ultimately led to the formation of a lesbian and gay student culture at universities across the nation, all linked through Yahoo! mailing lists, connecting them with pre-existing LGBT subcultures and with Lambda Istanbul and Kaos GL (for more information on Legato, please refer to Gorkemli).
undergraduate studies. I found the participants of this study through e-mail correspondence and face-to-face contacts. These methods of finding participants for the study, which took place in Istanbul due to temporal and financial constraints, led to a geographically homogeneous participant pool. In addition, since all of the participants are Legato members and membership requires former or current affiliation with a university and access to computers and the Internet, all of them have had access to computers one way or another, whether at home or school, or both, as in the case of the two participants I discuss in this article. Thus, the participants, who are representative of the Legato population in the urban environment of Istanbul, should not be viewed as representative of the entire Turkish lesbian and gay population.

During the interviews, which ranged in length from ninety minutes to three hours, I asked the participants a number of questions about their literacy practices. Participant responses are presented here in third person and include portions of text translated directly from the transcribed interviews, which I conducted entirely in Turkish. The participants’ first-person statements and various unique descriptions are placed in double quotation marks. All names used are pseudonyms. Due to the lack of space here, the case studies of two participants, Bilal and Nalan, are featured. Bilal and Nalan were chosen because, out of all the interviews conducted, theirs demonstrate the largest variety of literacy practices.

**Bilal**

Bilal was twenty-three years old at the time of the interview. He talked about one of his first encounters with gay characters on TV as he watched the American film Philadelphia (1993). Realizing the possibility of being a homosexual without being effeminate, he recalled viewing the characters in the film as “rôle models”:
[The film] provided an example for me. The two characters there were quite masculine, and they had exactly the kind of ideal relationship I dreamt of having. I was like, ‘OK, I want something like this. There are examples of it in the world; I am not alone.’ This was helpful in this respect. The following stage is the search: ‘OK, there are such people, but how can I find them?’ That was the problem: I didn’t know how to find them. And chat helped me out with that (Bilal).

After Bilal’s parents bought him a computer with a modem, he started chatting online; he found out about gay.com during a chat session. After he had chatted online for about six months, he started meeting people offline. This is his description of how he felt after meeting a person, with whom he chatted online, for the first time:

I actually realized that what we call a homosexual is not someone out of this world, an alien. After this, I felt encouraged; gradually, I started meeting more people. As I met people, the number of gay people I knew increased. This is very different compared with high school; some find out and join Legato as they search online, whereas it wasn’t like that for me. One of my friends was in Legato, and he asked me to become a member. So, I joined Legato after forming a circle of friends (Bilal).

As of 2003, Bilal was a member of three Legato Yahoo! Groups: Legato Ortak Liste (the shared Legato group that connected all Legato members at different colleges through one mailing list), Legato Istanbul (an online group for lesbian and gay students at Istanbul University), and Legato Platform, a Yahoo! group for those interested in Legato regardless of their sexual orientation, age, occupation, or other descriptors (Legato members in Istanbul gave him the task of establishing and moderating this online group). He was subscribed to Ortak Liste after the first Legato meeting he attended at Café Dezanj in downtown Istanbul, where a sign-up sheet was passed around for those
who wanted to become a Legato member through joining Legato Ortak Liste at Yahoo! Groups. Since he was a student at Istanbul University, they also added him to Legato Istanbul. At the time of our interview, he was the moderator of this online group.

Initially, Bilal found Legato Ortak Liste very educating since it not only provided an archive of previous messages, but also served as a forum where longtime members educated newcomers about various issues. Over time, as he developed offline community connections, his use of the list changed, and he found it less educating and mostly informative, providing for communication between members in different cities. In addition to its online presence, Bilal also liked Legato’s face-to-face reading groups where attendees, all Legato members, read and discussed articles on LGBT² issues. As a senior in the Department of Natural Resources Engineering at Istanbul University, Bilal said,

I didn’t have anything to do with or any knowledge about social issues, for instance, the articles published on minorities. I think I couldn’t even find them even if I did research. For instance, there was a friend majoring in sociology and another majoring in philosophy, and they would bring articles. I read those articles, and this was my break; perhaps Legato pushed my perspective on homosexuality ten years forward. I mean perhaps it would have taken me ten years to get my present thoughts if hadn’t joined Legato at all (Bilal).

In the forums, whether online or offline, he accessed through Legato, Bilal says he also discovered that he had an internalized homophobia toward what he calls “effeminate” gay people and transsexuals. By spending time with the variety of people he met while setting up booths and participating in other such community activities, he says, he realized why he should not hate them and how they all work for the same cause.

² Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Transsexual
Nalan

Nalan, a self-identified bisexual female participant, was twenty-two years old when she was interviewed. She was a student at the Department of Electronics Engineering at Istanbul Technical University (ITU). She recalled that when she realized that she was different, she started searching to discover “if there were people like me” (Nalan). As part of this research, Nalan looked at mass media and books, and read whatever resources she could access, such as sexual psychology books. Concerning the results of her research, Nalan said, “Ultimately, we live in a predominantly Muslim country. While so much attention was paid to men, women’s sexual orientation was not discussed much out in the open. But I realized same-sex male orientation was viewed very negatively. I thought things shouldn’t be this way, but what people thought didn’t bother me much” (Nalan). Nalan came out to her friends in high school, and they were “OK with it.” However, like Bilal, she was not out to her family.

In college, Nalan gained access to a larger collection of books in her college’s library and read about topics such as lesbianism from a philosophical perspective. This was also when she found out about LGBT history abroad, specifically Stonewall in the United States. When she started college, Nalan got her first computer and “met the Internet” for the first time. She looked for lesbian chat rooms and started chatting with people online. She also did research on websites and found escinsellik.net, a Turkish website on homosexuality, through search engines.

Nalan found out about Legato for the first time in 1998-99. At the time, there was a lesbian and gay student group only at Middle East Technical University (METU) in Ankara. When she did a web search again later, she learned that Legato had spread to other universities, as well. Nalan joined Legato in her sophomore year in 2000-01; she located and joined online Legato groups on Yahoo! Groups. At the time of our interview, she was subscribed to two online groups: Legato
ITU (Istanbul Technical University) and Legato Ortak Liste (the general mailing list). At the beginning, she would send many messages, participating in discussions about what to do, where to go, and other such queries regarding initial Legato meetings. This changed later; she continued checking the e-mail from the mailing list every day, but without sending as many messages as at the beginning. She read what she considered important, including messages about controversial topics, such as whether bisexuality exists.

At a meeting that involved all Legato groups at universities in Istanbul, Nalan met some of her friends from elementary school and high school. One of her elementary school friends was attending Bogazici University, and Legato Bogazici was one of the most active Legato groups in Istanbul; as a result, Nalan began attending Legato Bogazici meetings. Following Legato Bogazici as a model, Nalan and her friends at Istanbul Technical University (ITU) decided to organize Legato ITU meetings on the ITU campus. Nalan had a friend prepare the fliers, and she posted them on campus. At their first meeting, only Nalan and one other person came. Later, more people (as many as seven) attended the meetings.

When the founder of the general Legato mailing list became too busy at work, he transferred moderator duties for the list to Nalan and two other people. As general moderators, they sent e-mail messages to all members of the group about such topics as coming out; finding friends at college; preparing, photocopying, and posting Legato fliers on campus; and placing Legato fliers in books on sexuality in college libraries. In addition to participating in Legato online groups, Nalan also co-founded Regl, an Internet-based lesbian group with a website and an online forum; joined Bilitis, another Internet-based activist lesbian group in Ankara; and followed the activities of Kaos GL, the LGBT advocacy organization in Ankara, reading its print and online journal, Kaos GL.
Nalan found mailing list discussions very useful: “one sees other people’s perspectives. This is very useful, since people are used to seeing things the way they usually do; it is very difficult for a person to see things differently” (Nalan). Nalan said that through her online group connections, she learned more about the lives of students with different interests and backgrounds, such as “humanities majors, how they think, what they do at school, etc… and different family structures, such as weak family bonds, strong ones, and those without families” (Nalan), which widened her horizons and provided her with a sense of future possibilities.

Nalan also visited Es-Alem.com, a Turkish mixed (same-sex and opposite-sex) dating site, where she looked at new profiles and read information. She described herself as “having a penchant for reading information” (Nalan). As for chat, she said she was very eager to chat with everyone in the beginning, but by 2003 she knew enough people and could meet new people through her friends, and so she did not feel the need to talk to strangers through the Internet. She also described herself as an avid follower of LGBT films. She remembered watching movies such as Stonewall (1995) and The Celluloid Closet (1995) as part of the LGBT advocacy organization Lambda Istanbul’s activities during Gay Pride week. She found out about other LGBT films, such as If These Walls Could Talk 2 (2000) and Kissing Jessica Stein (2001), through Amazon.com: “For instance, you search for Lost and Delirious, a Canadian movie made in 2001, on Amazon. Then you check what other products the buyer of this product preferred. Eight to ten movies appear, and I download them directly from the Internet and watch them” (Nalan). Regarding how she feels about watching such films, she says: “I of course like happy endings. I am either like ‘I hope to turn out like that,’ or about those movies ending with death, I make comments like ‘How stupid is this!? One has to be at peace with oneself.’ So, I like watching those movies” (Nalan).
In the next section, I discuss Bilal and Nalan’s practices of sexual literacy from three established perspectives in literacy studies—gateways of literacy, sponsors of literacy, and the accumulation of literacies—within the cultural ecology\(^3\) of Turkey as it applies to lesbian and gay literacy practices.

**Discussion: Gateways of Sexual Literacy**

Selfe, Hawisher, Woodbeck, and Wallikainen introduced the concept of *technological gateways*, “the places and situations in which people typically gain access to computers for the purpose of practicing digital literacy” (84). In a later article, Hawisher and Selfe (2006) broadened the concept of gateways to digital literacies: “Schools, homes, and increasingly the Internet itself are primary gateways through which people gain access to digital literacies” (633). Bilal’s and Nalan’s experiences also reveal that there are multiple gateways of critical sexual literacy: media (television and the Internet) at home and college; campuses; cafes; and the offices of the local LGBT advocacy organizations.

While home has traditionally served as not only a gateway for but also the locus of heterosexual sexual literacy (I will discuss this in more detail in the following sections on accumulation and sponsors of literacy), media at home, such as television and the Internet, served as the first gateways for critical sexual literacy; television provided gay representations, and the Internet helped prove to Bilal and Nalan that they were not alone, that there were indeed people who identified

\(^3\) I use the term “cultural ecology” in the same sense as defined by Hawisher, Selfe, Moraski, and Pearson: “In foregrounding the significance of multiple contexts for literacy efforts, we hint at the many related factors that shape, and are shaped by, people’s adoption of computers as literacy tools and environments: social contexts; educational practices, values, and expectations; cultural and ideological formations like race, class, and gender; political and economic trends and events; family practices and experiences; and historical and material conditions—among many, many other factors. We refer to these contexts as the cultural ecology of literacy and, with this term, we attempt to signal the complex web within which both humans and computer technologies coexist, and all communication takes place” (644).
in similar ways. Once they realized that through search engines and chat, they could meet other lesbian and gay Turks and even reach the established communities, Nalan and Bilal found other online and offline gateways, such as Legato mailing lists, the cafes and university campuses where Legato groups met, and the offices of Lambda in Istanbul, through which they met people, joined communities, and participated in reading groups, film screenings, and discussions on such topics as sexuality, heterosexism, and homophobia.

In addition, these gateways and the community interactions they engaged in through them made both Bilal and Nalan into student activists as they took on community roles as mailing list moderators and campus organizers; in these positions, they engaged in activist initiatives and taught their peers what they learned from Legato peers at other universities. In this manner, Bilal and Nalan’s experiences with the gateways of critical sexual literacy led them to maintain and create similar gateways and experiences for others.

Discussion: Sponsors of Sexual Literacy
Brandt (1998) defines sponsors of literacy in this manner:

Any agents, local or distant, concrete or abstract, who enable, support, teach, model, as well as recruit, regulate, suppress, or withhold literacy—and gain advantage by it in some way ... it is useful to think about who and what underwrites occasions of literacy learning ... Sponsors are delivery systems for the economies of literacy, the means by which these forces present themselves to—and through—individual learners. They also represent the causes into which people’s literacy gets recruited. (166-167)

Based on this definition, three main sponsors of sexual literacy stand out in Bilal and Nalan’s literacy experiences: their families, the Turkish state, and local advocacy organizations, such as Lambda Istanbul, Kaos GL, and Legato as an on-campus student activist group.
The role of their families and the state as sponsors of sexual literacy in both Bilal and Nalan's cases is twofold. On the one hand, their families modeled for them heterosexual behavior and family structure, which are reinforced and promoted in society at large through religious discourses and state policies regarding family values and LGBT activism. On the other hand, both their families and the state provided, albeit unwittingly, opportunities for them to go beyond the heterosexual model through access to media, such as television and computers at home and on college campuses. For example, Bilal's first encounter with a gay character was through television at home, and later he found out more about homosexuality through the Internet and chat on the computer his family bought for him. As for Nalan, her first encounter with homosexuality was also through the mass media she could access at home and the library at the public university she attended.

While the heterosexist social structure severely limited the discursive possibilities for expressing same-sex desire, it could not make it entirely impossible due to the means of communication available. When Lambda Istanbul and Kaos GL were founded at the beginning of the 1990s, they provided further discursive possibilities by ushering in not only Western lesbian and gay discourse, but also human and gay rights discourses about freedom of (sexual and gender) expression. In this manner, both Lambda Istanbul and Kaos GL have served as new sponsors of sexual literacy, encouraging and modeling for individual Turks the critique of heterosexism and promoting a positive view of homosexuality through their print, and later, online publications. Both organizations also promoted lesbian and gay student organizing on college campuses, contributing to the emergence of Legato as a student-led sponsor of sexual literacy; Legato modeled and maintained Kaos

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4 Homosexuality has never been illegal in Turkey; however, the increasing visibility of LGBT persons in recent years has led to legal attempts to stop LGBT activism, such as the 2006 court case brought against Lambda Istanbul by the Istanbul mayor's office, which argued that the existence and activities of the organization went against the general morality and family values of Turkish society. The appeals court in Istanbul dismissed the case in 2007. (Kaos GL)
GL and Lambda Istanbul’s LGBT critique and activism for students like Bilal and Nalan and their peers at their respective schools.

**Discussion: Accumulation of Sexual Literacies**

In discussing how literacies accumulate, Brandt (1995) draws attention to:

... latent forms of older, residual literacies that are at play alongside emerging ones. Rapid changes in literacy and education may not so much bring rupture from the past as they bring an accumulation of different and proliferating pasts, a piling up of literate artifacts and signifying practices that haunt the sites of literacy learning. These complicated amalgamations of literacy’s past, present, and future help to formulate the interpretive opportunities and complications facing current generations of literacy learners. (665).

In Bilal and Nalan’s experiences, their existing sexual literacies—both primary (home) and secondary (religious, medical, and state) dominant discourses\(^5\) of gender and sexuality—also exist side-by-side their emerging community-based sexual literacies and the social constructionist and activist discourses of sexuality.

There are a variety of primary and secondary discourses at work in Bilal and Nalan’s processes of coming out to themselves and others, and they illustrate the accumulation of differing strands of sexual literacy in their lives. First, while neither Nalan nor Bilal came from religious families, Islam as a primary discourse at home and

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\(^5\) I refer here to the social and ideological definition of literacy by Street and the specification of these categories of discourse by Gee, who also defined literacy from a social perspective as “the mastery of or fluent control over a secondary Discourse. Therefore, literacy is always plural: literacies (there are many of them, since there are many secondary Discourses, and we all have some and fail to have others)” (529). Gee categorizes discourses as primary versus secondary, and dominant versus non-dominant. Our primary discourse is the one we learn at home; it is what we acquire to understand the world and interact with others. The secondary discourses are those we acquire at various non-home-based social institutions, such as schools, businesses, and religious communities.
a secondary discourse outside home determines attitudes towards homosexuality in most Turkish contexts, whether the people involved practice their religion actively or not. Secondly, when their sons and daughters come out to them, many parents’ first reaction is to take them to a psychologist for treatment. And finally, current state challenges to LGBT organizing in Turkey, as in the aforementioned court case brought against Lambda Istanbul, show that sexual orientation is largely perceived negatively in relation to general morality and family values in the society.

While secondary religious, medical, and state discourses influenced Nalan and Bilal’s views of homosexuality in general, their influence also varied based on their gender differences. As Nalan commented, “so much attention was paid to men.” The most obvious example of this is the denunciation of homosexuality as a sin in the Muslim religious discourse, where male-to-male intercourse is expressly prohibited, with little mention of female-to-female same-sex contact. In terms of the state discourse, all males of age are required by law to serve in the Turkish army while women are not. While the army does not conduct a routine screening for homosexuality, if someone does not want to serve due to sexual orientation, they must provide photographic evidence of receptive (as opposed to insertive) homosexual activity. They must also undergo a set of tests at a military hospital, during which they have to demonstrate that they are indeed homosexual; one of the sure ways of doing so is to affect an “effeminate” demeanor. As a result, for Bilal, the challenge was to prove to himself that he could be a masculine (i.e., “straight-acting”) gay man, whereas for Nalan, the challenge was to prove to herself that lesbianism and bisexuality existed, and that, unlike what people thought, “it was not a figment of women’s imagination,” as a veteran lesbian activist affiliated with Lambda Istanbul once framed the issue during my conversation with her. In facing these related but different challenges during their process of coming out, Bilal and Nalan had to grapple with the aforementioned dominant, anti-homosexual discourses in their lives. Their emerging
community literacies and their learning about the social constructionist and activist discourses of sexuality helped them during this process and exercised their literacy skills in new and active ways.

The starting point for their community literacies was the Western representations of homosexuality in mass media and the Internet. Once they confirmed that there are different ways of being a homosexual—being a straight-acting gay man for Bilal, and existing as a lesbian or bisexual for Nalan—activities such as chatting with and meeting like-minded others, finding out about Legato and the existing LGBT advocacy organizations, getting in touch with fellow lesbian and gay college students majoring in different fields, and starting Legato groups on their own campuses, served to introduce them to social constructionist discourses of sexuality, LGBT activism, and diversity within the Turkish LGBT community. This was a tremendous process for both Bilal and Nalan, during which they navigated conflicting discourses of sexuality to emerge not only as activists with increasing literacy in alternative, non-dominant discourses of sexuality and gender, but also as individuals who are able to confront their own homophobia, as in Bilal’s case.

Communities of Sexual Literacy and the Politics of Place and Use
The discussion so far illustrates Bilal and Nalan’s progression through the gateways, discourses, and practices of sexual literacy; however, a look at the politics of place and use further contextualizes Bilal and Nalan’s experiences with their communities of sexual literacy. In an article about his literacy practices while growing up in Nepal, Pandey (2006) discusses the importance of mentioning the politics of use and the politics of place since they “bear significantly on my literate practices in the digital environment” (252). Related to the politics of use, he mentions difficulties with access, language, and computer literacy. Concerning the politics of place, he discusses infrastructure and local political struggles. Bilal and Nalan had access to computers and the Internet at home and college, and as college students living
and attending universities in metropolitan Istanbul, they had ample opportunities to develop digital, print, and foreign language (English) literacies; therefore, the politics of use mostly took the form of how often they chose to use Legato mailing list and chat, while the politics of place mostly took the form of multiple communities and the ongoing conflicts among them regarding homosexuality. As such, the politics of place influenced their sexual literacies more than the politics of use and continued shaping and re-shaping their practices of sexual literacy.

Bilal and Nalan's progression through the gateways of sexual literacy changed their notions and experiences of community from online to offline, altering their politics of use; in the case of the Legato members who did not follow the same progression, however, this posed problems regarding expected Legato outcomes. While media representations on television and the Internet gave them a sense of possibility and hence enabled an imagined identification with Turkish and Western LGBT communities, their online initiatives led to their participation in offline communities in metropolitan Istanbul. In terms of the politics of use, this change of focus from online to offline communities meant a declining use of online forums, such as mailing lists and chat. At the time of our interviews, they were chatting on the Internet less frequently since they had many gay and lesbian friends and acquaintances offline. As for the Legato mailing lists, they continued following them but read only what they considered to be important messages. This change in their politics of use was in line with the larger goals of Legato to use the online venues to recruit students for offline activism; these goals were realized in Nalan and Bilal's cases, partly because living in a big city and attending college facilitated their participation in offline communities. However, the individual politics of use and the goals of Legato did not overlap in the cases of other Legato members, who, due to their location as well as other individual circumstances, continued using online venues and so far chosen not to come out and become activists. As a result, the online community has existed side-by-side the offline one, continuing to provoke controversy.
and conflict regarding the goals of the larger Legato group and their feasibility in different individual circumstances and different parts of Turkey.

In terms of the politics of place, the transformation of their notions of community from imagined to real and from transnational to national and regional has further diversified Bilal and Nalan’s notions of community from its general, everyday sense to more specific meanings based on discourse and academic fields of study. Nalan and Bilal’s involvement with campus student groups and local LGBT organizations introduced them to fields of study-specific discourse and activist communities respectively, where they learned that sexuality was a social construct and that heterosexism needed to be confronted through social activist interventions by the community. This social sciences and the humanities-based knowledge of the social constructionist views of sexuality and minority consciousness were major revelations to the two engineering majors, and they both commented on how much they learned from interacting with peers majoring in social sciences and the humanities.

The social constructionist discourses of sexuality, however, hardly represent the larger Turkish academic community’s view of its LGBT members, calling attention to differences in outlook between the larger academic community and the activist one. For example, when the first LGBT student club in Turkey was allowed at Bilgi University, a private college in Istanbul, the presidents of prominent universities across Turkey responded to the news by stating that they did not have gay students on their campuses and that homosexuality had nothing to do with the educational mission of the institutions of higher education. Such news drew attention to brewing controversies between Turkish academia and campus activists that would only become more visible as students like Nalan and Bilal came out on their college campuses, putting their newly acquired skills of sexual literacy to social activist uses and thus increasing their fluency in social constructionist and activist discourses of sexuality.
Through participation in the non-university activist LGBT communities in Istanbul, Bilal and Nalan's notions and experience of the LGBT community were further refined, calling attention to the LGBT politics of place in Turkey. Prior to the emergence of gay and lesbian identities in Turkey, trans performance and transsexuality were widely known through cross-dressing entertainers and transsexual celebrities on Turkish television. When Bilal and Nalan discovered and identified with “straight-looking” gay and lesbian representations through Western and mostly U.S. media, this propelled their search for others who identified similarly. This search was fulfilled to a certain extent by the Legato student groups they joined; however, on joining the activist non-university LGBT communities through Lambda Istanbul in Istanbul, Bilal met many trans individuals who had been actively involved in the Turkish LGBT movement from the beginning.

Discovering the gender diversity within the LGBT community helped Bilal face his transphobia and attempt to truly embrace the diversity in the community. In Nalan’s case, since she identified as bisexual, she had to face the lack of acceptance of bisexuality in the Turkish LGBT community. While participating in both student and community-wide activist groups made them recognize different gender and sexual orientation-based identifications within the Turkish LGBT community, learning about constructionist discourses of sexuality provided them with conceptual tools to negotiate their own place in that community and their relationship to others who identify in different ways.

Despite all the gateways they have passed through, the new practices of sexual literacy they picked up, and the communities they joined, Bilal and Nalan were not out to the one community they were closest to: their families; this is related to the politics of both place and use. As single young adults, both Bilal and Nalan lived with their families. In Turkish culture, it is typical for young adults to continue living with their families until they get married (unless, of course, their profession necessitates that they live in another town or city). As gay and bisexual-identified young adults respectively, this made their access
to technology at home crucial. Both of them had computers and an Internet connection in their rooms, which their families invested in as part of their education and professionalization. In addition, as college students in metropolitan Istanbul, both Bilal and Nalan could easily find and join urban communities. The computer technologies they had access to in their rooms at home, coupled with the urban communities they could access away from home, made it possible for them to express their sexual orientation outside, and act as expected (i.e., heterosexual) at home. Meanwhile, not only the prospect of coming out to their parents, but also, as Nalan mentioned, the future dangers of being out while on the job market or at her workplace loomed large. Such concerns about the larger cultural context added to their reasons for maintaining the status quo at home. In this manner, the politics of place and use were intertwined closely with the communities of sexual literacy. These communities, and the clash among them as it related to homosexuality, continued to shape and reshape Nalan and Bilal’s practices of sexual literacy, and determined the extent of their relative fluency in the competing primary and secondary discourses of sexuality that accumulated in their lives.

**Conclusion: Present and Future Configurations of Sexual Literacy and Community-Based Literacy Learning**

In examining specific practices of sexual literacy by two Turkish college students living in Istanbul at a particular juncture (in summer 2003, when my interviews for this study took place); and drawing on established concepts of gateways, sponsors, and the accumulation of literacies, one can see sexual literacy emerging as a shifting terrain of accumulating practices taking place in multiple, and sometimes conflicting, community contexts and under the influence of multiple community sponsors.

Current scholarship in the studies of hybrid and global literacies and agency (Hawisher and Selfe, 2006; Lee; and Smith) emphasizes getting at the politics of place and use (Pandey, 2006 and 2007) in examining
and explaining how literacies are formed and put to use in unexpected ways in multiple contexts. To sum up how contingencies of place and use influenced Bilal and Nalan’s practices of sexual literacy, my analysis shows that differing, and sometimes conflicting, notions and experiences of community further inflect these practices, drawing attention to subtle critical differences concerning communities of sexual literacy to which researchers need to attend actively. In addition, other factors also influenced the results of this study. For example, during participant selection, Nevzat (not his real name), a college friend of mine, helped find most of the participants for the study. Since Nevzat’s involvement with Legato in Istanbul included many leadership activities, the participants he helped find for the study, such as Bilal and Nalan, often had interest and involvement in leadership and the use of online venues for offline activism. This, in turn, led to an emphasis on Internet-mediated activism and initiation into established LGBT communities and Legato groups. In a similar manner, the social class and urban location of participants also influenced the results of the study; if Bilal and Nalan were not middle to upper class, and if they were not from metropolitan Istanbul, their sexual literacies may not have been influenced so much by media, and their access to urban LGBT communities would have been limited, leading to entirely different outcomes. Therefore, researchers need to pay close attention to other variables, such as social class, geographical location, and personal interests.

In accordance with participants’ interests and the literacy activities they engaged in, the narratives of sexual literacy presented in this article focus mostly on coming out and social activism, and the discussion highlights conflicts between the primary and secondary discourses and the communities to which the participants were exposed. However, there are other influences that narratives of sexual literacy with different emphases may highlight. For example, both Nalan and Bilal mentioned that they use technology for additional purposes: finding partners and dating; Bilal chats on Gay.com, and Nalan goes to Es-
Alem.com, a Turkish dating site. In addition, they said that the media representations they found on TV and the Internet also influenced their feelings regarding their changing sense of who they are and where they belong. As I discussed previously, the mostly straight-looking nature of these representations often underplayed the gender and sexual diversity in LGBT communities, which Nalan and Bilal had to face and negotiate eventually as part of their offline community involvements. Closer examinations of such media venues will probably further reveal consumerist values and other ideologies that might conflict with the social activist values presented in this article. In a media-infused world, it is inevitable that such venues and attendant value-laden representations will shape sexual literacy; therefore, researchers of sexual literacy need to construct alternative narratives that approach sexual literacy not only as social activist narratives of coming out, but also those of erotic practice and affect. Such multiple and conflicting narratives will help better explain present and future configurations of sexual literacy.

Finally, there are pedagogical lessons to be drawn from Nalan and Bilal’s experiences and incorporated in service and other community-based literacy learning endeavors: most of their literacies are self-initiated and acquired in multiple contexts outside formal classroom instruction. The continuing conflicts they face due to differences among the communities they belong to are there to stay and will continue further shaping their sexual and other literacies and thus influence the extent of their relative fluency in the competing discourses in their lives. Due to the increasing access to computers and the Internet and the rapid development of social networking websites, students are developing and exercising new literacies of their own as they learn from fellow literacy learners outside the classroom; however, these new literacies do not replace completely the older forms of literacy, leading to an accumulation and sometimes conflicting co-existence of multiple discourses and literacy practices. New generations of literacy learners face this multiplicity of practices and discourses that provide both
interpretive opportunities and challenges, and their success depends on their ability to establish mastery of and fluency in the discourses important for their lives and careers in multiple contexts; therefore, current service and other literacy learning endeavors need to pay attention to this multiplicity so that they can help learners make use of new opportunities and cope with the concomitant challenges. Nalan and Bilal’s experiences demonstrate that critical notions of community, as well as a working understanding of how communities influence literacy practices and fluency in discourses through the politics of place and use, are crucial to the effective pedagogical application of the lessons the practices of sexual literacy offer to all educators.
Works Cited


A Stripped Classroom: Exotic Dancers, Sexuality, University Teaching, and Community Engagement

Carrie Jo Coaplen-Anderson, Morehead State University

This essay shares stories and valorizes concepts related to sexualized identities, highlighting details and reflections about exotic dancing and Bernadette Barton's Stripped. Further, the essay contends that potentially powerful and profound pedagogy exists in exploring these identities, and that explorations leading to developed awareness of sexually stigmatized individuals and groups may encourage student writers to become more engaged in supporting related community engagement.

Even though a decade has passed since I last danced nude center stage for dozens of strange men, and their dollar tips, I would do it again. If I thought that I could earn five hundred dollars this Saturday night, dancing at Déjà Vu, I would dance. I would wear black, vinyl short-shorts, a tight, white tank top, and cabernet lipstick. I would spray Clinique Happy perfume on my hair and skin. I loved the rush, the power, and the energy of performing and being adored, center stage on Saturday night, with Nine Inch Nails blasting and a wad of twenties wrapped around my wrist on an elastic garter band. Whatever the audience’s motivations, or the customers’ twisted proclivities, I transformed their attention into a positive thing, as pure an affirmation of my unique persona and looks as I could muster: accentuated hips and smallish breasts, easy smile, dynamic attitude, athleticism (I could climb a pole, flip upside down, and remove my top hanging there), and even my ability to talk to and bond with strangers. I manipulated them to buy private dances for their own good, their fun in the club, and my
rent money. *Thanks for donating to my grocery-wardrobe-education fund. We had a great time together, didn’t we?*

Writing the above paragraph felt good; confessing and sharing it with an imagined audience. I would like to share more details about my stripping days—more often—but don’t feel at liberty to do so. As Morehead State University sociologist Bernadette Barton explains in *Stripped: Inside the Lives of Exotic Dancers*, “Because stripping is such a socially stigmatized employment, the average performer has few opportunities to share her stories—not in the classroom, not with researchers, not with friends, and especially not with parents and partners” (xi). Of course, we all decide which personal details to share based on a complicated set of social, professional, cultural, or other factors, and the fact that I instinctively place my stripping experiences alongside seemingly mundane disclosures explains much about my views on stripping. Who cares? And why? Stripping was a job that I worked while in my twenties. We all have them. I understand that my dancing history is not usually appropriate to disclose, yet enjoy talking about the years that I spent working as a dancer, readily offering details when the subject arises, welcoming any and all questions. I tend to openly share life details anyway, being naturally candid, but also want to talk about stripping because my tenure as a dancer lasted eight years. My persona became infused with “Tempest,” my stage identity. I *am* an ex-stripper and always will be regardless of how many decades come between my last lap dance and me.

Using *Stripped* as this essay’s key text, I respond to stories, interview segments, and Barton’s views, adding my perspectives and experiences, even as I contradict her conclusions, many of which I relate to and agree with. I also join with other academic professionals who have investigated sexualized identities to discuss the unusual and/or useful manifestations of Tempest in the university classroom: flattery, flirting, and disrobing. Engaging with Barton’s work as well as confessing Tempest’s teaching strategies in the composition classroom, implicitly
argue that creating and offering strippers and other sex workers (and anyone with underrepresented or stigmatized experiences related to a sexualized sense of self) opportunities to share their stories and act on their concerns will provide opportunities for community engagement that can lead to social action.

Considering community engagement and social action in this way, through awareness of stories about and by marginalized individuals and groups, I recall a concept expressed in a life-writing seminar taught by Min Zhan Lu. The course texts shared underrepresented views and stories including Linda Hogan’s *Dwellings* and Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing’s ethnography, *In the Realm of the Diamond Queen*. Hogan meditates about the lost place of the natural world, and Tsing investigates the Meratus Dayak while writing about gender issues and power relations. I paraphrase Lu here, but when a student in that seminar asked about how reading texts like these could create social action, Lu commented that we might then assign one of the texts in our courses, and so on. Her response implies that a chain of interaction can be created through academic communities, and that reading and awareness constitute and lead to social actions.

Further, I want students to leave my classroom with a developed understanding of the often marginalized, ergo silenced, unknown, and complicated nature of sexualized identities. I want them to feel less afraid of discussing and valorizing anyone who might have suffered from circumstances caused by marginalization, especially within their digital, religious, athletic, social, cultural, and family communities: Facebook, Campus ministries, their university women’s soccer team, role playing club, arts center, and immediate family. More, I want writing students especially to create opportunities for sexualized others’ stories and concerns to be expressed, shared, and acted on. An ideal project would, for example, require students to visit strip clubs and interview sex workers to learn about what kinds of projects these community members would most want to pursue toward enacting positive change.
Additionally, and perhaps obviously, implicit is my contention that experiential narratives, shared and shaped personal experiences, become rightfully valorized through their authority. In “Redefining the Literate Self: The Politics of Critical Affirmation” Lu expresses thoughts that support my view:

All experiences which do not fit directly and neatly within simplistic notions of race, sex, class, and gender identity are then dismissed as private, non-political, and therefore, irrelevant. Such critical attention disembodies the personal by privileging theory over lived experience, the “social” over the “private,” “politics” over “pleasure” (175).

In my experience, the categories Lu lists here—private, personal, experience—have traditionally been seen by academia as unofficial, nontraditional, and even wrong. This essay challenges these views.

I hope, as you read my responses to Barton’s text, and as you become aware of Stripped, that a chain of community engagement will occur, as will an affirmation of shaped personal experiences being understood as reflective research. For example, I view Bernadette Barton’s project as nothing short of profoundly miraculous. Who in academia has ever (openly) cared so much about strippers, or so thoughtfully? Yet, I find myself yearning to contradict details or conclusions about the pleasures of stripping, and a sexualized identity by adding my memories and experiences to her findings. I do both throughout this essay, and ideally want students to create opportunities for members of marginalized sexual identity communities to do the same, whether through direct social actions, community projects, word of mouth testimonies, or even through an expanded awareness that might be shared casually in conversations.
I. Being Heard, Five-Dollar “Bills,” and Male Attention

“Hegemony is virtually watertight [in the United States] but not quite. There is leakage most often caused by those who have been traditionally excluded from the bounties of the dominant hegemony.”

Victor Villanueva

According to Barton’s research, including extensive and numerous interviews with and observations of exotic dancers, current or ex-strippers like me express a desire to be heard. One dancer relayed a story about a troubled co-worker:

Here I am in the fucking Cinema, in a bad wig, in a stall with no door, next to a woman who’s saying ‘I hate my life’ and puking. And no one can hear us. No one is even listening. And nobody gave a goddamn... No one ever listened to her. No one ever heard her. She never got any fuckin’ help. She bought five dollars worth of gasoline, sat in the back of a pickup truck, and lit a fucking match to herself and went up in flames and died (108).

This story, especially its vituperative nature, tragic outcome, and indirect call to action, points to the possibility that strippers could benefit from opportunities to share their experiences, to be “heard.” This passage also highlights that, unlike me, most strippers do not or did not experience their work as positive, or as I often expressed to customers “Are you kidding? I love my job. I get paid to dance and flirt all night.” Not that Tempest didn’t encounter the occasional dickhead customer, bitchy dancer, or jerk off manager, but generally I feel good about my stripping years. Barton summarizes, “There are, of course, exceptions, but overall and over time the toll of sex work is high” (42). For the rare ex-dancer who remembers stripping fondly, as well as those who might describe themselves as recovering from grabby men, customer rejection, poor body image, alcoholism, sexual dysfunction, or shame, the opportunity to compose and share and also act on their experiences and concerns would support community
engagement founded in awareness. Some of us enjoyed our work but, understandably, don’t often express that attitude. “Morgan” perfectly and colorfully assesses this conundrum: “It’s okay to say, ‘I used to be a stripper, but I got out of it.’ It’s not okay to say, ‘I was a stripper for several years. I fucking loved it. I had a blast and I still miss it today’” (Stripped 79).

I got a kick out of lap dancing for a former Presbyterian elder from my childhood church. He reacted with as much shock at seeing me as I did him. One customer mooned about my knowledge of Latin, and without fail, referenced the couch I danced for him on as a “chariot.” An 80 year-old regular, “Bill,” who visited me in the club once or twice a month, spent 200 dollars each visit. I had his home phone number, and would call him with my schedule. On Valentine’s Day one year, I asked if, rather than a dozen roses, he would put that money toward a pair of Lowa hiking boots. He delivered a dozen red carnations, each holding a five-dollar “Bill.” Despite sound bites like these that could be interpreted as superficially fond memories, I remember ugly details like not exactly relishing lap dancing for an 80 year-old man. I do not mean to flatten my experiences.

More significantly—more than chariots, five dollar bills, or 150 dollars tips on Derby Eve—I almost always enjoyed the work for the work itself. The money, of course, comprised a large percentage of that equation. Having been raised by a strong, outgoing, witty, flirtatious 5’8”, D-cupped, green-eyed woman, one who placed a prime on enjoying life at the micro-level (smell of jonquils, homemade butter cookies, heavy snow fall), I understand life’s sometimes overlooked charms and have loved to dance since I could remember Elton John’s “Crocodile Rock,” and Helen Reddy’s “I am Woman Hear Me Roar” at around age 5. Our home was celebratory. Music was part of that. My unusual experience of understanding how to talk with customers, and more specifically, how to talk them into spending money on dances, came from an inherited ability to not only enjoy life in most
circumstances, but also feel comfortable and confident with anyone. I am 5’3” tall. My hair is curly-frizzy. Freckles cover my face and arms, but at age twenty-two when I began stripping, my curves, eye contact, strength, brains, open spirit, and easy smile constituted a kind of Super Stripper. I was made for the work and it was made for me. Other less positive experiences, like my parent’s divorce and my father’s eventual abandonment when I was twelve years old, must also have contributed to my acumen with garnering male attention. This characteristic need of unhealthy male approval would have been present whether or not I became a stripper. I concede that dancing may have given me an outlet for that need as well as a kind of revenge against my father.

II. Lesbians, Stereotypes, Stigma, and Sex

“As long as young females are socialized to see themselves as incapable of choosing those situations of erotic engagement which would be most constructive for their lives, they will always be more vulnerable to victimization. This does not mean that they will not make mistakes…”

-bell hooks

Sharing stories and histories like mine, writing that provides insights about an often stigmatized and at least misunderstood sexual identity, can ideally lead to community acceptance of strippers’ thoughts, feelings, and concerns about their work, especially if, as is true of a number of women Barton interviewed, a dancer also identifies as lesbian or bisexual. “When questioned, my subjects had varying reactions to discussing sexual identity. Some said baldly that most dancers are queer…several suggested that the sex industry turns women into lesbians” (112). Based on her research, Barton also claims that “‘mainstream society’ stereotypes [female] “turn” me into a lesbian. Very few of the dancers I worked with openly identified themselves as bisexual or lesbian, but the few women who alluded to either lesbian or bisexual orientations more often presented themselves as bisexual experimenters. My coworkers, of course, may have chosen not to share
their sexual orientation with me because I spent the largest percentage of my shift hustling dances on the floor, rather than in the dressing room smoking cigarettes and dishing, nor did I disclose my bisexual identity, a disclosure that may have facilitated open discussion between us about sexual orientation.

Whatever the case, I find Barton’s use of the word “stereotypes” in the passage referred to above troubling (even as she seems to refer to those outside the industry who hold narrow minded views of strippers), in reference to strippers being labeled lesbians, for the generally negative connotations associated with stereotypes. I feel especially troubled because Barton is an out lesbian. When I hear this kind of expression, when students for example salaciously report or question sexual identity, my response is “So what?” The possibility that lesbian strippers, through sharing their stories and working with students on opportunities to do so, might express truths about their sexual identity related to their exotic dancer identity could serve doubly. Such work could provide positive experiences for dancers, and students working with dancers, as well as create nascent community attitudes and actions, especially because stigmatization, unfortunately but admittedly, surrounds both strippers and lesbians.

The problematic stigma surrounding lesbian strippers, and strippers generally, also exists because, as Barton aptly summarizes:

Even if [a stripper] has danced for a short time, the shadow of the strip bar obscures the rest of her life. We do not see her as a student, an activist, a daughter, a mother, a gardener, a Star Trek fan, or a master carpenter. Because she works as a stripper, she is a stripper twenty-four hours a day. This means that she, above all else, is an easy lay (88).

I applaud Barton’s understanding of strippers as complex; unfortunately, her research leads to this easy generalization: “[Being a stripper] means that she, above all else, is an easy lay.” I assume that Barton means to
identify a general stigma rather than to express a personal belief. Still

to the extent that it recalls the double standards related to gender and
sexual activities that have troubled me almost as soon as I became
sexually active, it too seems problematic.

Regardless of negative experiences and circumstances that periodically
lead to a woman’s becoming more sexually active than her peers, some
women enjoy sex for the sake of sex. Additionally, the phrase “is an
easy lay” implies that someone else is doing the laying, which further
implies that a woman who more easily engages in sexual activity is
being done to rather than equally or even more aggressively seeking
to do to. Barton later adds that, “Most stereotypes of dancers in
mainstream society characterize them as sexually promiscuous” (99).

She further elaborates that, “This would not be so terrible if our culture
did not classify women who have sex for money as worthless, dirty, and
stupid” (99). Because a meaningful and upsetting aspect of the stripper
stigma as Barton comes to understand it includes the “easy lay” notion,
I find myself passionately joining the din of voices who express disgust
at the double standard applied to women about sex, especially because,
as a stripper, I felt more comfortable than many women with my
hyper-sexualized sense of self. More, I join these voices as a woman
who had become more sexually active than her peers by the time I
began stripping at twenty-two years old. Strippers, as well as women
who enjoy and engage in sex more often than their peers, are wrongly
labeled “easy lays.” Technically, I understand that both strippers and
highly sexually active women may be viewed as promiscuous and,
if so, I view this adjective’s negative connotations to be as equally
inappropriate as I do the associated phrase “easy lay.”

I trust that the following observation need not be expressed, but
I articulate it here to be clear: Some of the dancers I worked with
presented themselves as engaging in less sexual activity than I
did. And again I ask “So What?” Commenting about stripping and
sexual authority, one of Barton’s informants responded with a line of
thought that relates to mine. "I thought [exotic dancing] was really empowering; I’m using my sexuality and getting paid what I’m worth” (27). This attitude characterizes one side of the “sex wars” that is often epitomized in feminist conversations about sex work. Barton summarizes these sides as “[conceptualizing] sex workers either as victims of patriarchy and perpetuators of sexism or as transgressive feminine warriors battling sexism through their resistance to ‘respectable womanhood’” (32).

A decade removed from the work, I still maintain that the latter seemed to have been truer than the former for most of the women I worked with. Further, the ideal response to sex workers of any type mirrors dancers’ often-warm attitudes toward one another. As did I, Barton found that “meeting other dancers and making friends with them was an unexpected reward of stripping,” a reward which led to the additional comment that, “Treating one another with dignity, affection, and respect is a feminist response to the toll of stripping and provides the foundation for a deeper critique of social inequality” (139). Writing and sharing my experiences, perceptions, and analysis of the sexualized nature of the work will ideally lead to community engagement, an engagement that shares less stereotyped and stigmatized dichotomous understandings about strippers and lesbians, and anyone with a marginalized sexual identity, and that also inspires students to create similar opportunities. I want these opportunities to involve collaborative efforts with local strippers, sex workers, or campus LGBTQ groups toward celebrating their experiences, challenging policies, or other social actions that might improve both their quality of living as well as larger community perceptions of these often marginalized individuals and groups. Further, all aspects of stripping, sex work, or sexual orientation may not seem worthy of celebration per se. In sharing and exposing our varied perceptions, memories, and attitudes about these sexualized identities, however, communities might learn best how to engage with, support, and serve us toward equality, inclusion, and informed social change.
III. Hot for teacher

"Some people who manage to write their way out of the working class describe the classroom as an oasis of possibility."

*Mike Rose*

The identity described above, the woman who easily became Tempest, who easily flirted and performed sexual dancing nude or half naked for money, informs my practice as a professor of writing. I am one among many college and university instructors and professors who claim similar sexually or erotically charged classroom influences. In "Erotic student/faculty relationships," for example, bell hooks asserts that "Passionate pedagogy in any setting is likely to spark erotic energy," and that "erotic energy can be used in constructive ways both in individual relationships and in the classroom setting." Using erotic gestures, I flatter, flirt, laugh, and move around a classroom using the logistics of working a strip club floor as much as I do the logistics of working an individual. "Working" here refers to concepts like teaching, engaging with, and facilitating guided learning. "Tempest," for example, intuitively uses a simple social theory that I perfected in the club: Pay the customer an honest compliment, even one as shallow as "That’s a great shirt."

As obvious as such a move may seem customers often appreciated any personal affirmation. Who doesn’t? I do not mean to directly compare students’ needs with those of strip club customers, but do point to persuasive behaviors that have become an application of seductive code switching. I find reasons to compliment students’ thoughts or stances, even as I disagree with them. My disagreements might even offer an element of seduction: “Thank you for speaking up, but I don’t know about that. Have you considered...?” Specifically, my interest in suggesting a new line of thought or leading the student elsewhere becomes an intimate event occurring between us. James McNinch claims that, “...good teaching, defined, in part, as effective teaching that positively influences learning, is seldom possible unless there is
an element of seduction in it” (“Queering”). Though he also makes the compelling claim that “it is teachers who are seduced by their students, not the other way around, as Hollywood would have us believe,” a claim I do not wish to unpack here, he adds that “Good teaching may also be defined as ethical teaching which celebrates differences by exploring them” (“Queering”). This claim is easy to agree with, even coupled with complicated sexualized classroom practices. Both claims contribute to the various and valuable erotic foundations upon which many classroom communities are built.

More superficially, embodying aspects of Tempest, I may also comment on a new haircut or sharp outfit. I want students to know that I notice them as individuals, not only as students. I also joke with them or laugh at their jokes. (In doing so, perhaps students do seduce me, as McNinch suggests. Either possibility—my seduction or theirs—activates erotic energy). I flirt, sort of. If a student asks a question, I may walk to her desk, responding as if we were the only people in the room. I move around as if the classroom is a stage, keeping students guessing about where I might land next, even as I maintain strong eye contact with one or several of them. I use my physically embodied self, aware of the power that strategic movements can achieve, simultaneously building confidence and safety among a developing community that trusts one another and me. Power, persuasion, and playfulness: *All the better to teach you with.* My performance is gendered, admittedly so.

In *The Lipstick Proviso* Karen Lehrman expresses an understanding of a gendered performance, specifically a sexualized feminine one. Embedded in a section about “sexy clothing,” bucking the patriarchy, and feminine stereotypes, she contends that:

> What this analysis completely misses is the sense of power women derive from wearing sexual clothing. They strut when they put on clingy dresses, sheer black stockings and heels. And they strut not just because they’re fulfilling stereotypes. They strut because sexuality is a form of power, a strength, an asset…” (94).
Strippers know this. So do their customers. And so do students. I often take the classroom stage wanting students to feel my confidence and become aware of the purposeful and authoritative embodiment that wearing pumps and a black pencil skirt evoke. This display of authority is also an invitation to see me as a woman empowered by femininity.

Additionally, if I'm unsure about a definition or concept, I admit that uncertainty, exposing myself, disrobing the typical professorial identity clothed in omniscience and ultimate authority. I want students to understand that I am a person, imagine that I like them (even if I don’t), while I manipulate and judge their writing: We are endeavoring toward developing understandings of the world, and our separate worlds, through language.

Ideally, the exchanges described in the paragraphs above contribute to the construction of a classroom that feels safe and communal, one that offers experiences and assignments that engage the personal even while they require critical research and rhetorical engagement. Because I require much, personally, from my students (researched personal narratives, in-class writing journals, individual presentations about their fields, reflective comments about scholarship), I want to discuss the connections between my personal experiences, teaching, and writing, including how exotic dancing comes into the classroom and my research. Hell, I would like to begin such a class by stating the following on the first moment of the first day: “I spent the better part of eight years dancing topless and nude at a strip club.”

Such an approach may not prove as fruitful as it might be saved for a more pedagogically productive exercise. I might ask students, for instance, to write a description of “professor,” a description of “student,” and the same for a stripper, drag queen, homosexual, prostitute, and lesbian. In small groups, students could share their writings then create new descriptions that coupled either “student” or “professor” with any of the other identities. These descriptions would be reported out to class, and discussed toward processing the veracity
and usefulness of stereotypes as well as the multi-dimensional nature of sexuality and identity, including identity’s role in writing. Such work would respond to Maria Gonzalez’ thoughts on students’ lack of maturity in discussing sexuality in the classroom:

I think that their emotionally immature responses result from the lack of adult dialogue about sexuality among students. This ability to openly and maturely discuss sexuality certainly has profound implications beyond students’ abilities to learn about the diversity of their world. Problems of HIV and other sexually transmitted diseases as well as those of sexual violence must be exacerbated as a result of this avoidance of discussion. (“Overcoming”).

Along with the possibility that a more sexually open and engaged classroom might lead to new awareness and perceptions about HIV, sexually transmitted diseases, and sexual violence, asking students to consider critical perspectives about their identities aligns with a concept summarized in Literacy: Reading The Word and the World.

Freire would have students look at their individual histories and cultures and compare those histories and ways of being with what they are led to believe is their place in the world, making the contradiction between their world views and the official world views explicit. This is the dialectic between the subjective and objective, the stuff known from within and the stuff from external forces (Macedo 54).

Transparency about my stripping past and sexuality, practice, and scholarship seems especially appropriate considering the complicated nature of the “subjective” and “objective” as referenced in the preceding passage.

Ergo, along with related writing exercises like the one described above, as well as the fruitful possibilities that can result from the explicit exploration of seemingly contrasting identities, I would like
to challenge students to critically reflect about sexualized others in literature, life writing, and scholarship: Dorothy Allison’s *Bastard Out of Carolina*, bell hooks’ “Passionate Pedagogy; erotic student/faculty relationships,” Julie Lindquists’s *A Place to Stand: Politics and Persuasion in a Working Class Bar*, Lily Burana’s *Strip City: A Stripper’s Farewell Journey Across America*, and Paul Monette’s *Becoming a Man: Half a Life Story*. Each piece listed shares the story of a person exploring, coping with, and/or valorizing a marginalized identity: lesbian, erotic professor, female bartender cum academic, stripper, and homosexual male.

Ideally, community engagement that inspires students to learn more about lesbians, strippers, and other people with stigmatized sexual identities would occur as a result of the work described in the above paragraphs. I want students to leave my classroom and a course that explores the sexually stigmatized questioning and analyzing their own sexualized personas, including becoming aware of the privileges and social norms that they take for granted. In doing so, further critical thinking could lead students to create collaborative community projects such as erotic LGBTQ poetry readings, or petitioning city officials to change unfair exotic dancing ordinances.

I am proud of my Tempest years and have written essays, poems, and scholarship that connect with stripping. I felt powerful when I saw those pieces in print, or read that work out loud to a crowd that included friends, family, university peers, professors, acquaintances, and strangers. To know that a group of people chose to buy my stripper chapbook, or listened to a symposium presentation about stripping and my university identity, transformed my sense of self. I have come to appreciate the many ways that Tempest positively influenced my life after Déjà Vu, including subsequent reflections about troubling moments that I survived and still cringe about.
Ideally, my writing here will continue to do more of the same and in doing so, invite students, professors, instructors, and others in our community, as well as those on the fringes, to introduce Tempest, and others like me, to more students, colleagues, and friends. Ideally, my work in the classroom will lead students to connect with sexually othered communities. If so, our university community can participate in a kind of engagement invested in robust identity awareness and social responses, including supporting our pursuit to share stories, and act on our concerns, even as we strive to fully understand them. As Barton points out, "Dancers have only recently begun to publicly share their personal narratives; thus, their stories are still new to themselves and to the culture. It is logical that the writers of such a young genre would still be processing their own experiences" (131). Composition's contemporary foundations are founded in writing and discovery. Victor Villanueva addresses this aspect of writing in *Bootstraps*, contending that, "Change is possible, I believe. Language used consciously, a matter of rhetoric, is a principal means—perhaps the means—by which change can begin to take place. The rhetorical includes writing, a means of learning, of discovery ..." (Italics in the original, 121).

Finally, if the following general conclusion seems idealistic, it is nonetheless sincere. The more that we can learn about each other, especially connected to our unique identities, separate and at the same time inherently tied to our academic selves, the better our comprehension and application of that knowledge. The possible recipients who might benefit from those applications include students and colleagues who often seek to be understood for who they are alongside our necessary judgments of their work in our worlds.
Works Cited


Student Work from Harvey Milk High School

Since its founding, the Hetrick-Martin Institute has grown from a small, volunteer-led grass-roots advocacy organization into a leading professional provider of social support and programming for at-risk lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender or questioning (LGBTQ) youth. Hetrick-Martin youth members, ranging in age from 12 to 21, come from 174 zip codes throughout all of New York City and the surrounding metropolitan area. They are of all colors and sizes, come from all kinds of backgrounds, and their enthusiasm and creativity is boundless.

Hetrick-Martin is also the host agency for the groundbreaking Harvey Milk High School, devoted to serving at-risk youth and founded in 1985 in collaboration with the New York City Department of Education, which administers the school and is responsible for admissions.

The student written work and art work presented here was created as a result of the various programming offered here at Hetrick-Martin and Harvey Milk High School. The point of views expressed by the young people in their work may seem controversial to some, but their beliefs and behaviors expressed are neither condoned nor are they denied to exist for they are the lived experience of young people and affect their lives in real and important ways.

Sam Stiegler
Coordinator, Academic Enrichment
Hetrick-Martin Institute, Home of the Harvey Milk High School
My Bleeding Heart Theory
Erick Francis

I’ve just been feeling disturbed due to the people around me.
Feeling trapped in my closet like a freak on a leash.
Never sober, I lay in the dormant remnants of what I’ve been
praying for.
I am a victim to my own demise in missing you.
Unknowingly, I’m in your beautiful nightmare of disturbia
Or is it the rehab of your diminished heart.
I don’t know, but it’s lonely here.
I gave you my heart not knowing it was destined to be broken,
I took on that risk,
Such a foolish mistake
But now I just mostly bleed it out.
In the end,
Here I stand wanting you back,
But realizing whatever it takes,
it will be
but it never happens.
The feelings I thought was there is now dead and gone.
In me there’s nobody home.
Is this feeling remorse or have I broken?
No it can’t be!
The halo above your head has perished, never to return.
Your shadow holds the burdens of my drenched soul.
The heavens weep as I reminisce that very thought.
Is the hello I once said now a goodbye?
I will now leave this conversation with ease,
to finally be at peace my heart will lay.
I sometimes question if you were really there
or if you even cared
enough to cry about what we had.
I’ve found out what was truly there
and like a boy,
you were or still are a roaming satellite.
Not knowing what you were looking for was already in front of you.
But now I am gone.
My ego will not be diminished because of you,
Your entangled chains will not have me going under.
You will not be able to decipher my thoughts any longer.
Suffocate, I will no longer.
Even though vulnerable, I am aware of the signs.
I am now with my new boo and we break the dawn.
Now I am awake to finally realize that very wish what was in front of me all along.
I can now say...I am happy.
The Space Love Demands
Alyssia Thompson

This is the space my love demands, create the boundaries
With your hands. Wrap the memories in a rubber band
Treat love like contraband. But this is the space
that love demands

I’m exaggerating. Not lying. The highest peak of my irritation
We need to take a break, we need space
We need to evacuate
Lookin at you in disgrace I’d hate to think of you
in disdain. The same hate that will cause my pain
and leave your t-shirt with bloodstains
But this is the space that your love demands.
Time to make up your mind skip around the border line
to define what I could provide to you.
Something’s gotta change. We must rearrange before
Love cuts the thread that held us together
If I can’t love you the way I need to than I don’t wanna
Be together. You can’t be my
lover then you must be a stranger, with dangerous intentions
making my system overload, rage out of my control
sending it straight to my arteries. I’m ashamed to say
you used to be a part of me
You reckless but you can care less to caress
open wounds. Make me play the fool. And who
the hell are you.

You think you are above me but you swear you cannot love me
I never met someone who made me feel so ugly.
This Is Not A Community

Lance David

This is not a community
The dictionary told me that a community was a group of people
With the same interests in mind
And a dick told me that my community
will always be forgotten in time
So I cussed his ass out drivin’ by in that tore down pass out of a car
Heading from the bar throwing bottles at the knees
that have gotten me this far
Despite people like him that crow plain as day and steal the time
we have left in the sun
Because of the hate that prevents us from living as one
I let my hair down from my bun after I walked through these doors
I lined my eyes, subdued my time
just to try to find myself a little more
I’ve watched the trains and thought about the days I’ve never
wanted to see again
The pain, the tears the rivers unchanged, the years, the shame,
the fears, the end
I put on my heels that didn’t fit, tights and kinky twists
My chest exposed to catch a cold but I don’t give a damn
cuz I look good in this
I say bring on the world
Cuz I have conquered the streets, conquered the skies,
Walked in the tracks others left behind
And I don’t know where I’m going, but I know where I’ve been
and I have seen the dead
I have seen the blind I have seen the weary that prosper and smile
And I once believed I could win
But I can’t in this place
It all used to ring true but now it’s all bullshit
I rue as I head to this place
To be judged by others views
To think that the harassment we faced, the abuse we obliterated,
stated that we were not adjacent to those that put us under
But greater than them for our struggle
Happy to be living taller
But half assed community is no community indeed,
While the rest of us are having sex in our bathrooms
There are still some in the closet waiting to be relieved
Unaware that the tear that exists within their walls of despair
Takes all of their fear
In which it feeds but that’s their struggle,
I won’t knock them for that path that they can’t leave
But how can we even be a community?
If we don’t even know where the rest of the community be
And between broken economies and gay paved ways,
The people that hold this place together can’t even stay
Cuz life is not something assured, it is fleeting
Moving so fast we never know when we’re bleeding
But I’m crying for the stability and joy we gained from each other,
Counselors or staff we are friends, not just members
But why can’t we stop to appreciate the amazing people we are
And actually support one another instead of leaving scars
We are stars; we are friends, keep it cute,
We depend on this place to always be there
We travel so far
So why not be there for each other
Why not depend on the people this place is for?
I write this not to bash, not to throw but
For the abhor we live for everyday
For the spite, the revolution and all it’s dismay
For the deaths on a black wall
of the smiling children their pictures fall
And no one even noticed their names
That is far more than a crying shame
That deserves mourning so excuse me if I wear black everyday
As my community throws shade and never lets in shine
Allows the hate of the world to attack you and I
It does not justify calling names, talking shit and playing games
It does not sanctify our sins to go to church everyday
Just like it is not okay to say that shit is gay so
"Cut It Out", like my man Todd said
Cuz I say we are all we got, and we don’t even got it
We stay with our cliques and yes that is fine
But what about the girl that used to be a guy
That you laugh at but smile at when she walks by
Saying how she still looks a mess
She’s just trying to find what’s inside of her
She is living the same struggle as you and I
So why do our differences collide?
The dictionary told me that
a community is a group of people with the same
interests in mind
But where are your interests, is it sex, drugs, crime
Look around and recognize
exactly how much about your community
You know to realize that we are not a community,
We are just a group of people that see each other almost everyday,
Without a smile, a laugh or even a handshake
For people that have been tossed aside and forgotten,
Laughed at, trashed upon, left for rotting
We sure do have a hypocritical way of showing each other
What it is to be kind
And I ain’t no better, so we includes I
And us must be us but I wish we could try
Gay, straight, lesbian, trans-gendered whatever
We are all young people and I’d like to remember
Without HMI where would we be?
Without their support who would we lean on?
Gleam on, stream on, boosts self esteem from
I say goodbye and cry the time that we could be one
And welcome each other, support one another
Dream beams into stars, a community
A place where we all could belong together,
They tell me dream on forever
Cuz this,
this is not a community
Artwork

Joe Robles
An (Em)bodied Workshop: When Service-Learning Gets Bawdy

Brenda Glascott, California State University, San Bernardino

An (Em)bodied Workshop: When Service Learning Gets Bawdy explores the ways a student’s perception about which bodies are and are not sexualized creates problems for that student when she attempts to run a writing group for senior citizens with Alzheimer’s disease. This essay suggests that students engaging in service learning may import constructions of a mind/body split common in school settings to service learning sites as a way to authorize their presence in these sites. Students engaged in service learning need to be pushed to examine the ways their constructions of their work may erase the body.

I wasn’t in control, at least not in the same way the other students in my class were when they went into their service learning sites. Almost everyone else was working with children, running writing workshops or afterschool tutoring groups. I was trying to get a group of senior citizens with Alzheimer’s disease to write stories and poems. For the most part, my writing group liked me. But I wasn’t in control. I was, in Betty’s explanation, a pisherkid. “You know what that means?” she explained helpfully, “You pee in your pants.”

My writing group howled with laughter whenever Betty called me a pisherkid, which was often. I would laugh to seem good-humored, but it bugged me. I was twenty-five and in my second semester of graduate school. It was my first year teaching at the university and these senior citizens were disrupting my sense of myself as a teacher. I was
conceiving my work in this service-learning site as an extension of my teaching work in freshman composition. I knew I looked young, even to the college freshman, and I was trying to establish my authority, to figure out how I justified to my students and myself my right to lead a class. At that stage I was constructing my classroom authority around two poles: my greater age and maturity compared to college freshman, and my embracing of a life of the mind. I clung to the mind/body split, hoping my mind erased the ways age, gender, and size marked my body in the classroom. The seniors were having none of it.

"Look at your nails." Ken and I looked at my hand, which was holding the pen I was using to transcribe his story. The nails were ragged from chewing. "You shouldn't do that," said Ken, "a writing teacher should have nice hands."

When the classroom is mapped onto service-learning sites, what Tara Star Johnson calls "the Cartesian duality in education," or the projected separation of body and mind, is transported as well. I suspect this mapping happens particularly when the service-learning site is an educational institution or when the service-learning activities are similar to "schooled" activities. In my case, running a writing workshop in a day center for seniors was close enough to teaching writing at the university that I transported an understanding of my position as "teacher" with me. Aureliano Maria DeSoto writes that "[a]ll professors utilize masks that denote various personalities, such as professional, friend, mentor, confidant, taskmaster, authoritarian, and curmudgeon" (217). The teacher "mask" I tried to hide behind at the Anathan Club was that of a disembodied professional. To pull off this masquerade, I needed those I positioned as students to assume a mask of disembodied writers. While I was successful at projecting this mask onto my university students, I was not able to project it onto the Anathan writers. They would call attention to my body in unwelcome ways: my nails were ragged from chewing, my youth was associated with peeing in one's pants. More uncomfortably, the writers brought
their own bodies—sexualized and gendered—into our writing. In this essay, I explore how in my service-learning site my expectations about sexuality, formed from personal need and cultural constructions of both the elderly and the classroom, conflicted with my experience in ways that led me to shy away from potential writing opportunities. In undertaking my service-learning project I had constructed a narrative about who these people would be, but the seniors didn’t fit snugly in the asexual roles I assigned them.

Maggie: [Looking at an advertisement] She better cover up in the front there.
Rickie: She’s Miss Glamour Girl, she doesn’t like doing laundry.
Maggie: She thinks she’s hot. She’s not hot.
Daisy: Wouldn’t you like to have a figure like that?
Maggie: I have a figure like that. I couldn’t wear a dress like that?
Daisy: Where would your boobs be?
Maggie: Up.

It seemed I was being let into a secret world in which elderly people talked about sexualized bodies, including their own. This was unthinkable to me: I had chosen this service-learning site—in fact, I had created this site on my own—as a way of processing my grief for my grandfather, who had developed Alzheimer’s when I was ten years old. We had always been very close, and my family moved in with my grandfather to care for him when his disease made it dangerous for him to live alone. While the adults in my family began grieving for my grandfather when he developed the disease, I was not so willing to relinquish my belief that there was always something essential about him that couldn’t be taken away. This romanticism is undoubtedly a typical denial response. However, I had not been able to fully purge myself of the suspicion that we never really lost my grandfather—who he seemed to be in the later years was just another shade of the man he always was. So, I became interested in the silence this disease forces on its captives.
Although he is writing about literacy among the economically dispossessed, I suspect that Freire’s recognition of the “culture of silence” [where] to exist is only to live” also speaks to the experiences of men and women with Alzheimer’s (Freire 43). I wondered if writing wouldn’t give people with Alzheimer’s an opportunity to construct and communicate their reality. In his discussion of Hayden White, David Schraafsma states, “White makes it clear that stories give a necessary but illusory coherence to events. ‘Real life’ is obviously not coherent, not well made” (xx). The sense that all experience, regardless of the perceiver, is incoherent could serve to unite the “reality” of the person with Alzheimer’s and the person without. I suspected that it was the lack of power to create this “illusory coherence” through “stories” that isolated people with Alzheimer’s. I found instructive Schraafsma’s realization about “the importance of seeing the world as constitutive—as provisionally constructed and endlessly open to reconstruction through language” (33). One horror of the disease is that, as it unweaves the fabric of the mind, afflicted people often realize that this is happening.

One of the challenges of working at this site was that it was unexplored terrain. Although there were several Internet sites in 2000 that highlighted the writing of caregivers—journals, poems, and websites—there were few instances of people with the disease producing written artifacts. Time slips, “a team of artists working with caregivers and people with Alzheimer’s disease to encourage creative expression in Milwaukee and New York City,” was one of the few sites that I found which could offer any tangible guidance in doing this kind of work. When I contacted them originally they had not developed their training materials, so I had to extrapolate from the writing they displayed on their website. Once I started at Anathan Club I realized how polished the pieces on Time slips were—there was a strong editorial presence. One of my goals in undertaking this project had been to be accepting and non-critical of the material the writers produced; however, the collaborative process itself seemed to require my taking a more active
role in the construction of the pieces. For example, I had solicited possible titles for the story I ended up calling “An Afternoon Out” from all five of the writers present. Suggestions included “A Rose is a Rose,” “Summer Winter,” “Purple Lilacs,” “An Afternoon Out,” “Carrying on a Conversation,” and “Three Lonely People.” When I was transcribing the collaborative story later on my computer, I wondered what to do with so many titles. At the top of the page I included all of the titles under a heading “Possible Titles,” but I did single out “An Afternoon Out” as the title of the story. I chose this title because it seemed to be the most logical fit with the story the seniors told; however, I worried that my picking one of the most prosaic titles diminished the power of the piece and reinforced the linearity of storytelling that I didn’t want to privilege. Another issue in collaboration was negotiating the nature of orality. Many of the seniors have lost the hand coordination to write, so storytelling literally involves telling. Traditionally, written work is valued over oral. However, in his discussion about grassroots working class writing groups in England, Gerry Gregory assures us that “[t]he ordering, reordering, and articulation of ‘experience’ into ‘knowledge’ can occur equally in the tape-transcription/writing partnership processes” (118). The primary struggle against the disease is the fight to keep available pathways of communication. As Christine Decker, Allied Health Grant Project Manager at Ithaca College Gerontology Institute wrote to me, “Family members and friends often drift away because the disease is confusing, and it becomes difficult to know what to do or say” (Decker). So, in many ways, I was embarking on a personal crusade, but I was going to discover that I was uncomfortable with the full expression of “my” writers’ humanity because it included sexuality.

Journal Entry January 21, 2000
First day — I was very nervous — felt unprepared. I got there (didn’t need to ring the bell, someone was coming out). The five seniors were already in the sun room along with two nurse’s aides. There wasn’t room for me to work — very awkward — I felt like I
came off badly —unsure. Finally I propped my paper up on a chair against the door. I introduced myself and met the seniors —shook most of their hands —then wondered if that seemed weird or unladylike to them. When I said I was in grad. school, Betty said “Mazel Tov.” I started by getting on my knees and moving from person to person with my big pack of markers, letting them each pick a color. I had been nervous about this, that it would seem too childish —but they seemed pretty happy about it and were invested in defining themselves through color choice. Then I showed them the picture —had to hold it up to each of them in turn because they couldn’t see it across the room. I asked for possible titles. Betty came up with a lot, but the nurses interfered —harassing others to give suggestions and suggesting things themselves. (I guess sometimes harassment is the only way to get participation?) I didn’t write down nurse’s suggestions but wrote all of the senior’s down. I was a bit chagrined —this didn’t seem how Time slips did it —it looked like they got one title and constructed a tightish narrative from there. But I decided it was more important to be accepting toward all their ideas. That’s one problem with the nurse’s presence —they harass the seniors when their suggestions are atypical like Betty wanting to name one character Green. I really want them to be creative, to follow the twisting of their minds. I wonder if I need to talk to Zehava [the director] about this. My mom suggested it might be important to make them stick to “reality.” But at this point I’m not comfortable doing that —I think it goes against my project of valuing the way their minds work WITH the disease. Making them anxious about jumping through hoops won’t help. We came up with a pretty funny story —newlyweds and chicken soup recipes. Mary was difficult —she sat in the corner with her stuffed cat and made it meow then scolded it —she told me she would never know anyone in the picture and that it was a stupid, boring picture. I worry that this is too elementary for her —apparently she writes letters, etc. Zehava
said she would love it if we could get Mary involved—she says it takes her a while, if at all to get comfortable. I read the story back to them and stayed after to chat with Martin and Daisy—she was born in Russia and moved here when five years old. Martin was a solid materials scientist.

From the very first day I experienced dissonance in my sense of myself as a “teacher.” The nurses attending to the seniors were much older than me, and I struggled to establish the ground rules for the workshop in the face of their expectations of how the seniors should participate. One of the seniors, Mary, had taken a strong initial disliking to me. She was a remarkable physical presence—six feet tall, dressed in a red and camel shirt and blouse with many heavy necklaces and pins—and I couldn’t ignore her. She also had a toy cat that meowed. She held conversations with this cat and would get it to meow and then scold it; I often suspected she was whispering to the cat about me. The writing topics, though, were exciting and were topics the seniors explored frequently: food and romantic love. It is interesting what remains integral in minds being whittled away by disease—the body’s appetites.

**An Afternoon Out**

*By Daisy, Mary, Betty, Esther and Martin*

It’s lunchtime but there is nobody in the kitchen. The woman with her back to us is Amy and the other woman is Carrie. The guy in the background is stupid looking—smoking. He looks lonely too. The man’s name is John. Carrie is a boy’s name. They are not the type of people I’d know anything about. They are talking about the weather and recipes for chicken soup.

Here is the recipe for chicken soup: take a good, nice, fat chicken. Cut it up. Put it in the pot with carrots and onion, maybe parsley. Celery. Season it with a little salt, pepper. Cook it until chicken is very tender. Let it just simmer. Put matzo balls in it. Matzo ball recipe is on matzo meal box. Chicken—chick, chick,
chick—cluck, cluck, cluck. Carrots, onion, celery and chicken. Crackers. Tie all the greens together. Celery, parsley. Tie them so you don’t have to fish for them. You like the greens? You like to eat them? Okay, we’ll give them to you.

Nobody’s sick. Carrie is just a newlywed. She doesn’t know how to make soup. Carrie has been married two months. Does she like being married? Sure.

Carrie is getting a recipe for salami and eggs too. Cut the salami then put it in the eggs. Mix it all in and then put it in the garbage! Onions, carrots, celery. I don’t like salami and eggs.

Amy gives Carrie advice to work hard, to get up at seven o’clock. My mother used to get up very early to start fixing breakfast. She’d have dinner at noon. She’d make soup.

She won’t stay married. She wouldn’t know where to go. Everyone says get away from here.

Carrie works, she is a schoolteacher. After they leave the diner she’ll do nothing. She’ll go to department stores to see what’s on sale. She teaches second grade; she is very nice. Her husband is a psychiatrist.

This story was written in response to Edward Hopper’s painting, Chop Suey. I brought this in because it is an evocative painting, ripe for narrativizing. The gender construction in the narrative the Anathan Club writers built that first day would resonate throughout all the work I did with them for a year and a half. I remain intrigued by the compressed conflict in this story: Carrie, the newlywed, diligently seeking soup and salami and egg recipes, is doomed to divorce her psychiatrist husband. Although she is “very nice,” she will be warned or threatened to “get away from here” when her marriage breaks up. Is the detail that Carrie’s husband is a psychiatrist meant to suggest a negative trait or meant to suggest solidity in contrast to a schoolteacher who will spend an afternoon doing “nothing” and checking on department store sales? I suspect the latter because women often were negatively contrasted to men by the Anathan Club writers.
WOMEN
By Freddie, Betty, Daisy and Mary

If I never see another woman, it will be okay with me

They can be kind
They are good listeners
You can confide in a woman
They leave you alone

Their looks, their clothes

Chatterboxes
They can’t wait to tell somebody
About
Somebody’s divorce

There’s jealousy existing in some cases too

They can be understanding
They are good listeners
They are gossipy

There are woman you can’t trust
They pretend to be your friends
The majority are kind, helpful and loving
But it’s the bad ones that spoil it for the rest of us
It’s the same as men

They say people have a lot to learn from animals

Women won’t kill unless they want money

Of course there are exceptions, but most women are caring
Women look like you
Women are nurturing

MEN
By Freddie, Betty, Daisy and Mary

Men are romantic
They make children
Finally the truth is out!

They are affectionate
They’re always on the take
I like how much money he’s got
Men are embraceable

Men are interesting, to say the least
I get along with them so much better than with women
Women are always telling me what I should do and what I shouldn’t do
Men would never do that

I like them, but they’re not for me.

They know how to spend money
Poor guys, if they knew what we’re doing to them!

These poems were written collaboratively and the polyvocality in them creates interesting conflicting claims: women are both gossips and good to confide in. Women are both nurturing and ready to kill for money. Animals are only referred to in relation to women, not men. Men are presented as manipulated by women. The women writing this poem strongly associated men with sexual expression; these “embraceable,” “affectionate,” “romantic” men “make children.” This was a “truth” that the women laughed about.
I was very interested in exploring how the writers thought about gender—though it never occurred to me to ask about sex and sexuality—and I often brought it up in our writing prompts. The writers frequently referred to their mothers in our composing, most often to note how hard their mothers worked in their homes; their fathers were less three-dimensional in their memories than these mothers who worked from early morning to late evening cooking, sewing, and cleaning. While the majority of the women in our writing group had been homemakers like their mothers, two—Mary and Freddie—had been “career girls.” Mary didn’t talk about her work experiences much, but Freddie did. Freddie had worked in the truancy division of the New York City police department and had met her husband at work (he was her boss). She loved to tell stories about their wooing, fancy meals, and Broadway shows. She always choked up when she related warning her would-be husband after his proposal that she couldn’t have children following a car accident. There was a note of wonder in her voice, fifty-plus years later, when she described him telling her he was marrying her to be with her, not for children. It was at moments such as this, when I felt Freddie’s continuing sense of her own great fortune to find a man who wouldn’t reject her for her physical “limitation,” that I caught a glimpse of the vertiginous gap between these women’s life experience and mine. I wanted to know how they thought about the cultural construction of women.

Journal Entry January 28, 2000

Anyway, early on Daisy was talking about how she had wanted to be an actress. That gave me the idea of “Things you always wanted to do.” Well, the women did NOT like this topic very much. Aborted attempt that became all of us shouting at them “Have you ever ridden a bicycle” - none had. Then, asked them if they danced, if they went to dances. This was more productive —Daisy had a lot to say. Esther had the least though she was having a great time. Originally I had called our project a collaborative poem, and she was apparently tickled by the poetry idea. And kept saying to me
“Roses are red, violets are blues, oh how I hate the sight of you.” This was a good laugh. When she first said it she laughed so hard she had to lay her head on the table. I pretended to be hurt and she grabbed my hand and said “Laughter is good for the soul.” She was in a great mood the rest of the time — singing and doing little dances with her hands. (Zehava was delighted with this since Esther had been pretty depressed since her recent move into the nursing home).

**Things We Have Never Done**
*By Daisy, Betty and Esther*

*I always wanted to be an astronaut and
Ride a bicycle, I rode one but didn’t know how.
Did you ever ride a motorcycle?
No, do I look the type? Never rode a bicycle.*

*Years ago we used to go hiking.
George Washington Bridge.
Over there, over there, over there.
Those were the days I was able to walk good.
Entertaining you.*

The club’s writers, all women at this point, were not interested in accepting my invitation to perform a feminist critique on their lives’ limitations. I would never learn if Daisy never rode a bicycle because it was considered unfeminine or if there was another, more benign reason. The women writers delighted in talking about men and women’s power over men. While my attempts at plumbing the social constructions of gender were thwarted, the writers were continually opening up discussions about sex. These were openings I steadfastly failed to exploit.
Crisis Point: Seniors Are Sexual Beings Too

Freddie: “You think only young people have those problems, romantic problems. Old people have them too.”

I was having trouble getting the men of Anathan Club involved with the writing group. Often, they would absent themselves, going into another room to sleep. Then came Ken. A former shoe salesman and self-professed Lothario, Ken was an enthusiastic participant in our group. At the time I wrote that I thought he was “inappropriately sexual.” This might be because of the circumstances of our first meeting. Halfway through the semester, the professors teaching Writing in the Community conducted observations of the students in our service-learning sites. The first time I met Ken was when I was observed by my professor; at the time I felt Ken had derailed our work in order to harass my professor. I recorded my frustration in my journal:

Catherine came to observe today but unfortunately I only had 2 people: Daisy and Ken (a character — first time I’ve met him). There was a bit of an icy snow storm so Access wasn’t running and no one else made it. Today was a pretty short session so I could meet with Catherine and get to my student conf. (lasted only over an hour). My theme was trips and travel. Unbelievably Daisy has never been to the beach. She has only traveled to NY. We talked a bit about this and about Carbondale — I tried to get her to talk about giving birth (thinking about the journals I read from Britain) but she talked mostly about the locality of the hospital versus her town (actually makes sense considering the theme). Ken is a real dirty old man and has psychological problems — going to the hospital that night for electric shock therapy. (Found out later his daughter has some problems and doesn’t take the best of care of him). He kept flirting with Catherine to the point of harassment….. what is my role in this situation? I felt totally inappropriate to reprimand him and Catherine seemed to handle him pretty well but he took us off course for a good portion of the time. When I did get
some storytelling going, say from Daisy, he interrupted loudly to harass Catherine. Not a good example of what I do but does show the possible obstacles. Catherine suggested that at times I stuck too much to the topic — there were moments I could have let Daisy go.

Ken had thrown me off balance, and I responded to that discomfort with written hostility. To my shame I characterized him as “a dirty old man” and seemed to think it relevant that he struggled with depression. In another response to this observation that semester I wrote, “I didn’t feel comfortable establishing boundaries for his behavior. I should have anticipated this sort of situation since Alzheimer’s wears down typical inhibitions—I had certainly observed that with my own grandfather. Nonetheless, I felt that it would be disrespectful for me to scold a man so many years older than me.” What strikes me now, looking back at my responses to this “incident,” is that I was infantilizing the members of my writing group. I chose to perceive Ken’s flirting as a symptom of illness rather than a normal human activity. As people I categorized as both students and elderly, I doubly erased the senior writers’ sexuality. Because I didn’t feel that I inhabited the body of a teacher of other adults, I was wedded to the possibility that bodies are superseded by the mind in teaching situations. And, of course, our culture commonly denies that elderly bodies are still sexual bodies. This erasure was central to my comfort with my position as “teacher.” I ascribed to the ideology Leda Cooks describes as associating professionalism with the invisibility of the body (300). If my body was invisible, naturally the students’ bodies were too. This was a necessary requirement if I was going to successfully function as “an ideal self, a moral and virtuous self” freed from the physical body (303). The members of the Anathan writing group refused to occupy this mental space and leave physical bodies behind. Moreover, they did not see me as pure mind: Ken pointed out the lack of physical control betrayed by my nail biting, while Betty continuously called me a pishekid. Most of all, I was shocked that they talked about sexual desire in front of me.
Me: [Holding up a picture of John Waterhouse’s *The Lady of Shallot.*] What story does this picture tell?
Maggie: Here, Ken, this is your type.
Irene: She’s looking for her lost love.
Daisy: He died. He drowned. It looks as if she’s looking for him.
Ken: She’s looking for me.
Mary: He should live so long.
Mildred: She’s thirty. Her name is Jezebel.
Me: Is she bad?
Maggie: No, she isn’t. She just needs a man.

“She just needs a man.” By this time it was more than clear to me that these “adorable” elderly men and women wouldn’t believe Jezebel needed a man just to row her boat to shore. I had to rewrite the narrative I had tried to impose on my service-learning work. I had started this project looking, I think, to reconnect with my lost grandfather, who had been a widower my whole life and comfortably asexual in my perception. The writers at the Anathan Club wouldn’t fulfill the roles I had cast for them as grandparent figures and they didn’t censor themselves in front of me. As time progressed, and particularly when the semester ended and I no longer felt that I was being graded for my work at the club, I eased into relating to Ken and the other writers as full human beings. I found out that Mary was having an affair with Jim, an occasion which coincided with her brightening mood and increased participation in our writing group. I became more comfortable with Ken and with the fun had at my expense by the writing group.

Me: What is a good gift to give for a wedding?
Maggie: A waffle iron, electric skillet, an iron or dishes. Whatever you want. A bedspread.
Freddie: Depends on what kind of background they come from.
Ken: Prophylactics.
I noticed in time that I began to treat the writers the way Zehava treated them: as fellow adults. I laughed at their bawdy jokes and cringed when new volunteers spoke slowly and simply to club members. I discovered that I could shock Ken. We did a project that involved tracing our hands and then writing what our hands have done around and inside the tracings. Ken was very creative and talked about jobs, children and hygiene. He also leaned toward me and said, “Chased women, made love, wiped my backend.” When I duly wrote these phrases on his hands, he looked up at me with a blush. “Oh,” he said, laughing, “you wrote those down!”

**Lessons from the Anathan Club Writers**

*Ken*: They look like they’re in love. They are going to kiss.

*Maggie*: Is that all? That’s for teenagers; I’m an old lady.

My choice was not a popular one—I was the only member of the graduate-level Writing in the Community class at the University of Pittsburgh who chose to work with the elderly. My classmates were working with children, cancer patients, and adults in drug rehabilitation. These were more desirable communities to work with in part because of the challenge elderly bodies present, particularly to the young. Elderly bodies may be marked by incontinence, feebleness, and other reminders that the body fails us in the end. When I first undertook this project, I had anticipated these expressions of embodiment in my writers but I had never expected to find bodies that continued to be constructed as sexualized. I never expected that there would be secret trysts, which there were, and so much talk about the body and all of its functions.

This experience holds some lessons for me as a professor who has and will continue to incorporate service-learning into my own teaching. First, we need to encourage our students to honestly explore the narratives they construct about themselves in relation to the service-learning work they are doing. I had tried to impose a narrative about
myself unlocking the stories about historical events and life in different eras of grandparent figures. When the writers I worked with thwarted my expectations, I struggled and had to dramatically revise how I saw myself and how I saw the writers. I needed, in my journals, to take a second, reflexive step and examine what the events I recorded revealed about my prejudices and me. Second, before sending students into service-learning sites, we need to discuss how the students perceive their roles and the roles of those they are going to work with. Many students will, like me, seek to authorize their participation in these sites—particularly if they are leading educational activities—by mapping onto themselves the position of the teacher. We need to help students think through the assumptions they make about what teachers and students reveal about themselves to each other. We need to discuss the very real possibility that the students’ experience will not match their expectations and, perhaps, even role-play potential interactions they may have with the participants. These moves lay the groundwork for the reflexivity about the role of the university in relation to the community and about the power dynamics of the classroom that service-learning is uniquely positioned to facilitate.

The Anathan Club writers helped shape me as a teacher. I remind myself that when students and teachers act as if we are all mind and no body, we are engaging in a collective illusion. I encourage my students to represent themselves as round, complex people and not one-dimensional, affectless “minds.” But most of all, I glance uncomfortably at my bitten nails when I meet with students, and I still feel like a pisherkid more than I care to admit.
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Endnotes

1 I have changed the writers' names to preserve their anonymity.
Queer Rhetorics and Service-Learning: Reflection as Critical Engagement

Geoffrey W. Bateman, University of Denver

In Queer Rhetorics, an upper-division service-learning writing course taught at the University of Colorado at Boulder in 2005, students used queer theory to frame their engagement with local LGBTQ non-profit organizations in Boulder. In their journals, students moved from responding personally to the course material and their volunteer work to generating their own critical inquiries into queer discourse, as well as community-based service projects. This essay argues that self-reflecting on their own sexual citizenship in the context of community engagement fosters students' critical understanding of the public rhetoric of sexuality and gender and the social norms that delimit our sexual worlds.

"To seek out queer culture, to interact with it and learn from it, is a kind of public activity. It is a way of transforming oneself, and at the same time helping to elaborate a commonly accessible world."

Michael Warner, The Trouble with Normal

"The service-learning requirement of this course is clearly designed to immerse students uncritically in a radical worldview and to expose them, again uncritically, to radical organizations and political agendas all under the guise of providing them rhetorical skills."

"This is recruitment, plain and simple."

David Horowitz and Jacob Laksin, One-Party Classroom
As the temperature dropped below freezing on a clear, cold evening, early in December 2005, I sat in the main gathering room at Boulder Pride, the LGBT community center in a college town nestled into the foothills of the Rocky Mountains and home to the main campus of the University of Colorado. Not far from the city’s well-traveled pedestrian shopping mall, the center occupies a cozy Victorian house, its living room furnished with an oversized couch and comfortable chairs. Talking with one of the staff members, I watched as students from my Queer Rhetorics course laid out a buffet of food they had secured from a few local restaurants and grocery stores as a part of their attempt to use an LGBTQ community space to feed people who were homeless. In a stocking cap and many layers of warm clothing, a man lingered over the offerings, picking his way through the leftovers and donated food toward some semblance of a dinner.

The evening’s event represented the culmination of this group’s service project for the course they had nearly completed, an upper-division, service-learning writing course that I taught as a third-year Ph.D. student in the English Department for the Program of Writing and Rhetoric at the University of Colorado at Boulder. The course coupled readings on a variety of LGBTQ issues with service-learning and community engagement to help students develop as writers in personal, academic, and civic contexts. Immersing them in some of the year’s most pressing debates about sexuality and gender and inviting them to engage with local publics, a sphere of civic and discursive activity that “comes into being as individuals debate issues that concern them as a group” (Eberly 172), the class asked students to explore the relevance of queer theory and other queer academic discourse for Boulder’s LGBTQ community-based organizations. The course culminated in collaborative, student-initiated community service projects, which were paired with final inquiry-based, research papers.
At first glance, the service project at Boulder Pride seemed a failure. In their attempts to bring folks—especially youth—who were homeless or hungry into Boulder’s LGBT community center and foster connections between two marginalized groups of people, the students reached three individuals: the man who was homeless who came for the dinner, the staff member who stayed late to host the event, and the board member who stopped by to show his support. As we sat there talking to each other, having a bite to eat, and casting repeated glances at the door, we all confronted a growing sense of disappointment. The students kept making comments about how much food would be left over, and the staff member shrugged her shoulders, as if to say these kinds of events don’t always go as planned. I, too, felt like we had failed to engage effectively with these local publics, even though I knew from my own experiences that organizing such community-based events didn’t always produce quantifiable results.

As we packed up the remaining food to take to the Boulder Shelter for the Homeless, we found some small comfort in blaming the sudden cold front that had made the evening so inhospitable. I drove home that night wondering how I might have mentored the students’ good intentions more effectively into a productive engagement with Boulder Pride and the local homeless population. Should I have redirected them earlier in their planning process when I could see the potential for this kind of failure? Would they and the community have been better served by a less complicated project? Or did I do well by them by encouraging their ambition to think beyond the clearly defined markers of Boulder’s LGBTQ communities?

Reflecting on this experience four years later, I see this event less as a failure and more generously as the starting point for a new kind of community engagement. Even though my students did not mobilize a substantial number of LGBTQ people to feed the homeless, we did forge a moment of possible connection across differences, however tentative and imperfectly executed, that drew on resources publically
identified with the LGBTQ community center of Boulder to assist another dispossessed group of people. Serving the homeless within this space opened up the unexpected and complicated possibility that an LGBT community center, university students, and people experiencing homelessness might find common purpose in sharing a meal together, undermining our unspoken assumption that service-learning necessarily manifests itself as a form of charity, but can instead lead to a more mutually enriching interaction among civic agents. As well, the process the students went through to propose this project to Boulder Pride's staff and board of directors represented its own effective rhetorical engagement with a community-based organization. This alone was worth acknowledging as a collaborative success.

My own professional situation also shaped the outcomes of the course. I was an openly gay male graduate student teaching in a writing program outside his home department in the first few years of his graduate education. Despite the course's unique focus, its institutional context is all too familiar in service-learning lore and scholarship: I was an enthusiastic yet inadequately trained instructor jumping feet-first into teaching a service-learning course. Aware of the potential pitfalls, but inexperienced in how to navigate them, I improvised and adapted as problems arose. But out of such improvisation came unexpected and often rewarding results that didn't necessarily fit neatly into the evaluative criteria of a university writing curriculum, especially those results that reflected the students' evolved sense of themselves as sexual and gendered citizens.

As I reflect on my experience teaching this course, I find myself grappling with Shari J. Stenberg and Darby Arant Whealy's observation that "the value of service-learning exceeds outcomes and predetermined ends" (704). Their insistence that we pay attention to the impact of what we can't measure resonates powerfully with what my students and I achieved both within our classroom and off campus where staff, volunteers, and clients of three Boulder LGBTQ non-profits publically
manifest the “world-making activit[ies] of queer life” (Warner, *The Trouble with Normal* 147). For us, these “scenes of association and identity that transform the private lives they mediate” were housed within Boulder Pride, the Boulder County AIDS Project, and the Boulder chapter of PFLAG (Warner, *Publics and Counterpublics* 57). Fostering my students’ engagement with these organizations meant dedicating myself to the unpredictable joy that comes from the fundamental unsettling that constitutes queerness. Part of what makes queer culture so vibrant is its urgent inventiveness, or our ability to forge relationships out of differences and create publics that sustain our defiance, compliance, and revision of the norms that structure our desires. As Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick writes, “Queer is a continuing moment, movement, motive—recurrent, eddying, *troublant*” that refers, in part, to “the open mesh of possibilities, gaps, overlaps, dissonances and resonances, lapses and excesses of meaning when the constituent elements of anyone’s gender, of anyone’s sexuality aren’t made (or *can’t be made*) to signify monolithically” (*Tendencies*, xii, 8). Even as I’m sure the course would have benefited from an instructor with greater experience, this course centered this intimate improv, and our collective efforts to engage with these local manifestations of queerness forced us to embrace the contingent nature of the institutional and community contexts that we worked within and the rhetorical situations they presented.

It might go without saying that the situated messiness of such learning plays a central role in our service-learning pedagogies, but in this course’s attempt to render public the intimate discourses of gender and sexuality, I found myself embracing queerness’s unpredictable possibilities to an even greater extent, using them as sources for student inquiry and action. Grounding us amidst this contingency was a sustained critical self-reflection of how we experienced and made sense of the course. Cultivating this kind of reflective practice allowed me to respond flexibly to students’ questions and encouraged all of us to be more open to each other’s expertise and insights. We
learned to embrace our shared ignorance and together inhabited the position of novice in ways that expanded the locus of authority beyond my professorial role and into a more collaborative acknowledgment of how the students and our community partners all shaped the knowledge we created through our reflective practice. In this way, I taught "with a critically reflective stance," which in Chris M. Anson’s words, "model[ed] for students the kind of discursive explorations they should take in their journals and reflection logs," shifting "from providing knowledge to participating in the creation and exploration of knowledge with our students" (177). As important as the more formal writing assignments were for my students, the intellectual interactions that journaling provided us not only fostered a critical awareness of the rhetorical worlds we were exploring, but helped us all better see our role within them.

I taught Queer Rhetorics in a year that saw a flurry of statewide political activity in Colorado in relation to LGBTQ issues and in the midst of local campus controversies that coalesced around Ward Churchill, academic freedom, and the teaching of ethnic, gender, and queer studies. In the semester that preceded the course, national politics soured in ways that LGBTQ Coloradans found particularly disconcerting. On January 24, Colorado Senator Wayne Allard reintroduced a constitutional amendment to ban same-sex marriage, and Representative Marilyn Musgrave from Colorado’s 4th Congressional District announced her intent to take similar action in the House (Soraghan). Even though the “Marriage Protection Act” ultimately fizzled, it coincided with the beginning of a successful campaign sponsored by groups like Focus on the Family to amend Colorado’s state constitution to ban same-sex marriage, which Colorado voters approved in the 2006 election.
But the news wasn’t all negative. In May 2005, the Colorado State House of Representatives passed bills that barred discrimination against LGBT individuals and included LGBT people within Colorado’s existing hate crimes legislation (Frates). Ultimately, Colorado’s governor at the time, Bill Owens, vetoed the first bill but grudgingly approved the second, prompting many of us in the LGBTQ community to joke caustically that even though it was okay for employers to fire us in our state, at least they couldn’t kill us for being queer.

These headlines prompted frequent debate in one of the state’s largest newspapers, the Denver Post. In one guest commentary, Ann Zimmerman, a maintenance electrician at the Coors Brewery in Golden, Colorado, a smaller city just twenty miles south of Boulder, challenged President Bush’s support of a federal ban on gay marriage at the same time that I began to reach out to potential community partners to develop the service-learning component of the course. Writing about her partner and the children they raised together, she acknowledges the need for greater legal protections for families like hers, but even more important for her is the politics of recognition, a need that was palpable within Boulder’s LGBTQ community-based organizations.

“One day,” she writes, “I would simply like to introduce the woman I love not as my partner, or friend, or co-parent, but as my spouse. By that title, people would recognize the true meaning of our relationship and the depth of our love.” Appealing to love’s universality was and is certainly not unique to Colorado, but Zimmerman’s attempt to render her relationship visible and respectable represented a common strategy within arguments made by Colorado LGBTQ writers as they countered anti-gay sentiment represented by some of our elected officials. The risk involved in such public visibility also prompted straight-identified, but gay-friendly Denver Post columnist, Cindy Rodriquez, to write, “No wonder many gays and lesbians in this state feel a need to conceal their sexual identity. Listening to the anti-gay rhetoric here … it’s like you stepped back in time.” Describing why her gay friends hesitate to display their affection for same-sex partners openly, she argues,
“People don’t do it here because it’s too risky. It’s easier to hide than deal with bigoted people.”

As these brief examples illustrate, the state of Colorado and its major cities were grappling publicly with the political, legal, and cultural roles of LGBTQ people, their relationships, and their families. As I prepared the syllabus for Queer Rhetorics, I drew on these regional debates about marriage equality, LGBT visibility, and legal protections from discrimination to shape both the course reading and the assignments that would prepare students to engage ethically and in pedagogically sound ways with the community-based LGBTQ organizations in Boulder. In the first half of the semester, we read texts by scholars like Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, Michael Warner, John D’Emilio, and Lisa Duggan to generate a rich theoretical and historical context that I hoped would provide students with a rhetorical framework for their later work with these organizations.

To facilitate the students’ progress from these readings and the initial interactions with our community partners to their final research and community projects in the second half of the semester, I designed a sequence of reflective journal assignments that prompted students to think critically about the course reading, our guest speakers, their service-learning experiences, and the rhetorical contexts within which we pursued our community-based work. Even though I had yet to read Thomas Deans’ work on service-learning and composition, it’s clear now that I had constructed a course “designed to write about the community,” asking “students to do community service and then reflect on their community-based experiences in writing” (85). Even though I now tend to design courses in which writing serves as the means of community engagement, looking back, I am reminded of what students gain from such a regular and sustained reflection on their own learning, for it speaks to their very real need to forge connections with, process through, and respond to the material they study. Anticipating that my students would come to Queer Rhetorics with a range of knowledge
and ignorance about LGBTQ people, their histories, cultures, and use of language, I used journaling to "help students in processing the powerful affective and frequently disquieting experiences they undergo when doing outreach work in the contexts far from their comfort zones" (Deans 103). As important as preserving this kind of personal response space was, I also recognized intuitively, as Bruce Herzberg has argued, that although "[w]riting personal responses to community service is an important part of processing the experience," "it is not sufficient to raise critical or cultural consciousness" (309).

But as Deans describes, it can be an important first step, and in Queer Rhetorics, I used "personal writing as a bridge to analytical writing" (Deans 103), encouraging students to move from responding as private individuals to conducting more sustained research and generating public action on the issues they and our community partners felt were important. As the course unfolded, I used my responses to their journal writing to help students identify their interests and cultivate questions that could guide their final research assignment and develop meaningful community service projects for the LGBTQ organizations. Pairing these service projects with research papers, I intended for students to become critically aware of the issues they would address, hoping they would develop their own scholarly expertise in an issue that interested them from the first half of the semester.

Over the course of the term, students responded to six formal prompts that I provided them, but as they completed their final research and community service projects, they continued to reflect on their work more informally. In the more directive prompts, I asked students to describe their experiences with our community-based organizations and reflect on what they found significant in each of these situations. Then, I pushed them to think critically about the connections, tensions, or even contradictions between our course reading and the insight they had gained from our engagement with our partners. For example, in the first journal entry, I directed students "to reflect on today’s guest
speakers and describe the most significant thing that you learned about with regard to the Boulder County AIDS Project and living with HIV/AIDS.” Allowing them to respond on a more personal level, I then encouraged them to put their observations in dialogue with a passage from Michael Warner’s *The Trouble with Normal*: “[W]rite down one quotation from Warner’s second chapter, “What’s Wrong with Normal?” and reflect on what it has to say about HIV/AIDS and the issues discussed by our guest speakers (or how what they talked about enriches Warner’s argument).”

In their two- to three-page responses to this kind of prompt, students frequently dialogued in sophisticated ways with the reading, the guest speakers who came to our class early in the semester, and our volunteer work at our community partners, developing a critical awareness of the complexities of perspective and experience within Boulder’s LGBTQ communities. For example, many students responded quite passionately to Warner’s assertion that “[i]t does not seem possible to think of oneself as normal without thinking that some other kind of person is pathological” (*The Trouble with Normal* 60). Some of the more radical students—gay or straight—celebrated Warner’s critique of normativity and the generative possibilities of defying sexual and gender norms. Other students saw in both the speakers and themselves compelling normative impulses toward integrating LGBTQ experiences within mainstream culture, especially those who identified with what Steven Seidman describes as the “ethnic/minority sociopolitical agenda” of gay and lesbian politics (110). Understandably a number of the LGBTQ-identified students felt a very visceral need to normalize their sexualities and genders and found comfort in imagining themselves as part of a group that was slowly gaining access to middle-class respectability. In their initial reflections, many students seemed to be caught between these two choices, (1) enthusiastically embracing both queerness’s flaunting of difference and (2) a more assimilationist, and in their minds, commonsensical approach to LGBTQ minority models of identity and community. But as I grew more familiar with their
thinking about these issues, I saw that the terms of Warner’s debate struck them as a false binary, perhaps even an antiquated one, and they seemed much more comfortable inhabiting this space of contradiction than I would have expected. They appreciated the power of the norm without succumbing to it as the moral yardstick by which to measure the value of existing in the world as sexual and gendered human beings. Ultimately, we used their responses to tease out the affordances and limitations of each political orientation, fostering a greater appreciation of the many choices available to them as writers engaged with a vast repertoire of queer rhetorical strategies.

As our engagement with *The Trouble with Normal* suggests, I focused our inquiry more purposefully within national LGBTQ debates, and less on the disputes between pro-gay and anti-gay forces in the mainstream media. Given the statewide context, we certainly discussed these kinds of rhetorical exchanges, but I felt that it was important for students to see the richness of deliberation among LGBTQ writers and to situate queerness as central to our discussions rather than marginalize it as something in need of defense. For example, our discussions of same-sex marriage focused more on the tension between queer and feminist critiques of marriage as a normative institution and more mainstream gay and lesbian writers’ affirmations of marriage equality as a way to secure full citizenship. In this way, I invited students to grapple with the diversity of perspectives within LGBTQ publics, but emphasized a more sustained engagement with queer theorists like Warner because of his more capaciousness inclusiveness and resistance to the norms that have evolved within parts of our communities, or what Lisa Duggan has described as “the new homonormativity” (50). As Warner writes, “When you begin interacting with people in queer culture. . . You learn that . . . the statistical norm has no moral value. . . You learn that the people who look most different from you can be, by virtue of that fact, the very people from whom you have the most to learn” (*The Trouble with Normal* 70). Warner’s deconstruction of the moral foundation of the norm helped us take a rhetorical inventory of
queer discourse, highlighting the situations and strategies that make possible a "commonly accessible world" (Warner, *The Trouble with Normal* 71). Together we reflected on the epistemological and material conditions that allow LGBTQ people to elaborate the kind of public space in which queer identities, desires, bodies, styles, sex, friendships, families—all of the activities that trouble the norm—become a legitimate part of our social worlds.

By foregrounding the epistemological possibilities of difference, I hoped students would be better prepared to interact with our community partners and the local LGBTQ publics in Boulder on their own terms. This immersion required all of us to attend to the privilege of our academic epistemologies; it also made us reflect critically on the relationship between the insights our reading of queer theory and other scholarly discourse gave us and their relevance to the communities with which we engaged. To help students begin to see the complex relationships between our academic context and those of our community partners, I reserved four class sessions in the first five weeks of the course to host guest speakers who could talk about a range of issues of importance for local LGBTQ folks and prompted students to reflect critically in their journals on their evolving understanding of these issues. These speakers included staff and clients from the Boulder County AIDS Project and Boulder Pride, a local queer Latina writer and performance artist, and a panel of LGBTQ folks who shared their experiences living in Boulder.

Students' initial engagement with Boulder's LGBTQ publics thus put them in the position of an audience: I invited them to witness these staff members and activists' stories and learn from their perspectives and experiences. First and foremost, they listened to these guest speakers, which served as an apprenticeship for their later, more active engagement. To pre-empt the very real possibility that students would approach their service at our community sites as cultural tourists, the presence of these speakers within our classroom served as a more
controlled space in which students could articulate awkward or even ignorant questions to staff members or community activists who were prepared and willing to educate them, but through our ongoing dialogues, would also move them beyond their voyeuristic impulses. This format functioned to establish our guests as experts, in effect cultivating a sense of humility in my students as they began to see the multiple ways through which our culture creates and circulates knowledge about sexuality. Perhaps as important, it also equalized authority within the class, especially the authority of student experience in relation to LGBTQ issues. Listening together to these LGBTQ voices, the students—regardless of their own sexual orientations or gender identities—had to think about the central issues of our course through the words of these local experts and not just through the experiences of the most vocal LGBTQ students in the class. The diverse identities and experiences of our guests fostered for all of us a more complex understanding of LGBTQ issues in Boulder without forcing any individual to embody the entire community. As students reflected each week on these speakers—both in terms of their common experiences and the differences between them and the contexts within which they worked—they learned about the multiple ways LGBTQ people experience Boulder and understand themselves as public agents shaping the local political and social environment.

This dynamic was fostered in part by subsequent journal assignments that continued to ask students to reflect on what they found significant about each speaker and to explore how these organizations represented themselves to their clients and supporters. They continued to tease out relationships between these speakers and our course reading, but as important were the questions they posed as they began to wrestle with these issues and deepen their expertise. In this way, journaling allowed me to re-affirm their positions as novices, as students who could be confused and ask about local LGBTQ issues without fear of offending our community partners. Despite the truism that there are
no dumb questions, I did encourage students to be thoughtful in their ignorance: we collaborated as a class to take responsibility for what we didn’t know and generated ways to ask questions that engendered respectful dialogue with each other and our community partners later in the quarter.

Scripting this kind of reflective exchange was especially important considering the diversity of students and their sexual identities within the class and their reasons for taking the course. About a third of the eighteen students who enrolled in the course identified as LGBTQ, and they had to varying degrees gained familiarity with LGBTQ sexualities and genders through their own coming out process. Many of these students brought very personal desires to the course material, wanting to understand the communities they were entering into and legitimize their places within them. Their individual needs to engage with queerness in both public and intimate ways were ever present, and conditioned our discussions, our writing, and our community interactions. By asking my students to engage with local queer publics as a way to facilitate an awareness of the situations in which they write, could write, and should write about sexuality and gender, I obliged myself to attend to the constraints of their personal histories with regard to writing and sexuality.

These issues may have manifested themselves more immediately and visibly for the LGBTQ students, but the many straight students who took the course were also drawn to it for equally important and compelling reasons. Some chose the course because they had family members—brothers, uncles, even best friends—who were LGBTQ; others, because they saw this course as helping them professionalize. As aspiring high school teachers, a handful of students were vaguely aware that LGBTQ youth faced distinct and harrowing challenges as students in hostile school environments and hoped to sharpen their own expertise to better prepare themselves for the classroom. Perhaps most surprising to me, though, were the students who weren’t
aware that “queer” signified anything meaningful about sexuality, identity, or culture. A few quirky students were drawn, and not entirely inaccurately, to the strangeness they thought queerness represented. One self-identified anarchist student was curious about the relationship between queer identities and politics, but he was drawn to queer theory for its non-normative impulses and deconstructive tendencies and its proximity to his own anarchist philosophy.

Attending to this diversity of student knowledge and experience, I used their critical reflections and our class discussions to generate a common language to frame the rest of the semester. After the guest speakers’ visits, we began to travel off campus to gain familiarity with the material spaces of Boulder’s LGBTQ non-profit communities. In weeks four through six, we made three trips off campus as a class to attend meetings and volunteer at these organizations, setting aside our Friday afternoon class meetings to insure that everyone would be able to join in our collective endeavor for at least an hour. In this phase of the course, I believed it was important to volunteer as a class to build our own community and that my participation as their instructor was essential, for it signaled to them not only the centrality of such work to our course, but also that I valued it as their professor and as a gay man. Equally important was the message it sent to our community partners: I wasn’t just shipping my students off to them for a few hours of obligatory service; rather, they saw that a faculty member—even if just a graduate instructor—was committed to building relationships with them. Working with my students on whatever task was at hand fostered a more collaborative, democratic sense within the class, as well as between the university and our community partners—a pedagogical strategy that I continue to prioritize in my service-learning courses.

For our first off-campus event, we attended a meeting of our local PFLAG chapter. The topic of the evening was health issues within the LGBTQ community. The guest speaker, a queer-identified staff member with the Boulder County Health Department, presented information
about HIV infection rates in LGBTQ populations, queer teenage suicide statistics, the high incidence of smoking within our communities, and breast cancer risks for queer women. Some of my students were aware of this information while others found it shocking, even morally outrageous. In their journals, I asked them to “describe what it was like … to attend the PFLAG meeting” and to think about what it meant to venture off-campus for the first time: “How was it different than if we had guest speakers from PFLAG come to our class? Second, reflect on the presentation about LGBTIQ health issues. What did you learn? Find a quote from any of our reading thus far, write it down, and explore its relation to your experience Thursday evening.” Looking back at this prompt, I am struck by how open-ended I left it, and I wonder if I shouldn’t have directed earlier in the course to “search beyond the person for a systemic explanation” (Herzberg 309).

But granting students the chance to forge their own personal connections to the course material didn’t inhibit critical thinking. Especially for LGBTQ students, journaling provided an empowering opportunity to analyze sexual and gender identities in relation to local public discussions about LGBTIQ community health. One queer student used our visit to PFLAG and his subsequent reflection to forge a more intimate understanding with his family about the public costs of discrimination and invited one of his parents to attend the meeting with him. When they arrived, they both manifested a quiet sense of apprehension. As we sat down, I couldn’t help but feel a tender appreciation for the moment’s awkwardness and its significance for both of them. In his reflection and later conversations in office hours, the student confirmed that it was one of the most challenging moments in his life, but he testified to the impact that the public nature of this meeting had on his parent. Their relationship shifted in a way that wouldn’t have occurred in private, for the presence of other people provided his parent a new context in which to understand the son’s evolving sexual identity as a gay man. It also provided my student with resources to use to understand his own health and well-being, and his
ability to self-reflect in his journal and in our class discussions allowed him to articulate these new discoveries.

This example may seem to remove us too far from what the priorities of a writing course should be and where our expertise as writing instructors lies. Who was I to play amateur counselor or community organizer to these students and invite them to engage in community work in such a way as to surface some of their most intimate desires? My response to this legitimate concern is quite frankly, how can we not? Especially in light of the still staggering youth suicide rate that continues to plague our communities—just two years ago, a gay male student killed himself at the university I currently teach at—we need to find ways to fashion what Rosa Eberly describes as the “protopublic spaces” of our classrooms into hospitable places in which “students can practice public discourse ... by writing and thinking about and for different publics in different ethe (“From Writers” 172). In courses like Queer Rhetorics, this means we should recognize the public potential within our classrooms and see our class time as a gathering of readers and writers in which we can make sexuality visible.

I recognize the risks inherent in such praxis when we invite students to write about sex, sexuality, gender, and desire in relation to both public discourse and their intimate experiences. Class discussions create discomfort; conversations get complicated, and sometimes seem inappropriate. Peer review can be a difficult exchange when students narrate, analyze, or craft arguments about sex. Knowing how to respond appropriately to student writing and class discussion was a constant question, and I found myself drawing on skills I had developed from my previous work experiences at a non-profit, AIDS-service organization. I had received little training as a graduate student in how to facilitate learning about such intimate issues. Cultivating a sincere and respectful curiosity for my students’ sexualities, listening to their stories, experiences and analyses carefully, reflecting back to them what I heard, and asking questions (rather than providing
answers) to promote further discussion—all powerful techniques I had learned as a facilitator of discussion groups for gay and bisexual men—proved useful in the moments of greatest challenge. They also modeled for students the ways in which I hoped they would reflect critically on these issues in their own writing. As personal as these conversations were, they didn’t remain so as students began to expand their consciousness beyond their immediate experiences.

From discussions about public sex environments on campus to students talking and writing about their first sexual experiences, difficult conversations abounded in our class. But in the protopublic space of our classroom, we didn’t isolate these issues solely, or even primarily, as private concerns of individuals, but rather as illustrative examples of sexuality’s normative and very public systems and structures. Witnessing students’ enthusiastic embrace of these challenges as they immersed themselves intentionally into these situations, I confronted an obvious reality, but one academic culture likes to ignore: our students have bodies and desires. To draw upon the lessons of queer theory in a writing classroom, especially one that attempts to connect with queer publics distinct from our college campuses, means that we should engage our students in how these private experiences manifest publically and structure our lived experience. If, as Warner suggests, “being interested in queer theory is a way to mess up the desexualized space of the academy, exude some rut, re-imagine the publics from and from which academic intellectuals write, dress, and perform” (“Introduction” xxvi), then mapping out the connections and tensions between queer theory and local LGBTQ publics means we should expect, and even look forward to, more mess when we invite our students to deliberate and take action on these issues. When we handle them with a sensitive awareness of the multiple positions our students inhabit in relation to their bodies and their desires, the risks translate into meaningful encounters with writing, agency, and sexuality. In some small way, it fosters the kinds of spaces many of us as LGBTQ people would like to see more of in our communities—spaces in which people
can engage in authentic, respectful, and civil conversations about some of the most intimate aspects our lives.

As we approached the second half of the course, I encouraged students to aspire to this kind of personally engaged scholarship, and they drew upon the reflective writing in their journals to generate a topic that they could research for their final essay and that would serve as the basis for their community service project. These projects coincided so that students would gain academic expertise in the issue they selected as they took public action on it. In consultation with me, the class organized itself into interest groups and developed ideas for their projects in collaboration with our community partners. The issues they focused on included the local impact of the ban on gays and lesbians in the military, LGBTQ parenting, homeless queer youth, LGBTQ teenage suicide, and safe schools for queer students. Ultimately, students generated resource materials for these issues and organized educational panels, calls to action, and the event at Boulder Pride.

In the end, though, I ask myself, what purpose did these projects serve? To what extent did they succeed in the collaborative give-and-take of working with and serving Boulder's LGBTQ communities? I still find this success somewhat difficult to measure. I do know that students engaged enthusiastically with their projects, even if the work overwhelmed them at times, and their reflections testified to how much they learned as writers, as students of queerness, and even as organizers. But even with our conscious efforts in the first half of the course to connect with three of Boulder's most visible community-based LGBTQ organizations, many of the students struggled in their attempts to create projects that responded appropriately to the needs of these organizations and their constituents. As the story that opened this essay suggests, the visions of students don't translate seamlessly into public successes, but that doesn't mean that important relationships and learning aren't fostered in the midst of such failure.
The group focusing on LGBTQ parenting similarly faltered. The two students working together on this issue created materials to publicize the resources in Boulder and the Denver metropolitan area for LGBTQ parents, but ultimately, they struggled to deliver these materials in meaningful ways to parents they envisioned might find them helpful. Even though they had been working with a volunteer-based political organization that advocated for queer families, the students and the volunteers found it difficult to connect and communicate effectively in large part because the organization wasn’t equipped to coordinate student volunteers and the students weren’t familiar enough with the contours of this community.

The most successful student project decided to treat the university campus as its own public. Wanting to share some of the insights they had gained from the course with their peers across campus, a group of five students organized a panel that featured an undergraduate lesbian student who had been discharged from the university’s ROTC program when she came out, a gay man and a lesbian who were co-parenting two children together, and a queer professor who was an expert on the university’s LGBTQ history. On the evening of the event, the room full of curious faces confirmed that this particular project appealed to the campus, forging a moment of common interest among students, faculty, and staff who attended the event. As the two children played in the corner of the classroom while their parents spoke about creating their own intentional queer family, the room came together in a deliberative act, using the spaces of a public university, or the “commonest of common places” (Eberly, “Quantum Publics”), to foster a greater collective understanding about the issues that my students believed would benefit their peers and enhance the campus.

Regardless of what students achieved in these projects, their final journal reflections attested to the richness of their experience, for they described forging important connections with our community partners that transformed their understanding of LGBTQ issues. Even
though collaborating with some of the organizations may have proven frustrating for some groups, students valued learning about publics they either didn’t know existed or were unfamiliar with prior to taking the course. The course thus fostered spaces in which students grappled with the complexities of queer rhetorical situations and provided them a chance to reflect critically on their evolution as writers invested in the public nature of LGBTQ issues. Writing within these situations, they confronted a unique learning environment that allowed them to explore issues intellectually that weren’t (and still aren’t) typically available at many universities and in ways that were powerfully attuned to their individual needs as sexual citizens.

Considering the richness of our collaborative experience, you can imagine my chagrin, when, as I drafted this article, I discovered that Queer Rhetorics had made it onto one of David Horowitz’s infamous lists of politically reprehensible college courses. Sensationalizing the controversy that erupted when Ward Churchill publicly criticized the United States after 9/11, Horowitz and Jacob Laksin devote an entire chapter of One-Party Classroom to the University of Colorado, arguing that this “case signaled the radicalism infecting the university in Boulder.” Having scoured online syllabi that they viewed as suspect, they conclude that “the university liberal arts faculty offers a disturbing number of courses that are neither academic nor scholarly, but blatantly ideological” (37). I suppose I shouldn’t be surprised that Queer Rhetorics serves as fodder for Horowitz and Laksin’s polemic. Perhaps I should even feel flattered. But it does unnerve me to see them so blatantly misrepresent the course and the valuable lessons that we learned together. It may seem odd to fret over the criticism of someone who critiques a course after selectively reading a few of the books on the syllabus without ever having stepped foot into the classroom. But I do worry, because Horowitz and Laksin equate any sympathetic engagement with queer publics as tantamount to indoctrination, and they fail to see how the focus of Queer Rhetorics was fundamentally rhetorical in very traditional ways. For all its interest in the non-
normative impulses of queerness, the course allied itself with principles of persuasive discourse that have for centuries formed the theoretical foundations of democratic possibilities rather than their foreclosure.

Such vehement accusations to the contrary only reinforce my sense of how much we need to nurture queer perspectives within our universities and between our academic institutions and the LGBTQ publics neighboring our campuses. Our students deserve to learn how to access the worlds that are in the process of being created, especially those that by their very existence presume some form of critical distance from the assumptions about sexuality and gender that structure our social order. Rather than dictate a political program for my students, Queer Rhetorics cultivated an attitude toward politics that eschewed normalizing any discourse about what the public sphere should be, which may be exactly what Horowitz and Laksin fear. If the course exposed them to anything, it gave students the opportunity to grapple with issues of personal relevance and write about them within community-based, public situations, prompting them to reflect regularly and meaningfully on their actions as rhetors and civic agents. What the course’s detractors call “recruitment” is, for many of us, better known as an invitation to education, a publicly oriented curiosity that seeks to understand and expand the world, not limit it.
Works Cited


Serving the Public: Gender, Sexuality, and Race at the Margins

Jill McCracken, University of South Florida St. Petersburg

This article presents an interdisciplinary advanced honors course: Gender, Sexuality, Race, and Marginalized Communities. Through this course and its service-learning applications, students discovered that discourses of gender, sexuality, and race are not simply theoretical—ultimately, they impact people’s lives. I include an explanation of the curriculum and the service-learning applications in my design and facilitation of the course, as well as samples of student work and a partial “showcase” of the student’s final community event. In addition to describing one course in particular, this article aims to explore service-learning in activist, educative, and research formats and the implications for our students, our own research and knowledge, and our communities.

“I knew I had to tell you I was a whore because I intended, from the very first trick I turned, to talk about it in public [...] Maybe, even now, my words make a difference to you. They make a difference to me. I have created a life I can speak about.

Love,
Carol”

Carol Queen from “Dear Mom: A Letter about Whoring”

“We live our lives enveloped in symbols. How we perceive, what we know, what we experience, and how we act are the results of our own symbol use and that of those around us [...] we engage in a process of thinking about symbols, discovering how they work, why they affect
us, and choosing to communicate in particular ways as a result of the options they present.”

Sonja A. Foss in Rhetorical Criticism: Exploration and Practice

“This class has turned me into an activist.”

April Maltz, student

Service-Learning, Rhetorical Analysis, and Community Activism

The above quotation by Carol Queen comes from a reading I gave my students on the first day of our Honor’s Seminar: Gender, Sexuality, Race, and Marginalized Communities. “Dear Mom: A Letter about Whoring” is just that, a letter Carol Queen wrote to her mother after her mother’s death to explain her life as a whore, or sex worker. I chose this piece because I wanted to introduce the theoretical concepts of the class—rhetoric, gender, sexuality, and race, among others—in a way that was practical, lived, and also a bit shocking. This letter serves as the first chapter in Queen’s book Real Live Nude Girl: Chronicles of Sex-Positive Culture where, in her words,

I am showing you the sex-positive world I could only discover after having been ostracized by a pack of scared kids. Once I decided most of what my culture had told me about sex was wrong, I set out on a prolonged walk on the wild side, and by now I’ve walked into more secret places than I ever knew existed.

They are wild and spirit-filled gardens, indeed. (xviii)

Her book introduces the reader into these “wild and spirit-filled gardens;” one of which is working and identifying as a whore. Queen’s lived reality—as she portrays it—is one that is largely marginalized within all strata of U.S. culture. In response to the reading, as well
as throughout the course, I asked my students to rhetorically situate themselves amongst persons who are marginalized in order to better understand how these categories can be used to subordinate and oppress.

One of the most important goals of both my teaching and research is to apply academic knowledge to citizenship—or the communities in which we live. I strive, through the intellectual work of both my teaching and research, to involve and share the knowledge I and my students create with the local, interpersonal, civic, and/or international communities, as applicable. This article presents 1) a description of my work as a teacher, researcher, and activist as a context for this course; and 2) an explanation of the curriculum and the service-learning applications in my design and facilitation of the course. This explanation is interwoven with descriptions and a partial “showcase” of student work that offer examples of the discoveries students made that discourses of gender, sexuality, and race are not simply theoretical—ultimately, they impact people’s lives. In addition to describing one course in particular, this article aims to explore service-learning in activist, educative, and research formats and the implications for our students, our own research and knowledge, and our communities.

My choice to integrate teaching, research, and activism has service-learning at its foundation. As Melody Bowdon and J. Blake Scott explain: “At its core, service-learning is a hands-on approach that uses community service as a vehicle for teaching specific course-based skills and strategies” (1). Service-learning is a way students can take their theories to the street, so to speak, test them, and then design projects in which they are both personally invested and can then be shared with the community at large.

Central to this course are also rhetoric and rhetorical analysis, and I use Sonja A. Foss’s *Rhetorical Criticism* to introduce these concepts to students because she draws attention to symbols and then questions
how these symbols impact how meaning is made. As I included in the above introductory quotation, Foss states:

We live our lives enveloped in symbols. How we perceive, what we know, what we experience, and how we act are the results of our own symbol use and that of those around us [...] we engage in a process of thinking about symbols, discovering how they work, why they affect us, and choosing to communicate in particular ways as a result of the options they present. (3)

Rhetorical analysis is the examination and subsequent co-creation of these symbols for the purposes of communication.

The primary goal of this course is for students to apply rhetorical theory and analysis to the concepts of gender, sexuality, and race, as well as the value systems that accompany these categorizations. The students examined specific marginalized positions and communities in order to make their own arguments about discourse and these marginalized communities. All of their research culminated in projects that focus on the application of theory to specific marginalized communities. Throughout the course, I encouraged my students to think about how their research of an issue relates to the communities in which the project is situated (local, academic, university-wide, special interest, etc.) and how they can then share the knowledge they create with applicable communities.

My expression of service-learning also encourages the students to involve their communities directly in the research, if possible. This strategy guards against a student who may not know a lot about an issue rushing in to tell a community how things “should” be done. Rather, in the best case scenario, the research project should develop from the needs of the community and the community should be directly involved in the creation of the project. (I include examples of this process in the section titled Student Projects: “Bringing Sex, Gender,
and Race to the Globe.”) By incorporating service-learning, or the application of these theories to practical sites, into the curriculum, students can better understand the implications of marginalized statuses in the public sphere. Simultaneously, the presentation of their work within the community requires expertise in their own use of rhetoric, as the students must consider the strategies they use and the effectiveness of their communication with audiences beyond the class.

Setting the Stage
As an assistant professor in the Department of Languages, Literature, and Writing at the University of South Florida St. Petersburg, I define myself as an educator, researcher, and activist. These identities create intersections from which all of my teaching, research, and activism occur. And in order for my research and teaching to be purposeful, it must also contribute to the shared experience of the various communities in which I live. Likewise, in order to be a responsible and effective researcher and teacher, I must be integrated and engaged in the communities in which I am researching. Ultimately, the goal of my research, teaching, and activism is to create knowledge that leads to communities that are active in working toward finding their own solutions, better living conditions for those who exist at the margins of society, social justice, and equality. This goal requires an approach to research that is not for research’s sake alone, but ultimately with and for the communities I research.

My research focuses on the rhetoric of marginalized communities, in particular, that of sex work/trafficking and public policy. It centers on the language surrounding what is commonly referred to as “prostitution” or street sex work, that is, people who exchange sex for money, drugs, or other gain. In addition to focusing on sexuality, race, and gender, through this research site I also analyze values, morals, poverty, and policy. Based on an ethnographic case study, I am currently analyzing representations of street sex workers and their effects on sex workers and society. This analysis reveals the power of
everyday language and its influence on the material conditions of street sex workers’ lives ("Discourse on the Margins").

This partial biography of my academic life begins to mark my own position as an educator and researcher. Because I want to be responsible to the communities that I research, I am active on national and international sex-industry listservs and serve on the boards of sex worker rights organizations. My involvement in these sex-worker led spaces provides a significant source of knowledge, support, and in its own sense, community, in part because researching the sex industry is also marginalized. When I have questions about the sex worker community, my research, or my teaching of these subjects, I can and do go to these listservs and ask questions. I am also called upon by these communities to participate as an educator, researcher, critical thinker, and writer. I am privileged to be an active member in these organizations, and I am proud to be involved in the work that they do.

Community Intersections: Civic. Sex Work. and Academic

Diagram 1: Community Intersections: Civic, Sex Work, and Academic
The academic and activist parts of my life, as well as this course, combine at least three “communities,” although there are more than three and they cannot be differentiated so easily. As a point of reference, I created the “Community Intersections: Civic, Sex Work, and Academic” diagram to help the reader understand how I use this word *community*, to which communities I am referring, as well as how they overlap and divide in my engagements with teaching, research, and activism.

**The Course**
The course description reads:

This course asks students to rhetorically analyze how mainstream and marginalized communities are constructed by focusing on theories and practical applications of gender(s), sexualit(ies), and race(s)/ethnicity(ies). In addition to focusing on historical and contemporary theories related to rhetorical analysis, genders, sexualities, race/ethnicities, and marginalized populations, students will research, analyze, and present practical applications of lived circumstances of these intersections. Students will develop their own theories and terminologies in relationship to assigned texts and reflect on potential practices that arise from those theories. (See Appendix A for more information related to the course description and student learning outcomes.)

When I began planning this course, I struggled with separating the issues into categories of gender, sex, and race because they are so closely intertwined. But in the end, I decided it would be best to provide areas of focus and then create time within the course where the intersections of these categories could be examined more fully. Because my students come from different disciplines and do not necessarily have any exposure to the theories and subject matter of the class, especially those related to rhetorical analysis, I divided the semester into five distinct units:
Within the first unit I created a foundation whereby the students gained the tools through which they could rhetorically analyze the discourse and those theorizing about gender, sexuality, race, and other categories. In addition to rhetorical theories, I also incorporated definitions and theories related to feminism. For example, one extended definition was included early in the semester from Foss, Foss, and Griffen’s “Introduction” to Feminist Rhetorical Theories:

For us, feminism is an important perspective for at least three reasons. It validates values and experiences often associated with women. [...] Feminism also is important because it gives voice to individuals marginalized and devalued by the dominant culture and thus provides a more holistic understanding of the world. [...] Finally, we believe feminism is important because it establishes and legitimates a value system that privileges mutuality, respect, caring, power-with, interconnection, and immanent value. These values stand in direct contrast to those that characterize the dominant culture—hierarchy, competition, domination, alienation, and power-over, for example. (5)

This definition and reading provide the students with a framework through which to view dominant and marginalized cultures by placing the underlying values of each at the forefront.

Both traditional and feminist rhetorical theories such as Kenneth Burke, Lloyd Bitzer, Sonja Foss, Gloria Anzaldúa, and bell hooks provided the backbone for this course. I then moved into readings, films, and practical examples that focused on the core areas of Gender, Sexuality,
and Race,² emphasizing marginalized communities. Readings and theories of oppression, inequality, and privilege were also incorporated so that students would have the tools through which to apply systemic theories to specific applications. Finally, I brought in guest speakers and chose readings that framed the intersections between and among these categories to provide a foundation from which the students could better understand and interrogate their own projects.

In the remainder of this article I highlight student examples that demonstrate their knowledge and application of specific theories to the larger community. See Appendix B for a description of the course assignments.³

Theory Applied to Community: Course Readings and Student Work

In order to reach one of the course goals that students “develop their own theories and terminologies in relationship to assigned texts and reflect on potential practices that arise from those theories,” I used “daily writings” to ask students to restate an author’s argument and then briefly analyze an author or authors in response to a question. For example, in response to a daily writing assignment where I asked the students “How does feminism relate to the other categories we are addressing: Gender, Sexuality, Race, and Marginalized Communities?” April Maltz wrote:

Oppression. The subjugation of minority or weaker subsets of society to the will of those in power. The lines for this power play can be drawn by gender, race, sexuality—any distinguishing characteristic of an individual or a group. Feminism, as defined by Foss, Foss, and Griffin, is a movement against all of these types of oppression. As such, it is relevant to the study of each of these communities, because they are all held under the umbrella of feminist ideals. The belief is that to exclude other marginalized aspects of society is to give less credence to their struggles as a
marginalized community. Additionally, there is crossover between all of these categories: a black person can be a woman, just as a woman can be a black person, just as this black woman can be bisexual, homosexual, or a trans-gender.

Feminism relates both through experience and ideals. All of these communities have suffered, and all strive to thrive. ("Feminism")

One reading that was particularly powerful for students was Anne Fausto-Sterling’s “The Five Sexes: Why Male and Female Are Not Enough” where she argues for at least five categories of sexes rather than the traditional male, female, and intersex, based on the differences that actually occur in human bodies related to XY chromosomes, testes, ovaries, and other male and female characteristics. After reading this article I asked students to respond to the following prompt in their blogs:

Consider the following quotes from Fausto-Sterling “The Five Sexes” and then answer the questions:

“Hermaphrodites have unruly bodies” (118)

“[...] a more sophisticated knowledge of the complexity of sexual systems has led to the repression of such intricacy” (116)

“The treatment of intersexuality in this century provides a clear example of what the French historian Michel Foucault has called biopower: The knowledge developed in biochemistry, embryology, endocrinology, psychology and surgery has enabled physicians to control the very sex of the human body. The multiple contradictions in that kind of power call for some kind of scrutiny” (117-118)

• What does Fausto-Sterling mean by these statements?
• What are the inherent arguments?
• What are the implications?
By asking these questions, I encouraged my students to explain the author’s arguments and then make their own arguments while drawing out the implications of this theory for people’s lives. An excellent example of this process occurred in Natalee Sbrana’s blog response where she writes:

Anne Fausto-Sterling means that medical professionals have, intentionally or not, developed and utilized “biopower” to create solutions for intersexual persons outside of the binary sexes. The inherent argument is that intersexual people will live mean, unloved, frustrated lives if they are bereft of purely male or female purpose. “On the other hand, the same medical accomplishments can be read not as progress but a mode of discipline” (118). The implications are that people who are neither male nor female cannot pursue happiness in an intersexual body - an unconstitutional cause, at the very least!

Please Duly Note:
I like the author’s description of male and female as being a “two-party sexual system” (pg. 114). I think this best describes the political and biological implications that make up cultural sexuality. I like that she re-introduces the medical community as a key player in the realm of sexuality (doctors also play a role in gender assignment, as discussed in an earlier reading by Kate Bornstein).

Critique:
The author takes too casual a utilitarian approach to the intersexual sacrifice towards freeing the bi-polarization of sexuality. I say there is much, much more to that transition than intersexual activism. Sexuality is not purely about sex and reproductive origins, it also encompasses gender and private property (women and children). (“The Five Sexes”)
Within each unit, I also required that the students write a critical essay that establishes and supports a central claim in relationship to the assigned readings. In her critical essay response, Amanda Sliby incorporates Fausto-Sterling into her essay and makes the argument:

Instead of discussing the sexuality of hermaphrodites as “unruly” we should interpret their sexuality as “un-governable” on the same grounds as males or females. This re-definition is a liberating concept because one may view hermaphrodites as self-governing, rather than governed by others, as well as having its own individual needs [...].

Science attempts to explain the unexplainable. Fausto-Sterling’s article argues that our existing scientific terms cannot encompass the complexity of sex and the numerous ways in which people sexually identify. Each sexual discovery, whether personal or scientific, has the ability to transcend previous knowledge; thus, sexuality is alive and growing. The question is, will we allow these discoveries to be accessible, alive and airborne, or will we smother them in the attempt of preserving our own ideals and sexuality? (“Ideas on How and Where We Should Discuss Sexuality”)

Within both of these responses, each student integrates Fausto-Sterling into her own argument and then applies that argument to the communities in which they live. Amanda asks if our discoveries regarding sexuality will be accessible and alive rather than smothered, whereas Natalee critiques this argument while she relates it to people who are intersexual as well as to theories regarding sexuality, gender, and private property.

Two theorists who were particularly useful to students throughout the semester were Tracy E. Ore and Marilyn Frye. Ore encouraged the students to think about difference, inequality, and privilege. In “Constructing Differences” Ore argues:
It is not the differences that are the causes of inequality in our culture. Rather, it is the meanings and values applied to these differences that makes them harmful [...]. A fundamental component in examining constructions of difference and systems of inequality is critical thinking about the social constructs on which systems of inequality rely. This requires us to examine how the social structure has affected our values, attitudes, and behaviors (1-2).

Ore’s argument brings the underlying values, attitudes, and behaviors to the forefront, which enabled students to apply this and other theories to real-world examples because they were able to look more deeply at how these values were exercised in policies, stigma, access to education, and other specific situations.

In Marilyn Frye’s article “Oppression,” she defines this term and then explains it within a context of systemic and cultural forces:

The experience of oppressed people is that the living of one’s life is confined and shaped by forces and barriers which are not accidental or occasional and hence avoidable, but are systematically related to each other in such a way as to catch one between and among them and restrict or penalize motion in any direction. It is the experience of being caged in: all avenues, in every direction, are blocked or booby-trapped.

Cages. Consider a birdcage. If you look very closely at just one wire in the cage, you cannot see the other wires. If your conception of what is before you is determined by this myopic focus, you could look at that one wire, up and down the length of it, and be unable to see why a bird would not just fly around the wire anytime it wanted to go somewhere [...] . It is only when you step back, stop looking at the wires one by one, microscopically, and take a macroscopic view of the whole cage, that you can see why the bird does not go anywhere. (176)
As my student explains in her final seminar paper, “The Intersections of Oppression: A Visual Representation”:

The metaphor of the birdcage calls attention to the fact that many people cannot conceptualize oppression because a microscopic view is taken; not a macroscopic view that enables understanding of how structural violence abets oppression. A macroscopic view involves understanding the categories of oppression from a historical perspective, as well as looking at the intersections of these categories to see how they relate to the individual. (Sbrana 2)

Students used this birdcage metaphor throughout the semester in order to analyze and make sense of the intersections of oppression. Diana Cabili’s midterm exam applies the theoretical arguments of Ore and Frye to her analysis of the Sex Workers Outreach Project web site, which defines itself as “a national social justice network dedicated to the fundamental human rights of sex workers and their communities, focusing on ending violence and stigma through education and advocacy” (“SWOP-USA: Sex Workers Outreach Project”). She writes:

The idea of matrix of domination is comparable to Marilyn Frye’s definition of oppression which illustrates oppression as systematic. Marilyn Frye in “Oppression” defined oppression as a system in which one’s life is confined and shaped by forces and barriers which are not accidental or occasional...[that] are systematically related to each other in such a way as to catch one between and among them and restrict or penalize motion in any direction (p. 176).

As one further looks into the SWOP website, the reader finds a poem by Daisy Anarchy called “Green River Cry”. In the poem, the writer curses the systemic oppression she and her sister faces in their job as sex workers:
We are going to melt their/systems of death-/missile systems/police
departments/their systematic sexism/ their systematic racism/ their Order/
killing us slowly with minimum/wage/or killing us quickly/with bloody
violence.

In this example, we see the system of oppression that both Ore and
Frye illustrated. Sex workers are systematically oppressed. This
oppression is evident by policies of government in which criminal
penalties against sex workers are increased and when “protective”
legislations like the Trafficking Victims Protection Act (TVPA) are
passed.

Furthermore, oppression of sex workers is also validated by the
acceptance of the public to continue to stigmatize the profession;
or more than likely, to accept their lack of education of sex workers
and the sex industry and just believe the “myths.” Systemic
oppression of sex workers are represented in the institution
of the State and Public Policy when the majority’s ideology
becomes public policy. In order for these policies to be enacted,
it is important to know why one group prevails over another.
(“Systemic Inequality of Sex Workers”)

This type of analysis is an example of one of my student learning
outcomes: “Students will analyze and demonstrate their understanding
of the implications of intersections between race, gender, and sexuality
for a specific site of research (marginalized community) that illustrates
the depth and breadth of their knowledge.” In other words, students
will make the theories applicable to people’s lives. Her argument and
stance about sex workers is not necessarily what is most important, but
rather that she understands and can apply these theories to a real-world
organization.

I included readings where authors incorporate theories of gender,
sexuality, and race explicitly with rhetorical analysis. In order to draw
out the intersections between these categories, I asked the students to
position the authors in conversation, explaining how the authors would discuss certain points based on the articles they had read for that day. One example of the sophisticated connections the students made occurs in Charlie Manter’s response to a daily writing assignment where I asked students to:

Choose hooks’ “Representations of Whiteness in the Black Imagination” or Anzaldúa’s “Borderlands/La frontera” or “How to Tame a Wild Tongue” and explain their argument. Then, based on their argument, analyze one of the readings for today (George Lipsitz “The Possessive Investment in Whiteness,” Paul Gilroy “Race Ends Here,” Peggy McIntosh “White Privilege and Male Privilege,” or hooks “Shaping Feminist Theory”). Basically, apply hooks or Anzaldúa’s theory to one of the readings for today—if Anzaldúa or hooks were speaking to one of the authors we read for today, what would they say? How would they relate? How does this reading reflect what the theorist is saying, or contrast with her argument? Use specific examples to support your analysis.

Earlier in the unit we had read hooks and Anzaldúa and had discussed how their arguments are rhetorical because they focus on how language and symbols contribute to how we understand the world and make meaning within it. I include Charlie’s full response to demonstrate his analysis as well as its application. He writes:

In “Representations of Whiteness in the Black Imagination,” bell hooks describes how black people view white people at large. Despite whites imagining themselves as “invisible” to blacks since blacks are “invisible” to them and historically whites have been able to “control the black gaze,” blacks have very vivid imagery associated with whiteness (hooks 168). hooks explains it isn’t merely black being synonymous with goodness and white being synonymous with evil (as the reverse is the case in white minds), but rather blacks associate whiteness with terror, which stems from their existence in a society hostile to them.
Peggy McIntosh’s theory of white privilege fits perfectly with hooks’ theory of whiteness as terrorizing in the black imagination. McIntosh lists some of the unwritten benefits she experiences through no merit of her own, but that she receives anyways because she matches the skin color of the majority of people in her society. Some of these items emphasize why whiteness equals terror in the black imagination. She includes items like her neighbors will be pleasant or neutral to her regardless of where she chooses to live, she can go shopping alone without being followed by a mall detective, and if she gets pulled over she can be sure it’s not because of her race.

The opposite of these claims—the fact that neighbors may be disagreeable to you, that a mall detective may follow you shopping, or that you may be stopped, all purely because of your race—is what inspires this fear of whiteness in blacks (these neighbors, mall detectives, and cops will no doubt most likely be white). The theorists also mesh because of the description of the housing situation. hooks argues that part of the fear stems from the segregation of neighborhoods and that blacks feel the most fear in all white neighborhoods, which turns out to be a common phenomenon because of the discriminatory housing practices McIntosh mentions. (“Tuesday, October 27, 2009”)

By holding the two authors in conversation, Charlie makes connections he might not otherwise make and applies these connections to the world in which he lives.

Another example occurred with one student’s application of Gloria Anzaldúa’s rhetorical theory to her own recent experiences with Facebook. In her article “How to Tame a Wild Tongue” Anzaldúa asks: “How do you tame a wild tongue, train it to be quiet, how do you bridle and saddle it? How do you make it lie down?” (419). In asking these questions, she argues that trying to control one’s language is akin
to robbing one of her identity. In her essay entitled “Language and Identity in Race,” Damaris Escalera argues:

Language is an important part of our everyday lives. A few weeks ago, a friend of mine spoke about her frustrations of individuals not being able to speak English in the United States on her Facebook page. Her statement immediately made me think of how much we actually oppress the Spanish speakers in this country. The Spanish language is the second most-common language in the United States. Gloria Anzaldúa in “How to Tame a Wild Tongue” argues that “ethnic identity is twin skin to linguistic identity.” In this piece, she describes her struggles of being oppressed as a Chicana, the insecurities that she faced and how she fought to keep her “identity”.

After explaining her argument, she concludes her essay with:

Not everyone wants to conform to the “American” ways but they want to celebrate the diversity of each individual. As Anzaldúa states there is no one Chicano language just as there is no one Chicano experience (424). It is important to not be ashamed of one’s identity but to embrace it.

Anzaldúa wrote about the shame Chicano’s feel when listening to their ethnic music or even talking to a fellow Chicano at a party. How did it get to the point where we feel inadequate to carry a conversation with someone because we have a different dialect or carry an accent even in our own culture? Gloria Anzaldúa’s “How to Tame a Wild Tongue” made me excited to recognize and embrace my own culture and language. We should not discriminate their language and accent; we should be inspired by their attempt to keep their individuality.
“Who is to say that robbing a people of its language is less violent than war?”

*Ray Gywn Smith*  
*(qtd. in Anzaldúa)*

This analysis and argument is applied theory, as Damaris applies what she’s reading to the real-world context of Facebook and within her own life as well.

Students brought their own interests to the course through their New Scholarship and Theory Presentations. The Theory Presentation requires each student to present a theory to the class that provides additional information and helps contextualize the readings for that day. A New Scholarship Presentation was also required where the students research and present a scholarly source (published between 2006 and 2009) to the class that focuses on a marginalized community in relationship to gender, sexuality, race/ethnicity, or other area of interest.

One excellent example was Damaris Escalara’s New Scholarship Presentation, “Anne Fausto-Sterling’s ‘The Five Sexes’ and the Biggest Gender/Sex Controversy in Sports History”) where she highlighted the challenges that exist to normative understandings of sex and gender when she contextualized news articles surrounding South African runner, Caster Semenya, and speculations about her gender. Damaris drew on Fausto-Sterling’s “The Five Sexes” as well as her book, *Sexing the Body*, to analyze this recent situation as well as to ask the following questions of her classmates:

Culturally, we recognize two genders.

- Does this eliminate hermaphrodites from competing in sports?
- If not, what category should they compete in?
- Should they be allowed to compete in the category that they relate to?
• Should Caster Semenya be stripped of her gold medal recently won in Berlin?
• Does she have an advantage over her other competitors? Is it relevant?

What ensued were conversations about practical applications of theory. Damaris concluded her discussion by drawing on Fausto-Sterling’s *Sexing the Body* where she argues: “Labeling someone a man or woman is a social decision. We may use scientific knowledge to help us make the decision. But only our beliefs about gender affect what kinds of knowledge scientists produce about sex in the first place” (348). Within this presentation, her questions and the discussion that ensued were practical applications of theory. This presentation stirred much discussion about gender roles, competition, equality, and how individuals struggle with their placement in these marginalized categories.

**Guest Speakers: Interactions and Applications**

“I loved the speakers coming to visit with our class last week. It is definitely different hearing personal stories of marginalization from individuals that have experienced it first hand. The theories that we have been reading about have come to life and it makes the situation real. The speakers’ emotions were most effective. Sitting with them around the conference table, I had no idea about their exact identities. It shows how much we stereotype individuals in these marginalized communities. I loved hearing their stories. I think the interaction was excellent.”

—Damaris Escalera’s “Daily Writing”

In order to support my students’ analysis of the intersections of marginalized categories, I arranged to have guest speakers present to our class. These presentations occurred at the end of the-semester when students were working on their course projects. These speakers were invited for two reasons: First, because a primary focus of the course
is service-learning and practical applications to our civic community, I wanted the students to be able to relate these issues to the local community. Secondly, I believe inviting people from the community into the classroom bridges a gap for both community organizations and students. The students have an opportunity to talk to people who understand these issues as they relate to their particular communities, and the local organizations have an opportunity to gain a perspective on what academics are teaching about these issues—while simultaneously emphasizing that professors value their experiences as equally important to the course readings, lectures, and discussions.

The first event was comprised of a panel from Metro Charities, an organization that works in both St. Petersburg and the Tampa Bay area to educate and provide services to the Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, and Transgender (GLBT) communities. This panel consisted of three people who worked for and contracted with the organization, and they all personally identified as belonging to one of these marginalized groups (two women identify as lesbians and one identifies as a female-to-male transgendered man). One of the panelists was also able to speak to the issues of being marginalized in terms of her race, and how oppression can be exacerbated because of the multiple hierarchies that involve both sexuality and race. After discussing their organization and its work in the local community, they each explained who they are, their own experience with the organization, and what they believe are the major issues for GLBT communities. The panel then took questions from the students. Some of their questions included:

- What kind of outreach does your organization do? What kind of support services do you offer?
- What kind of sexuality education do you offer? Is it offered through the schools, or through other organizations? How does this sexuality education relate to desire, responsibility, sexually transmitted infections, etc.?
- What does it mean to be “too black?” or “too lesbian?”
• What was your experience transitioning from female to male? How did you know that you wanted to be a male? Are you comfortable talking about that?

At one point in the discussion, panelists were asking questions of each other in terms of their own experience about being “out” and “public” regarding how they identified, if they were afraid in specific circumstances, and how their personal lives relate to their work experiences and expertise. Overall, the students and participants valued the interchange, and it was particularly educational and beneficial for the students because they were confronted with people in the community who are directly addressing these issues and marginalized communities.

The second guest speaker, GW Rolle, is the Community Education Coordinator for the Pinellas County Coalition for the Homeless. He is also the Director of the Faces of Homelessness Speakers Bureau. This speaker had been to prison at a young age and earned a degree at Syracuse University as a means of leaving prison while simultaneously earning this degree. Rolle experienced homelessness sporadically since the age of fourteen, and his latest episode of homelessness was a five-year period in St. Petersburg, Florida. While homeless, he became an outspoken advocate for homeless persons’ rights and dignity. He is also the 2009 National Law Center for Homelessness and Poverty’s McKinney Vento Personal Achievement Award winner. I asked Rolle to come to our class because he challenges many of the common perceptions of people who experience homelessness and have been to prison, and he works with the local homeless community and has extensive knowledge and credibility based on his own experiences and those related to his work. Having read articles such as Gregory Mantsios “Class in America—2003,” David Cole’s “No Equal Justice: Race and Class in the American Criminal Justice System,” and Angela Davis’s “Masked Racism: Reflections on the Prison Industrial Complex,” students were able to talk to the speaker about these
theories and how they relate to lived experiences—both personal and based on his employment with a social service organization. Students had discussions about ongoing problems related to homelessness, capitalism and socialism, how other countries confront these problems, and the mental struggles that accompany homelessness. Based on this discussion, one student was motivated to change her course project and work on the *St. Petersburg Homeless Image*, a newspaper Rolle was in the process of creating. This project is explained in more detail in Student Projects: “Bringing Sex, Gender, and Race to the Globe.”

The final guest speakers were representatives from the Coalition of Immokalee Workers (CIW) and the Student/Farmworker Alliance. The CIW is a Community-based organization of mainly Latino, Mayan Indian, and Haitian immigrants working in low-wage jobs throughout the state of Florida. [...] From this basis we fight for, among other things: a fair wage for the work we do, more respect on the part of our bosses and the industries where we work, better and cheaper housing, stronger laws and stronger enforcement against those who would violate workers’ rights, the right to organize on our jobs without fear of retaliation, and an end to indentured servitude in the fields (“About CIW”).

As Amanda Sliby wrote in her blog response:

On Thursday, November 19, a member from the Coalition of Immokalee Workers and a member from the Student/Farmworker Alliance came to our class to discuss human rights for tomato pickers in Florida. The information they shared was eye opening to issues of modern-day slavery on farms across the state. Astoundingly, both people represented very successful organization and resistance against the domination of corporate giants.
To this day, CIW and SFA are working together on campaigning for a code of conduct, written and discussed between the farm workers, corporations and farm owners that include human rights; and just one more cent per pound of tomatoes that they pick. In a video we watched about CIW, someone mentioned that CIW’s campaign against Taco Bell (back in 1998?) was the first instance of ‘paying money back down the supply chain.’ This statement really struck me. (“Guest Speakers—CIW and SFA”)

Members of the Coalition and their allies, or Fair Food activists, were traveling throughout the country to educate and “protest Publix’s [and other grocery stores] refusal to support tomato growers who today are implementing more ethical farm labor practices” (“TOP Stories”). This movement against Publix mirrors those that the CIW has successfully held against such corporations as Taco Bell,© McDonald’s,© Subway,© and Whole Foods.© All of these organizations, after letter campaigns, demonstrations, and boycotts, agreed to pay the workers who pick tomatoes one penny more per pound. Oscar Otzoy, Staff Member of the Coalition of Immokalee Workers, and Meghan Cohorst, National Co-Coordinator of the Student/Farmworker Alliance, educated the class about the issues and then answered their questions. As Charlie Manter wrote in his blog:

I learned a lot from the CIW. They truly demonstrate the power that a small group of people can have when they organize. I also learned that the reason farm workers can’t form unions stems from racism. The Wagner Act, which gives workers the right to organize, excluded domestic workers and farm workers because many of the Southern Democrats that FDR needed to pass his New Deal agenda had black house workers and black tenant farmers and sharecroppers working on their land and didn’t want them unionizing. This is a classic example of the institutional oppression of public policy as outlined by Tracy Ore. The power of the CIW stems from the pathos of their campaign. These people who do
manual labor and end up making less than minimum wage were only asking a giant, nation-wide corporation with millions in profits to pay an extra penny per pound of tomatoes. That seems like nothing, yet these workers were claiming it would drastically improve their standard of living. It’s hard to deny them that penny per pound. Although they were marginalized, they were able to achieve their goal because public opinion was on their side. Marginalized communities are usually marginalized precisely because public opinion isn’t usually with them. ("Tuesday, November 24, 2009")

Because I had invited the guest speakers to visit our class at a time when the students were beginning to work on their course projects, the students could more directly explore the relationships between their projects and the local community. For example, one student wanted to contact the panelists from Metro Charities in order to incorporate examples of people in the community into her construction of a "birdcage" that represented Frye’s argument. In addition to providing resources for the students’ projects, these speakers offered a more broad and detailed understanding of the needs of the communities they represented—which therefore allowed for a greater investment from the students in making their projects applicable to the civic community.

**Student Projects: “Bringing Sex, Gender, and Race to the Globe”**

Central to this course is my requirement that the students create a project that analyzes a particular marginalized community in relationship to the theories we have discussed throughout the semester. The students were also required to create a visual/performance presentation of their course project that they would include in a community event at the end of the semester. The purpose of this presentation is to share the students’ work, analysis, and projects with the general community, thereby providing an audience beyond our class while simultaneously sharing new information with the community. These projects and the final community presentation directly benefit the
students, as well as the community, because the students are invested in their projects, have chosen an issue they know has implications in a specific community, and are often-times working with community members to complete their projects. Therefore the assignment is not one that simply fulfills a requirement or helps them to earn a course grade. Because the projects are shared with the community, the students must consider their audiences and how to present their information most effectively.

The students could choose from several course project options, including:

- a more traditional seminar paper that presented research and their analysis of a marginalized community;
- a collaborative course paper, where the student could work with another class member to develop questions and answers about a particular issue;
- a literature review/annotated bibliography that outlined an issue or area in more depth that could provide the basis for further research in a thesis or another course;
- two to three creative pieces in response to the readings and themes of the class. If this option were chosen, each creative response would be accompanied by a short reflective memo that outlines the thought processes and rationale for the response, or;
- papers appropriate for conference presentations. Based on conference proposals selected by the student, they would represent a substantial research base that would be summarized for a particular audience.

The students titled their community event "Bringing Sex, Gender, and Race to the Globe," as a play on words because it was held at the Globe Coffee Lounge in downtown St. Petersburg. We designed a flier and distributed it on campus and in the downtown community. Because The
Globe Coffee Lounge is located in downtown St. Petersburg, we hoped that the community would be drawn to and attend this event. The pictures that accompany the descriptions of student projects were taken at this final event. Some of their work is also included in this issue, as well as links to their complete essays, hosted on the Reflections website.

An example of direct community involvement in a service-learning project occurred with two students. One example involved the sex worker community and its annual event, the International Day to End Violence Against Sex Workers, which occurs on December 17th. I asked my students if anyone would be interested in working on a project related to this event because of its proximity to the end of the semester in December. I planned to attend the national event in December 2009, and I thought a student might want to create a project or undertake research that could be shared with the larger community. In addition to asking if students were interested in this project, I also sent an email to several sex worker led listservs in which I participate asking if there were any projects that students could work on for this upcoming event. A colleague responded, stating:

I've always been curious about the origins of the “NHI - no human involved” designation which was routinely assigned to murdered prostitutes on official police forms. I believe it originated in the 1940s but I'm not positive. Preliminary research could include state and local police, museums, police unions/legions.

The NHI designation is a shocking and poignant example of the type of extreme marginalization sex workers have faced in our not-so-distance past. If we could locate an actual form, and trace its history, I think it would be a powerful tool for us to use in making people comprehend the depth of the issues sex workers have to face. (Anonymous e-mail correspondence)
Figure 1: "No Humans Involved" poster

Figure 2: "'NHI' Condones Violence Against Prostitutes" poster
I made this information available to my students, and one student chose this issue for her course project. The colleague who suggested the project also served as an “advisor” for the student. This student, Diana Cabili, researched the No Human Involved (NHI) designation and then designed and printed three posters for the International Day to End Violence Against Sex Workers event.

In addition to these posters, Diana also wrote and performed a rap song at the community event that accompanied a presentation of pictures of the women that were killed by the “Green River Killer” or Gary Ridgeway (see McCarthy, Rule, and SWOP-USA), an American serial killer who killed numerous women whom he identified as “prostitutes.” In addition to the posters and her community presentation, Diana wrote an analysis of this NHI designation and how it served to marginalize sex workers, as well as others. Her essay in its entirety, as well as her song, can be found at http://reflectionsjournalonline.org/drupal/node/3. I took her posters with me to the national event, and therefore Diana was able to reach an audience beyond our local community (Cabili “NHI Condones Violence Against Prostitutes”).

Another student chose to work with a community member who was a guest speaker in our course. GW Rolle is the executive director of the St. Petersburg Homeless Image, a newspaper that is written for the local community and is sold by people who are homeless in order to generate income for themselves. Within this project, the student, Damaris, designed the newspaper template, created the first issue, and helped Rolle learn how to use the software program in order to complete future issues. In addition to her layout of the issue, Damaris also wrote journals about her experience working on the paper and analyzed the newspaper articles and the newspaper as a whole, based on the theories we encountered in class. She then wrote a paper that outlined her process, analyzed the articles, and provided suggestions for Rolle and the St. Petersburg Homeless Image that could be incorporated to make their newspaper more effective. She presented
this newspaper at the community presentation, as well as a poster that provided background information about homelessness in St. Petersburg. Damaris plans to continue her work with the newspaper, helping to layout additional issues. The first issue of the *St. Petersburg Homeless Image*, as well as her paper “Changing the ‘Homeless Image’” can be found at http://reflectionsjournalonline.org/drupal/node/3.

One student, Amanda Sliby, examined and compared concepts of feminism across cultures, specifically the United States and Chiapas,

![St. Petersburg Homeless Image newspaper and descriptive poster](image)

Mexico. As she states in her final seminar paper:

> Through in-class discussions, the classroom became the first space outside of my internal pondering, the first “community” […], where I began to interpret feminism. Now, at the end of the semester, I am looking at how different communities define and discuss feminism. Reading about different feminisms helps me to have a broader understanding of what it means to identify as
Joshua Lovelace, in his project "In Whose Best Interest? The Marginalization of Men in the Family Court System," created a personal and political analysis of "gender bias prevalent within the family court system" (5). Another student, Fabiola Lambert, rhetorically analyzed the Child Protection Compact Act of 2009, which seeks to "to protect and rescue children from trafficking by the establishment of Child Protection Compacts between the United States and select, eligible countries with a significant prevalence of trafficking in children" (qtd. in Lambert "Trafficking of Children and the Child Protection Compact Act of 2009" 2). Finally, two student projects drew on Frye’s birdcage metaphor. Their visual representations are included below, as well as an explanation of their cages written in their own words in their accompanying analyses.

The first cage is explained by April Mantz and Charlie Manter’s opening paragraph of their final seminar paper, "The Genesis of Oppression":

What is the origin of oppression? Why do we hear so much about it from some circles, and yet can rarely identify it when it confronts us in our everyday lives? We set out to answer this question within the context of our Honors Seminar, Gender, Sex, Race, and Marginalized Communities. We focused on rhetorically analyzing oppression as it occurs in American society using Kenneth Burke’s rhetorical theory, which states that our reality is represented through the use of symbols and that it is created by the terministic screens through which we view these symbols. We also drew on Tracy Ore and Marilyn Frye’s theories of oppression. Tracy Ore claims that oppression is institutionalized, and that there are five types of institutional oppression: family, media, education, state and public policy, and economy. The institutional
oppression creates the framework for interpersonal and internalized oppression, with interpersonal speaking about actions taken against an individual and internalized referring to the identification with the negative stimuli of the surrounding oppression and absorbing it as self-image even as it is against self-betterment. Frye speaks on these levels of oppression as through a macro and micro lens: when one looks from within the system, one cannot see the bars that hold them, but when one steps away from the institution, the cage becomes clear. In employing these theories, we have created three birdcages each nested within the other, like the matroyshka dolls, commonly referred to as Russian dolls. The arrangement from outermost to innermost is: institutional, interpersonal, and internal. Each cage has its own unique attributes to symbolize visually the nature of its oppression. (1)

The second cage focused most directly on Frye’s metaphor of the birdcage, and as the Natalee Sbrana explains in her final paper “The Intersections of Oppression”:

Figure 4: Front view of “The Genesis of Oppression”
I created a birdcage out of eight collage panels which depicted images of the categories of oppression race, sex, gender, sexuality, and class. As this birdcage was to be presented to the community, I decided to focus on local events to highlight the fact that oppression does not exist "out there, somewhere in the United States," but rather right here, in Florida [...] The primary goal of this project was to illustrate how structural violence services oppression and how those categories that are used to validate violence and oppression result in physical and symbolic violence. A secondary goal was to illustrate how communities can also come together in solidarity to fight for those people who are marginalized. This goal stems from the understanding that we are all marginalized, and we all benefit from the marginalization of people to some degree. (3-5)

All of the students gave a short presentation at the community event where they explained their projects. They then took questions from the audience and were available after the presentation to discuss their
projects. Making this knowledge available to the local community moves their academic engagement into a civic sphere—thereby applying academic knowledge to citizenship.

"This course is actually affecting my life—and I'm not sure I like it!"
About midway into the semester, I arrived a few minutes early to class and heard the students talking about their lives. One student said something to the effect of: "This course is actually affecting my life—it even played a role in my most recent breakup!" We discussed this statement a bit in terms of how he understood gender roles based on our readings and their impact on his own analysis of his interpersonal relationships. "And you can't take it back," he went on. "You can't forget that you've learned all of this stuff." I agreed. You can not take it back. This was the first tangible glimpse that I had of this course's
influence in my students’ lives. I include this final section, in part, at their request. Because I was writing this article during the semester in which the course was occurring, I asked for my students’ feedback on various drafts. Not only did I want them to give me permission to include their work, but I wanted them to evaluate my portrayal of the course to make sure that it corresponded with theirs. Later in the semester, during our first discussion of my article, almost all of the students complained that I had provided an overview of the course and their work, but I hadn’t really emphasized how powerful the course was for them and how much it was affecting their view of the world—how they understand their other courses, their interpersonal relationships, policy decisions, news stories, and their roles in the world around them. They encouraged me to address this oversight—which led to the addition of this section.

As I expressed through the heading of this section, the students felt a lot of frustration throughout the course—much of which I am sure was not shared with me. The course content emphasized inequality and oppression, as well as the privileged roles many of my students inhabit. Some of this frustration was included in their daily writings and critical essays. For example, Amanda Sliby wrote a blog response early in the semester that directly addressed her frustration with others in the course. Entitled “Listen men,” she writes:

I have to admit that I am upset by the declining number of males in our class, which discusses feminism, gender and sexuality. I study feminism because I care about what it means to be a woman in today’s world. I read feminist theories because I want to understand why I have nasty feelings of oppression even though I think I’m not afraid to speak out. […] I speak about feminism because I care about women and I care about myself.

It feels like a blow to my core when a man says, “I like the way things are.” I immediately try to give him the benefit of the doubt
(because I don’t want to become the non-Feminist’s caricature of a
defensive man-hating feminist) by saying that he is just ignorant;
he has no idea what it is like to be woman; he is “a product of his
culture.” But why should I make excuses for him? You shouldn’t
have to be a woman to care about their needs. [...] You don’t have
to be woman to celebrate her.

I’m so frustrated because it feels like no matter how much I care
or how much I write about women’s rights, it doesn’t matter until
men start to identify as feminists along with women. If we want to
live in a society that equally treats two sexes (or four or six sexes
for that matter), man and woman, I think (in the words of Judith
Lorber) “we have to learn to be women and men.” We need to
identify with each other. For men that means thinking about what
kind of person he is by identifying or not identifying as a feminist.

Another student, Josh Lovelace, expressed his frustration with the
course material in his critical essay about race/ethnicity:

I’ll be honest this section has had a profound impact on how I feel.
I can point to notes written in class where I told myself that I’m
not a racist and I gain nothing from being in a society with a group
of upper class white males at the heart of the power complex. But
looking back on those now, I feel foolish at how blind I’ve been.
[...] I’ll admit that at times during these past few weeks I have
been angry and frustrated at what I thought were personal attacks
on my character. It was only after careful analysis that I realized
there is a lot of truth in the theories offered by these authors. Now
it’s up to me to take what I’ve learned and do something positive
with it. (“Racism Essay”)

Their frustration, enthusiasm, and investment in the course stemmed
from its content. The students emphasized this point again and again.
Anyone could talk about gender, race, sexuality, and class—it wasn’t
something they had to have an in-depth knowledge of like "calculus or chemistry." Therefore, the students found themselves talking to their friends and family, educating them in a way, about the subjects we explored in the class. As Charlie Manter wrote in another blog:

First, the course has affected my life because the themes of the class come up all the time in everyday situations and the ideas are accessible to everyone. They’re subjects that are easy to talk about and that everyone has an opinion on. They also make for lively conversation as opposed to denser subjects like chemistry or calculus. The course has also fundamentally altered my perceptions of what things like gender, sexuality, and race are. I’m certainly more tolerant than I was at the beginning of the semester. The concept of rhetorical analysis alone has made me look at everything I read and everything I see in a new light. I end up asking different questions than I used to. Let’s say I’m watching the news—instead of merely analyzing policy prescriptions and criticisms on their face, I look beneath the surface. [...] I’m also constantly looking at the racial makeup of TV casts and looking for the subtler stereotypes and thinking about how my own romantic relationships mirror this idea of patriarchy. (“Tuesday, November 24, 2009”)

Ultimately, I believe the combination of theory, examples, guest speakers, and in particular, the service-learning components of the class helped my students find a way to work through their frustration and discontentment with the theories in order to create projects that they believed made a difference in their community. During the final month of the course, the students analyzed the intersections between these categories based on local organizations, guest speakers, and their own projects. Rhetorical theories and analysis became tools they could use to educate and persuade others—specifically in relationship to these marginalized statuses the students came to care deeply about. Students
were able to incorporate these theories and issues into their lives. They were invested in their own and each others’ projects. They were enthusiastic about the community event and presenting their projects to the community because it allowed them a space through which they could make their own difference in the way marginalized communities are shaped and can be shaped differently.

Ultimately this course changed the way many of the students viewed the world, their course projects, and their own actions in the world. As April Maltz wrote in her blog from which I quoted at the beginning of this article:

This class has regularly been a topic of discussion outside of the classroom between me and my fellow classmates, and me and my friends. It has opened my eyes to the invisible injustices and shed new light on the blatant. I take care to express this knowledge to those who will listen. I have been inspired between this and other classes to begin an Amnesty International student chapter at the USFSP campus. I will be going to the march with the CIW on December sixth, and I recruited one of my good friends to go with me with the phrase, “the more voices, the louder the demands” and “make capitalism work again.” I feel that I am better able to argue against and analyze the systems of oppression that we all encounter so frequently without even noticing, like Tatum’s “smog breathers.” I now find myself seeing seemingly innocuous phrases and concepts in new, more insidious ways—and I want to change it. This class has turned me into an activist. ("Daily Writings – Due November 24")

Applying these theories to people’s lives through service-learning increases students’ passion for the subject and enriches the connections between the academy and the local community. Both the students and the communities in which they live benefit from the theoretical and applied knowledge the students create and share.
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Endnotes

1 First and foremost I want to thank my students for making this class possible. I am honored and impressed by their willingness to engage with theories they knew little about, question their own assumptions and ideologies, and fully participate in the hard work of analysis and practical applications of these theories. Thanks for challenging me, making me a better teacher, and co-creating a class that was unforgettable.

2 Within the “race” category, I included readings about class/socioeconomic status as well. These categories, as well as others, emerged frequently in many of the readings and discussions.

3 I want to thank Morgan Gresham, colleague and friend, for her initial assignment descriptions that I used as a basis for these course assignments. I also want to thank my research assistant, Michael Silva, for his dedication to finding and making sources available for the course.

4 Because my students were writing to complete assignments rather than for publication, I have edited their work for clarification and grammar, but have not changed their content. All of the students in the course granted me permission to edit and use their work in this publication. All of the students are referred to by their real names.

5 This event was generously supported by the Honors Program at the University of South Florida St. Petersburg. Thank you for your intellectual, programmatic, and financial support. Many thanks go to Thomas Smith, the Director of the Honors Program, who supported this class, the students’ projects, and this community event from its inception.

6 We thank Melanie Marquez for publicizing and photographing the community event “Bringing Sex, Gender, and Race to the Globe” for inclusion in this journal issue.
Because allies of sex workers are marginalized and stigmatized as well as those who work in the sex industry, this colleague chose to remain anonymous.
"NHI" condones violence against prostitutes

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For many people, the word "NHI" means nothing more than an acronym. It does not illustrate or symbolize victimization, injustice, marginalization, or a complete disregard of humanity in life and death. "NHI" or No Humans Involved is a designation that was used by police, politicians, and judges when dealing with prostitutes and other marginalized communities. This paper will mainly look at the effects of NHI in regards to women sex workers. NHI is an example of the institutional oppression that Tracey E. Ore's *Maintaining Inequalities: Systems of Oppression and Privilege* addresses. By designating crimes against sex workers as "NHI," police, politicians, and judges are accepting the continued violence against sex workers, and the belief that sex workers are unworthy of human rights. The main problem of society is the clashing of ideologies, defined as a system of beliefs. It is important that for oppression and thus, the oppression of sex workers, to end, ideologies of individuals must be dynamic to ideologies of other individuals. In other words, we need to be able to have our ideology, but still be willing to learn, change, or adapt to those ideologies of others.

Law enforcement agencies ability to discount the importance of crime against prostitutes is illustrative of Marilyn Frye's definition of oppression as systematic. Frye in *Oppression* defined oppression as a system in which
one’s life is confined and shaped by forces and barriers which are not accidental or occasional...[that] are systematically related to each other in such a way as to catch one between and among them and restrict or penalize motion in any direction (p. 176).

The prostitute is oppressed countless times. First, they are considered criminals by the criminalization of prostitution and therefore, are relegated to the “darker” side of life. Second, they encounter degradation by the johns, the pimps, and of course, by the law. The violence is ignored or accepted as “one of life’s harsh realities” (Sisco, in Scholder, 1993, p. 42). Now, with NHI, the prostitute is forgotten once again in her death. When a crime involves a victim who is a prostitute, there is no rush to find the killer. Why should they? Prostitutes are as just criminals as the serial killer. This selective enforcement is evident when a police source told the Sacramento Bee about the deaths of more than 40 women, “a lot of that was because these were ‘misdemeanor murders,’ biker women, and hookers...sometimes we’d call them ‘N [HI] s’ no humans involved” (Wiegand, 1990). The sex worker’s systematic oppression is best summed up in a statement by Judge Gilbert C. Alston, a former Los Angeles Police Officer,

the law did not afford prostitutes protection against rape or sodomy if they had agreed to and were paid for a “lesser” sex act...A woman who goes out on the street and makes a whore out of herself opens herself up to anybody...She steps outside the protection of the law (Arax, in Almodovar, 1999, p. 2).

In analyzing the statement, one sees the systematic oppression against prostitutes not only happening in the streets and precincts, but also in the court of law. The prostitute’s “experience of being caged in” is illustrated by Judge Alston’s
beliefs (Frye, p. 176). On the one hand, they have to deal with police officers and arrest; while on the other, they have to deal with the lack of blindness of Lady Justice. When did society give the power to those whose job is “to serve and protect” to decide whose human or not? To decide who will receive justice or not? To designate a person to be marginalized and forgotten even in death? NHI is a systematic form of oppression that marginalizes prostitutes. In Frye’s words, this is an example of the “double bind” (p. 175). Prostitutes are caught in situations in which options are reduced to a very few, and all solutions exposes one to punishment, censure or deprivation (Frye, 1983). In this instance, the “double bind” is personified when the police officer is also the judge.

The criminalization of prostitution continues to marginalize these women. The ‘double bind’ has essentially been institutionalized in the law regarding prostitutes. On the one hand, sex workers are being raped, brutalized, violated, and murdered. While on the other, laws against prostitutes disables them from receiving the law’s protection and justice from the courts. Due to the nature of their profession, they are instead arrested and charged for prostitution, while the johns and the pimps are left to brutalize another sex worker. This is shown in the number of prostitutes in the US prison and jail system. According to Jody Raphael’s Listening to Olivia, “out of fourteen million arrests in 2000 in the United States,... 53,403 women faced arrest for prostitution and commercialized vice” (2004, p. 142). The prostitutes are punished in many ways even if the fault is on the perpetrator. NHI is another form of punishment that is a double bind; essentially, it punishes the sex worker by not recognizing the crime committed against her even in death.
Ideologies as maintained by the State and Policy

Tracy E. Ore’s *Maintaining Inequalities: Systems of Oppression and Privilege* reveals the presence of the matrix of domination—essentially, the belief that “ideologies that maintain systems of inequalities are built into the rules, policies, and practices of our social institutions” and “these ideologies often depend on one another” (p. 193). NHI illustrates the matrix of domination in which one group’s ideology is reigning over another (sex workers). This matrix of domination is demonstrated during the murder investigations of more than 40 women from 1985-1992 in San Diego. According to Sisco, “the series of killings became referred to routinely as the ‘prostitute murders’ (Sisco, in Scholder, 1993, p. 42). By its label, public perception was skewed to “hinder awareness and outrage” (Sisco, in Scholder, 1993, p. 42). But is it all law enforcement manipulation? Should the media be the only one to blame? Is the public not capable of making decisions? As Ore stated, the matrix of domination gains its strength from ideologies working together to create a system of inequality. In combining the ability to oppress by the media and law enforcement, public perception can definitely be skewed and manipulated. But the public also plays a role in institutionalizing the matrix of domination. The attitude of blaming the victim or accepting that violence and death are occupational hazards for sex workers are institutionalized in the systems of family, education, and religion. As Sisco noted in her article,

we are conditioned to believe that violence and death are known occupational hazards for sex workers, we respond to their demise with apathy or a resigned willingness to blame the victim, to accept the murder of a prostitute as one of life’s harsh realities. At the same time, we are relieved that such brutality could never be visited upon those of us who comply with societal mores (in Scholder, 1993, p. 42).
The above example shows what No Humans Involved does to the prostitute victim who is murdered. NHI essentially “disappears” slain and murdered prostitutes. They are another statistic; another prostitute killed in their line of work. The disappearance is made complete with the lack of public outrage; the public delude themselves from the injustice of NHI by continuing to believe that they will never experience such brutality if they follow society’s standards; by continuing to believe that violence, rape, and murder are all part of being a sex worker.

These competing ideologies between law enforcement and sex workers promote a negative effect in society. Law enforcement beliefs that sex workers are unlawful, immoral, and unworthy of protection have and are being enforced. In contrast, sex workers ideology focuses on basic human rights of protection, nonviolence, and freedom. Kenneth Burke’s *Language as Symbolic Action* identifies these clashing realities as “terministic screens” (p. 1341). Burke argues that terministic screens allows for multiple realities because our choice of terms to describe one reality can be a different reality in the perspective of the listener/audience. According to this definition, the two clashing realities are whether or not the oppression of sex workers is just or unjust. But, who decides the reality that should be followed? In describing Politics and the State as social institutions that contributes to the systematic oppression and inequality of sex workers,

the state acts as a blueprint for how various procedures of the government should be carried out. In maintaining inequality, it acts in the interest of the dominant group or groups in society, reinforcing policies that work in their favor (Ore, p. 204).
Oppression is viewed through the reality of the more dominant group because they are the most listened to; they have the power to enact policies, to clamor for a better position in society, to use their power and oppressed those who are powerless. The state is supposed to try to promote social equality but until it stops listening, and interpreting the oppressive realities of the dominant group into public policy, oppression will continue. It is important that those who are systematically silent are included in the making of the blueprint in society. The first reality sees prostitution as immoral; contributes to the spread of diseases; contributes to the rising divorce rate; and, that it is against Judeo-Christian beliefs (Aronson, 2006). In contrast, the other reality sees oppression from the johns, the pimps, the police, the public; they see lack of shelters to escape to; they experience violence, rape, and death; and, they feel the dehumanization (Aronson, 2006). Which reality prevails? Why is it considered more important than the other? Unfortunately, law enforcement ideology will prevail because they are the rules of society—they are supported by the social institution of politics and the state to continue ignoring the plight of sex workers. The social institutions of Public Policy and State have been given the silent consent by the public to continue to oppress sex workers—by allowing the police to label murdered women NHI because of their status.

This clashing of ideologies does not bode well for society as a whole. As a result of the cover-up and poor police work in the San Diego murders, the public was lead to believe that the murdered women were all prostitutes; therefore, women believed in the false sense of security that if they followed the rules, they would not end up like the murdered women (Sisco, in Scholder, 1993). However, it is important to note that the majority of the women killed were not prostitutes; rather, they were nurses,
homemakers, computer programmers, etc. (Sisco, in Scholder, 1993). Furthermore, the media coverage also did not reveal the fact that most of the victims killed were teenagers under 18 years old (De Santis & Serra, 2000). This clashing of ideologies not only makes the lives of women unsafe, but endangers young girls as well.

The ongoing inequality and oppression of sex workers reveals how unimportant sex workers are to society. Terms like “misdemeanor murders” and NHI “make it clear that those of us who choose, for whatever reason, to engage in commercial sex are no longer considered a part of the human race” (Almodovar, 1999, p. 3). As a community of people, should we just accept the belief that prostitutes are not humans? Burke’s “collective revelation” describes how we distinguish between “actions” of “persons” and the “motions” of “things” (p. 1346). According to Burke, “the difference between a thing and a person is that one merely moves whereas the other acts” (p. 1346). The NHI designation exemplifies society viewing prostitutes as merely things, rather than people. The social institution of State and Policy illustrates this marginalization by deciding what right, or lack thereof, that sex workers receive when crimes are committed against them. Furthermore, the illusion that “laws against prostitution are meant to protect basic human rights and to preserve our (society’s) dignity” implies that prostitutes are not humans whose rights and dignity are worth protecting (Almodovar, 1999, p. 2). This is a reality that sees society’s human rights and dignity to be preserve, and then there’s the worthless ‘Other’ that needs to be destroyed or forgotten for the sake of preserving mainstream society’s human rights and dignity. According to Almodovar, “laws against prostitution serve to brand the prostitute as worthless and inhuman,” therefore, “it is possible to conclude that the deaths of prostitutes are meaningless and thus it is not necessary to expend
the energy to investigate their murders” (1999, p. 3). The truth of this statement is disheartening, especially when one considers the uproar that would occur if the person murdered was a “good-girl” from a middle-class neighborhood.

The Sacramento Bee reveals the bipolarity of law enforcement towards investigating murders of prostitute versus murders of middle-class women. In an unrelated series of murders in San Diego in 1990, five women were murdered—all lived in a quiet, middle-class neighborhood. As a result of these homicides, the largest manhunt in San Diego history took place and the perpetrator was quickly apprehended (Wiegand, 1990; Sisco, in Scholder, 1999). This investigation illustrates selective law enforcing by police. It shows what Almodovar and what NHI does to sex workers. They are considered worthless and not human enough worth protecting or worth investigating crimes committed against them.

**Media Oppression**

In a number of articles I have read, one reason that was given to accept designations of prostitute murders, misdemeanor murders, and NHI was that the police did not have enough funding and time to designate to all murders. This is refuted when a sheriff was quoted saying, “It’s hard to evoke as much empathy for a prostitute as there is for a pretty little college coed” (Sisco, in Scholder, p. 44). The sheriff was responding to the question regarding the delaying tactics in the “prostitute murders” versus the speedy result of the murder of a college coed. Obviously, there is enough resources to create a large manhunt for a speedy resolution of five murdered middle-class women, but there is not enough funding to look for the perpetrator who has killed more than 40 women. I admit that if you see the headlines “College Coed Murdered” and “Middle-class women murdered in a quiet neighborhood” versus the headlines “prostitute murders,” the
The majority of the public would be more concerned of the former group. The media is a form of oppression in society that has the power to exacerbate the problem concerning sex workers. The way the media portrays violence against women is unfair and often underestimates the problem. According to Elizabeth K. Carll,

"By presenting stories of violence against women as separate isolated events, the news media reinforces the idea that the violence was an isolated pathology or deviance. Maintaining this mirage of individual pathology, the news media denies the social roots of violence against women and absolves the larger society of any obligation to end it" (2003, p. 3).

The media's influence is important to whether a crime and the victim is correctly portrayed. According to Sisco, the media coverage of the No Humans Involve project continued to perpetuate the myth that all slain women were prostitutes. The media also referred to the term of NHI as "an old time police term...a bit of folksy nostalgia without contemporary currency" (Sisco, in Scholder, 1993, p.43). The fact that both the media and the police have made light of this term shows the lack of concern for sex workers rights. It also illustrates their lack of knowledge on how such term continues to demean sex workers; and, it implies the ignorance to the violence that these women experienced.

Additionally, as Carll stated, the media's report that violence against women are often portrayed as isolated events strengthens the argument that violence against prostitutes only happen to prostitutes. The police are able to get away with NHI, prostitute murders, and misdemeanor murders because the labeling implies violence against prostitutes are experienced only when one does not follow societal norms (Sisco, in Scholder, 1993). The
combination of the police and the media’s indifference implies to the public not to worry about the murdered women. It continues the conditioning that prostitution includes the risk of not only physical abuse, but also murder. By using the term NHI, the media and police demonstrate to the public that violence and murder against prostitutes happen. NHI takes away the identity of women who just happens to be prostitutes.

**Language as Oppression**
The murder of the women in San Diego went silent because terms like prostitute murders, misdemeanor murders, and NHI were used to describe the victims. Due to our conditioning regarding sex workers, to ignore or to accept the hazards of the industry, we, as a society has allowed the degradation and oppression of women. As Elaine Audet state in *Prostitution: Rights of Women or right to women?* “prostitution constitutes one of the most violent forms of collective oppression of women” (2003). To ignore victims labeled as NHI because they are prostitutes ignores the fact that the victims were women. NHI therefore, not only condones violence against prostitutes but it also overlooks the issue of violence against women. This issue is largely due to society’s use of language. Terms like prostitute murders, misdemeanor murders, and NHI automatically relegates victims into something less than human and not worth investigative time. Why is language important? Why is it effective in marginalizing the sex worker community? Robert Moore describes why language is an important part of our culture. In *Racism in the English Language*, Moore state

Language not only develops in conjunction with a society’s historical, economic and political evolution; it also reflects that society’s attitudes and thinking. Language not only expresses ideas and concepts but actually shapes thoughts (1976, p. 396).
Prostitution is the oldest profession and yet, the language that describes this industry still places the women in a position of less than human. What does this imply about our society who uses NHI to describe crimes against sex workers? Why should we care? It implies that this society has a long way to go in securing women rights and dignity. It also illustrates the ability of language to shape the values of future generations.

The importance of language is its ability to express ideas and shape thoughts and because of this ability language can maintain inequality. Ore’s *Maintaining Inequalities* argues that “the ways in which we use language can maintain the values, roles, norms, and ideologies of the dominant culture” (p. 207). The use of the term NHI shows the dominant cultures ability to decide who is human or not. In this instant, language is being use to maintain inequality against prostitutes. Because it is a tool use to interpret our environment, language creates reality (Ore). In correlating this definition with Kenneth Burke’s terministic screens and the ability of the dominant group to have their reality as the accepted norm, language not only creates reality, it can also define what exists in that reality (Ore). Through language, the dominant group is able to designate who exist. By using NHI, the dominant group is essentially saying prostitutes are not humans, and therefore, do not exist. Or, maybe not completely labeling them as inexisten, but by using terms such as NHI, the dominant group is deciding whose reality is more important. When the No Humans Involve public art project was shown to the community to give voice to the murdered women (“prostitute murders”), language was again use to trivialize their deaths. While the exhibit was open, a police officer wrote a comment in the gallery saying, “he had been trained to disregard the humanity of victims from the “darker side” of life” (Sisco, in Scholder, 1993, p. 43). This shows that when we start labeling a person a slut, a
prostitute, a sex worker, a hooker, and a whore, we begin to form this concept of “they” are different. While differences are good, “it is the meanings and values applied to these differences that makes them harmful” (Ore, p. 1). Sex workers, whose occupation is considered ‘different,’ are considered insignificant to society; thus, NHI is use when crime is committed against them. The language of NHI implies that sex workers don’t exist. The worse of it all is that it also implies these WOMEN don’t exist; that the violence committed against them does not exist.

Language maintains inequality in its ability to pass on culture (our values, beliefs, etc.). According to Ore, language helps children learn about socially constructed differences and meanings to them (Ore). Prostitution is an old occupation with the same bad connotation. NHI is another word that defines our values and beliefs that sex workers are not important. Before I had this Honors class, I learned that prostitutes were unacceptable through my family and my church. I was taught about their differences, their ungodliness, and their sinfulness. NHI is a term that I would have accepted and “prostitute murders” would have caused me to just flip another page of the newspapers. This is my example of language’s ability to pass on to the next generation our values whether they are wrong or right. NHI is a term that if passed on will cause the extinction of these women because it will continue to devalue these women’s worth.

If I would ask random people if they are being oppressed, I would think that most will say no. The word oppression is often believe to be a physical form of oppression—being jailed for one’s belief, being beaten and raped, etc. are the images that comes to mind when describing oppression. As Frye argues, oppression is a systematic process. It is not just the visual and physical violence, but oppression happens through State and
Public polices, by the media, and even through language. NHI or No Humans Involve is an oppressive system that systematically dehumanizes sex workers. In the process, it degrades all women.

**Concluding with a community project**

During my community presentation, the debate over the criminality of prostitutes was brought up by one of the audience. The way I understood his question was that why should they have rights or standing in the law when they are criminals who have committed a crime? Why should there be recognition of their deaths when they are criminals? First of all, should prostitution be criminalized? By criminalizing sex workers, society has essentially put these women between a rock and a hard place. They cannot get protection from the law when they are raped, beaten, and murdered. They also cannot escape the abuse and violence from the johns and the pimps. They are further stigmatized by the public. Who, then, are the criminals here? Whether sex workers chose the profession, whether they like it, hate it, was force into it, should not matter. The fact that sex workers face and experience humiliations, physical and sexual violence, theft, and murder should be reason enough for protection instead of oppression (Audet, 2003). For some reason, the public and the police like oppressing sex workers because they do not address the marginalization that NHI does against sex workers. While in contrast, there is outrage when women (who are not prostitutes) are violated. Are not sex workers women? Are not women, people? NHI should not have withstood the lawfulness process of policies in the start because NHI violates human rights. The debate of whether sex workers are sex workers or prostitutes and whether they can be identified as humans is moot. Whether it’s a sex worker or a prostitute should not matter—that is a woman, who is a person and therefore, a human being with rights.
Furthermore, since when did this country have a perfect law? The Jim Crow Laws were supposed to be perfect laws—good laws—that kept African Americans from going to good schools, riding in the front of the bus, drinking in the same fountain as White people and going to restaurants. These laws were later considered unconstitutional and repealed. Just because a law says that prostitution is criminal does not mean it’s the right law. First of all, by criminalizing prostitution, society is essentially creating an arrest record for these women. This arrest record virtually guarantees that they will not be employed when they do want to leave the sex industry (Almodovar, 1999). Additionally, because sex workers are criminals their voices are essentially silenced. They cannot report rape and brutality for fear of being arrested by police; they cannot escape easily from the johns and pimps; and, they cannot get help from shelters because they are involved in a “criminal” activity (Aronson, 2006). Criminalization of prostitution allows for police to continue labeling sex workers as NHI. This places sex workers in a position of less than human. The silence of society to this injustice further illustrates its acceptance to the marginalization of sex workers. Finally, the debate concerning prostitutes has also divided feminist organizations that are meant to give voice to prostitutes. According to Gregg Aronson, “the goals and solutions sought by the others (feminist organizations) so fundamentally conflict with their own that they have vowed not to cooperate” (2006, p. 1). These feminist organizations are arguing against each other and losing their credibility by criticizing the other’s argument (Aronson, 2006). By their quarrel, they have become another wall for sex workers—they are not helping sex workers by continuing to shout over each other’s voices. What all parties need to realize is oppression of prostitutes is oppression to women. As Almodovar stated, “laws against prostitution are extraneous and do nothing to protect
women. If we want to protect women, we should concentrate on enforcing laws designed to punish offenders truly infringe on a woman's right to choose” (1999, p. 4). The debate is not prostitution versus sex workers because by utilizing these terms, we have labeled these women and forgotten they are people. From the above arguments, it is safe to say that prostitutes are treated as not humans therefore, NHI is very appropriate. But as I said before, are all policies perfect and right? When the policy is about dehumanizing and oppressing a group of human beings then it is not right. Ideologies present in society will often clash. It is important to realize that to start changing the oppression that result from the conflict of beliefs, one must be willing to listen, react, adapt, learn, and sometimes, change one’s belief.

Terms like NHI, prostitute murders and misdemeanor murders silences victims of crime because of their status in society. When the term “prostitute murders” was used to describe the San Diego murders, there was a lack of public outrage. I believe that this silence brought what Lloyd F. Bitzer would describe as a rhetorical situation. According to Bitzer, rhetoric is situational when:

rhetorical discourse comes into existence as a response to a situation, in the sense that an answer comes into existence in response to a question, or a solution in response to a problem (p.5).

The very first NHI No Humans Involved projects seek to give voice to the murdered victims and to show that violence against one woman is violence to all women (Sisco, in Scholder, 1993). NHI project was the first response to the NHI situation. Bitzer also noted that “rhetorical situations mature and decay without giving birth to rhetorical utterance” (p. 4). The fact that I was asked to do this project by the community illustrates that the
situation involving sex worker oppression is still an issue.
This is the answer to the ‘so what?’ question. The community
wanted to hear, and needed to hear and learn of the continuing
marginalization of sex workers. So what? Because people and
their rights matter; that’s what.

In creating my community project, I wanted to give voice to
the murdered women as well. It is my way of answering and
bringing change to the still present situation. These women
were not only silenced by their perpetrator but also by the
law that was and should have protected them. This was a very
difficult project because I found that they were also muted
in mainstream society. Their portrayal by the media and the
labeling by law enforcement made it almost impossible to
learn about the subject. NHI and the other accompanying terms
were like whispers in society. I saw it in blogs, in articles, in
newspapers, and some books but never was NHI mentioned
outright. It was defined, commented on, but most often it was
cited in a large article—a one sentence depiction of a term
that made the deaths of many women insignificant. San Diego
Mayor Maureen O’Connor illustrates the irrelevance of sex
workers when instead of fighting for the murdered women and
correcting police practices, she said, “This is a big city with big
city problems...and one of those problems is that there are a lot
of disturbed, dangerous people on the streets” (Weigand, 1990,
p. 4). The reality is that danger come in many forms—the worst
is the one that blind sides you. Donna Marie Gentile, one of the
40 murdered women, had a point in saying that “the badge is
capable of committing crimes” (Weigand, 1990, p. 2). Gentile
was later found naked, beaten, and strangled with her mouth and
throat stuffed with gravel.
Project End to Violence against Sex Workers

Speech:
Look...Here I am
Standing here, all alone
In the dark, no one cares
Just a shadow
Forgotten, another statistic for you to swallow
Listen to this, another voice
This time it’s not just any noise
But listen now, I’m a person
This is my voice against oppression
An oppression, humanly created
Under the assumption that it was needed

Verse I:
Look at me, standing here
Under the harsh light of your stare
You don’t care, I’m a scare
Just a problem in your mind
(To) set aside, not provide even my need to be alive
Look at me, dying here
Voice silenced, you un-aware
Forgotten under your so called peace
Forced to live a disgrace
But hear me now!
This weakening voice
A plea to you to make a choice
For the better
(I want) a future where I’m more than litter
Pick me up
Stand with me, I ask for you not to flee
Against this violence that rules me
A violence that surrounds
All around me I hear pain, I see death and more sufferin’
Where’s the help? There is nothin’
My human rights (just) forsaken
Refrain:
You are the voice, the one with all the power
Make a change to make a world that’s better
Come with me and understand my world
Before you judge and restrict me with your hold
Verse II:
In the dark, I am nothing
Just a body, all for sale
To a world unaware
Of this scare and disaster
My body’s been rape and been beaten
But you hear none of the screamin’
(You see) in the news, another crime
Violence against my kind
What you see, what you hear
There is no victim due to fear
You see me as not human
Just some flesh for consumption
Do you know NHI?
This special word to poke my eye
No humans involve
As prostitutes we are nothing
I tell you now, I’m somebody
Asking for the right to my body
Do you hear me now?
This ain’t a joke
All I ask is to be understood
To be accepted as I should...be
Now, you see?
Just accept me as me (optional?)
Refrain:
You are the voice, the one with all the power
Make a change to make a world that’s better
Come with me and understand my world
Before you judge and restrict me with your hold

*Bridge:*
I’m begging you
Hear my plea
Don’t you see this misery?
All I ask is for your help
Change inside and then you’ll find
The answer was always in your mind
See me then...
Help me...
Allow me to just be me...

This rap song was a way for me to give voice to the murdered women and the sex workers and prostitutes (women themselves) who are still experiencing the marginalization and degradation for their status in society. Bitzer argued that rhetoric is “a mode of altering reality” and “to produce action or change in the world” (p.4). I wanted my project to continue the discourse of the oppression of sex workers; and, to be a start into changing and adapting one’s ideologies with those surrounding us. Jim W. Corder proposes a solution into changing one’s perception by arguing that,

A necessary correlate of acceptance (of the other’s view) is understanding, an understanding which implies that the listener accepts the views of the speaker without knowing cognitively what will result. Such understanding, in turn, encourages the speaker to explore untried avenues of exchange” (1985, p.24).
This project does not seek in forcing one’s ideologies into others, but to listen and understand to more than one belief system. It is only when we change inside can we have the ability to see the oppression in society—and, the solution into breaking the problem.

Conclusion
The purpose of this rhetorical analysis is to illustrate that NHI and other terms like it are not just merely terms. Whether a term is nostalgic and old, it still has meanings and values that it carries; this message can be good or bad and then the term is learned. NHI is a labeling that results in the continuation of stigma against prostitutes, and essentially condones violence against women. It is important that to change ideologies, we must be able to change our own ideologies—to react, to change and then adapt. This analysis was to reveal how NHI or No Humans Involve is a systematic oppression implicating the police, the justice system, the law and policy, the media, the public, and finally, our culture. Language is important in society and NHI is one term that should not be utilized as an identification of people.
Works Cited


The Intersections of Oppression: A Visual Representation

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Introduction

It is difficult to imagine one’s place within oppression, and even more difficult to picture one’s participation in it. Yet the fact remains that we live in a hierarchical society that creates a steep slope for marginalized communities to climb. Marginalization occurs when an individual or group is considered “outside” the bounds of mainstream society based on differential association from the “norm”, i.e. white, male, rich, and heterosexual.

The categories of marginalization include race, class, sexuality, and gender. These categories are used to assess vulnerable portions of society that are subject to oppression. The feminist scholar Marilyn Frye notes that

“The root of the word “oppression” is the element “press.” The press of the crowd; pressed into military service; to press a pair of pants; printing press; press the button. Presses are used to mold things or flatten them or reduce them in bulk, sometimes to reduce them by squeezing out the gases or liquids in them. Something pressed is something caught between and among forces and barriers which are so related to each other that jointly they restrain, restrict, or prevent the thing’s motion or mobility. Mold. Immobilize. Reduce” (Frye 175).
This understanding of how the word oppression is defined aids in understanding how the concept of oppression applies to marginalized persons. To further understand this application, one must be aware of how "the concept of structural violence is intended to inform the study of the social machinery of oppression" (Farmer 307). Structural violence is "the experience of people who live in poverty or are marginalized by racism, gender inequality, or a noxious mix of all of the above" (Farmer 308). Structural violence must also be understood as being

"structured and structuring. It constricts the agency of its victims. It tightens a physical noose around their necks, and this garroting determines the way in which resources-food, medicine, even affection, are allocated and experienced" (Farmer 315).

Along the same line, Frye describes oppression as being an experience of "living...one's life...confined and shaped by forces and barriers which are not accidental or occasional...but are systematically related to each other in such a way as to catch one between and among them and restrict or penalize motion in any direction" (Frye 760). In this way oppression and structural violence can be viewed as parallel concepts that seek to describe the systemic ways that individual persons are restricted in a given society. Frye uses the visual evocation of a cage to further detail how oppression works:

"Consider a birdcage. If you look very closely at just one wire in the cage, you cannot see the other wires. If your conception of what is before you is determined by this myopic focus, you could look at that one wire, up and down the length of it, and be unable to see why a bird would not just fly around the wire anytime it wanted to go somewhere. [...] It is only when you step back, stop looking at the wires one by one, microscopically, and take a macroscopic view of the whole cage, that you can see why the bird does not go anywhere" (Frye 176).
In other words, the metaphor of the birdcage calls attention to the fact that many people cannot conceptualize oppression because a microscopic view is taken; not a macroscopic view that enables understanding of how structural violence abets oppression. A macroscopic view involves understanding the categories of oppression from a historical perspective, as well as looking at the intersections of these categories to see how they relate to the individual. In conclusion, the experience of oppression is real, and it exists in the form of structural violence.

The Intersections Of Oppression: A Visual Representation
Taking Frye’s metaphor of a birdcage as the means of conveying the systemic nature of oppression, I created a birdcage out of eight collage panels which depicted images of the categories of oppression race, sex, gender, sexuality, and class. As this birdcage was to be presented to the community, I decided to focus on local events to highlight the fact that oppression does not “out there, somewhere in the United States,” but rather right here, in Florida.

To do this, two of the panels illustrated South Florida residents Hope Witsell and Ryan Skipper. Hope Witsell was just thirteen years old when she committed suicide by hanging. She committed suicide because she was a victim of bullying, being called a “slut” and “whore,” among other things, because she had sent a picture of her breasts to her boyfriend via text. The picture got out, and the middle school and neighboring high school all participated in the bullying. This bullying falls under the category of sexism and sexuality. Sexism was involved because Hope was a girl, and was victimized because she was a girl due to the double standard surrounding relationships in American society. Sexuality is involved because she was a young girl trying to express her sexuality amidst a wider culture that promotes pornography and the sexual objectification of young women. Sexuality is also involved because her decision to send pornographic images of herself to her boyfriend is grounded in the wider cultural myth that

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pornography and other sexually symbolic acts are the means by which to “keep a boyfriend.” All of these categories resulted in the violent oppression and stigmatization of a young girl that resulted in her death. Although the death was a suicide, the violent reaction to her individual decision was what swayed the hand that killed her – her own. Because this event happened in a country south of St. Petersburg, Florida, where the community presentation was being presented, Hope Witsell was a heart-wrenching example of how oppression can result in violence in a localized event.

Next to the image of Hope Witsell hanging, was an image contracted from the Internet of two black men who were lynched - their hanging, mutilated bodies surrounded by a crowd of white people. This image, when put next to the image of Hope, served the purpose of illustrating how the physical violence of lynching inflicted on those two black men by the wider (whiter) community of the past is similar to the symbolic violence of suicide inflicted on Hope by the wider community today. Another South Florida incident that occurred in Polk County, Florida (neighbor to Pinellas Country, where St. Petersburg is located) regards the brutal murder of Ryan Skipper.

Ryan Skipper was in his early twenties when he was stabbed to death over twenty times. Two men decided to steal a car, and they targeted Ryan because he was homosexual. The brutality of his murder depicts an anti-gay violence, not just violence related to property theft. Sexuality is the category this violence falls under. Florida, in general, has many structural laws that restrict the homosexual experience of marriage and family. Therefore this anti-gay violent event stems from a wider verification of anti-gay sentiment found in the governing body and the voting population of Florida residents. Gender also plays a role in this violence because homosexuality is popularly understood by the mainstream community as being effeminate – a feminine attribute. In this way violence against homosexuality can also be understood as an offshoot of violence against that which is feminine, or womanly.
The primary goal of this project was to illustrate how structural violence services oppression and how those categories that are used to validate violence and oppression result in physical and symbolic violence. A secondary goal was to illustrate how communities can also come together in solidarity to fight for those people who are marginalized. This goal stems from the understanding that we are all marginalized, and we all benefit from the marginalization of people to some degree. An example of how the wider community benefits can be seen by the formation of the Coalition of Immokalee Farmworkers (CIW). This South Florida group of farmworkers formed at the grassroots level to combat injustice, exploitation, and human slavery that their community was subject to. Class and race play heavily into this coalition because the farmworkers are poor and usually from a race other than Caucasian. Because of this, they are marginalized and exploited. There is a law that decrees that farmworkers and domestic servants cannot form unions. This law is rooted in racism, and dates back to the American days of slavery. To illustrate the fact that farmworkers experience slave conditions I took a painting of slaves doing labor – picking cotton and then the bales of cotton being lifted upon their backs, next to a picture taken from the CIW album that depicts farmworkers picking tomatoes and then the buckets of tomatoes, weighing 32 lbs, being lifted upon their backs. The images were strikingly similar, and so these images were placed next to each other with a caption taken from a magazine that reads “the greediest generation.”

The fact is that human slavery still exists, and by thinking about slavery in terms of black-only or as something that used to occur, there is little popular recognition of the persistence of human slavery today. Florida, in particular, is one of the top three states in the nation that participates in human trafficking. The wider community benefits from these transactions of human flesh and labor by paying a few cents less for tomatoes, or clothing, or other goods. Because of the often economic ends to these kinds of benefits to the wider community, I was sure
to include a quote from the feminist writer Sylvia Plath, reach reads, “And money the sperm fluid of it all.” This quote is significant because it is implicit of patriarchy and the causation and fruition of money surrounding marginalized communities and oppression.

Quotes such as that, and other images of race, sexuality, sex, class, and gender, were all meshed together to illustrate the myriad of ways that these categories can intersect. I chose the creative venue of collage for specific reasons. One is that a collage utilized images readily accessible to the public. These images and words are therefore part of the current trend of symbols that perpetuate racism, sexism, classism, and heteronormativism. Only by putting these images into the context of oppression and structural violence is the viewer made aware of the symbolic meaning of these images. This relates to Frye’s aforementioned message which was to look at systemic oppression macroscopically rather than microscopically.

The images I used of black women, of homosexuals, of sexism, of AIDS, may not appear to be oppressive. Yet when put together, as in a collage, the emerging picture is one of racism, sexism, classism, and other categories of oppression as well as the intersections of oppression (e.g. a black woman). For the viewer, the collage birdcage offered a variety of images and words that they can personally identify with. This is an effort towards making the audience aware of their own experience(s) as an oppressed person. Perhaps it was also enable them to identify some categories that they act as oppressors, too. To give them the incentive to do this kind of analytical thinking, I provided on one of the panels a mirror with the inscription above: “what is your "ism?"” That question is twofold, because it challenges the viewer to ask themselves what “ism” they can be classified under, and also what “isms” they themselves classify others.
Conclusion
In conclusion, the images used for the collage were all used in an effort to explore the categories and intersections of gender, race, sexuality, sex, and class. In doing so, these images were purposive of evoking a response in the audience to create change. Lloyd F. Bitzer defines rhetoric as "a mode of altering reality, not by the direct application of energy to objects, but by the creation of discourse which changes reality through the mediation of thought and action" (Bitzer 4). The visual discourse that occurred between the audience and the collage depicted the American world in which "rhetorical exigencies abound; the world [that] really invites change - change conceived and effected by human agents who quite properly address a mediating audience" (Bitzer 13).

Dr. Paul Farmer makes the argument that

"structural violence now comes with symbolic props far more powerful-indeed, far more convincing-than anything we might serve up to counter them; examples include the discounting of any divergent voice as "unrealistic" or "utopian,"" (Farmer 317).

This is a significant concept because the following argument I am about to make involves an idealistic, and therefore "unrealistic" or "utopian." I am saying that, in solidarity with these communities that are alternative to the mainstream ideologies, in solidarity with the divergent voices from mainstream society, and by using these injustices of oppression suffered by the marginalization of all people within a hierarchical culture as a catalyst for change, change must and will be effected. It is being affected by the CIW, by community organizations such as Metro Charities, an organization that caters to the Lesbian/Gay/Bisexual/Transgender (LGBT) community. And because these organizations are made up of people, because society is made up of people, and because people can serve as mediators of change, then change (for the better) will necessarily follow. Hoping and acting upon
that hope for change is exactly the picture of what the struggle against structural violence and oppression looks like.
Genetic Oppression
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What is the origin of oppression? Why do we hear so much about it from some circles, and yet can rarely identify it when it confronts us in our everyday lives? Charlie Manter and I, April Maltz, set out to answer this question within the context of our Honors Seminar, Gender, Sex, Race, and Marginalized Communities. We focused on rhetorically analyzing oppression as it occurs in American society using Kenneth Burke’s rhetorical theory, which states that our reality is represented through the use of symbols and that it is created by the terministic screens through which we view these symbols and by drawing on Tracy Ore and Marilyn Frye’s theories of oppression. Tracy Ore claims that oppression is institutionalized, and that there are five types of institutional oppression: family, media, education, state and public policy, and economy. The institutional oppression creates the framework for interpersonal and internalized oppression, with interpersonal speaking about actions taken against an individual and internalized referring to the identification with the negative stimuli of the surrounding oppression and absorbing it as self-image even as it is against self-betterment. Frye speaks on these levels of oppression as through a macro and micro lens: when one looks from within the system, one cannot see the bars that hold them, but when one steps away from the institution, the cage becomes clear. In employing these theories, we have created three birdcages each nested within
the other, like the matoyshka dolls, commonly referred to as Russian
dolls. The arrangement from outermost to innermost is: institutional,
interpersonal, and internal. Each cage has its own unique attributes to
symbolize visually the nature of its oppression.

The institutional cage is the outermost. There are five bars, one for
each type of institutional oppression: family, education, media, state
and public policy, and the economy. These bars are constructed from
aluminum foil and duct tape to create the feel of an industrial and
rigid frame. On each of these bars are images representing oppressive
systems based on race, gender, sexuality, and class. These images are
the symbols that Burke talks about, and in this paper we analyze the
affects of these images on their audience.

For the family bar, we have used the following images:

- KKK and child - this image signifies the passing on of values,
including those regarding race, which can have either negative
or positive connotations.
- Traditional gender roles - young children model their parents’
behavior and look to them for appropriate behavior, and when
children are presented with gender-specific tasks, they identify
with the task as being relative to their gender.
- Birds and bees - the family defines the concept of sex
for a child, and this image symbolizes the importance of
this through “the talk” about sex, commonly referred to
as “the birds and the bees.” These talks are by standards
heteronormative.
- Annie - the popular film/play Annie depicts the distinction in
family life of the wealthy and the poor. She is shown both as
a poor orphan and as the adoptee of the millionaire, “Daddy
Warbucks.” This aspect of upbringing defines reality for a
child and affects their values significantly, particularly as to
material objects though many values are learned.
For the education bar, we have used the following images:

- Segregated schools: the situation of segregation in schools creates an us V. them mentality, where the most-often white majority does not experience the culture of the minorities and does not learn the benefits of diversity. Often schools that are predominately a racial minority have worse education and lower economic status, so lower quality tools with which to conduct education.

- Home Ec.- gender-specific classes such as home ec and shop classes foster the concept of gender-appropriate roles.

- Heteronormative sex ed – In school we are given a basic education of sex, and it is always given under the auspices of an overarching heteronormative society. These discussions are often abstinence-only and feature images such as the one displayed, with “male” and “female” euphemisms. They ignore the concept of individual desire and gloss over the fact that there are alternate forms of sexual encounter, or “alternative lifestyles.”

- Memorization V. Critical thinking - big difference in education lies in the difference between poorer public schools and richer private institutions. The poorer class curriculum is based more off of rote memorization and does not involve critical thinking. It is essentially education on how to become a good member of the workforce. In the more affluent schools, there is a stronger emphasis on critical thinking tasks and management or problem-solving skills.

For the media bar, we have used the following images:

- Robert Downey in “black face” – this image speaks strongly of racial irreverence in American culture. The idea of painting a white man to look like a black man is wrong on a number of very foundational levels that we feel do not need further remark.
• Madonna and Britney kissing – it has become a fad for straight women to interact with each other in a sexual manner, i.e. kissing, etc., to “turn on” a watching male. This has lead to the invalidation of the lesbian community, creating an image that it is simply for the pleasure of the man and encouraging the thought that lesbian women can be “changed” by a heterosexual experience.

• iPod with misogynist song: this image is a twofold representation of oppression, both class (by virtue of the iPod being a common status symbol) and gender. Women are frequently devalued in the pop music culture, whether they are booty popping in a music video or being verbally assaulted with negative language like “whore” and “bitch.”

• Paris Hilton – Paris Hilton represents the American obsession with the obscenely wealthy. It is an overarching theme in the media that there are only two classes: “Main Street,” or the middle class, and the wealthy. These images that we are inundated with negate the recognition that there is a class system in the American society, and encourages dehumanization in the portrayal of the poor.

For the state and public policy bar, we have used the following images:

• Hammed Karzai with a turban in a metal detector - racial profiling is encouraged by the actions authorities and subsequently affects the lay public. Knowing that Middle Easterners are profiled by the airline security forces makes it more acceptable.

• Mom in court with kid – gender preference is given to the mother in custody battles, which marginalizes the perception of the father’s capacity to fulfill his role in his child’s life.

• gay marriage - homosexual discrimination in legislation provides a support system for interpersonal oppression

• Crack versus cocaine – the rich get reduced jail time than the poor even if convicted of the exact same crime.
For the economy bar, we have used the following images:

- White hand with money – the white man still holds the majority of the money: think CEOs
- All-male photo of bank CEOs – women still have hurdles to overcome to be truly equal in employment; all-male portrayals of top executives imply that women simply cannot reach the higher echelons of employment.
- Gender appropriate clothing – what you wear matters to where you work, and it is unacceptable in many cases to wear clothing that is not “gender appropriate,” which does not leave room for acceptance of more than the binary concept of a male-female gender classification.
- Tuxedo – “professional attire” excludes those who have not had the luxury to purchase “nice” or many clothes from many occupations.

The interpersonal birdcage is composed of thick rope, representing a very organic type of oppression, as opposed to the industrial, rigid framework of the institutional cage. This cage is meant to show how the institutional discrimination against persons or types of persons foster negative attitudes between people. These negative attitudes are shown through everyday words and jokes that we don’t always think of as oppressive. Statements like “That’s so gay” box the term “gay” into a negative connotation. The culmination of these reinforced negative attitudes is ultimately violent reprisal against the target. No image connotes this more clearly than does a noose, the form of wanton violence amongst humans that has become so entrenched in history. Through this noose comes the head of the internal cage.

The internal cage is composed out of modeling clay for its malleability. A rat ball was sawed in half to create a hemisphere upon which we could build the androgynous figure of human diversity. The clay is swirling patchwork of all the racially-specific color terminologies:
black, brown, red, yellow, and white. All of these terms are slang and euphemisms for particular races. These are all of the slang terms for different races of human that we have all heard. They are swirled to represent that they are interchangeable and that every person, no matter their “color” is affected by these systems of oppression. The internal cage is also intended as a graphic and gruesome portrayal of what happens when our defenses collapse against the oppression we encounter from the institutional and interpersonal standpoint. We become afraid and self-loathing, which is why the figure is shown splayed, ripping itself apart, and vulnerable. A white “bar” is depicted as the backbone of the figure and used as a metaphor for the “backbone of oppression.” This bar enters the back of the figure’s skull and comes out of the figure’s mouth. Visually this represents the suppression of both the intellect and the voice of the marginalized individuals within a society.

So now we know about the structure and the types of oppression. What do we do with this knowledge? Why do we care? By knowing about these often unrecognized forms of oppression, we can know them when we see them, and understand the impact that they have on the community and on people. We can change ourselves and work to change others. We can make progress, removing one birdcage at a time.
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Discovering Feminisms: A Cross-Cultural Analysis for a Deeper Understanding

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Introduction

At the start of my junior year this semester, Professor McCracken asked our class whether or not we identified as feminists. I hesitated before raising my hand. I knew that I wanted to be a feminist but I was afraid that if I was questioned further about what it means to be a feminist, I would not have a worthy answer. Having minimal background in the history and contemporary struggle for women’s rights, I quickly glanced around the classroom to gather a reason why my hand should remain raised. I noticed some hands raised confidently and others at half-mast. Then I noticed the white board displaying the title of our class: Gender, Race, and Sexuality in Marginalized Communities. I really care about these issues, I asserted in my mind, and my classmates must too, if they chose to take this course. Looking into the faces of my peers and inside myself, I felt internal and external respect at the thought of discussing these personal topics; I began to feel reassurance with my fingers spread in the open air. I care about myself and I care about others who want to talk about what it means to be feminist or lesbian or black or homosexual or straight, white and male. Through in-class discussions, the classroom became first space outside of my internal pondering, the first “community” (in this case a community of eight college students and a teacher), where I began to interpret feminism. Now, at the end
of the semester, I am looking at how different communities define and discuss feminism. Reading about different feminisms helps me to have a broader understanding of what it means to identify as “feminist.”

The Rhetorical Process
The process I consciously use to think about feminism is rhetorical analysis. In *Rhetorical Criticism: Exploration and Practice*, Sonja Foss describes several ways in which we use rhetoric. Being new to feminist and rhetorical theory, my processes of researching and writing this paper are largely personal discoveries; thus, I chose to relate rhetoric as “a means of self-discovery and a coming of self-knowledge” (Foss, 5); a “process by which our reality or our world comes into being... [as] a result of communicating about it” (Foss, 6). I don’t hesitate to add that I see self-discovery as a continuous process in feminist and rhetorical theory, no matter how familiar one is with these thought processes. This idea of continuous mental development and change is also at the heart of feminism, “an evolving process that necessarily changes as conditions in the world change” (Foss, Foss, and Griffin, 3); an important idea to keep in mind as we recognize emerging feminisms in different contexts. “How people communicate ideas to particular audiences in a given time and situation” (?, 1), then, is central to understanding feminism cross-culturally.

As laid out in Foss’s article, the first step in rhetorical analysis is “the formulation of a question to ask that relates to rhetorical theory and selection of an artifact that can be investigated in order to provide at least a partial answer to the question” (Foss, 14). My question is: How does reading about indigenous women’s organizing in Chiapas change how I understand feminism? To begin to understand an answer to this question, I researched information on indigenous women who are gaining political power in Chiapas. A bulk of this information is related to women’s movements as a result of the Zapatista up-rising in Mexico.
Foss’s next step in the rhetorical criticism process is the “selection of an artifact that can be investigated in order to provide at least a partial answer to the question” (Foss, 14). The artifact I chose to pay close attention to is the symbolic military violence played out against women in Chiapas. My research consists of recent ethnographies (1994-2009) done in Chiapas, such as those about women’s cooperatives, effects of the Zapatista movement, and the 1997 massacre at the hamlet of Acteal. I will also incorporate articles on indigenous feminism by Native scholars, to understand how “feminist” is palliated by indigenous peoples on a wider scale. The most significant artifacts for this analysis, illuminating my question as to how we see and talk about feminism, are the interjections of accounts by indigenous women who have directly suffered the consequences of bringing feminist values into their particular realities.

The Social, Political, and Economic Background in Mexico

New Year’s Eve, 1993, Mexico City: The Mexican elite were celebrating the election of Harvard-educated Salinas de Gortari, who was portrayed by the North American press as “an enlightened technocrat who would lead Mexico into a new economic era. Salinas de Gortari and the Mexican government chose to pursue the course most favored by foreign debt holders: capitalistic reform” (Collier, 155). The notion of “capitalistic reform” is part of an ideology of progress, which is maintained and enforced by Mexican elites. Capitalistic reform means industrial development and the need for industry laborers, so that Mexico can become a more powerful player in the world economy. Following the suit of becoming a more “developed” nation, Mexican elites adopt ideologies of development and progress from the Western world and incongruently apply them to the realities in Mexico. Mexico’s signing of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) which coincided with the new presidential election of 1994, for example, is a step towards Mexico becoming a more “economically reformed” or “developed” nation. While signing NAFTA is applaudable from above, it affects lives of approximately 1.6 million farm workers
who cannot compete with the cheap price of American corn pushed into Mexico. With no regard to human rights, the timeline of progress is carried out at the expense of those most vulnerable to notions of economic and social “progress”: the indigenous peoples of Mexico.

Indigenous peoples have long been seen as an obstacle to the ideology of progress. Their ways of life, belief system, clothing, rituals, and type of agriculture have all been labeled as “backwards” or just plain ignorant. The notion of progress requires order; or, in other words, a means to control the population. The assumed need for order of communities that have been labeled “backwards” creates a breeding ground for violence. Throughout Mexican history, order has been enforced from above, by the elites, and within, by local bosses—caciques and caudillos—who may be indigenous themselves but choose to support the elite agenda, in order to gain personal benefits.

The indigenous peoples of Mexico are made up of rural communities located primarily in the southern Mexican states of Chiapas, Oaxaca and Yucatan. In traditional communities, people are dependent on their land for physical survival and also have a religious tie to their particular environment. Land as subsistent and spiritual grounding is used by the government as leverage for manipulation—the government uses land to bribe people into joining paramilitary forces and expropriates land in order to remove indigenous people’s autonomy and place them in positions as laborers, peasants or campesinos. During the Mexican Revolution of 1910, Emiliano Zapata emerged as the leader of landless peasants, whose traditional land rights were being taken away. These Zapatistas, as they came to be known, attempted to re-gain autonomy—which meant re-claiming the right to their lands. Emiliano Zapata was assassinated by the government in 1919.

New Year’s Eve, 1993, Mexico City: Against the backdrop of the Mexican elite celebrating more capitalist reform to come, “Sub-Comandante Marcos and the Zapatistas burst onto the scene...they
drew international attention to the plight of those at the losing end of Mexico’s economic globalization, particularly the indigenous groups who were losing both their livelihood and their hopes for self-determination” (Collier, 155). The public re-appearance of the Zapatista movement prioritizes the attainment of land and democracy for indigenous people in Mexico. This fight for indigenous rights is also important because it has created a space for indigenous women to publicly voice their struggles as women. Considering that marginalized peoples voices are silenced or ignored, the negotiation of these types of spaces is vital to their battles against oppression. In other words, although the Zapatista movement didn’t begin with the specific purpose of gender equality, indigenous women were able to use this movement as a jumping off point—they re-directed a ray of the spotlight being shined on indigenous people to familial problems they wanted to address. Many indigenous women “not only demand cultural and political rights for their communities, but signal that the construction of a more just society must begin within the family itself” (Castillo, 40). This argument brings importance to feminists’ fight for gender equality around the world—achieving egalitarian lifestyles should be a foremost battle of social equality because we have individual control of our private living spaces. As Rosalva A. Hernandez Castillo reasons, the analysis of gender and equality is important for understanding structures of domination.

“The public appearance of the Zapatista National Liberation Army (EZLN) in 1994 served as a catalyst in the organization of indigenous women in Mexico. Zapatista women became some of the most important advocates of indigenous women’s rights” (Castillo, 40). The Women’s Revolutionary Law, containing ten articles addressing rights of indigenous women, was written by indigenous Zapatista women along with indigenous women of different language dialects, and was made public on January 1, 1994. Some of the rights addressed in the charter are “the right to political participation and to hold leadership posts within the political system; to a life free of sexual and domestic
violence; to decide how many children they want to have; to a fair wage; to choose a spouse; to an education; and to quality health services” (Castillo, 40-1). This movement of indigenous women within the Zapatista movement has been termed Zapatismo. The emergence of Zapatismo is the outward, political expression of what indigenous women had been discussing and reflecting upon within their communal groups (such as in weaving or other daily tasks) for years.

Emerging Indigenous Feminisms
Prior to the 1990s, literature on indigenous feminists in Mexico is non-existent. This does not mean that issues pertaining to gender inequality did not persist; to speak of “indigenous feminisms” would have simply been unthinkable in prior years. Presently, some indigenous women “have opted to self-identify as feminists. A minority (but very important part) of indigenous women have made women’s rights the principal demand of their organizations” (Castillo, 40).

The emergence of indigenous women’s movements in Mexico in the 1990s coincides with the emergence of indigenous women’s movements throughout Latin America. Indigenous women throughout Latin America unite their struggles to “denounce the economic and racial oppression” (Castillo, 40). The racial discrimination that these women face results from national ideologies to create “white” “citizens.” Their ethnic identity is attempted to be made to disappear through processes such as mestizaje or the “whitening” and transformation of indigenous peoples into national “citizens,” in order to create a hegemonic nation. One form of economic oppression is that land and thus subsistence living are taken and indigenous people are pushed into wage labor.

At the same time as indigenous women unite as a discriminated race, they are working towards specific goals within their organizations and communities, to change traditions with which they are unhappy. Analyzing and critiquing their own culture is part of the reflection
process which also aims to revive important forgotten customs. The “bad” traditions that women from an EZLN base in one particular community want to do away with include drinking, adultery, preventing girls from going to school, denying women their land inheritance, and not planning how many children to have. They say that these traditions “are not ones that the ancestors entrusted them to carry on but practices that [they] came to accept or tolerate over time” (Eber, 149).

The participation of indigenous women in the political sphere of their own communities has challenged traditional roles of power. Within their important role in the Zapatista resistance they are also challenging the hegemonic project of the nation, which aims to dominate them and force them to disappear as a people. Individuals working in the opposite direction—those who support “bad” traditions and those who join government paramilitaries—have not let these women gain autonomy without them paying a high price.

**The Dangers of Political Involvement**

“Legally, the government cannot advance military on the Zapatistas under the terms of the law for dialogue passed by the federal congress in 1995” (Collier, 167). To counter acts of autonomy, the government instead works through paramilitaries. Indigenous men are lured into these paramilitary groups with a sense of camaraderie, a degree of power, and booty like animals and land. These men are vulnerable to military control because they don’t have hopes of ever attaining their own land otherwise plus their indigenous identity has long been illegitimized. The government keeps its hands clean as paramilitaries wreak hell and heinous crimes in indigenous communities.

In many communities, women’s meetings are seen as the result of Zapatista influence. Because of this presumed association, the women’s groups are frequently subjected to paramilitary aggression. The immediate reaction to the foundation of Las Abejas pacifist resistance group was “the gang rape, in December 1992, of three of the wives
of the founding members, one of whom was seven months pregnant. From then until now, violence against women has been the order of the day...The massacre at Acteal was the most violent of these series of aggressions; killing these women was an attempt to destroy a symbol of the Zapatista resistance” (2001: Castillo, 54).

On December 22, 1997, 21 women, 9 men and 13 children, all members of Las Abejas, were murdered at a refugee camp in Acteal. 60 men belonging to the paramilitary group La Mascara Roja, (The Red Mask), carried out the massacre with AK-47s in an all day event. Four of the women killed were pregnant and their fetuses were cut out of their bodies then thrown back and forth on the blades of the murderers’ machetes. “Kill the seed!” they shouted. “This symbolic violence synthesizes the policy of extermination towards these groups—marginalized and excluded from national progress—which has been sustained silently, unnoticed by many” (2001: Castillo, 57).

Claiming Indigenous Feminism
“We as indigenous women argued about whether we should claim feminism as an intellectual space in order to confront gendered and other concerns...feminist consciousness could cause conflict between indigenous men and women...Rather than viewing a Native feminist consciousness as a force that could cause internal conflict or as a white construct, it should be emphasized as furthering an essential goal.” (Ramirez, 23-6)

Renya Ramirez, enrolled member of the Winnebago Tribe of Nebraska and an academic. Teacher of Native American studies at the University of California, Santa Cruz

“And I started to be aware that changing one’s consciousness meant an important step for indigenous women themselves” (Castillo, 40).

Marta, Mixtec woman from the organization, Et Naaxwihiy (The Space We Live In)
“As an anthropologist trained in the Mexican Marxist tradition, I considered feminism to be a bourgeois ideology that “divided the people,” for many years. Women’s specific problems were not considered very different from those of marginalized groups as a whole. It was not until April 1989 when I was confronted with the darkest side of patriarchal violence, that I began to consider the importance of the analysis of gender for understanding structures of domination” (Castillo, 105-6).

Rosalva Aida Hernandez Castillo, anthropologist and a member of a non-governmental organization involved in the fight against sexual and domestic violence towards women. San Cristobal de Las Casas, Chiapas

Situating Myself
I am a twenty year-old, middle-class, white, female, undergraduate Anthropology student from Saint Petersburg, Florida. I am a feminist. How does the indigenous women’s struggle in Chiapas affect how I now understand feminism? The first truth that came to light for me was the amount of social power and security I have within society. I can wear a t-shirt that says “female power!” I can create a women’s activist group at my college campus or I can sign up for women’s studies classes or receive a doctoral degree in the history of women’s movements. I can do any of these things without the thought of death threat crossing my mind. Indigenous women in Chiapas are being killed, raped and maimed for their outward expression of wanting a change—and many do not identify as feminist. To me, this particular fact reinforces my position of privilege, that I fit the racial profile of a citizen of a developed nation. Despite women’s freedom to speak out in the U.S.A. culture, thousands of women are raped every day. Now what does this statistic have to say about the amount of power and security I have?

Rape is symbolically used by military groups in Chiapas to “put women back in their place” and to effeminate men for failing to “protect” their
women. Survivors of the Acteal massacre continue to be threatened by paramilitary groups. “Civil society has the responsibility to pressure these new authorities” (Castillo, 14). Rape. The word alone makes me cringe. I have never been raped but I keep the safety button off my portable can of mace and never walk alone at night. I remember my college’s list of places for women to caution “predators,” including stair wells and parking lots. If I have the freedom to demand that I be treated as an equal gender, how is it that I am still afraid of and vulnerable to male sexual aggression which strips women of that very freedom? Has our civil society taken on the responsibility to pressure rapists? Violence against women does not cease because women are allowed to hold positions of power. Nor does the violence cease because women are white or colored or upper-class or indigenous.

As an indigenous feminist I intend to recover the philosophical principles of my culture and to make them fit into the reality of the twenty-first century. That is to say, to criticize what I don’t like about my culture while proudly accepting that I belong to that culture. Indigenous feminism is to me part of a principle—women develop and make revolution to construct ourselves as independent persons who become a community that can give to others without forgetting about themselves. The philosophical principles that I would recover from my culture are equality, complementarity between men and women, and between men and men and women and women. That part of the Mayan culture currently does not exist, and to state the contrary is to turn a blind eye to the oppression that indigenous women suffer. The complementarity is now only part of history; today there is only inequality, but complementarity and equality can be constructed. I would also recover the double vision, or the idea of the cabawil, the one who can look forward and back, to one side and the other and see the black and white, all at the same time. To recover this referent, as applied to women, implies knowing one’s self with all the sad and terrible things that are part of my reality as a woman.
and to reconstruct myself with all the good things I have. It means to recognize that there are women different than me, that there are ladinas and indigenous women, that there are black, urban and campesina women (Castillo, 38).

*Alma Lopez, Quiche woman, council member of the City of Quetzaltenango, Guatemala*

I noticed that as I read about the struggles of indigenous women, I look for signs of approval that my participation in learning about women’s movements in Chiapas is welcomed, needed, or important. I am sure that a large part of how I identify with and within the situation in Chiapas is shaped by where and how I am approved as a participant. I was deeply moved by Alma Lopez’s insight as an indigenous woman who self-identifies as feminist because her words reached out to me as a woman, despite that I am white. The claiming of “indigenous feminist” and indigenous women fighting for gender equality who do not identify as feminist, have equally made me see the importance of feminism as a shared consciousness. I have learned that it is necessary to couple social inequalities that further marginalize women, such as race, profession, sexuality, etc., with feminism, to remind us that women struggle on very different forefronts—some of which we may be unaware.

I believe that understanding feminism and women’s struggles through a multi-cultural lens deepens our knowledge of what we are all struggling against and brings attention to unseen elements that we should be struggling for. I think one of the elements that hinder our process of creating a feminist consciousness is religious beliefs and the severance of women from their tie to nature. The indigenous women in Chiapas are in a process of resurrecting forgotten egalitarian traditions. Learning from these women’s cultural past, we can envision a future feminism that has broader, stronger roots.

The 45 massacred in Acteal are not buried in a mass grave but a communal plot. “There are no headstones marking the exact spot where
each body lies, nor the names and ages, but nobody fears forgetting. In these latitudes the collective memory is more tenacious than the written word” (Castillo: 2001, 34). “Harvest Time” is written above a wooden cross. In the indigenous Tzotzil language, “wooden cross” translates as “sacred tree.” “It is at the cross that [people leave] harmful things that [they have] come in contact with on the trails, “in the world,” away from [their] people” (Guiteras-Holmes, 294). The cross is related to the earth, and it’s prolongation of her.
Works Cited


Queering Syracuse: Remember When?

Alison Mountz, Syracuse University
Amy Tweedy, Syracuse University

This paper recounts the experiences of co-teaching a community-engaged seminar focused on study of sexuality and space in the city of Syracuse. This geographical focus grounded engagement and provides here a platform from which to address the difficulties of identifying communities organized around diverse, socially-constructed identities. The study of sexuality and space prompts a rethinking of how and whether sexuality operates in the city as a situated series of locations or, rather, a series of identities shaping all spaces. The paper explores a semester-long, student-driven discussion concerning queer as a category in relation to the study of sexuality and community. Through discussion of this scholarship, we engaged students in the ongoing process of figuring out what it meant to locate queer communities and to queer the broader community.

"Thank you for all the nice times. Thank you for all the remember-whens."

Anne-Marie McDonald, The Way the Crow Flies, p7

1: On queer community

This essay offers reflections on our experiences as co-instructors of a community-engaged course taught in the spring semester of 2009 at Syracuse University that explored geographies of sexuality and space, including the relationships between sex and gender, and space and place. “Sexuality and Space: Queering
Syracuse” focused on the ways in which gender identity expressions unfold geographically, always contingent and contextual. Fluid understandings of sexuality prompt us to re-think the sometimes mundane geographies that we take for granted at a variety of scales, including the body, home, city, workplace, and nation-state. As is often the case in community-engaged teaching (e.g., Mountz et al. 2008), both students and instructors invested themselves within and beyond the class in ways that exceeded the reach of course materials, class discussions, and the general expectations of twenty-two undergraduate and graduate students enrolled in a three-credit course. Months after the course ended, remembering has proven an important process as we recall, individually and collaboratively, the moments that taught us as instructors and that both enhanced and problematized connections between sexuality and community engagement.

A grant from Imagining America funded community engagement in the course with support for co-teaching, a public lecture series, and a final student-sponsored event. The course was also highlighted in the LGBT Studies Program and Minor’s thematic focus on sexuality and space. We (Mountz and Tweedy) gave the first lecture, which laid the groundwork for the class and community partners, explaining the design of the course and the larger project of queering Syracuse. The three subsequent lectures were given by prominent scholars in the field of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) studies: Professors David Valentine (Anthropology, University of Minnesota), Judith Halberstam (English, University of Southern California), and Michael Brown (Geography, University of Washington). At the request of community members who wanted to take the course but were unable to do so, we staged open reading groups coinciding with the guest
lectures, engaging community resources and facilities for meeting spaces.¹

The literature on sexuality and space begins with the critical assumption that space is not only gendered, but heteronormative. As Brown et al. suggest, “What we do makes the spaces and places we inhabit, just as the spaces we inhabit provide an active and constitutive context that shapes our actions, interactions and identities” (2007:4). The study of sexuality and space is thus the study of how sexualities are spatialized and how geographies are sexualized. This semantic twist carries implications for two distinct, though related, perspectives. Loosely, on the one hand, there is academic inquiry into the sexualization of particular places and spaces, such as bars, bathrooms, borders, home, and institutions. But the study of sexuality and space is not limited, or even expressly focused on, the study of sexual behavior. The partial integration of queer theory into the literature on gender and sexuality has disrupted ideas predicated on unified categories of gay or lesbian (Browne et al. 2007, Knopp 2007), a turn that has important spatial implications.

Queer theory also complicated our search for queer community. How would we find a community identified, in part, by socially constructed identity categories that disrupted mappable sites, populations, and communities (Brown & Knopp 2008)? Epistemological dilemmas to define and locate the diverse and dispersed communities that we had imagined engaging elicited creative geographical explorations. We began our search by contacting colleagues and friends in LGBT communities who helped us to compile a list of local community leaders and organizations. We sent a letter to each of these people and organizations in January 2009, inviting them to our opening lecture.

¹ Those community members were unable to take the course for a number of reasons. For some, work schedules did not allow, and we realized that the number who were interested would overwhelm a course that was already over-enrolled with undergraduate and graduate students. In the future, we would like to follow in the footsteps of colleagues who have taught open-enrollment courses in the community.
on sexuality and space where we would invite and incite, and attempt to define some of the terms that mattered to us in the design of our lecture series: sexuality, space, queer, and community among them. We wondered if community members, whoever that category referenced, would really be interested in a lecture series given by academics from across the country. Fortunately, they were.

We began our first lecture with over 100 people in the audience. We knew that something exciting had begun, but we had no idea where it was headed or how it would go. We asked the audience to identify queer spaces in Syracuse. They had a lot to say, and tension over the term “queer” emerged quickly. One woman in attendance argued that more senior members of the LGBT community would not like or identify with our use of this term. Another prompted a discussion of the differences between queer space and safe space. As the discussion continued, we realized that some were thinking of these spaces synonymously, and we challenged this coupling.

Meanwhile, a revealing conversation about a neighborhood called “homo hill” emerged. One woman stood up and said that she lived on “homo hill” and named the location. A second stood up and said that she lived on “homo hill,” naming a different location. Finally, a third audience member responded that this was no mystery to decode: “homo hill” was wherever people saw gay folks living. This conversation illuminated the dilemma of locating queer communities, people, and sites.

2: On queer/ing space
As the semester began, we remained conflicted about our use of the term “queer.” Was it necessarily synonymous with the oft-uttered phrase, “Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender?” How would we use this word “queer” in more inclusive ways and still respect the historical roots, particularly given that the term had violent episodes written into its own history and the individual and collective
histories, memories, and bodies of our community. Was queer limited to recognized gay places? Or could queer be used more broadly to disrupt heteronormative places? We introduced our own complicated and ambivalent engagement with the term “queer” to our students on the first day of class, and that introduction engendered a semester-long conversation about language, politics, inclusion, exclusion, and activism surrounding the use of terms like “queer,” “queering,” “heterosexuality,” “LGBT,” and “transgender.” We struggled as a group with a desire for something we could articulate as queer politics and queer community; at the same time, we fought to maintain the very political elusiveness that the term elicits.

In mid-February, during the third class of the semester, a student complained that people seemed to share a lot of personal stories. Before we had a chance to respond ourselves, students’ hands popped up vigorously around the room. It seems they were already engaged in this fight, and eager to explain why. One student exclaimed emotionally that a lot of people had been waiting for a long time for this class to be included in the curriculum. He was invested in the mere existence of the course even before he attended class on the first day. A second student insisted that there was personal information shared because this was a feminist classroom in which positionality mattered. She had observed and invested in our teaching method, one that respected and elicited the inclusion of student experiences of living, working, struggling, and being in various communities.

The complications of queer surfaced again at the end when we received student feedback that we had not amply represented heterosexuality in course content. We remember not really knowing what to do with these comments that came in too late for us to address them or some of the very heteronormative exchanges that they reproduced in papers. We felt frustrated by the tension between a semester-long conversation about the complexity of queer that challenged a direct correlation with one’s individual identity and a class that was designed purposefully to
center LGBT lives. We thought of our discussions on red light districts in the city, prostitution, sadomasochism, and straight experiences in gay bars. Certainly, our aim had never been to imply that being straight was any less complicated than being gay. These multiple perspectives—the impulses to include or exclude personal experience, the desire to claim queer space in university curricula, and the feeling of being left out of that space—illuminate yet again the ongoing struggle within the classroom and the larger project to identify an inclusive collection of people interested and invested in engagement with LGBT communities.

Meanwhile, other people in the community had their own interpretations of the course objectives. In announcing the first public lecture that we would give in late January to introduce the course, lecture series, and main concepts, the Syracuse Post-Standard published its own interpretation. Avoiding use of the term queer altogether, the newspaper instead announced that we would speak "about what it means to be gay in Syracuse" (Post Standard 2009). We wondered if that would have been an easier lecture to prepare.

Within the course, we included an interdisciplinary range of readings that addressed the concept of queer and an array of possibilities on what it means to "queer" space (Binnie 1995, Browne et al. 2007). We included readings to situate a geographical framework that centered the city and vice versa (Amin & Thrift 2002). Throughout the semester, ideas about queering the city were fictionalized (Feinburg 2006), imagined (Valentine 2006), consumed (Binnie 1995), privatized (Duncan 1996), masqueraded (Rose 1996), desired (Rofel 2007), mapped (Brown & Knopp 2008) and globalized (Oswin 2006). Through discussion of this scholarship, we engaged students in the ongoing process of figuring out what it meant to locate queer communities and to queer the broader community. The students were given two fieldwork "writing the city" exercises. The first assignment asked them to visit two sites: one where they felt comfortable and one where they felt uncomfortable. In reading the papers, we were surprised
by the limited number of venues students had selected. These were primarily heterosexual spaces of consumption such as coffee shops and bars. And the students did not necessarily recognize the continuous presence of sexuality, the ways sexuality was represented through physical place, decoration, dress, mannerisms, speech and interactions with those around them.

Several weeks later, the second writing-the-city assignment asked them to visit yet a third site, observe how gender, sex, and sexuality were produced there, and position themselves in that site while recording their spatial observations and affective responses. In reading the second assignment, we were again confused by the descriptions that, while more theoretically nuanced, still did not attend to sexuality in a sustained way. In class, we discussed the papers. One involving a description of a ride on a city bus prompted a particularly important discussion. The student had written thoughtfully about riding the bus to work and sitting next to nurses in uniform, witnessing a fight between a girlfriend and boyfriend, and observing the men sitting on the back of the bus. In his final paragraph, he claimed that sexuality was not visibly present. We engaged students in debate about how sexuality unfolded on the bus and about the ways in which he was—or was not—in fact “queering” the bus. We began to realize we had not done an adequate job of setting the stage for how sexuality presents itself in everyday life; that queer sites in the city need not fly a rainbow flag to claim space. We had spent so much time in those first weeks of class arguing about what it meant to queer the city (and unpacking the historical and political claims to that word) that we had missed some bigger part of the picture. This discussion was a difficult one for the class, and one that would resurface later in discussions of how students could collectively queer the city in their final projects.

These questions remained open throughout the semester both on and off campus. As we worked to design a course and associated events that also queered space in some way, the challenge of connecting the
academy with the local community was reflected in our search for appropriate locations to host events. The locally owned bookstore, run by gay entrepreneurs in Hawley-Green (known locally as a gay neighborhood) was an ideal site for the community reading group, but was not wheelchair accessible. The queer youth organization that also volunteered space was accessible, but occupied a hidden location in order to protect clientele. We would need to reveal their secret location only to those planning to attend the reading group. We struggled alongside students to find community locations that were queer enough for the final event. The process of choosing the location was as important as the final choice as the process illuminated criteria for a queer-friendly space.

The locations and their spatial implications were as important on campus as they were off campus. We worried together over what to wear for the performance of our first lecture, agreeing that suits would be too formal. As we walked our guest lecturers into the imposing Greek auditorium in the Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs where we had moved the lectures in order to accommodate the growing audience, we felt that there was something wrong with this space. The architecture of the auditorium countered both the process of queering community engagement and our interest in destabilizing hierarchies: its formality, the microphone it required, and the stiffer introductions it engendered. We worked within the space of the classroom to engage this conundrum and hoped that students would do the same in their final projects.

Toward the end of the semester, we asked the students in class to write down what the term “queer” meant to each of them. We received a wide array of responses that reflected the students’ own identities and social locations, but also embraced a nuanced respect for difference. In the next class, we asked students to work in small groups to design a typology of meanings of “queer” and to then represent this typology visually on the board. A burst of collective creativity, laughter, and
blushing ensued. (See Figure 1, Diagram of Queer). These responses were incorporated into the final exhibit to highlight the multiplicity of meanings of the term.

3: Queer culminations

In addition to the three-hour, weekly seminar meetings, students collaborated to produce loosely-structured, culminating projects enacted at the end of the semester: planning a queer event, representing a queer city, and compiling a queer local community history. The culminating queer event where projects were presented was the final event of the semester where community members from across and beyond campus were invited to participate and students showcased their final projects. The following week, they installed their projects
for a second time at the Shine student union building on the campus of Syracuse University. There, community members continued to interact with the maps designed to queer the city.

In their final projects, the students responded thoughtfully to many of the arguments we had had throughout the semester about queering and where and how to engage LGBT communities. Each group took up the conversation in different and creative ways. The group that endeavored to map the queer city invited visitors to place pins with different colors onto large maps on moveable cubes in response to questions about where they would locate violence, safe space, consumption, and so on, in the city. (See Figure 2, moveable queer maps).

Figure 2: Moveable Queer Maps
Queering Syracuse

Friday May 1st, 2009
4:00pm-6:00pm
Artrage Gallery
505 Hawley Avenue
Syracuse, NY

Please join us in this community-wide event to celebrate, document, and create a Queer Syracuse. Students from the Space and Sexuality class at SU have archived and mapped a Queer Syracuse, but your involvement is needed. Please bring small artifacts or pictures to add to our living map.

Performance by Keith and Ferasha featuring Down to Funk.

Refreshments will be provided by Sparky Town.

The LGBT Studies Program and Minor, Geography Department, and Imagining America are pleased to sponsor the Sexuality and Space lecture series and Queering Syracuse event with support from Anthropology, Cultural Foundations of Education, Communication and Rhetorical Studies, College of Human Ecology, Women’s and Gender Studies, Sociology, English, the Writing Program, and the LGBT Resource Center.

Figure 3: Postcard Invitation
Another group attempted a queer history of a local Catholic church with a long history of special services for members of the LGBT community. Another group actually planned the queer event where all of these projects came to fruition. They chose Artrage, an art gallery committed to social justice and located in Hawley-Green. They advertised this as *Queering Syracuse*, our culminating event (see Figure 3 postcard invitation). At the event itself, they set up a video camera for testimony where community members were invited to recall the past and imagine the future of LGBT communities and organizing in Syracuse.

Another student group showed a documentary video they made that captured a conversation about “queer” between three students driving back from spending an afternoon at an archive at a neighboring university. The conversation conveyed the circular arguments that flowed through the class on a weekly basis. The video ended with a pair of men’s shoes, worn by one of the women. (See Figure 4, photograph of shoes).

The final event proved queer in many ways. As we were setting up, we had an unexpected visit from middle-school students expecting ArtRage’s publicized exhibition who started interacting with the projects immediately, much to everyone’s delight. Their teacher rambled on nervously to the gallery director while the students contributed gleefully to the maps, marking and writing, “A lesbian was born here,” and “A queer played with her two moms here.”

Figure 4: Photograph of Shoes
While the term queer was controversial and sometimes pulled us apart due to multiple definitions, it is also what pulled us together through events, political projects, and classroom discussions. A few days before the event we became obsessed with obtaining black hats with QUEERING SYRACUSE in white block print. The hats represented a visual display of solidarity and teamwork after a semester of political and intellectual debates. These hats kept one of us up for three nights “straight” worrying first about whether we should get them, next about whether we could get them, and finally, once ordered, whether they would be ready in time. A girlfriend kindly picked them up and delivered them at the final hour.

In the end, it mattered little that we had no universal definition of queer. We had struggled throughout the semester to think about sexuality through a geographical lens that went beyond identity to include and complicate and be complicated by place and space. Queering Syracuse—or any space, for that matter—was not a moment of complete and victorious transformation of heteronormativity, but an open moment of bodies in action with the potential to open up new futures continuously and simultaneously. The students found a way to represent the multiplicity of queer through food, spatial arrangements, activities and activism, multiple historical narratives, diverse people in attendance, multimedia and multi-layered representations, and colored chalk feet traced outside on the sidewalk. As we were packing up, an actual rainbow in the sky rewarded us, reminding us of the contextual, the contingent, the fleeting, the hopeful imbued in queer projects, and reminding us to “remember when.”
Acknowledgements:

We would like to thank Imaging America for generous support of this endeavor, with a special thank you to Director Jan Cohen-Cruz. We also thank Margaret Himley and Andrew London, Co-Directors of LGBT Studies, for their commitment and enthusiasm in all aspects of the course. The experience would not have worked without the students who bravely signed up for the course and committed themselves to fifteen weeks of extra work and discussions that never felt complete. We would like to extend our thanks for the generous participation of community members, including the LGBT Resource Center. We are also grateful for feedback from the editors of Reflections on this paper.

Works Cited


William Burns, Suffolk County Community College

Over the last twenty years, space and place have become increasingly common tropes in composition studies, resonating with the recognition of the social construction of writing and identity. Bridging the divide between composition practice and spatial theory, Rhonda Grego and Nancy Thompson’s *Teaching/Writing in Thirdspaces: The Studio Approach* articulates an “institutionally aware” methodology called the writing studio, one that seeks a “third space” location outside the usual educational and disciplinary binaries. The writing studio is an “alongside” environment where student writers compose, discuss, and critique their work in a non-classroom setting in order to examine how their own positioning inside and outside the academy influences what, how, and why they write. Grego and Thompson’s book brings to composition a much needed awareness of third spaces, a concept borrowed from postmodern geographer and urban planner Edward Soja.

Grego and Thompson’s prologue describes the exigency for their taking a studio approach: in the early 1990’s the South Carolina Commission on Higher Education abolished basic writing at four year state supported colleges and universities. When the University of South Carolina (USC) decided not to offer “remedial” writing courses, Grego and Thompson created alternative resources for student writers entering the university. The studio approach emerged as a way to address student needs: small groups of students along with a staff group facilitator
met frequently to discuss, analyze, and work on assignments. By addressing writing as an interface between local and larger institutional interests, Grego and Thompson’s studio approach brings a heightened awareness of how institutional positioning and power relations define student writing and basic writers. The authors attend closely to the physical layout of the studio: design, body proximities, tools, furniture, technological resources, and equipment. The studio is explained as a “spatialized and spatializing methodology” that offers the potential for institutional change through making power relations and disciplinary expectations explicit, specifically by identifying how and where students and instructors locate themselves and their work.

Chapter One constructs a critical framework for their approach. Calling attention to the influence of institutional geography and material conditions on local and historical experiences, Grego and Thompson identify the ways that institutional and disciplinary rhetorics can disembody and distance both students and instructors from serious engagement with the complex dynamics of everyday work places. The gap between theoretical and pedagogical perspectives and the “real” work done in classrooms and on campuses challenges over-generalized and abstract notions of space and place in the academy. To address this oversight, Grego and Thompson suggest their own “interactional inquiry,” a research method that utilizes small groups, workshops, qualitative strategies, and a feminist ethos to deconstruct traditional research roles and call attention to the specific, complex social relations that instructors and students bring with them to an institutional setting.

Chapter Two continues such institutional critique while introducing the work of Kenneth Burke and cultural geographers Edward Soja and Doreen Massey. Starting with Burke’s pentadic rhetorical analysis of “scene,” the authors establish writing as encompassing many different, overlapping, and conflicting geographies. The studio exists “outside but alongside” the classroom, taking advantage of the tensions and gaps between institutional and everyday experiences, combining internal and external analysis. Grego and Thompson then draw on Soja’s theory of third space, the liminal, in-between places not rigidly
structured by institutional, social, and spatial conventions. The authors imagine the studio as being able to shift across and between disciplinary and institutional areas and boundaries to open up and decentralize student writing. Moreover, because the studio thirddspace is not a typical classroom controlled by curriculum, program of study, or subject matter, it recontextualizes traditional student/teacher power relationships.

Chapters Three and Four move from theoretical discussions to concrete examples, exploring the studio approach in three different institutional settings. Using thick description, writing samples, and quotes from participants, Grego and Thompson identify how student writers and studio staff are positioned within their studios and in their specific institutions’ geographies. Chapter Three examines how student writers in studio groups engaged institutional and spatial awareness to analyze their work and their location, while Chapter Four focuses on the experiences of the studio staff, adding disciplinary positioning to geographies that instructors and graduate students must navigate. These chapters serve as models of interactional inquiry research, a method that seeks not only to discover knowledge to create and map settings and interactions through collaboration, sharing, talking, and storytelling. Even when articulating their methodology the authors include aspects of spatial awareness, describing the physical proximity of researchers and participants sitting together and discussing experiences, albeit often marginalized by their own institutions.

In a powerfully written Epilogue Grego and Thompson trace the personal and professional repercussions of the studio approach, measuring its successes and set-backs on institutional and individual levels. Using personal accounts, the authors highlight the risks inherent in having students and instructors question an educational institution’s power. Ironically, though the studio approach had been adopted by their university, the authors recount how the institution questioned the disciplinary and professional value of interactional inquiry as a valid method of research, denying one of the authors tenure and a position in the hierarchy. Still, Grego and Thompson argue that scholars in
composition should incorporate analyses of space and place, place and material conditions into other modes of rhetorical analysis, s\ldots\ldots ing way to highlight how external, material conditions influence our writing lives.

While *Teaching/Writing in Thirdspaces* does not address community writing or service learning, it is easy to recognize the value that the studio approach could bring to explaining, creating, and sustaining the "alongside," cooperative status of university/community partnerships. Likewise, alt\ldots\ldotshough Grego and Thompson identify the writing center at USC as "centralized" and too removed (institutionally and spatially) from the specific needs of student writers and instructors, the potential for framing the writing center as an "in between" place to achieve third space positioning through the use of\ldots\ldotsh invites interactional inquiry seems promising. By exploring the "flows, forces, and tensions" between everyday, institutional, and disciplinary spaces and places, Grego and Thompson's studio approach offers practical and *material* methods for applying third space concepts in composition.

William H. Thelin, The University of Akron

Making writing meaningful for our students entails, to a great extent, finding a real audience for their ideas. Students, after all, instinctively know they are writing for their instructor, which often turns what should be audience-based decisions into grade-based decisions. The movement toward public writing seems to have considered this need, as real readers not invested in the student earning an “A” enter into the picture. Yet, instructors of writing have struggled to find space for student work outside the classroom, especially for assignments dealing with social or political concerns. Seemingly innovative ideas from years ago—letters-to-the-editor assignments, sharing drafts on electronic bulletin boards, client-based service learning projects, blogging—appeared to have missed the mark in terms of public impact. While dedicated instructors have focused on the New Media and continue to seek ways to have their students’ voices heard, Nancy Welch in *Living Room: Teaching Public Writing in a Privatized World* reminds us of the political limitations put upon citizens in the 21st Century and suggests that any possibility for public success starts with reviewing the history of class and labor struggles.

Highly personal throughout, *Living Room* addresses the deterioration of citizens’ rights, as well as the reduction of space, to speak publicly in a neoliberal world. Welch draws on experience well beyond the classroom, and the book’s application extends to a wider readership than just teachers and students. Welch has analyzed the silence
that neoliberals wish citizens would embrace (although neoliberal rhetoric ironically espouses a commitment to democracy) and sees the constraints the rhetorical and physical acts of politeness impose upon dissenters. In so doing, she raises questions concerning authority. Who authorizes us to speak? How is expertise intertwined with authority? How does authority silence? How is authority seized rather than granted? Throughout is a critique of academia that demonstrates its disconnectedness from effective political action, often through its maintenance of silence.

At her best, Welch uses irony to convey the ridiculousness of situations she confronts. Her early analysis of privacy and privatization comes to life with humorous anecdotes of her family’s insistence on keeping matters private, her quitting her job as a secretary, and her time spent working for the treasurer of a famous senate candidate’s campaign. Each story serves as a catalyst for deeper understanding of the complexities involved in privacy and privacy rights. In the chapter “This Is Not a Rally” she recounts an on-campus, anti-war panel intent on an open and free dialogue on the matter at hand. When a student asks about the qualifications of one of the panelists—the panelist’s right to speak publicly, in other words—he is, himself, silenced by the moderator who invokes the authority of the event organizers to make the decisions on who should speak. Such episodes represent the disjuncture between ideology and actuality and propel readers to ponder the key terms under study: privacy, authority, argument, public, neoliberalism, privatization, and rhetoric.

While Welch has not written a “how-to” volume (she, in fact, advises that not every professor can or should teach courses like the ones she does), certainly her critiques model for instructors the way effective argument unfolds in the public. She rarely leaves behind her classroom, reminding readers throughout of the lessons she has learned from and for her teaching. Yet most of the examples involve extralinguistic and sometimes extralegal activities in order for success to be achieved. In the quest for room to speak and to be heard—to move through the constraints of oppressive notions of privatization—people often have
to abandon the rules of order and decorum. Neoliberalism tacitly encourages students and citizens to leave arguments to experts, that the extent of democratic participation for them begins and ends with elections. Clearly if we are to engage in teaching writing that matters in the public sphere, disruption of the rules that bind us to this message must occur. If nothing else, Welch demonstrates the ineffectiveness of negotiation. Neoliberalism swallows words that seek cooperation in a dialogic process, as power, not logic, dictates outcomes. Welch looks for a rhetorical, perhaps pedagogical, response to the unsustainable conditions of today’s world.

Welch further shows the ineffectiveness of individuals acting alone. Her discussion of her husband’s cancer early in the volume signifies, among other things, the futility of informed, rhetorical, but nonetheless individualized appeals against systemic deafness. Her valiant student being detained by a police officer after posting her protest poem on a metal utility box reminds readers of the risk of asking students to go public individually. The successes documented in Living Room involve people working collectively. Whether it’s Welch documenting war protesters confronting and overcoming police barriers, or her review of the labor struggles of the black auto workers organizing the Dodge Revolutionary Union Movement in 1968, or her account of the construction of tent cities by students protesting its university’s policies on livable wage, the necessity of people working collectively comes through explicitly and implicitly.

With these rich examples of rhetoric and action united, Living Room ultimately must make an instructor of writing wonder what the goals of her or his classroom should be. If public argument works through collectivism and often extralinguistic, extralegal actions, teaching a form of writing that privileges the aesthetic of solitary writers’ use of evidence and logic and their ability to be clear, concise, correct, and decorous seems plain silly. Why teach a form of argument that does not work when applied to the public world? Welch does not give answers, necessarily, but her ability to tie together seemingly disparate events into a united theory of public argument points the field of
writing studies in a progressive direction that will allow practitioners to theorize for themselves ways to teach students awareness of the dearth of public space in which they can be heard and the many ways to transgress constraints on their ideas.
Appendix A

Here are the major writing assignments, sequenced from English 101-103, that Jonathan developed for his service-learning course on HIV and AIDS.

Major Writing Assignment Sequence

All students, throughout the sequence, will be required to keep a journal, which will contain responses (usually provoked by prompts) about specific course readings, speakers, discussions, or issues. In addition, all writing will be undertaken with potential Web publication in mind; indeed, throughout the course, students will be focused on (1) thinking about service-learning experiences and potential projects and (2) assisting in the development of the *YOUth & AIDS* Website. And finally, each course will require students to write capstone reflection essays, in which they discuss and examine (albeit briefly) how their various experiences of service learning have furthered the development of both their writing skills and their individual styles as writers.

**English 101**

**First:** Compose a pamphlet, directed at a particular and specified audience, detailing the dangers of AIDS/HIV, as well as steps to
prevent catching it or transmitting it to others. You may (and probably should) include graphics (but no one more than two that fill half a page), and the entire pamphlet should fill six “thirds” of a folded piece of 8.5 x 11 sheet of paper, including cover page. When you submit your pamphlet to me for appraisal, include a two page, typed (in either a 10 or 12 point, legible black font), double-spaced meta-essay, in which you discuss the writerly and readerly choices you made in constructing your pamphlet. In other words, how have you addressed the needs, concerns, and issues of a particular audience? How have you included research in an accessible and usable manner? How have you effectively used visual rhetoric in your pamphlet? How have you established your own credibility as a source of information? And, finally, what values or assumptions does your pamphlet “safely” make?

REMEMBER: Your work on this pamphlet will be used in selected University College “Orientation to Learning” courses; so, consider your audience carefully!

Second: Choose from one of the following (either assignment should result in the production of a piece of writing about 5 typed pages in length, double-spaced):

A. Art (writing, music, drawing, etc.) about AIDS is often simultaneously moving and provocative—aesthetic and political. Choose one piece of art about AIDS and write an “appreciation” of the piece, in which you discuss how the artist addresses the impact of AIDS as a social, cultural, or even political issues. Back up your discussion with detailed and clearly thought-out reasons.

B. Compose a lesson plan in which you creatively and substantively describe how a teacher can prepare and deliver a half-hour lesson about AIDS and HIV. The teacher will be addressing new college students, roughly 18-20 years in age, from Cincinnati. What would you have the teacher tell them? And how? Remember to think
in terms of developing some creative, interactive exercises that will convey important information about AIDS in an interesting and engaging way. Rhetorically, your task is to explain how you would proceed with this lesson clearly and specifically. Back up your discussion of the lesson with detailed and clearly thought-out reasons.

C. Compose a letter to the Webmaster of YOUth & AIDS telling either him or her what you would like to see added to the site. You should develop an interesting, engaging idea that will appeal to the target audience of the site—as well as reveal that you know what that target audience is! You might offer advice about a substantial improvement, or you might suggest an entirely new set of pages. Regardless, remember to be specific in proposing one substantive addition to the site. Back up your choice with detailed and clearly thought-out reasons.

REMEMBER: Your work on these assignments will be used in selected University College “Orientation to Learning” courses; so, consider your audience carefully!

Third: Compose a profile of a local agency that works with issues surrounding AIDS and HIV. (The number of such agencies is fairly large, so you shouldn’t have trouble finding one. Consult with me if you run into difficulties.) Your profile should include information that you gather about the agency from the Web, pamphlets, local and/or national resource guides, and at least one interview with a staff member. Ultimately, your profile should fulfill two functions: (1) Your profile should also be presented in such a way that demonstrates that you relaying the material you’ve gathered to an audience that is interested in knowing more about the agency in question. As such, you should anticipate the kinds of questions that your readers might have about the agency, as well as what kinds of information your readers will need to know. And finally, you might also provide your readers with
some of your own impressions of the agency, such as brief evaluations of the agency’s friendliness, accessibility, and overall demeanor. (2) Your profile must answer the question, why does such an agency exist? Keep in mind that this question may have both multiple and speculative answers. Consider each carefully. **Your profile, which may be selected for publication on the YOUth & AIDS Website, will be peer-edited.**

**English 102**

**First:** Abstinence-only sex education is becoming a popular agenda item among some politicians and legislators. At the same time, many others criticize this approach from a variety of perspectives. Your job in this paper (about 4-6 typed pages, double-spaced) is to locate an argument either for or against abstinence-only education, summarize it, and *critique* it. Your critique should take advantage of what you have learned in this class about logical fallacies. In the process of critiquing, work toward your own position on abstinence-only education. **Your essay, which may be selected for publication on the YOUth & AIDS Website, will be peer-edited.**

**Second:** Compose a substantive letter (5 typed pages, double spaced), addressed to the community agency you wish to serve, detailing both your understanding of that agency’s mission *and* what qualities you feel you would bring to that agency. Consider your audience! HINT: Think of this letter in terms of the rhetoric of argument we have been discussing in class…

**Third:** Write a substantive evaluation of a Website that deals with AIDS or HIV. You should think in terms of the rhetoric of argument that we have been discussing in class, consider who might disagree with your evaluation, and how you would respond to those critics. Think also about the possibility of sending your critique to the Webmaster or Webmistress of the site you critique—and think about how the possibility of sending your critique should effect your tone and
writing style. To make your critique substantive, you will want to site outside sources about AIDS and HIV, as well as make comparisons to other sites dealing with the disease. Your critique should be between 5-7 typed, double-spaced pages. **Your work on this evaluation will be peer-edited and may help us develop a “link list” for the YOUth & AIDS Website.**

**English 103**

**First:** Using your collected reflection journals (which should span three quarters, if students have been following the sequence since 101), as well as your communication with and investigation of a community agency that you will soon serve, compose a reflective essay in which you describe, discuss, and analyze what you *anticipate* your upcoming service-learning experience will be like. Some questions to consider (do not simply use these to organize your essay; rather, use them to brainstorm): What do you expect to happen? What do you expect to learn? How can you tell? What has been unexpected or even provocative so far in your experience of talking critically about AIDS in these courses? What has surprised you? What do you anticipate might surprise you during your service-learning experience? Your essay should be about 5 pages, double-spaced.

**Second:** Choose from one of the following:

**A.** Using your collected reflection journals, information from research, your experience with service-learning, and any other sources you can think of, compose an essay (of approximately 10-12 pages, double-spaced) in which you critically examine *one* particular social, cultural, or political dimension of the AIDS crisis. Successful essays will combine textual sources, online sources, and field research (including your experience of service learning) to articulate both awareness of and a critical position toward one way in which AIDS
B. Working with your supervisor at the agency you have chosen, compose a substantive, researched document that will be beneficial for the agency you are working with. Such documents could include portions of grant proposals, text for pamphlets, internal documents, or other useful writing for the agency. You must also demonstrate, in a meta-writing essay, how this writing is productive for your chosen agency, and you should secure a short letter of support for your work from a member of the agency.

Your essay, which may be selected for publication on the *YOUth & AIDS* Website, will be peer-edited.
In *Literacy, Sexuality, Pedagogy*, Alexander argues for the development of students' "sexual literacy." Such a literacy is not concerned with developing fluency with sexuality as a "hot" topic, but with understanding the connectedness of sexuality and literacy in Western culture.

An important new resource for WPA preparation courses in rhetoric and composition PhD programs. In *Going Public*, Rose and Weiser moderate a discussion of the role of the writing program vis-a-vis the engagement movement, the service learning movement, and current interest in public discourse/civic rhetoric among scholars.
Sheridan-Rabideau tells the fascinating but sadly all too common story of the rise and demise of a feminist organization for girls ... The book contextualizes the emergence of this feminist organization within 1990s girl culture and poses a challenge to feminism's image for both a new generation and to potential funding agencies in a time and context hostile to feminism."

— CHOICE

“This is a bright, readable, passionate, and highly authoritative book.”

— Deborah Brandt, author of Literacy in American Lives