

WRITING QUEERLY: HOW TRANS PERSPECTIVES
CAN BENEFIT WRITING CENTERS

by

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A thesis submitted to the Graduate Council of
Texas State University in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts
with a Major in Rhetoric and Composition
May 2020

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DEDICATION

To all the trannies, ladyboys, and those who don't *fit*. We imagine the future.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I want to express a profound amount of gratitude to my thesis chair, Dr. Nancy Wilson, who provided me endless support and a good kick in the pants when I needed it the most. From the late-night phone calls to the piles of books you've so generously lent, this project has been the most challenging pursuit of my academic career, and all the while, you listened to me and assured me that my work was valuable, that *I* was valuable. Without your direction, I would not have been able to be the scholar I am today.

I am also thankful for the assistance I've received from the additional members of my thesis committee, Dr. Deborah Balzhiser and Dr. Rebecca Jackson. I want to thank Dr. Balzhiser, specifically, for introducing me to writing center work as an undergrad tutor and giving me the opportunity to continue to work in the center as a grad student. I would also like to thank Dr. Jackson for encouraging me to submit a presentation proposal for the 2019 NCPTW-IWCA conference, the presentation which eventually inspired the topic of this thesis. You have each instilled within me a passion for writing center work that would have otherwise been left unknown to me.

Last, I would like to express my gratitude for the support from my mom, brother, and sisters. You've given me support when needed, and I would not have gotten to this point without you. Most importantly, I want to thank my girlfriend, Kayla. My long days and nights spent huddled over books and behind the screen surely weren't easy, and I am forever grateful for your unending support and love throughout this process.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	v
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS.....	viii
CHAPTER	
I. LAYING THE GROUNDWORK.....	1
Introduction.....	1
Organization of Thesis.....	5
Literature Review.....	6
Gender and the Writing Center	6
Interruption/Disruption/Liminality.....	11
Research Questions.....	15
Research Design.....	16
Limitations	17
Conclusion	17
II. BROADENING THE DEFINITION OF WOMEN	20
Feminist Theories: What is Woman?.....	22
The Political and Educational Rights of Women.....	22
The Social Rights and Expectations of Women	25
Performing Womanhood and Acknowledging Intersectionality ...	29
Women in Writing Pedagogy.....	32
Conclusion	39
III. CHALLENGING HETERONORMATIVITY.....	41
Queer Theories: What is Queer?.....	42
Addressing Sex, Gender, and Sexuality	42
De-Centering Heterosexuality	46
From Homosexual to Queer	50
Queering Composition/Writing Center Praxis.....	55
Conclusion	60
IV. DEFINING TRANS AND CELEBRATING TRANSGRESSIONS.....	62

Trans Theories: What is Trans?	62
From Gender Liberation to Trans Liberation	63
Embracing Fluidity and Becoming Nonbinary	67
Simply Performativity?	70
Transgressing Traditional Composition/Writing Center Praxis	72
Advancing Knowledge of Trans Experiences, Practices, and People	75
Trans Practices in Action	78
Trans Theories as Enlightenment	82
Conclusion	87
Implications	89
LITERATURE CITED	91

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

Abbreviation	Description
AAVE	African American Vernacular English
CDA	Critical Discourse Analysis
Cis	Cisgender
GLB	Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual
HRC	Human Rights Campaign
HRT	Hormone Replacement Therapy
LGBT	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender
LGBTQIA+	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex, Asexual, plus all other queer identities
NCTE/CCCC	National Council of Teachers of English/College Composition and Communication Conference
SAE	Standard Academic English/Standard American English
Terfs	Trans-exclusionary radical feminists
Trans	Transgender

I. LAYING THE GROUNDWORK

“We must find ways to blur the boundaries, so that we can push them, so that we can take our field and our students outside the bounds of where we think we can go, outside the bounds of what kinds of knowledges we can access, and how.”

-Stacey Waite, “Cultivating the Scavenger, A Queerer Feminist Future for Rhetoric and Composition,” 2015, pp. 54

Introduction

One of my girlfriend’s common criticisms about my behavior is that I tend to “mansplain.” She typically says this to me when we’re arguing about the meaning or interpretation of something, and I know she’s aware of how much the word irks me because it’s been a common offensive strategy in our quarrels. There just isn’t a *real* way for me to respond to her when she makes this comment. If I try to argue that I am not mansplaining, then I risk coming off as defensive. If I try to counter with a remark about how it is basically impossible for me to mansplain things to her, then I risk making her feel as if her emotions are invalidated.

One reason this situation is so intriguing is that I’m a transgender man. So, is her accusation valid? When my girlfriend and I first met in 2016, I still identified as a woman, and she has been with me at every step of my transition, having been the person who encouraged me to begin hormone replacement therapy (HRT) back in May 2018. When I think of mansplaining, though, I think of heterosexual cisgender men who condescend to assert their authority over women. This definition is an exact opposite of my identity and personality.

In all fairness, though, since my girlfriend *does* see me as a man now, I can understand how, in her eyes, I *am* capable of mansplaining. Until my girlfriend’s comment, I had not even considered that others might read my behavior differently

because they also see me as a man. I had been working in our university writing center since Fall 2016, but it was Fall 2018 now, which meant that if Kayla observed a change in my behavior and attitude throughout the short time of my transition, then the writers who came into the center (those who come in regularly, at least) might have observed a change, as well. For example, before I transitioned, I might be working with a female writer and feel as if her paper needed more work than what she thought, and if I were to rush the session to help her as much as possible, she might have seen my behavior as helpful rather than controlling and my gender as a source of connection as opposed to toxicity or dominance. In that same scenario, the female writer might now deem my male tone too forceful and resent that I was trying to control the way she writes her paper. She might find me guilty of mansplaining and toxic masculinity. Although I believed that my personality and behavior didn't change once I began transitioning, that didn't mean that I wasn't perceived differently by writers.

Of course, male and female tutors are equally capable of exhibiting toxic qualities, but perception matters, and if my girlfriend could perceive my behavior as mansplaining, maybe others did, too. For all I knew, I may have unconsciously started performing toxic behavior in the process of socially transitioning from female to male. I'll admit that early in my transition, around Fall 2018, I bought into the belief that the only way I would ever "pass" in public was if I practiced traditional masculinity. I felt like I had to become stoic in public, and I felt ashamed that I only had friends who were women. However, my assumption wasn't accurate. There had been, and still is, a strong push for acceptance of non-traditional masculinity (i.e. men who reject the belief that men must be tough and unfeeling); in a sense, the hegemony was shifting from

androcentrism just as I, myself, was becoming andro, so there was nothing wrong with me getting with the times, so to speak.

I discovered that practicing renegotiation of my gender performance gave me the insight I needed to evolve my tutoring practices. As a female tutor, when I thought about gender and tutoring, I thought about negotiating power and authority, as well as the potential for sexual harassment. However, as I was transitioning and renegotiating how I performed my male identity, I was simultaneously reconstructing a new *ethos* for myself. At first I had this idea in my head about how male tutors *should* behave—direct, non-intrusive, detached— but I wanted my new tutoring *self* (i.e. the way I negotiated power dynamics, my communication style, etc.) to be informed by the person I was as a woman. After all, gender is linked to a tutor’s *ethos* as well.

I wasn’t sure if the meta-awareness that I began employing in my sessions would change the interactions I had with writers, but as the semester of Fall 2018 went on, I noticed that my awareness of my behavior allowed me to better connect with students and enriched my experiences as a tutor. Because I was constantly thinking about how writers would respond to my actions and behavior, I was more engaged in sessions than I had ever been before, and I was able to anticipate writers’ responses more effectively. In the same steps I took to make sure I was being “read” as male by society, I began practicing attentiveness toward remaining respectful, thoughtful, and supportive in my actions as a writing center tutor.

It can be easy for tutors, like me, who are working with writers four-to-five hours straight, to put thoughts about their behavior on the backburner. In that amount of time, we could potentially work with 5-8 writers back-to-back, so, most of the time, I think it’s

safe to say that we are more focused on remaining mentally present in our sessions rather than focusing on our behavior. Since I was constantly thinking about the way I acted and sounded, though, I put an equal amount of effort into paying attention to the even the smallest of ways that I might affect a writer, such as my proximity to the writer and the inflection I used when I spoke.

Eventually, the new experiences I began to have while tutoring made me wonder if perspectives such as mine could potentially help other tutors get something *more* out of their sessions. In *Facing the Center*, Harry Denny, a well-known queer writing center scholar, asks us to use “face” as a starting point for writing center inquiry, for there are many ways that we can explore the topic of identities in the center (2-3). Furthermore, there are many connotations for the word “face.” Faces can be parts of the body, rhetorical performances, and acts of confrontation (Denny 2-3). The various faces that Denny writes about made me think to myself, “What are the faces I’ve encountered in the writing center?” Using Denny’s comments as a springboard, I found that the space of the center, the peer tutors and writers in the center, and the tutoring practices in the center are each essential to making the face of the center that Denny claims needs “interrogation and mapping” (3). I agree with Denny’s claim because the only way that the center can ever really progress or evolve is if we question the dominant hegemonies and traditional practices in the center. I had certainly transgressed my everyday practices as a writing center tutor by simply focusing more on my performance and behavior than that of the writers or other tutors I was working with, but I knew that in order to make real change, more work had to be done.

In this thesis, I take a nod from Denny, but I also further complicate his concept

of faces by allowing for a liminal position, so not gay *or* straight, not male *or* female, but *queer* and *trans*. In doing so, I am advocating for a writing center with a *new* consciousness, “where the possibility of uniting all that is separate occurs” (Anzaldúa 102). This assembly is not one where severed or separated pieces merely come together. Nor is it a balancing of opposing powers. Instead it is, as Chicana Feminist Gloria Anzaldúa theorizes, “a third element which is greater than the sum of its severed parts” (101-102). It will be a writing center that is not obligated to uphold hegemonies and dominant practices; rather it will be one that is conscious of its position and the strength it can hold when it is situated in the middle. This is a center that has been made aware of its own compliance with hegemonies and has thus acted upon disrupting those hegemonies so that it may evolve into something greater than its previous self.

Organization of Thesis

My final thesis product will include four chapters. The remainder of this introductory chapter will give an overview of the research in the field that I am addressing, as well as indicate the existing gaps in literature and provide an explanation of the frameworks I use for my thesis research. The second chapter will be a critical discourse analysis of Feminist scholarship relevant to my topic, identifying Feminist influences in composition/writing center praxis. The third chapter follows the same format as the second; however, I use this chapter to explore queer theory and its impact on composition/writing center praxis as these two theories are the basis of transgender theories. The last chapter will explore transgender theories, as well as my own experiences, and will posit the implications of writing center tutoring practices influenced by Trans (Transgender) theories and pedagogies.

Literature Review

Gender and the Writing Center

In *Peripheral Visions for Writing Centers*, Jackie Grutsch McKinney considers the attention given to the space and identity of the center. According to Grutsch McKinney, the writing center grand narrative is that centers are “comfortable, iconoclastic places where all students go to get one-to-one tutoring on their writing” (3). Specifically, the writing center is cast as a comfortable home, and “historically, in Western culture, the home was the sphere of the female, the wife” (26). The items in the center—beanbag chairs, couches, lamps, and rugs—also do little to oppose the assumption that the writing center is a feminized space (26).

Grutsch McKinney’s main critique of this identifier is that the way we arrange our home, as well as the items we fill our homes with, are essentially tied to our cultures, so it is more than reasonable to recognize that the homes of Mexican American or African American writers wouldn’t look like the homes of the historically white women who direct writing centers nor the white students in higher education. Thus, although the master narrative depicts student writers visiting the center as returning to a safe home, Grutsch McKinney notes that it is a home that is “culturally marked” (25). Consequently, if we consider Grutsch McKinney’s “grand narrative” to be comparable to the writing center’s central identity, then we can assume that the writing center’s identity is that of a space that is comfortable and uncomfortable, inviting and hostile, all at the same time.

In contrast, the harsh, detached world of academia is located in other sections of the university, which is cast as a masculine space. If male-dominated spaces are detached or untidy, cold and uncomfortable, it is only natural that writing center directors, most of

whom are women, would want to create a space that is ostensibly feminine rather than masculine. Grutsch McKinney argues that writing centers may have been deliberately created in response to male-dominated spaces in higher education (26). Troubling not only these stereotypes of masculine and feminine but the male/female binary itself will be a central goal of this thesis.

In *Facing the Writing Center*, Denny also comments upon the *hegemonically* (i.e. binary) gendered narratives that define the center, arguing that the spatial identity of the center is in a constant flux depending on the performativity of the space and the people who inhabit it (149). For Denny, those previously mentioned identifiers for the center—the center as comfortable, iconoclastic, and inclusive—each depends on the identity that is composing the “face” of the center. Denny writes, “At its core, face is about identity and raises questions about who we are, and how we come to know and present identity, as a phenomenon that’s unified, coherent, and captured in a singular essence, or as something more multi-faceted and dynamic” (2). Denny is aware that there are dominant, hegemonic narratives that enforce certain performances in the space, and he specifically admits that the most telling of our identity, our gender, “presents a never-ending binary tango that imprints on every interaction (159). Like Grutsch McKinney, Denny believes that feminization precedes thoughts of the writing center (100), so can one necessarily blame tutors and writers for making gendered assumptions about the identity of the center?

Ultimately, the characterization of writing center tutors as more feminine can be traced to theories about the power and authority tutors possess by nature of hierarchies in the center. Three distinguishable groups of people in the center are writing center

directors, writing center tutors, and writers. If, as Grutsch McKinney writes, we believe the metaphor of the women as caretakers, then writing center directors are cast as mothers, and the tutors and writers are cast as children (26), but one wonders if this casting is accurate. If we assume that tutors are cast as children because they are peers to the writers, then we must be critical of whether the tutors are *actually* peers in a session. The difficulty of exhibiting positive authority and power (i.e. earned or delegated power) in a session is widely examined in writing center studies.

Like Grutsch McKinney, Peter Carino, in “Early Writing Centers: A History,” contends that “writing centers are fond of seeing themselves in metaphors of family—cozy homes with soft couches where when students go, they must be taken in” (113). Carino further argues that “to pretend that there is not a hierarchical relationship between tutor and student is a fallacy” (98), for students typically enter the center to receive guidance, and writers expose their anxieties and rarely possess power and authority over a tutor. Even men, who possess more power and authority in almost every aspect in society, are subordinates in the center.

In *Researching the Writing Center*, Rebecca Day Babcock and Therese Thonus compile contemporary writing center scholarship. In confirmation of Carino’s claim, Babcock and Thonus found that research shows the authoritarian role of the tutor isn’t necessarily affected by the gender of the tutor or writer; the role in the center determines the authority one has (125). Babcock and Thonus explain that one of the main responsibilities for tutors is to navigate power structures in the session. Since the writer comes to the writing center for help, the tutor already holds a substantial amount of power and authority by nature of the writer’s presence (124). On top of this, the structure

of the session, itself, is cause for an imbalance of power and authority between the writer and tutor. According to Babcock and Thonus, multiple studies indicate that once the tutor begins speaking or reading aloud, the authority to speak or read is rarely given up; the tutor will dominate the speaking role in the session and rarely allow the writer to speak, save for when the writer is asked to answer questions (122). Furthermore, Babcock and Thonus also discuss the ways that gender is performed in the center, confirming the belief that the writing center is a feminine, homely space (64, 125).

Babcock and Thonus agree that the success of tutoring sessions is dependent upon the meaningful exchange of ideas in a session. They report that vocal communication in writing center sessions is either instructional or interpersonal (111). The instructional talk consists of the direction given to the writer—the suggestions and information needed to learn *how* to write (112). The interpersonal dialogue in the session is defined as “phatic” talk and consists of seemingly unrelated conversations, chit-chat, and other talk that may affirm commonalities between the tutor and writer (114). Babcock and Thonus believe that phatic talk is just as, if not more, important than the instructional talk that takes place in the session because it can result in idea generation for the student and promote relaxation in the high-anxiety space of the session (114).

Paula Gillespie and Neal Lerner in *The Allyn and Bacon Guide* support—unconsciously, perhaps—the argument that writing centers are safe, feminine spaces that function in contrast to uncomfortable, domineering, male-dominated spaces. For instance, Gillespie and Lerner stress the difference between editors and tutors, working to dispel common myths about the practices of writing center tutors. Interestingly, though, Gillespie and Lerner reinforce traditional gender roles in their discussion about the

common narratives about editors and tutors. Gillespie and Lerner write, “When you think of an editor, you might think of a cranky, hard-bitten, cigar-chomping Perry White, calling all the shots and making all the decisions, sending Clark Kent and Lois Lane off on assignments” (26). Gillespie’s and Lerner’s reason for making this characterization is to draw attention to everything writing center tutors are *not*. Writing center tutors aren’t domineering men; they’re even-tempered, sentimental, and collaborative. These qualities aren’t necessarily negative; however, Gillespie and Lerner do not provide a gender-neutral description of a stereotypical editor, either. Because they’ve described the editor as Perry White, a man, this is the character that will remain in the tutor’s head. Consequently, the tutor who is reading Gillespie’s and Lerner’s guide will likely assume that if writing center tutors aren’t supposed to be like Perry White, then they must be the complete opposite; implicitly, writing center tutors should be less masculine and more feminine.

Further along, Gillespie and Lerner argue that writing expertise can come in handy, but the real work of a tutor consists of understanding how to set the tone for a session; easing writer anxiety; listening to, or reading, the entire paper; and knowing which sections to work on first. For Gillespie and Lerner, tutors’ practices are informed by their responsibility to help the writer achieve his/her/their writing goals. Ultimately, however, *The Allyn and Bacon Guide* is focused on teaching new tutors how to balance authority in the session and how to ask questions without giving *too* much or little away (i.e. directive and non-directive practices). Little attention is spent on guidance for tutor behavior, or attitude, other than a few sections that discuss being mindful of authoritative and disengaged behavior (Gillespie and Lerner 30, 51). Once again, negative tutor

behaviors are cast as masculine and can be read as an admonition to be non-directive, humble, and supportive, qualities traditionally associated with femininity. This either/or thinking can lead to tutoring scripts predicated on essentialized gender identities that, in turn, essentialize the tutor and tutee roles.

Interruption/Disruption/Liminality

Jacques Derrida, with his theory of deconstruction, challenges precisely this type of dichotomous thinking. Derrida writes, "In a classical philosophical opposition we are not dealing with the peaceful coexistence of a *vis-à-vis*, but rather with a violent hierarchy. One of the two terms governs the other (axiologically, logically, etc.), or has the upper hand. . . . The hierarchy of dual oppositions always reestablishes itself" (41-42). For Derrida, there is something *more* to the picture than the binary that is present. We cannot simply accept the binary, for within the binary, one part is more powerful than the other; hence, we can observe which part is hegemonic. So, not only does one part of the binary define the other, such as how one might say that men are defined by everything that women are not, but Derrida believes that the more powerful part of the binary is observable as well. In the examples described above, for instance, men would be determined as the more powerful part of the binary, given that men hold a large amount of power and status in society that most women cannot obtain.

Stacey Waite, a queer compositionist, would agree with Derrida's assessment, and she specifically believes that thinking "queerly" would help us disrupt traditional, hegemonic ways of thinking and being. Waite writes in "Cultivating the Scavenger,"

One way, and perhaps the most common way, we come to know is by learning how systems work and then thinking inside those systems "logically." But, of

course, the system already predetermines the logic, formulates the bounds of what is possible to think. But what if we thought another way? What if instead of thinking systematically, we thought in less obedient, even less “logical” ways?
(57)

If the system we are in is keeping us from evolving, or even progressing, Waite agrees with Anzaldúa and Derrida that we must move against that system. Furthermore, Waite writes, “But if we are willing to truly disrupt our systems (our genders, our writing, our field), we have to take the time to interrupt the very patterns of thought that produce our genders, our writing, our field” (58). While Waite is speaking of disruption within the field of composition, her remark can be applied to the field of writing centers as well.

On the same topic of disruption, Elizabeth Boquet’s *Noise from the Writing Center* begins with a reflection on interruption and disruption in the writing center. Boquet notes that there have been two definitive moments in her writing center career in which her work has been disrupted. The first instance occurred after a student with whom she’d been working for the semester still managed to fail his writing course. Boquet thought that the student had surely learned *something* after visiting center, but, obviously, her assumption was wrong, which led her to wonder how she could change her approaches (1-2). The second instance occurred after receiving a complaint from a professor about the noise coming from the center. The professor was upset that the people in the center had made such a “racket,” and Boquet was equally upset that the professor had the gall to request that the center refrain from engaging in intellectual activities, no matter the volume (xiii-xv). However, upon reflection, Boquet realized that these “disruptions” she experienced were useful “dislocations” that helped separate herself

from a situation. Boquet writes, “In times of such dislocation, noise should be expected and recognized for what it is: an attempt to alert others. To warn them. To gain assistance. To garner sympathy. To raise awareness...it encourages [us] to imagine other possibilities, alternative ways of enacting a pedagogy, an administration, a profession” (Boquet 6).

Interruption and disruption are not strategies that are unique to queer writing center and composition theories, as they are also found in Feminist theories of composition. In *Rethinking Ethos*, Kathleen J. Ryan, Nancy Meyers, and Rebecca Jones highlight different ways that Feminist theories of rhetoric have affected hegemonies in composition: “Interruption refers to breaks, divides, hitches, disruptions, disturbances, ruptures, or breeches—counters to traditional ways of behaving or conversing—to change the status quo of dominant values and practices” (23). In other words, for the authors, interrupting is a form of interrogating hegemonies (25). Even more so than a strategy for interrogating hegemonies, Ryan et al. write, “rhetors must construct ethically responsible rhetorics by disrupting their own habits through listening to others” (24). Those who feel that they are working to disrupt hegemonies may be unconscious of the hegemonic ways of thinking and being that inform themselves. Self-disruption, as Ryan et al. perceive it, is similar to the millennial call to “check your privilege,” which is a way for even those who are considered minorities—men of color and women of color, for instance—to consider the ways that their intersecting identities could correspond with hegemonic power and privilege. For example, a man of color is a minority, yet he has more privilege than women of color; women of color, too, remain powerless in some aspects of society, yet they may be middle-class rather than lower-class, straight rather

than gay, as well as cisgender.

Rather than viewing intersectionality as exclusively and invariably negative, Anzaldúa writes that liminal figures are “the embodiment of the *hieros gamos*: the coming together of opposite qualities within” (41), and when these two sides come together, when they accept each other instead of resist, they reach a new form of consciousness, *la mestiza* (44). Unfortunately, it is hard for us to achieve this form of consciousness because our society tells us that it is practically forbidden. Anzaldúa writes, “What we are suffering from is an absolute despot duality that says we are able to be only one or the other. It claims that human nature is limited and cannot evolve into something better” (41). In other words, we can only be the majority *or* the minority, gay *or* straight, woman *or* man. We are limited to the circumstances we are born into, but also by the binary that we refuse to deconstruct.

According to Anzaldúa, however, when we disrupt the dualities that are forced upon us, we evolve into *la mestiza*, a liminal positionality that enables us to, in turn, think liminally. Anzaldúa writes, “The work of the *mestiza* consciousness is to break down the subject-object duality that keeps her a prisoner and to show in the flesh and through images in her work how duality is transcended” (102). Of course, it is not easy for one to evolve into *la mestiza* if one does not embody the borderland experience, as Anzaldúa would argue that the borderland experience belongs to those who belong to two separate, dichotomous cultures. These individuals are one person made up of two cultures at the same time; they can never fully leave one half of themselves behind, nor should they be asked to, so these people are the ones who are capable of evolving into *la mestiza*. Despite this criterion, however, one would argue that even if a person has never had the

borderland experience, that doesn't mean a person is incapable of understanding the essence of *la mestiza*.

Writing center tutors are liminal figures in the center since peer writing center tutors exist on a borderland between the dominant university institution and the “lesser” world of the student, and while it is simplistic to impose hierarchical roles, these roles do greatly impact how a tutor behaves. Tutors are technically teaching writing to students in tutoring sessions and controlling the direction of a tutoring session, but they are also learning about writing at the same time because of their interactions with writers and other writing center materials. Tutors *do* hold a large amount of authority in a session by nature of their role in the center, but it should be noted that tutors are not the supreme authoritative figure in the center. That position in the hierarchy of power remains reserved for administrators and instructors in the university, for even writing center directors are not the true authoritative figure in the center; their actions are often bound by budget restrictions, as well as university requirements. Ironically, however, as Anzaldúa asserts, tutors are, perhaps, more powerful figures *because of* their liminality—because they are attuned to the consciousness of both the dominant and subordinate in the center. Their liminality is a great source of strength because it enables them to remain aware of the power structures around them; it gives them the knowhow to perform the role of teacher and/or role of peer as needed.

Research Questions

Based on my interests in implementing transgender experiences in the multiple faces I identified in the center, as well as addressing questions that arose after reviewing existing literature, the guiding questions for my thesis are the following:

- How have Transgender theories of composition emerged out of Feminist theories of composition?
- How have Transgender theories of composition emerged out of Queer theories of composition?
- Why should writing centers advance knowledge on trans experiences and practices and how they can do so?
- How can Transgender theories of knowledge, action, and enlightenment be used to make tutors aware of the faces of the center?
- How can writing centers implement Transgender theories in their training practices?
- Are tutors aware of their liminality, and if they aren't, why *should* they be aware of it, and what can we do to raise their awareness of their own liminality?

In order to answer these questions, I plan to perform a critical analysis of Feminist and queer theories to map the major moves in those fields and help me further situate transgender experiences in composition and writing center scholarship. Then, I plan to break from critical analysis and discuss implementations of transgender experiences in the writing center based upon my own personal experiences, thus laying the groundwork for Trans writing center praxis.

Research Design

I strongly believe that in order to disrupt hegemonies, we must be critical of those hegemonies. Therefore, the research design of this thesis is largely influenced by critical analysis. Although I do not employ a specific method of critical analysis, my thesis takes a nod from Thomas Huckin et al. Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). Huckin et al. write

that CDA is an “approach to textual study that aims to explicate abuses of power promoted by those texts, by analyzing linguistic/semiotic details in light of the larger social and political contexts in which those texts circulate” (107). Again, I will not be performing a CDA, specifically, so my work will not fully delve into the social and political contexts of the works I discuss. Instead, I briefly discuss context and focus my attention on mapping the moves made by the Feminist, Queer, and Trans works I discuss. Furthermore, I intend for the last chapter of my thesis to contain an account of my personal experiences in the center so that I may discuss implementations of Trans writing center praxis.

Limitations

One of the most obvious limitations of my study is that I can only speak to my own experiences as a transgender man. I am unaware of any of the ways in which my *more* marginalized counterparts—black transgender women, for example—have experienced transitioning from one gender to another. I am also limited by the lack of literature written by similar scholars in my field. Furthermore, one of my biggest challenges for this thesis is analyzing larger discourses in order to theorize my own.

Conclusion

The “writing center as a home” metaphor was developed to establish the writing center as an antithesis to the university classroom, bringing up an interesting point about gendered spaces on a university campus. While it may seem positive to have a “home” on a university campus, this metaphor reinforces problematic binaries, such as the home as a solely feminine space, which leads some to associate the writing center with subalterns since women traditionally hold less power outside of the home. Grutsch McKinney also

explains in *Peripheral Visions* that the writing center grand narrative has been entirely constructed and maintained by narratives that “conform” to hegemonies rather than confront them (17). We may like to believe that our centers are neutral spaces that promote comfortability, but the reality of the situation is that there is no such thing as a space that *isn't* marked by the people within it.

Gillespie and Lerner make precisely this point, arguing that there are certain social expectations, stereotypes, and assumptions that both the tutor and writer bring into a session (51). These social expectations are influenced primarily by race, gender, and socioeconomic status, and if we consider our roles as tutors and writers as “faces” that we wear, we will find that our faces are inherently created by the identities we assume (Denny 2). Yet, much can be said about how writing center practices can work to help tutors practice meta-awareness of “faces” in writing center sessions. On this note, Geller et al. write, “As tutors begin to think, write, and produce new knowledge in and through the boundary regions of theory and practice, not only do they begin to (re)create and transform their own identities, but also the identity of the community of practice within and to which they speak and write” (106). We cannot evolve the work of the center as a whole if we do not disrupt it from within.

As I explained in my introduction, when I identified as a woman, I accepted the typically compliant role I held in the center, and I ultimately remained passive in interrogating some of the larger societal expectations that came along with the part of my identity. I was more comfortable working with other female students because I felt that male students would try to dominate the session, and I believed that even though I had some power and authority as a tutor, my status as a woman still meant that I lacked power

outside of the center. Interestingly, then, I felt safer inside the “home,” inside the margin of the university. However, my transition helped me see that those who work in centers should not be satisfied nor compliant to assumptions about things both *inside* and *outside* of the center; our role is much larger than that, and the world is much larger than what’s in the margin and what’s in the center.

As I explained earlier, binaries aren’t as simple as they seem; they can always be disrupted, and the liminal figures within each space are more powerful than the binary. In a similar vein, Boquet writes, “rather than assuming that writing centers arise from the margins, exist on the margins, and are populated by the marginal, we might instead view writing center staff and students as bastardizing the work of the institution. That is, we might say that they are not a threat from without but are rather a threat from within” (32). My transition allowed me to gain awareness of the power that I held *because* of my liminality, both as a transgender man and tutor. *Because* I transitioned, I became aware of my power and how to use my experiences to benefit my engagement in sessions, and if more tutors were aware of their own liminality, perhaps they’d see the benefit that trans experiences can have on tutoring practices, too.

II. BROADENING THE DEFINITION OF WOMEN

“Each of us is here now because in one way or another we share a commitment to language and to the power of language, and to the reclaiming of that language which has been made to work against us.”

-Audre Lorde, “The Transformation of Silence into Language and Action,” 1977, pp. 304

The first guiding question of my thesis is the following: “How have transgender theories of composition/writing center praxis emerged out of Feminist theories of rhetoric and composition?” To answer this question, I first need to understand the question that informed Feminist theory: “What is a woman?” This question seems to have an easy answer, but its answer has changed throughout time, shaped by the episteme of different eras and cultures. In particular, the writers who first attempted to answer these questions painted a picture of Feminist theory with broad brushstrokes, and each additional writer’s contribution to the question acts as an even finer brushstroke that works to paint a more defined answer to the question. When we reassess what those have said before us, we are able to discern what was considered presently important/unimportant or valuable/worthless for the writer. Even though the writers who are celebrated in Feminist history and theory each sacrificed a great deal during their time for the rights of women, queer and transgender people were often omitted or minimized in Feminist theory. As a result, Feminist composition/writing center praxis, which is informed by Feminist theory, needs to be updated to include queer and trans people and Queer and Trans perspectives, as well.

As will be demonstrated in the current and third chapters of this thesis, critically analyzing texts enables us not only to scrutinize Feminist theorists, but also to expand and complicate current Feminist pedagogies to allow for a more inclusive and expansive composition/writing center praxis informed by Trans theory and pedagogy. My thesis

will make use of the words “foregrounded,” “backgrounded,” and “omitted,” in order to assess the hegemonic views found within the texts I analyze. In addition to analyzing theory, I will consider how writing pedagogy mirrors or reflects the hegemonic views that are present with the texts I refer to. To answer the question of what trans *is*, we must first gain understanding of what has been left out of by Feminist theorists, including compositionists and writing center theorists informed by these theories, up to this point.

This chapter will begin with an examination of the shifting definitions of women throughout the 20th century. In the first section, I begin with an analysis of the works of first-wave Feminists Susan B. Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Suffragettes who, indicative of their time, viewed the rights of white women as greater than those of women of color. I then discuss the work of second-wave Feminists Simone de Beauvoir and Betty Friedan, who further challenged the societal limitations placed on women, but again centered their theories on white women. My discussion of Alice Walker focuses on her womanist theory as a corrective to the omission of women of color from mainstream Feminism. Last, I will consider contemporary definitions and theories by Judith Butler and Kimberlé Crenshaw who enlarge and complicate the definitions of women to include not only race, but also sexuality, class, ability, and so on.

In the following section, I will then consider how the previous theories and definitions of woman has informed the field of composition pedagogy. For example, in the late 1800s, Feminist pedagogies would have been non-existent, leading to the proliferation of the generic “he” in academia, as well as classist and racist pedagogies that stressed the use of Standard Academic English (SAE). After this explanation, I delve into bell hooks’s transgressive pedagogy, which works to subvert the previous dominant

composition pedagogies. Finally, I consider how today's writing pedagogy has progressed to become more inclusive of various genders, races and ethnicities, and languages.

Feminist Theories: What is Woman?

The Feminist movement has typically been represented as waves, with the first wave being concerned with women's political rights, the second consisting of women's social equality, and the third attempting to redefine womanhood and address intersectionality, which will be later defined in this chapter. Although using the term "waves" presumes that the work of the Feminist movement has ebbed and flowed, the contributions of Feminists never truly leave nor slow down; rather, previous author's works are added to, or revised, in order to become, eventually, more inclusive and representative of the many ways that women perform gender and acknowledging how race, class, and sexuality intersect with gender.

The Political and Educational Rights of Women

Beginning with the Seneca Falls Convention in 1848, Susan B. Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton are perhaps the most recognizable suffragists who led the charge for women's political equality.¹ Even as they fought for women's rights, they did not actually fight for *all* women's rights. Anthony and Stanton mention *all* women in a very general sense and do not delve into issues of race because, at this time, people of color were not included in the default definition of "America." Americans were, as St. John de Crèvecoeur writes in his 1782 *Letters from an American Farmer*, "English, Dutch,

¹ Suffice it to say that the following Feminist writers are not the sole major contributors to Feminist theory. However, I have included those whose works that are indicative of the major line of thinking from their respective eras.

Germans, and Swedes,” adding that “The Americans were once scattered all over Europe; here, they are incorporated into one of the finest systems of population which has ever appeared” (44, 47). Clearly, free African Americans and African American slaves are not included in the American melting pot. Furthermore, Lisa Tetrault notes in her analysis of Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony’s 1881 *History of Women’s Suffrage*, “There is little awareness in the volume of the ways in which womanhood is marked as white. . . . To the contrary, Stanton and Anthony present themselves as—and surely believed themselves to be—the ‘true’ representatives of meaningful inclusion” (134).

In 1872, for example, Anthony was prosecuted by the United States of America for voting at a local election, and in the transcript of her trial “The United States of America v. Susan B. Anthony,” she draws upon the constitutional rights of U.S. citizens in order to argue for political equality for women, as well as to defend herself against the prosecution (152-56). As stated in the U.S. Constitution and noted by Anthony, every American citizen is given the right of trial by peers; however, as the lone woman in the court, Anthony is surrounded by men, her “political superiors”; therefore, as she points out, she was not receiving a fair trial (155). Her move in addressing this disparity is to highlight the political inequality of women.

Although Anthony foregrounds the very clear subjugation of *all* women in America, she does not make any clear specification as to which race of women she is speaking up for, the assumption being that she was advocating for white women like herself. Anthony *does* briefly mention race, perhaps because her trial occurred after the ratification of the Fifteenth Amendment, which gave African men the right to vote. However, race is not foregrounded in her work, and women of color are omitted from her

defense. Anthony also makes brief mention of class and education when she states, "... even then I should have had just cause for protests, for not one of these men was my peer; but, native or foreign, white or black, rich or poor, educated or ignorant, awake or asleep, sober or drunk, each and every man of them was my political superior; hence, in no sense, my peer (155), yet she appears to mention only these parts of a person's identity in order to highlight that fact that, despite all the political progress (i.e. giving the right to vote to foreign, black, poor, ignorant men), women *still* don't have any political rights.²

In a similar vein, in Stanton's 1892 "The Solitude of the Self," she argues that a woman, just as a man, has an individual soul and is thereby just as deserving of the ability to "use all her faculties for her own safety and happiness.... [and] have the same rights as all other members according to the fundamental principles of the [U.S.] government," as well as to make decision based on each citizen's individual right to "choose [her] own surroundings" (172), including her family, education, and political representation (174-77). Stanton foregrounds in her argument the men who are often backgrounded in common arguments against women's ability to hold "masculine" careers and pursue education. Stanton notes that these men work in "feminine" positions as chefs, launders, and dressmakers (176). However, their careers do not make them any less masculine or any more feminine. Stanton asks, why is it that men can "subordinate" themselves, in a sense, but women cannot become superior (176)? While Stanton's inquiry is valid, it is worthwhile to note that she is generally focusing on the occupations that would presumably be available to women in the upper-class domestic sphere, for

² In other words, Stanton is a "problematic fave" for most Feminists. She laid the groundwork for the Feminist movement, but some of her racist and classist actions wouldn't be regarded well, today.

women of color would surely be working for white families and doing similar work for them. Moreover, Stanton's work obviously has class and race biases; as Joy Ritchie and Kate Ronald, authors of *Available Means*, note, Stanton openly opposed the Fifteenth Amendment as well (172).

Anthony and Stanton sought to argue for women's equality to men; however, their arguments come from a place of privilege. They do not mention how race, class or education affect a woman's dependence on men or limit their option to pronounce their independence. Arguably, the very fact that Anthony and Stanton are so vocal, not to mention published, reveals that their race, class, and education enable them to be outspoken; other women were not as fortunate. As we'll see in following section, Stanton and Anthony provided only broad strokes in the painting of womanhood, and their answer to the question "What is a woman?" is that women—or more specifically, white, upper-class women—are in every way the political, occupational, and educational equal to men. Thus, even though Stanton and Anthony would have objected to denying women education and a public life, they also failed to decenter their own identities to make room for non-White, poor, and LGBTQIA+ women. Unfortunately, even the second wave of feminism is marred by ethnocentrism, heterosexism, and classism.

The Social Rights and Expectations of Women

The Civil Rights Movement and Sexual Revolution spanned the 1950s to the 1980s (Lumen), and during that time, the Feminist movement saw a separation between white Feminists and "Womanists" in regard to the social rights and expectations of women.

In her 1952 work, "The Second Sex," Simone de Beauvoir sets out to define

women, concluding that, in terms of social mores, women are the second sex, the Other, defined by the patriarchal hegemony as everything that a man is not. De Beauvoir's work is also a call to action; she writes, "woman may fail to lay claim to the status of subject because she lacks definite resources, because she feels the necessary bond that ties her to man regardless of reciprocity, and because she is often very well pleased with her role as the *Other*" (257). With this statement, de Beauvoir is arguing that women have become complacent after the years of the "first wave" of Feminism and that their bond with men ensures their status as the second sex and the weaker sex. Per de Beauvoir, women will never refute their subjugation because, if they did, they would lose all the status and protection that are given to them by men.³

Unfortunately, because de Beauvoir's work foregrounds the gender binary, she excludes the possibility of a third option for gender. Specifically, she notes, "The couple is a fundamental unity with its two halves riveted together, and the cleavage of society along the line of sex is impossible. Here is to be found the basic trait of woman: she is the Other in totality of which the two components are necessary to one another" (257). In this statement, not only is heterosexuality foregrounded, but de Beauvoir is illustrating how women's inherent bond to men is absolutely essential to her life, as if it is entirely unimaginable for women hold a romantic, sexual, or economical bond with one another during the 1950s. Understandably, de Beauvoir makes these claims to call attention to the absurdity of women's dependence on men; however, she should have also pointed out how women can succeed individually or with one another, not expound exclusively upon all the ways in which women are dependent upon and identified by men.

³ Yikes.

As a response to de Beauvoir, Betty Friedan's goal in the 1963 *The Feminine Mystique* is to assert that women want nothing more than to break free from the assumption that women are fulfilled by the domestic sphere. Friedan writes,

I do not accept the answer that there is no problem because American women have luxuries that women in other times and lands never dreamed of...The women who suffer this problem have a hunger that cannot fill. It persists in women whose husbands are struggling internes and law clerks, or prosperous doctors and lawyers...And women who think it will be solved by more money, a bigger house, a second car, moving to a better suburb, often discover it gets worse. (26)

In the previous statement, Friedan foregrounds some aspects of class, sex, and gender in her argument, such as domesticity and marriage; however, like de Beauvoir, Friedan, too, omits not only race from her argument, but also the concerns of non-white, non-wealthy, non-married, and childless women; her argument exclusively pertains to suburban homemakers.

On the omission of non-white, non-suburban women from Friedan's work, in *When and Where I Enter: The Impact of Black Women on Race and Sexism in America*, Paula J. Giddings writes that Friedan

spoke to middle-class White women, bored in suburbia (an escape hatch from increasingly Black cities) and seeking sanction to work at a "meaningful" job outside the home. Not only were the problems of the White suburban housewife (who may have had Black domestic help) irrelevant to Black Women, they were also alien to them. Friedan's observation that "I never knew a woman, when I was

growing up, who used her mind, played her own part in the world, and also loved, and had children” seemed to come from another planet. (299)

Friedan’s argument, while compelling women to strive for something *more* in life, paints women as trapped in domesticity just as de Beauvoir suggested. Furthermore, Friedan’s work extends the conflict in de Beauvoir’s work by describing women as not only trying to find a way to get out of Suburbia, but also evidently ignorant of the lives of other lower-class and/or women of color around them. Now, Friedan’s main point is there is more to women than domestic life, for women want *more* than domesticity; they want a life that is better than the one men provide for them. However, Friedan writes as if *all* women are concerned with the domestic sphere, but surely domestic issues can’t be the *only* issue on all women’s minds.

In contrast to white Feminists, Alice Walker argues that women of color—black women, specifically—have a harder time attaining rights than white women because of the sexism within the African American race. For example, it may be easy for white women to speak up for themselves because they only have one superior: the white men who are their husbands, keeping them stifled in Suburbia, as Friedan argues. But it *is* harder for black women because they have the white race, as well as their own race against them. In fact, as Walker notes in her 1983 work “In Search of our Mothers’ Gardens, “Black women are called, in folklore that so aptly identifies one’s status in society, ‘the mule of the world,’ because we have been handed the burdens everyone else—*everyone* else refused to carry” (318).

De Beauvoir’s and Friedan’s works are important because they work to explain *how* the patriarchy is sustained and *why* it persists. Per de Beauvoir, the patriarchy is

sustained by women, themselves, and per Friedan, the patriarchy is sustained by societal expectations of women. Both arguments are true; however, de Beauvoir and Friedan both fail to complicate “womanhood” and explore the ways in which variables such as race, class, sexuality, etc. factor into one’s overall contextual and fluid gender identity. Like Sojourner Truth’s demonstration of her musculature in “Ain’t I a Woman,” not all women are white, soft, and dainty; women are much more varied than that, and contrary to the arguments of white Feminists, Womanists such as Alice Walker believed that men *and* women must work together to gain equality for women (Beyond the Moment).

Performing Womanhood and Acknowledging Intersectionality

Judith Butler’s 1989 *Gender Trouble* was written in response to the criticism and heterosexist assumptions found within former Feminist works. Butler believes that previous movements in Feminism sought to define women by distinguishing them from rather than equating them to men, thus—perhaps, unconsciously—creating gender norms that all women were meant to follow. For example, if men were rough, women were soft, and so forth. With sexuality foregrounded in *Gender Trouble*, Butler acknowledges that men are not the only partners open to women. For once, heterosexual women are backgrounded in Feminist theory. Further, Butler is troubled with how to define women, yet she puzzles over why we must call people *women* at all, for, again, once we define a word, a gender, or sex, we eventually create requirements one must meet in order to call oneself any given identifier. In simpler terms, when we define an identity, we create essentialized definitions that most often reaffirm a binary.

In this sense, Butler at least somewhat acknowledges the existence of multiple genders: if one is homosexual, one’s gender is *troubled*, as sexuality has historically been

an indicator of one's gender (i.e. men are sexually attracted to women and women are sexually attracted to men). If one is homosexual, does that mean one is no longer the gender one was before? Even presenting such a question or *trouble* includes non-normative genders in a way that was not discussed in previous Feminist works. In her discussion of Herculine Barbin, Butler also observes the following:

The free play of [sexual] attributes has the effect of exposing the illusory character of sex as an abiding substantive substrate to which these various attributes are presumed to adhere. Moreover, Herculine's sexuality constitutes a set of gender transgressions which challenge the very distinction between heterosexual and lesbian erotic exchange, underscoring the points of their ambiguous convergence and redistribution. (136-7)

Unlike her Feminist predecessors, Butler attempts to connect gender to other aspects of one's identity, providing insight into the *trouble* that occurs between gender performance and sexuality when one's gender is non-normative. For Butler, gender is performative, tied to all aspects of identity, such as race, class, and ethnicity. To demand a definition of *woman* or *Feminism* is to risk creating a misnomer (6).

Kimberlé Crenshaw's "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence Against Women of Color" foregrounds the fact that women have suffered from political, social, and educational inequality but emphasizes that there are issues that still go undiscussed: the injustices minority women face in their own homes at the expense of identity politics that can often conflate all identities in a group into one larger group. The best example of this consequence is found within the arguments of previous Feminists mentioned in this chapter who omitted issues of race, gender, class, and

sexuality from their arguments in order to “universalize” the experiences of women.⁴

These writers did not make note of potential intersectionality; that is, they did not account for the possibility of women who are black and impoverished or black and wealthy, but also black and disabled, and/or black and queer, and so on. This omission, Crenshaw notes, results in a large problem: “ignoring differences *within* groups contributes to tension *among* groups” (1242).

Crenshaw’s main argument is that the violence that some women experience is not universal, and, therefore, it is omitted from mainstream discussions of Feminist issues. By way of example, bell hooks once wrote that Black men perpetuate rape culture because sexual violence is one of the only areas in which they maintain power in their lives, for “[rape] is their only expressive access to the patriarchal power they are told all men should possess as their gendered birthright” (“Seduced By Violence No More” 129). The issue of domestic violence and rape is extremely prevalent in Black relationships, Crenshaw notes, and she believes it is an injustice that goes undiscussed because laws have historically been concerned with protecting white women from Black men, not Black women from Black men (1251). She further mentions, “While the heightened concern with protecting white women against Black men has been primarily criticized as a form of discrimination against Black men, it just as surely reflects devaluation of Black women” (1271-72). Now, Crenshaw’s argument is certainly valid and valuable to issues of Feminism and racism; however, her argument omits one of the groups most susceptible to rape and violence: black transgender women. This particular group of people experienced twenty-six deaths within the past year, which does not even consider

⁴ White Feminists like Anthony, Stanton, de Beauvoir, and Freidan.

the number of instances of violence, harassment, or abuse that this group experienced (HRC). Intersectionality is an extremely important topic in Feminism; however, the issues of trans and queer folk cannot remain backgrounded in Feminist arguments.

Women in Writing Pedagogy

Not surprisingly, shifting definitions of womanhood color the field of rhetoric and composition. In the late 1800s, White women would have been fighting just for the right to be included in the academic world (and women of color would not even have that hope). As Stanton notes, women would either be denied admission outright or be forced to go to universities that teach homemaking skills rather than academic topics like “the sciences, law, medicine, and theology” (176). In fact, in her recount of the history of women’s education, Jennifer Madigan writes, “In 1918, the Commission on the Reorganization of Secondary Education made a case for the creation of a two track system: one track steered students, primarily males, toward college preparatory coursework, and the other track provided vocational training” (12). In addition, despite advancements in women’s political and legal rights and societal roles, “through the mid 1960s girls were channeled into occupational choices that were limited to [homemaking or secretarial work]” (12).

Composition guidebooks reflected the sexist assumptions of that time, too. For example, in the 1925 *Progressive Composition’s* chapter on academic discussion, Frances M. Perry includes this passage: “Whenever we set forth our opinions on any subject, whether in speech or in writing, we discuss the subject. The preacher in the pulpit does all the talking, but his sermon is a discussion. He explains the words he has taken for his text, and shows his hearers how they should be understood and how they may be applied

to the affairs of everyday life” (222). One could argue that Perry is using the generic “he,” but preachers at that time would have been exclusively male, so “he” clearly means a male. Tellingly, women are excluded from even being considered as academically capable in Perry’s example. Indeed, throughout the text, men are shown in the roles of public figures, leaders, and intellectuals whereas women are depicted in the accepted roles of mothers and wives.

Similarly, Dr. Edwin C. Woolley’s 1907 *Handbook of Composition* provides an example for correct sentence structure that reflects sexist views of women while also reflecting the era’s racial and class inequality: “His master was always very kind to him. His master’s wife, however, was altogether too parsimonious” (35). Given the date of the handbook’s publication, it is easy to assume that the unknown subject of the sentence could be an African American slave reflecting on his masters’ behaviors towards him. However, the example could be referring to class issues represented by the master/servant dichotomy. In either case, the sexism is apparent in that the contrast here implies that the man is kind, so the woman is unkind; the woman is parsimonious, so the man is generous. It seems quite clear to me that a male author who is concerned with his *ethos* would paint men as kind and women as unkind, creating a text that reflects the prevalent sexism and racism of the time. Woolley is also perpetuating a stereotype of a shrewish homemaker who chokes off her husband’s generosity to others. So, what is a woman in early twentieth-century composition texts? She seems to be White, upper-class, and married, so heterosexual and cisgendered. In other words, she is drawn by men via broad brush strokes in ways that conformed to the societal expectations of the time.

Fast-forward to the mid-twentieth century, and women have the right to attend

university; however, academia is still by no means an inclusive atmosphere for women, for it wasn't even until 1974 that Title IX was passed, thus prohibiting discrimination in schools on the basis of sex (Madigan 12). Progress has been made, and yet as evidenced by several composition guidebooks, the generic "he" was still used prominently.⁵

Thankfully the work of Feminists from the 1950s-1980s certainly helped encourage the use of masculine and feminine pronouns, so as to include women in formal writing. The 1986 *Harbrace College Handbook* details the history of pronoun usage when the sex or gender of the antecedent is unknown: "Until recently the rule for formal English required the use of *he*, *his*, or *him* to refer to such antecedents as *everyone* or *a person*... This use of the masculine pronoun is still widespread... But this rule is less rigid now. During the seventies and eighties, such forms as *he or she* and *he/she* have gained currency" (68).

So, women in the mid-twentieth century have gained access to representation in academia, but what about people of color? In the 1967 edition of the *Harbrace College Handbook*, students are encouraged to avoid what we know today as African American Vernacular English (AAVE), teaching students to elect to write in SAE above all. On this matter, the handbook states, "*Illiteracies* (also called *vulgarisms*) are the *nonstandard* expressions of uneducated people" (198), and the example given of an *illiteracy* is the following sentence: "The boys *ain't* going. *They's* no use asking them" (199). In addition, the 1986 version of this handbook uses the same example, "They's no use"; however, the 1986 version refrains from referring to this example as uneducated language—a minor improvement, at the absolute least. Regardless, the inclusion of AAVE as an "illiteracy" in both handbooks works to diminish the legitimacy of the language, as well as the

⁵ The 1967 and 1986 *Harbrace College Handbook*, specifically.

intelligence and educational capabilities of people of color.

For Womanists of this time, if academia were to become truly equal for *all* people, a new pedagogical approach must be taken, for the other pedagogical conventions previously described did nothing more than promote whiteness and forsake non-whiteness. Power, rather than knowledge, was the purpose of education. In response to that approach to education, Womanists such as bell hooks envisioned pedagogy as an opportunity for social justice via transgression. Though her book *Teaching to Transgress* was published in 1994, hooks recounts that she had begun writing the project during graduate school in the late 1970s, indicating that the conflicts of which she writes have been present for well over 20 years (9). hooks writes of the classroom, “For years it has been a place where education has been undermined by teachers and students alike who seek to use it as a platform for opportunistic concerns rather than as a place to learn” (12). Per hooks, education had been transformed into a commodity that praised white males, specifically, and encouraged minorities to conform to dominant hegemonies, and, since hooks was deeply inspired by the critical pedagogy of Paulo Freire, it follows that traditional pedagogy is against the entire basis of education as a practice of freedom.⁶

Paulo Freire’s critical pedagogy is also evident in the NCTE’s/CCCC’s 1974 position statement, “Students Right to their Own Language”:

We affirm the students’ right to their own patterns and varieties of language—the dialects of their nurture or whatever dialects in which they find their own identity

⁶ hooks writes that Paulo Freire’s critical pedagogy considers “education as the practice of freedom,” hence the title of her work (6). Critical pedagogy is counter-hegemonic and encourages students to raise critical questions and confront inequalities in the classroom, thereby empowering students to be critically engaged and transform the outside world.

and style. Language scholars long ago denied that the myth of a standard American dialect has any validity. The claim that any one dialect is unacceptable amounts to an attempt of one social group to exert its dominance over another. Such a claim leads to false advice for speakers and writers, and immoral advice for humans. A nation proud of its diverse heritage and its cultural and racial variety will preserve its heritage of dialects. We affirm strongly that teachers must have the experiences and training that will enable them to respect diversity and uphold the right of students to their own language. (4)

This position statement sought to dispel the racist pedagogical practices that were embedded in academia. Although, it is arguable whether such pedagogical practices carry through, today.

Now in the twenty-first century, we are much more pedagogically progressive and inclusive, and it is interesting to see that some composition handbooks since the late 1980s have also considered the possibilities of progressing and easing the conflict of gender altogether, just like Butler promotes. While I should note that the 1986 edition of the *Harbrace College Handbook* still supports the generic “he,” or at least the combination of *he* and *she*, the handbook also notes that “writers are using plural pronouns to refer to singular antecedents that denote both sexes or either sex” (68). Even though this pedagogical move maintains the gender binary, it is still a start and is commendable. Moreover, a later edition of the handbook, the 1998 *Hodges’ Harbrace Handbook*, includes, “When referring to a noun that can include both men and women, you can avoid the pronoun *he* by dropping the pronoun... You can also avoid the problem by recasting in the plural, in the passive, or in the imperative” (74). Here, we can see

pedagogical moves being taken to remove the problem of gender from writing; however, like the 1986 handbook, the option of a third, non-binary gender is not considered in the 1998 handbook.

In the newest edition of *The EasyWriter*, however, Andrea Lunsford writes, “Many writers use *he* or *she*, *his* or *her*, and so on to refer to [unknown] antecedents...However, such wording ignores or even excludes people who do not identify as male or female or who prefer not to use *he* or *she* pronouns. Recasting the sentence in the plural is often a more inclusive alternative” (332). Within this last example, we can see there is a clear recognition of various genders and an intention to subvert traditional writing, as well as traditional writing pedagogy. In addition to these pedagogical changes, Lunsford’s *EasyWriter* also contains a section for “Writing across Cultures and Communities” and “Language That Builds Common Ground,” which contain sections about reflection on what may be normal for the writer and audience (246), as well as examining one’s assumptions about gender and pronoun preferences, race and ethnicity, and even abilities and disabilities (250-54). Further, Lunsford discusses other varieties of English—African American Vernacular English (AAVE) and Tex-Mex, for example—and how Standard American English (SAE) is nothing but another variation of English (255). Her point in addressing all these variations of composition considers Crenshaw’s argument about intersectionality and works to make composition pedagogy more inclusive and diverse.

As far as writing centers go, Carino in “Early Writing Centers: A History” reports that writing centers began in the university classroom as a writing lab as early as the 1910s, which means that women would have been excluded from writing lab work, as

university classrooms were almost exclusively male until open admissions began to “proliferate” in the 1960s (105, 109). These classroom-based writing labs were based on current-traditionalist pedagogies and focused on lower-order concerns, such as spelling, grammar, and punctuation, and they were mediated by teachers. Notably, it wasn’t until the 1940s that writing labs began to be used by the army and sought to better communication skills, something that most writing centers include in their missions today (107).

It also was not until the late 1960s that the writing center became representative of the safe, feminine home that Grutsch McKinney critiques. Even though the intention was to counter the academic patriarchy by creating a nurturing, anti-institutional space—just as Stanton and Anthony, as well as second-wave Feminist such as Friedan and de Beauvoir, had hoped—the 1960s writing centers had assumed that white women’s culture was universal, and writing centers thus assumed a version of “home” that was predicated on the white culture’s vision. Hence, even as universities became increasingly racially and socio-economically diverse, writing centers failed to acknowledge intersectionality. Instead, as Gillespie and Lerner expound, open admissions policies created a “remediation of the underprepared” whereby the tutor/writer hierarchy formed (147). It is valuable to note that contemporary writing center history does not perceive writers as in need of remediation from “more experienced” student tutors; rather, they are places of collaboration amongst peers, where tutor and tutee learn from one another. And, by the 1990s, Andrea Lunsford separates writing centers into three categories: storehouse, garret, and Burkean parlor, to which Eric Hobson simplified as writing centers who practice positivist, expressivist, and social-constructionist pedagogies, confirming the

shift from remediation to collaboration (147-48).⁷ Within this brief account of writing center history and praxis, we're able to trace the paradigm shift from traditional to Feminist praxis.

Conclusion

White Feminists, such as Susan B. Anthony, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Simone de Beauvoir and Betty Friedan, excluded racial issues in their work, choosing, instead, to focus their work generally on the issues of *all* women. However, their work remained “colorblind” and omitted race in a way that sorely misrepresented *all* women’s issues, and furthermore, in the case of de Beauvoir and Friedan, women were painted as *less than* men and needing to be *better than*, thus reinforcing a gender hierarchy instead of gender equality. In response to white Feminism, Alice Walker coined the term “Womanism.” Womanism is made up of Black Feminists and other Feminists of color, such as Audre Lorde and bell hooks, who are committed “willfully” to the survival and wholeness of entire people, male *and* female” (Beyond the Moment). Butler and Crenshaw carry on the legacy of Womanists, but Butler questions the validity of a definition for womanhood, and Crenshaw acknowledges that there is more to consider when it comes to womanhood than sex or gender. And, lastly, the history of composition and writing centers have greatly changed in correspondence with the Feminist movement. We have discussed the omission of women from pedagogy altogether; we’ve learned how transgressive pedagogies, such as hooks’, work against sexist, classist, and racist pedagogies; and we’ve noted the ways in which today’s pedagogy has become more

⁷ Gillespie and Lerner reference Lunsford’s 1991 *Collaboration and Control* and Hobson’s 1992 “Maintaining Our Balance,” specifically

inclusive of non-normative people, cultures, and languages.

In the next chapter, “Challenging Heteronormativity,” I continue my critical analysis by exploring the work of significant queer theorists. As with this current chapter, this next chapter will begin with an examination of queer theory in order to answer the questions, “What is Queer?” First, I intend to define sex, gender, and sexuality, as they are each different facets of a person’s identity. Then, I will discuss how Queer theory de-centers heteronormativity, and finally, I will conclude by examining how Queer theory has shifted to become less focused on sexuality and more focused on *queerness*, itself. Following this section, I will end with a discussion of queer composition/writing center praxis.

III. CHALLENGING HETERONORMATIVITY

“And, at its best, queer theory focuses on and makes central not only the socially constructed nature of sexuality and sexual categories, but also the varying degrees and multiple sites of power distributed within all categories of sexuality, including the normative category of heterosexuality.”

-Cathy Cohen, “Punks, Bulldaggers, and Welfare Queens,” 1997, pp. 439

The second guiding question of my thesis asks, “How have Transgender theories of composition/writing center praxis emerged out of Queer theory and composition pedagogy?” Similar to the previous chapter, I will examine queer theory throughout the twentieth century to uncover the answer to the question “What is queer?” The answer to this question, along with the findings from the previous chapter, work together to identify the goal of Trans theories and composition/writing center praxis, for as I explained earlier in this work, these theories build upon one another until we reach a culmination in Trans theories.

I will continue my work by conducting a critical analysis over prominent queer theory from the twentieth century by Gayle Rubin, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, Audre Lorde, Adrienne Rich, Cathy Cohen, and Gloria Anzaldúa. First, I will discuss Rubin’s “Thinking Sex” and Sedgwick’s *Epistemology of the Closet*, which detail the need to include homosexuals in theory and distinguish the differences between sex, gender, and sexuality. From there, I will explore works by Lorde and Rich that challenge and de-center compulsory heterosexuality. After that section, I address the work of Cohen and Anzaldúa, examining their arguments for expanding queer theory from homosexuality to *all* queer identities. As in the previous chapter, too, I will finish by identifying the pedagogical moves influenced by the various queer theories I discuss. First, I will present a history of LGBT representation in pedagogy. Then, I unpack how queer pedagogies are

considered to be more inclusive and understanding of uncertainty, thus being more supportive of fluidity and a rejection of dominant pedagogies. I also address how queer theory challenges traditional authority and composition methods, and I end with a discussion about how queer theory promotes revision via reflection of one's identity.

Queer Theories: What is Queer?

The following works in Queer theory address some of the most important issues backgrounded or omitted in Feminist theory: issues of sexuality and intersectionality. However, just as Feminist theory began with broad strokes, so, too, did the work of queer theorists. With each curved brushstroke added to the painting of "What is queer?," the work of queer theorists led to more inclusive and expansive understandings of the effect that heteronormativity can have on one's sociopolitical agency and self-understanding.

Addressing Sex, Gender, and Sexuality

Scholars Gayle S. Rubin and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick first wrote what is now considered "Queer theory" in 1984 and 1990, respectively. Their works were written during the AIDS Epidemic, a time during which the LGBT community—but primarily gay men—were experiencing social exclusion. Their solution to this problem? Educate others about sexuality in order to demonstrate that sexuality isn't a deviancy.

In her 1984 essay "Thinking Sex"—arguably one of the defining texts of Queer theory—Gayle S. Rubin responds to early Feminist theorists who arranged gender and sexuality into a binary opposition that lacked depth and variety.⁸ Specifically, Rubin believes that Queer theory should correspondingly be concerned with human sexuality since sexuality is varied and related to all aspects of one's life; it is the make or break

⁸ This is mostly a critique of Feminists like de Beauvoir and Friedan.

when it comes to power and agency. Backgrounded in Feminist works from the late 1800s- to 1970s, women's subjugation was tied to their chromosomal, gendered, and sexual relationship with men. In most cases, sex and gender were conflated, and women's agency came from their performance of gender roles in heterosexual relationships. Women were "the second sex," the *natural* counterparts to men, and women were meant to embody the characteristics of the cult of true womanhood: piety, purity, submissiveness, and domesticity. If a woman behaved in any way other than those characteristics, she would have troubled her gender expectations, thereby making herself deviant in society.

Inspired by Rubin's work, in her 1990 *Epistemology of the Closet*, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick sought to disrupt the assumption that sexuality and gender are inherently connected to one another. In her book, Sedgwick defines the differences between sex, gender, and sexuality, describing how they've been misrepresented by Feminism. Sex, she explains, is chromosomal (e.g. XX and XY); however, most assume that gender, although it is socially constructed, corresponds with one's biological sex. In addition, as demonstrated by white Feminists, many believe that gender determines one's sexuality (i.e. men are attracted to women and women are attracted to men); however, that is simply not the case, for each of these subjects—sex, gender, and sexuality—are related, though not mutually constitutive (Sedgwick 29). According to Sedgwick, gender is very much performative, as Butler formerly described, and this distinction is important to note since it enables us to understand how, while some parts of identity are biological, there are multiple facets of our identity that are performative.

In relation to gender performance, Rubin's work is a response to the cult of true

womanhood, and it is reflective of a fork within the topic of sexuality in Feminism: the formation of sex-positive and sex-negative Feminism. Sex-negative Feminism seeks to rid the public of everything that make women appear deviant and able to be used for the gain of men—pornography and sex work, for instance. In contrast, sex-positive Feminism argues that the public needs to become less critical of the women in the aforementioned lines of work. While some women surely have been taken advantage of by men, there are other women who take enjoyment out of reclaiming and owning their sexuality. In all, sex-positive Feminism opposes the portrayal and enforcement of *all* women as pious, pure, submissive, and domestic.

Furthermore, Rubin notes that the mere option of being anything other than publicly heterosexual has been almost entirely forbidden in history, for homosexuals have been historically perceived as a direct opposition to the institution of marriage. Where heterosexual relationships benefit society, homosexual relationships are a “menace” to society, and where marriage result in children, homosexual relationships lack children and seek to corrupt children (Rubin 145-46) Rubin believed, too, that just as Feminism critiqued gender hierarchies and the placement of men *above* women, there needed to be an additional “radical theory of sex” that critiqued sexual oppression (170). Rubin argues that, like gender, sexuality is linked to sociopolitical power, and sexual deviancies have been forcibly backgrounded and omitted throughout history, for deviancy is a threat to the hegemony since it cannot be controlled or ordered. As an example of the uncontrollable nature of deviancy, the AIDS crisis, the event that inspired Rubin’s work, was everything that “moral,” “upstanding” citizens feared since it was deadly and seemingly incurable. Many right-wing and centrist politicians believed homosexual men

were being punished for their deviancy, and Rubin felt compelled to challenge their criticism of homosexuality. Per Rubin, gay men were not deviant nor were they incorrectly performing their gender expectations; rather, the negative public sentiment towards them was the result of homophobia and “gay panic” (170-71).

Somewhat related, the main purpose of Sedgwick’s *Epistemology* is to foreground men in queer theory. Understandably, and as Lee Edelman notes in “Unnamed: Eve’s Epistemology,” the event that serves as the exigence for Sedgwick’s book is the AIDS crisis, which gay men specifically endured, and the resulting chapters of her book investigate closeted homosexuality in the literary canon, which was almost exclusively made up of men (185-86). Therefore, it is not entirely suspect that Sedgwick calls her theory a “gay male-oriented” and “antihomophobic” analysis; Sedgwick even admits that her analyses cannot be synonymous with lesbians since the experiences of either parties are located on different ends of the gender spectrum (36). Furthermore, Sedgwick notes that her omission, and sometimes backgrounding, of lesbians from her discussion is rightfully intentional and valid. For instance, just as women’s sexuality has been subsumed by men in discussions of Feminism, lesbians could also be subsumed in queer theory because the nomenclature of sexuality is, most often, male-focused (39). Take, for example, the terms “homosexual” and “gay.” If one were provided those terms and asked to imagine a person, in both cases, one almost always imagines a man, as the terms do not inherently refer to women as the word “lesbian” does (17).

Notably, Rubin foregrounds sexual variation in her book as a means to advocate for sex-positive Feminism, with arguments for pornography and sadomasochism, child sexuality and masturbation, as well as pedophilia and bestiality. All this considered, she

omits the topics of bisexuality and asexuality from her discussion, and she includes *transsexuality* as a sexual concern, when it is presently considered a concern of gender. In regard to the omission of asexuality, I believe this sexuality was omitted because a common criticism of sexuality at the time was that sexuality was an inherent part of biology. As Rubin explains, many believed, and even still believe, that we have a biological need to engage in sex for both pleasure and procreation, and anything that does not fit into that belief is deviant (150). Perhaps, too, as a sex-positive Feminist, a self-constituted rejection of sexuality, like asexuality, simply wasn't on her radar. Regardless, just as Feminism foregrounded issues within the gender hierarchy, Rubin also warns us to remain critical of sexual hierarchies. In all, for both Rubin and Sedgwick, sexuality and gender are connected to one another, but they do not define one another, and neither theorist was as interested with the hybridity of intersectionality as were other theorists of color (Stryker 124-25).

De-Centering Heterosexuality

The work of Womanists—women of color, like Audre Lorde, and other minority Womanists, like Adrienne Rich—de-centered heterosexuality in Feminism through acts of transgression. Once heterosexuality is de-centered, all other identities—race, religion, class, etc.—gain the power to come to the forefront, thus displaying the presence of intersectionality.

In “Compulsory Heterosexuality and the Lesbian Experience,” Adrienne Rich, tackles the assumption of compulsory heterosexuality that stemmed from some of the Feminist

works discussed in the previous chapter.⁹ Rich asks two key questions: 1) Why have women been forced to feel ashamed, and therefore forced to background or omit, their lesbianism? and 2) Why has the existence of lesbians been omitted from Queer scholarship, as well as Feminist studies? (632). Rich believes that the answer to the two questions comes from the establishment of heterosexuality as “a beachhead of male dominance” (633). Feminists write about how to achieve equality with men, but it seems as if none are willing to consider that heterosexuality and the institution of marriage are systems that dominate women, for how can a woman self-actualize herself when she is still forced to submit to men? The solution, for Rich, is to foreground that which has been backgrounded and omitted in “heterocentric” assumptions: women and “the lesbian continuum” (648).

For Rich, the lesbian continuum does not necessarily relate to sexual experiences between women; rather the continuum includes “a range—throughout each woman’s life and throughout history—of a woman-identified experience” (648). In other words, rather than foregrounding the relationships between men *and* women, we should instead foreground and focus our attention on the experiences between and amongst women. Women have been backgrounded in sociopolitical discussions and used to satiate men for far too long. Notably—for Rich, at least—women aren’t truly satiated by men, for how can one be truly satiated by submission in all facets of life? Heterosexuality presupposes women’s behavior when women should be deciding how they wish to behave on their

⁹ The works I discussed by Simone de Beauvoir and Betty Friedan exclusively centered on women’s sexual, social, and economical connection to men, as if lesbians—or single women, for that matter—didn’t exist. Almost makes one want to say, “*Suffering Sappho!*”

own. If we want women to become more engaged in politics, economics, and education, we must take their connection to men out of the picture and re-emphasize women's connection to women. Women should gain authority for the sake of being women, not for the sake of becoming equal to *men*.

Notably, Audre Lorde's 1984 *Sister Outsider* is a collection of essays and speeches inspired by Lorde's identity as a Black lesbian activist and poet, cancer survivor, as well as mother and Feminist writer. Crenshaw's "Mapping the Margins" would be published seven years after Lorde's collection; however, issues of intersectionality are foregrounded in Lorde's work. One chapter in particular, "Scratching the Surface: Some Notes on Barriers to Women and Loving," speaks to the intersecting issues of heterosexism, homophobia, sexism, racism. Lorde experiences greater amounts of systemic inequality, oppression, and omission from discussions of equality because she directly opposes everything of which the hegemony is comprised: she is Black, a woman, *and* homosexual. To make matters even more challenging, she finds it difficult to gain support from the members of her own racial community. As noted earlier in this chapter by hooks, Black men feel that they must oppress Black women in order to maintain their own authority.¹⁰ Moreover, per Lorde, if a Black woman is a lesbian, then she is even more oppressed because Black men are threatened by the lack of attraction lesbians feel display toward them (48).

Similarly, Black heterosexual women oppress Black lesbians because, within the Black community, there is a powerful aversion to same-sex sexual contact, which Lorde argues is directly related to the fear of "the death of the Black race" (50-51). This issue,

¹⁰ See page 32.

Lorde notes, is one that cannot be excused, backgrounded, or omitted any longer. Moreover, as Lorde argues in her chapter “Scratching the Surface,” heterosexual Black women have been forced to reject that which does not align with the dominant hegemony, and Black women, like Black men, establish their authority based on the performance of their sexuality (46). Per Lorde, instead of heterosexual Black women and men gathering strength from their cultural commonalities, they are able to establish their authority because their sexuality is not *othered*.

Furthermore, Lorde stresses at the end of her chapter that *real* authority can only be established when it is defined for the self, rather than for the sake of another, and Black women must come together, regardless of their sexualities or other differences, if they wish to be free from oppression (52). Lorde’s work must not be misunderstood, though. She is not writing in response to men’s oppression; rather she is concerned with the lack of understanding and support from her fellow sisters, heterosexual Black women. This problem is not new, for it is the same problem that has been present throughout the founding of Feminist theory. Women may identify with one another because they are women; however, it does not follow that all women must be, or *are*, heterosexual. In “The Re-Vision of the Muse,” Mary J. Carruthers argues that because Lorde and Rich are lesbians, they do not seek to dominate their muse or depict their relationship as one of possession. The former two qualities are inherently masculine (Carruthers 295). Instead, Lorde’s and Rich’s poetry are “a meeting of familiars which recalls a completeness that is present but forgotten or suppressed by history” (296).

All this being said, though, I wonder how Lorde and Rich would respond to the women omitted from their work: lesbian trans women, and Black trans women. Would

these writers hold that their arguments remain the same, regardless of gender transition, or would the authors believe that women are still maintaining heterosexuality? Their answer, I think, would depend on how they perceive trans women in general, which is something that will be discussed later on in this chapter and the subsequent chapter. For Rich and Lorde, however, their work is Queer—and not Feminist—because they argue for a system of being that is other than heterosexuality.

From Homosexual to Queer

While the previously mentioned theorists may be described as queer theorists, it is arguable whether their works are truly focused on *queer* issues since they mostly focus on issues of sexuality.¹¹ Cathy Cohen and Gloria Anzaldúa discuss sexuality, gender, class, race, etc. in their works, offering a picture of queer theory that represents an even broader, fluid LGBTQIA+ community.

Just as Jacques Derrida teaches us that a binary is comprised of terms that do not just supplement one another, but privilege one, defining what is “queer” as everything that is not heterosexual is an oversight that retains the heteronormative hierarchy. In “Punks, Bulldaggers, and Welfare Queens,” Cathy Cohen extends the work of queer Black women such as Lorde and Walker by arguing that the queer political movement thus far has become nothing more than a replication of dominant systems that focuses on a single identity and backgrounds all other intersecting identities. One may assume that everyone who is heterosexual is in the dominant group while everyone queer is in the

¹¹ As you’ll notice, the previous theorists focused on gay men and lesbian women, leaving out discussions on transgender or other gender non-conforming individuals. Their work speaks of gender but only in a performative sense, and as you’ll see in the next chapter, some transgender theorists reject the claim that *all gender is a performance*.

minority group, but these assumptions are severely lacking. Cohen's argument, then, is to broaden Queer theory to more than just sexuality, for Queer politics' focus on sexuality has made it one-dimensional, a single-oppression framework that "misrepresent[s] the distribution of power within and outside of gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgendered communities, and therefore limit[s] the comprehensive and transformational character of queer politics" (441).¹²

Cohen's solution to the one-dimensional portrayal of Queer politics is to create a new form of Queer politics that is inclusive of "all those who stand on the outside of the dominant constructed norm of the state-sanctioned white-middle and upper-class heterosexuality [and homosexuality]" (441). For instance, just as race, gender, class, education, ability, etc. are issues found within past heteronormative sociopolitical issues, these issues translate to Queer sociopolitical issues, too. As an example of these issues, gay and lesbian women may choose to date only *real* men and women (i.e. cisgender men and women), and some lesbians and gays may look down on others who do not fit into dominant hegemonies—such as being stereotypically masculine or feminine and being middle- or upper-class rather than poor. For example, the lesbians in my hometown, Corpus Christi, Texas, are most often lower-class Hispanics, and they wear khaki Dickies with polo shirts, and their hair is usually slicked back in a tight bun. They are referred to as *Corpus Lesbians*, a term that is often laced with disgust. When I originally came out as lesbian, my white friend who was raised in an upper-middle-class home told me she

¹² "The Combahee River Collective," drafted by Barbara Smith, Beverly Smith, and Demita Frazier speaks to the limitation of single-oppression frameworks as well. However, their statement specifically addresses how Black lesbian women have been excluded from Feminism because Feminism focused on white, heterosexual women rather than *all* women.

would accept me as long as I didn't look like a Corpus Lesbian. Here, sexuality, race, gender, and class are all at play.

In the U.S., homosexuality remains an identity that is marginalized; however, taking a nod from Crenshaw, there are other identities comprising a single *self* that give one privilege over another. Just as Lorde argued for justice for Black women, Cohen argues that we cannot forget the “welfare queens,” the lower-class black women who experience even harsher inequality than other members of their own race. She writes, “Only by recognizing the link between the ideological, social, political, and economic marginalization of punks, bulldaggers, and welfare queens can we begin to develop political analyses and political strategies effective in confronting the linked yet varied sites of power in this country” (462). In Cohen’s theory of Queer politics, sexuality is still important; however, for the sake of progress and introspection, the time had come to foreground race, class, and gender so that Queer politics could encompass and represent *all* who transgress normative behavior, not just those who have “deviant” sexualities.

While Cohen’s argument is progressive and valuable, she still omits an essential part of one’s identity that is often excluded from traditional pedagogy and may cause one to be regarded as non-normative: ability. For, even as scholars delve into intersectionality, it is well known that, in terms of power and privilege, those who are neurodiverse or handicapped still lack power and privilege to this day. In addition, in “The Radical Potential of Black Feminist Evaluation,” Sarah Haley considers Cohen’s work and notes that in the 1890s the use of the word “queer” was used in the South to refer to “strange... excessive and delinquent bodies” (181). Surely, it is important to consider the power and privilege of people who cannot “control” their own bodies in accordance with normative

ways of being, and the work of Black Feminists opens the door to understanding the types of bodies that are privileged in society.

Once queer theory is expanded to include not just sexuality and gender, but all other forms of being queer (i.e. being disabled, poor, uneducated, of color), Queer theory will no longer depend upon a binary opposition, like homosexual/heterosexual, for its definition. Instead, queer theory will be known as an analysis of the fringes and the center, in which the fringes are foregrounded, for even within the binary opposition of the fringes and the center, one may find a mixture of identities that could technically be placed in either one and/or both of the groups. For instance, a white nonbinary person is on the fringes of gender identity yet is in the center of racial identity; they embody liminality.

Queerness is unspecified and different in terms of how we come to define it, yet just as previous queer theorists have contended, queer identity gains authority by celebrating its commonalities, not its differences. In *Borderlands/La Frontera*, Gloria Anzaldúa invokes Queer theory to foreground commonalities across identifications, rather than foreground the differences among identifications. In the borderlands, Anzaldúa writes, “the prohibited and forbidden are its inhabitants... the squint-eyed, the perverse, the queer, the troublesome, the mongrel, the mulato, the half-breed, the half dead; in short, those who cross over, pass over, or go through the confines of the ‘normal’” (25). These are various identifications to point out; however, the most important factor amongst all of them is that they do not accord with the dominant hegemony made up of normative identifications.

Anzaldúa further foregrounds the universality of “queerness,” which she calls the “*la*

mestiza,” when she writes,

I am cultureless because, as a Feminist, I challenge the collective cultural/religious male-derived beliefs of Indo-Hispanics and Anglos; yet I am cultured because I am participating in the creation of yet another culture, a new story to explain the world and our participation in it, a new value system with images and symbols that connect us to each other and to the planet. *Soy un amasamineto*, I am an act of kneading, of uniting and joining that not only has produced both a creature of darkness and a creature of light, but also a creature that questions the definitions of light and dark and gives them new meaning. (103)

In the same spirit of hooks’s arguments for transgression at the beginning of this chapter, a queer person like *la mestiza* is a transgression, and, therefore, a step towards freedom. Queer people are not constrained by the dominant hegemony nor are they constrained by a lesser power; rather, they move fluidly across spectrums.

On this note, Ian Barnard, in “Gloria Anzaldúa’s Queer *Mestisaje*,” explains that Anzaldúa uses her ethnicity to springboard the idea of *la mestiza*; however, that doesn’t necessarily mean that *la mestiza* is tied to her specific race and ethnicity, as some fear (43-4). In some cases, race and ethnicity can be backgrounded, making room for all types of borderland cultures to be foregrounded, thus enabling different identifications to become *la mestiza*. It must be stressed again, however, that Anzaldúa’s universality of *la mestiza* is not an attempt to background or omit race and ethnicity, as it once was in the past. Instead, it is an attempt to form a less divisive identification that is still able to account for the unique experiences of those who have been othered by the majority, those whose identities are valuable and able to access ways of being that transcend the

normative.

Queering Composition/Writing Center Praxis

Pedagogically, Rubin's and Sedgwick's work aligns with the push for a more inclusive composition classroom that, by the 1970s, had already begun to discuss issues of race, class, and gender. In a sense, Rubin's and Sedgwick's exclusion of intersectionality was warranted because their point was to advocate for an identity that had previously not been considered in pedagogy. In their survey of queer theory, "Queer Compositions(s): Queer Theory in the Writing Classroom," Johnathan Alexander and Michelle Gibson note, "In the 1970s virtually no work was being done that today we would call lesbian or gay composition scholarship—an absence that can be attributed to two distinct factors: first, composition scholarship in general was less theoretical and more pragmatic at that time, and second, the gay rights movement was still in its infancy" (9). However, in the 1980s, "most of the composition scholarship addressing lesbian and gay issues dealt with two goals: including gay and lesbian experience in the composition classroom—mainly in readers, writing assignments, and classroom discussion—and gaining professional visibility" (10). Then, in the 1990s, scholars began to use queer theory as a critique for scholarship and pedagogy (12). Sexuality had been excluded from composition scholarship because writing pedagogy had consistently been pragmatic, not theoretical, and it certainly wasn't personally motivated, either. At the time of Sedgwick's or Rubin's publications, then, LGBT scholars and teachers felt that it was time to increase LGBT representation in academia, for students and other closeted scholars, alike. Their goal was to show others that non-normative sexualities were not deviant; rather they were useful in expanding one's understanding of oneself.

Still, it is important to note that, as we'll see in the rest of this section, pedagogy can also be used in a social constructivist sense that seeks to normalize being queer, too. As described previously, Lorde argues that women gain agency by defining themselves, for definitions forced upon them by others are so often inaccurate. Take, for instance, the example shared from the 1907 *Handbook of Composition*.¹³ If we believed Woolley's description of women as parsimonious and men as kind to be an accurate definition of *all* women, then that portrayal would be wildly biased and inaccurate, considering all the definitions of women already covered in this thesis. For this reason, it is valid to believe that the queer community gains agency by defining itself, too. Since heteronormativity would have it that everything be defined and hierarchically ordered, then it would follow that queer theory should remain undefined and disordered.

Additionally, Rich would argue that women live for the sake of women and not men, so, for Rich, the queer community exists for the sake of the queer community and not the heterosexual community. On this subject, in *Teaching Queer*, Stacey Waite attempts to describe queer theory without defining queer theory. Waite explains, "Composition scholars have been grappling with uncertainty for some time, implicitly or explicitly. But perhaps when uncertainty is valued and expressed through queerer understandings of identity and relation we might begin to imagine new possibilities for writing and the teaching of writing" (93). These new possibilities of writing are achievable *because of* transgression, for as Connie Monson and Jacqueline Rhodes write in "Risking Queer," "the classroom, far from being an ivory tower separate or separable from power relations at large, necessarily inherits and refracts [power relations]. Students emerge as docile

¹³ See pages 34-35.

bodies whose desire is mediated and shaped by language and ergo by pedagogical prescriptives on discourse” (85). This statement explains how societal beliefs *could* inform pedagogical practices. If education can make students docile, then it should be able to make students transgressive. As demonstrated in the previous chapter on Feminism, inclusive pedagogy did not exist until the world itself became more inclusive, and the same goes for Queer pedagogy, too.

Queer theory’s resistance to being defined has already appeared in this section, but it will appear here once more, given the descriptions that Cohen and Anzaldúa have given for identities that are expansive and fluid. Waite explains again, “‘Queer’ works are like a sheet of ice—whatever we put there slips and slides and become impossible to pin down for more than a temporary moment” (168), and one of the main characteristics of queer theory is that it disrupts binaries. The concept of slipperiness is very similar to *la mestiza* who is both her culture and other cultures at the same time, in both worlds and a third space at the same time. She cannot be caught and forced into a box because she is not completely in one area or another. Furthermore, Waite writes, “I think that one aspect of pedagogies that might call themselves ‘queer’ is to disrupt these models of power...that confine our identities and our abilities to see more complex webs of possibilities as thinkers” (168). Here, especially, we see Queer theory’s connection to Feminist theory. In a patriarchy, women communicate with one another in interdependent and egalitarian webs whereas men have the freedom to communicate as independent agents, as the default.

Furthermore, since queer theory encourages transgressing dominant social norms, the act of transgression can appear in different ways in the composition classroom, done in

hopes of subverting authority. Jennifer DiGrazia and Michel Boucher explain in “Writing InQueeries” that one act of transgression can be seen in teachers’ attempts to flip authority in the composition classroom: Students participate in peer review more often; they analyze themselves as texts; and they are given little instructional guidance to practice teaching and learning from one another (32). In many ways, authority is embodied, and teaching *queerly* asks one to remain cognizant of how classroom positions increase and decrease authority. Do teachers stand behind a podium and lecture? Do they move freely throughout the classrooms or sit down at a table? When students are given more authority, they may be hesitant at first (they are the ones wanting to *learn*, after all); however, there is a large amount of power given to students when they are encouraged to behave and compose their work as if they are the sole expert on the subject. The agency they gain from such transgressive actions slowly helps students rise to the top of the hierarchy.

Moreover, DiGrazia and Michel note that transgression also appears in resisting SAE and current-traditional pedagogy focused on the writing product rather than the writing process. Queer pedagogy encourages students to go off the tracks and compose their work in non-traditional ways. Multimodal composition is encouraged, as is code-switching and composing works using multiple genres, and students are asked to compose works according to the ways in which *they* want their work to be perceived, which means they are more attuned to reflecting on their work and revising as needed

(37).¹⁴ In all, Queer pedagogy is a liberatory pedagogy because it is not restrictive and does not demand a single definition nor a single formula or method of writing.

All this theoretical commentary still leaves a question about what this Queer, Feminist-inspired pedagogy looks like in action. Karen Kopelson in “Dis/Integrating the Gay/Queer Binary” asserts that a *performative pedagogy* informed by queer theory “endeavors to proliferate innumerable—and *innumberable*—possibilities for identity, rather than to *represent* one bounded identity or the other, ultimately to expose and contest the normalizing processes of identity’s construction” (20). Identity performance is such a large part of the writing classroom because writing is all about how writers use language to convey meaning and portray themselves. Therefore, in order to emphasize the fluidity and variance of identity, teachers are encouraged to stress the recursive nature of the writing process to their students, for just as identity is consistently re-evaluated, re-constituted, and re-established, so, too, are writers able to revise their work as often as they need. Furthermore, Kopelson cites Donna Qualley when she writes that revision is not a mere surface change (29). If revising a paper during the writing process is similar to revising one’s self, students should be asked to think about how their identities are “revised.” Do they ever perceive themselves as a finished project, or do they feel as if they are always in a state of *becoming*, influenced by the convergence of their identities? I believe theorists like Cohen and Anzaldúa would argue for the latter.

¹⁴ As an example of non-traditional composition, this semester I had my students complete autoethnographies based on a part of their identity that they feel is misrepresented in scholarship. Their works include narrative, scholarly research, pictures, and statistical data, and because their work is so personal to *them*, they seem to be more responsive to feedback than my previous classes, and they seem more genuinely interested and passionate about their work, too.

In terms of writing center praxis, Andrew Rihn and Jay Sloan report in their article “Rainbows in the Past were Gay” that they often feel both “pride and disappointment” with the writing center field because theorists are making ground with writing center theory, yet sexuality is hardly ever addressed. Denny is the most prominent Queer writing center theorist who examines LGBT tutor narratives that navigate the consequences of coming out and acknowledging sexuality in the center.¹⁵ Rihn and Sloan emphasize the importance of making the center a safe space to come out should a tutor or student decide to do so. Tutors should also be trained to interact with homophobic papers without making the writer feel attacked. Overall, however, less time is spent discussing queer tutoring practices, and more time is spent discussing the need to have a diverse staff. For example, Rihn and Sloan note that directors should promote the acceptance of *all* types of people on staff in order to encourage more diverse applicants.

Conclusion

Like the abstraction of Feminism, over time, the work of Queer theorists and queerness becomes more and more expansive and abstract. Since Rubin and Sedgwick were writing in the late 1980s and early 1990s, their work is concerned with defending homosexual men, primarily, and educating others about the differences between sex, gender, and sexuality. Their work, while useful, still failed to account for intersectionality and backgrounded lesbians, which provided an opportunity for Lorde and Rich to discuss the experience of lesbians and de-center sexual hierarchies. Like Lorde and Rich, Cohen and Anzaldúa emphasize intersectionality; however, their work does more than simply

¹⁵ Rihn and Sloan also acknowledge the work of lesser known queer writing scholars, such as Jonathan Doucette, Curtis Dickerson, Jonathan Rylander.

challenge binaries and argue for homosexual inclusion in theory. Instead, they argue that theory also includes all who are *queered* or *othered* in society, thus enabling Queer theory to expand and cover all identities that are considered non-normative, while still accounting for how minorities can still be privileged. Queer theory has also benefitted composition pedagogy in numerous ways. Queer pedagogy relishes uncertainty and asks that teachers allow more independent and group work rather than lecture, as well as encourages experimentation with form and genre via multimodal and multigenre work since positivist and current-traditional composition typically favor the logic of monomodal and mono-generic works. Since Queer pedagogy naturally challenges the norm, students are asked to embrace fluidity and question their identities. Furthermore, when students are more engaged with and reflective of their identities, they are more involved with their work and willing to revise and engage with the writing process.

My next chapter, “Trans Theories in Action,” builds on and complicates Feminist and Queer theory, as well as Feminist and Queer composition/writing center praxis. The first section of this chapter will answer the question “What is trans?” as it relates to theory. I will discuss first the trans movement as it relates to social justice issues, and then, I will abstract that discussion to link the trans movement to a systematic resistance to binaries and consequently the embracing of fluid gender performance. As with the chapters on Feminist and Queer issues, after I discuss Trans theories, I will detail Trans composition pedagogies. Different than the former two chapters, however, I will write a third section containing examples about my experiences as a tutor, which will work to ground Trans composition/writing center praxis and posit new tutoring practices that can benefit writing center tutoring practices.

IV. DEFINING TRANS AND CELEBRATING TRANSGRESSIONS

“That focal point or fulcrum, that juncture where the mestiza stands, is where phenomena tend to collide. It is where the possibility of uniting all that is separate occurs...In attempting to work out a synthesis, the self has added a third element which is greater than the sum of its severed parts. That third element is a new consciousness—a mestiza consciousness—and though it is a source of intense pain, its energy comes from the continual creative motion that keeps breaking down the unitary aspect of each new paradigm.”

-Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera*, 1987, pp. 101-102

The transgender (trans) movement is a response to all previous theorists who either knowingly or unconsciously omitted or misrepresented trans issues in Feminist and Queer theory. Where previous theorists foregrounded heteronormativity and homonormativity, Trans theorists responded by foregrounding issues such as trans liberation from sexuality, gender performance, and fluidity. I will thus break from the format of the past two chapters and explain in this first larger section how Trans theorists, themselves, responded to what previous theories foregrounded, backgrounded, and omitted and how Trans theorists have answered the question “What is trans?” Then, because Trans composition/writing center pedagogy is fairly limited, I will spend the larger section of this chapter discussing my own experiences as a trans writing center tutor, explaining why writing centers should break from traditional composition/writing center praxis and clarifying how they can do so.

Trans Theories: What is trans?

The following work by Trans and other Queer theorists teaches us about who trans people are, what they experience, and why trans experiences are valuable. Referring back to the analogy of Feminist and Queer theories as brushstrokes in a painting, the previously discussed theorists in Feminist and Queer theory had made brushstrokes that seemingly created a painting that would benefit from some blending, to which Trans

theorists felt the need to blur those lines, swirling the colors together until no visible lines were left. For the following theorists, the answer to “What is trans?” is varied and open for interpretation, influenced by the internal conflict and re-negotiations that trans people experience on a daily basis.

From Gender Liberation to Trans Liberation

This section answers the question “What is trans?” by briefly delving into the background and mission of the transgender movement. Authors Cressida Heyes, C. L. Cole, and Shannon L.C. Cate each describe instances of liberation within the topics of gender and transgender identities, explaining how the concept of liberation has been at the forefront of the Trans movement since its development.

Cressida Heyes, in her 2003 article “Feminist Solidarity after Queer Theory,” notes that feminism and the transgender movement have “often been cast as opposing movements” (1094) because Feminist authors such as Janice Raymond and Bernice Hausman have represented “transsexual” individuals as mentally ill or a “dupe,” thus inspiring trans-exclusionary radical feminists (terfs) to argue against trans issues having any space or liberty to express non-normative genders within the Feminist movement. Their arguments, Heyes believes, “seem paradigmatic of many of the most pressing Feminist anxieties about identity, gender, and personal transformation” (1098). Where feminism created a clear, separate space for women from men so that women could have the space to transform themselves liberally, away from the patriarchy, the inclusion of trans women is considered an *invasion* since many cisgender women still consider trans women to be cisgender men. There is an ongoing belief that no matter how well a trans woman “passes” (i.e. is regarded by the public as their preferred gender), they will never

be able to truly relate to cisgender women. With this explanation, Heyes foregrounds the criticism and violence against trans women that often goes undiscussed in Feminist and Queer theory: many cisgender people believe that it is impossible for a trans person to be free from the influence that their former gender had on their lives. Essentially, trans women are still men, and trans men are still women.

Heyes also critiques early Trans theorists such as Leslie Feinberg and Kate Bornstein who have proclaimed that all people should have the individual freedom to express their gender as they choose, for she believes that their definition of gender liberation is lacking ethical bearing, as gender is “a web of relations in ongoing tension and negotiation” (1112). Heyes also foregrounds the influence of privilege in her work, something that few theorists have considered in the past. Heyes believes it may be nice to believe that *all* people want to live free from the confines of gender roles and expectations, but that belief is unrealistic. Heyes writes, “there are many who lap up gender ideology precisely because it supports their privilege” (1112). White men and women are *supposed* to adhere to prescriptive gender norms because they are also aware that remaining safely inside the status quo yields cultural capital; whereas, defying gender norms means a loss of not only cultural capital, but, perhaps, even a loss of family and of life. Instances such as this reveal that the ethics of gender liberation isn’t necessarily related to *how* people perform their gender but rather *why* they perform gender the way they do.

As a cisgender Feminist writer, Heyes is careful with her work; she is not attempting to use her experiences to speak for trans people nor create new Trans theories. Rather she hopes that her work will inspire other cisgender Feminist writers to “interrogate [their] own identities and [their] comfort with [their] own gender” (1117). Heyes does believe

that a person's ability to "self-fashion" their own identity is extremely important since gender is inherently "*relationally* formed" by the actions of those around us—our culture, value, and beliefs (1094). However, she argues that there should be an ethics of self-fashioning that "recognize[s] the discursive limits on the individual self-transformation without denying agency to gendered objects" (1096). In other words, Heyes believes that we must keep in mind that there are variables that affect why a person wants to live one way or another, as it is entirely in their right to do so, and one's knowledge of gender performance is only as vast as the language and experiences their communities afford them. For Heyes, we can try to educate everyone about the breadth of gender performance; however, equitable gender liberation consists of accepting both normative *and* non-normative genders. It is hypocritical of those who have non-normative genders to shame those who are normatively gendered.

While Heyes was concerned with ethical self-transformation and gender liberation, C. L. Cole and Shannon L.C. Cate were concerned with liberating the transgender community from the homonormativity and gender normativity of the LGBT community. In "Compulsory Gender," written in 2008, Cole and Cate refer to Adrienne Rich's "Compulsory Heterosexuality" and extend the implications that Rich's work could have on the trans community, arguing that just as Rich's logic "untangled" compulsory heterosexuality, so, too, will her logic untangle compulsory gender normativity within the LGBT community. The authors argue that the trans community is often backgrounded or omitted from queer issues, which isn't necessarily any person's fault—rather it is a result of how and why the LGBT community was formed. Initially, the community was formed to represent non-normative sexualities—gay, lesbian, and bisexual. The label "T" for

transgender was added to the “alphabet soup” after the fact for those with non-normative genders. It was assumed that each letter stood for individual groups and identities that wouldn’t mix or intersect with one another. “Transgender,” in this case, was similar to sexuality since the only knowledge of trans people came from the visibility of activists such as Marsha P. Johnson in the Stonewall Riot. At the time, people like Johnson were assumed to be gay men in drag, and, therefore, being trans was almost a result of being gay. Nowadays, however, we know this assumption isn’t the case. We are more than aware that drag queens can still identify as men, and “transgender” isn’t an isolated identity within the LGBT community. There are gay, lesbian, and bisexual trans men and women, and one’s gender generally has no bearing on one’s sexuality.

Additionally, Cole and Cate theorize a transgender continuum based on Rich’s lesbian continuum. They write, “Just as Rich denaturalized heterosexuality *and* foregrounded its violences and its real effects, it is crucial that the transgender continuum foreground the violences of sexual binaries” (286). Thus, the gender normativity in the LGBT community—or really, the GLB community—perpetuates transphobia and violence against trans people, to some extent, because the GLB community foregrounds the sexual binary, and therefore gender normativity, within its definitions of sexuality. For example, the term “gay” means “men who love men”; “lesbian” means “women who love men”; and “bisexual” means “men/women who love both men and women.” There is no room for trans people in those definitions because, even if they choose to perform their gender in a normative way, trans people are not cisgender. In fact, the only term that does accompany trans people is the term “Pansexual,” which means, “attracted to people regardless of gender” (GLAAD), and while the addition of pansexual to the alphabet soup

is valuable, it is still backgrounded and omitted in everyday conversation. For example, even if one were to say the full acronym LGBTQIA+, pansexuality is still omitted from representation.

Even so, Cole and Cate argue that pointing to the transgender continuum (i.e. the lived experiences of trans-identifying people) is one of the only ways to enact Rich's logic and end compulsory gender normativity within the LGBT community. They write:

Identifying inconsistencies in paradigmatic binary sexing; drawing attention to the diversity of lived, gendered experience; and capitalizing on gender performativity are mechanisms for denaturalizing sex. At the same time, they point to the remarkable resiliency of sexual regulation, the ongoing policing of bodies and the very real violence it entails, and the absolute need to address those injustices.

(286)

In order for there to be a transgender liberation, Heyes, Cole, and Cate foreground the idea that we need to stop the policing of *all bodies*. Their answer to the question "What is trans?" is an answer that explains what trans *is not*. Trans is *not* related to sexuality, as was previously thought, and trans is not rejecting others' genders, both normative and non-normative, for it is important to understand that people perform their gender in many different ways depending on their life experiences. In addition, trans *is not* ignoring the relational nature of gender performance and its effect on one's gender performance. Once we successfully understand these explanations, we will obtain equitable gender and transgender liberation.

Embracing Fluidity and Becoming Nonbinary

In this section, I focus on Kate Bornstein and Gloria Anzaldúa, both influential

authors in Trans scholarship, and their discussions of the importance and value of embracing the fluidity afforded by being trans. These authors' answer to the question "What is trans?" is that trans can be anything; it is unable to be categorized, and its fluidity is a characteristic that works to disrupt hegemonies, as well as bridge differences and transcend cultures.

Another trans author whose work has inspired and influenced countless trans scholars, Kate Bornstein foregrounds the criticism trans people receive from cisgender, transphobic people, arguing in her 1995 chapter "Gender Rage, Gender Terror" that trans people should all aspire to be "gender terrorists" (236), for if "gender defenders" are people who work to sustain the status quo and want trans people to be kept hidden, then trans people should do everything in their power to work against the defenders. In fact, defenders may be trans people themselves; they may want to remain hidden and pass to the general public because if they do not pass, they lose privilege and risk losing everything they have built in their life after transitioning (240-241). Trans people may prefer to be able to live their lives peacefully without being looked at like freaks of nature. *What could possibly be wrong with that?* Bornstein's answer to that question would be that compliance does nothing to dismantle an oppressive system, and as Gwendolyn Ann Smith writes in "We're all Freaks," we all have an urge to "identify the 'real' freaks, so we can feel closer to normal" (29). Humans want to be safe, not alone on the fringes.

Similar to Smith, Bornstein's main issue with passing is not that that people want to assume a normative gender for the sake of their own preference; rather she feels that trans people want to pass *only* because they feel pressured by society. With all this in

mind, as Bornstein argues, the only way we can dismantle gender binaries and criticism is to embrace fluidity and denounce picking a side on the normative/non-normative gender binary. Nonbinary identities are truly “fluid,” and as Sandy Stone writes in “The Empire Strikes Back,” nonbinary identities “authentically represent the complexities and ambiguities of lived experiences” (230).

As an author who celebrates complexity and ambiguity, Gloria Anzaldúa theorizes her own version of a nonbinary gender in *Borderlands/La Frontera*:

Numerous possibilities leave *la mestiza* floundering in uncharted seas... Only by remaining flexible is she to stretch the psyche horizontally and vertically.... The new *mestiza* copes by developing a tolerance for contradictions, a tolerance for ambiguity... She learns to juggle cultures. She has a plural personality, she operates in a pluralistic mode—nothing is thrust out, the good the bad and the ugly, nothing rejected, nothing abandoned. Not only does she sustain contradictions, she turns the ambivalence into something else... In attempting to work out a synthesis, the self has added a third element which is greater than the sum of its severed parts... its energy comes from the continual creative motion that keeps breaking down the unitary aspect of each paradigm. (101)

If non-normative and fluid genders are opposed by the larger normative public, as Bornstein and Stone foregrounded in their arguments, Anzaldúa’s counter to that opposition is to redefine, or reimagine, a space that encompasses both normative and non-normative genders. Where normative and non-normative genders were once a binary opposition, the third gender Anzaldúa theorizes can be a part of either side of the binary, as well as separate from the binary, at any given point in time. In their answers to the

question “What is trans?” Bornstein, Stone, and Anzaldúa take what was once considered “degenerate” or “on the fringe” and argue that non-normative identities are actually transcendent; they disrupt binaries by bridging binaries.

Simply Performativity?

This section discusses differing opinions on the subject of gender performance and its usefulness for explaining how gender *works*. These opinions contribute to answering the question “What is trans?” by exploring Trans theories about gender performance and the legitimacy of the claim that gender is just an act. The authors discussed in this chapter are trans authors Julia Serano, Susan Stryker, and Sandy Stone.

Kate Bornstein and Bear Bergman’s *Gender Outlaws: The Next Generation* contains a collection of essays written by Trans theorists on topics ranging from gender performativity to transgender activism. One particular text, Julia Serano’s 2007 “Performance Piece,” challenges the consensus on gender performativity inspired by Butler in *Gender Trouble*. Serano believes that Trans theorists turn the notion of gender performance into an absolute, as seen in the common phrase, “All gender is a performance.” This absolute language, Serano argues, omits any recognition of the *real* things we feel about gender. She explains, “Sure, I can perform gender: I can curtsy, or throw like a girl, or bat my eyelashes. But *performance* doesn’t explain why certain behaviors and ways of being come to me more naturally than others” (85). In Serano’s opinion, the argument for gender as performance assumes that gender is a fiction, and it unconsciously foregrounds violence against the trans community and thus marginalizes trans people further (87). For example, if we were to believe that trans people were putting on an act of some sort, then it would seem less probable that trans people’s

feelings about gender were truthful. Hence, the resulting violence against the trans community, as seen in the way that people disregard trans issues or vilify the community, would be valid.

From this point, Serano defines gender, so she can explain why she doesn't agree with gender as a performance: "[Gender is] an amalgamation of bodies, identities, and life experiences, subconscious urges, sensations, and behaviors, some of which develop organically, and others which are shaped by language and culture" (87). To assume that gender is merely a performance is to assume that the things that shape you *aren't* real, that they have no bearing on who you are as a person. That being said, Serano attempts to foreground the reality of gender. Sometimes gender *is* an act, but a lot of the time, it *isn't* (87). To assume that gender is a conscious act would be to assume that *everyone* is thinking of their gender performance *all the time*. Moreover, she even goes as far as to claim that there are no genders nor sexualities that reinforce a gender binary, which directly opposes most of Queer and Trans scholarship that unpacks the ways that heterosexuality reinforces traditional gender roles and the gender binary.

In response to Serano's opposition to gender as a performance, in her 1987 "The Empire Strikes Back," Susan Stryker, one of the foremost Trans theorists, argues that "'being something' consists of 'doing it'" (131). Stryker argues that those who oppose Butler's assertion about the performativity of gender are omitting an entire group of trans people who truly suffer a great deal to actualize, or perform, their gender for others, and "rather than being an objective quality of the body (defined by sex), gender is constituted by all the innumerable acts of performing it: how we dress, move, speak, touch, look" (131). Whether or not a person is aware of their performance, the way they portray

themselves via their bodies is an action that someone else is receiving.

Stone grapples with performativity as it relates to transsexuals (i.e. those who undergo sex reassignment surgery) who hope to “become invisible” and perform a normative gender. Stone writes, “The highest purpose of the transsexual is to erase himself/herself, to fade into the ‘normal’ population as soon as possible” (230). This concept that Stone describes is commonly known to the trans community as “passing” or “going stealth,” which hints that trans people perceive their existence as something they need to keep hidden or a secret. Stone, however, argues that trans people shouldn’t feel like they must limit their performance, and their existence is not a third gender, as some claim. Instead, trans people should perceive their gender as a *genre*: “a set of embodied texts whose potential for *productive* disruption of structured [gender]... has yet to be explored” (231). For Stone, the only people trans people should feel the urge to perform gender for is themselves, and trans people should perceive gender performance as a way “to begin to rearticulate their lives not as a series of erasures in the service of a species of feminism conceived from within a traditional frame, but as a political action begun by reappropriating difference and reclaiming the power of the refigured and reinscribed body” (232). In other words, being trans is not passive nor complicit. Being trans is a deliberate action against normative ways of being that works to reclaim agency for non-normative identities. In the following section, I will argue that writing centers would do well to enact a similarly inclusive, transgressive, and liberating identity.

Transgressing Traditional Composition/Writing Center Praxis

In the introductory chapter of this thesis, I asked several questions that will be answered throughout the last half of this final chapter:

- How can Transgender theories relating to knowledge, action, and enlightenment be used to make tutors aware of the faces of the center?
- Why should writing centers advance knowledge on trans experiences and practices and how they can do so?
- How can writing centers implement Transgender theories in their training practices?
- Are tutors aware of their liminality, and if they aren't, why *should* they be aware of it, and what can we do to raise their awareness of their own liminality?

I have spent almost the entirety of this thesis advocating for our responsibility to question and disrupt dominant hegemonies. More specifically, though, I believe that writing centers need to do their part to subvert the dominant traditional composition/writing center praxis that is used to train writing center tutors. I am thus in agreement with Laura Greenfield who, in *Radical Writing Center Praxis: A Paradigm from Ethical Political Engagement*, writes that there must be a new paradigm in writing center studies:

Critical of the ways the field has failed to recognize consciously and name explicitly the necessary political underpinnings of its theories and practices, I challenge both the conservative values that have rendered writing centers complicit actors in numerous systems of oppression but also the dominant liberal writing center practices to engage in transformative change making. Indeed, I argue that when relativism and neutrality are held up as virtues, the liberal practices that emerge serve to facilitate the very injustices many writing center people in theory despise. (9)

Greenfield is writing in response to writing center theorists such as Stephen North,

Carino, Lerner, Babcock, and Grutsch McKinney who point out injustices in the center's history but have not done *more* to challenge and actively work against those injustices (9). Following the words of Lorde, "You can't dismantle the master's house with the master's tools" (*Sister Outsider* 112). We've seen the impact that Feminist and Queer theorists have made on traditional composition/writing center praxis, and we've discussed how, despite the progress, traditional composition/writing praxis has been reified. In my opinion, it's time for Trans theorists to have the opportunity to effect change as well. Who better to disrupt tradition than a group who is completely opposite tradition?

Because Trans composition/writing center praxis remains scarce, save the work of Queer theorists like Waite, Alexander, and a few trans graduate and doctoral students, like Neil Simpkins, it is appropriate for me to take my own experiences, as well as the insight from the aforementioned scholars, and begin charting new territory in Trans composition/writing center praxis. The last half of this chapter will be broken into three sections and will answer, as a whole, the first question I've outlined above: How can Transgender theories relating to knowledge, action, and enlightenment be used to make tutors aware of the faces of the center? The first section is spent, then, detailing why writing centers should advance knowledge on trans experiences and practices and how they can do so. The second section answers the question about how writing centers can take action and implement Transgender theories in their training practices. Finally, the third section responds to the questions "Are tutors aware of their liminality?" "If they aren't, why should they be aware of it?" And, "What can we do to raise their awareness of their own liminality?"

Advancing Knowledge of Trans Experiences, Practices, and People

As discussed earlier in this chapter, the trans community was lumped into the “alphabet soup” of sexualities, but its definition was not as well-known as the gay, lesbian, or bisexual communities. Instead, trans people were derided as confused dykes and fags, perverse *trannies* or *freaks*. I, myself, didn’t know what it meant to be trans until I began working at the writing center as an undergrad. There was a tutor named K¹⁶ who started working at the center at the same time I did. I remember I noticed right away that K seemed to favor a more masculine gender performance. Honestly, I thought K was a lesbian like I was at the time until I referred to K as *she*, and K explained to me that he used masculine pronouns, he/him/his.

At that point in time, my writing center *did* train tutors how to navigate homophobic, sexist, and racist student papers, but not so much transphobic papers, and if I remember correctly, I don’t think we mentioned our preferred pronouns during the icebreaker of our first training. After those first few weeks of work, however, another tutor came out as nonbinary, and then, I announced that I was questioning my gender. A couple of semesters after that, there were at least four gender non-conforming tutors working at my center, so at least twenty-five percent of my center’s staff was trans.¹⁷ Thankfully, my director responded to all of our coming out by celebrating us, rather than being confused or angered, or even annoyed, by us. She acknowledged that our center had lacked representation, and she felt the need to ensure that we would all feel comfortable at work and free to express our gender identity and take pride in who we are.

¹⁶ I’ll refer to this tutor as K for the sake of anonymity.

¹⁷ Is it just me, or does writing center work seem to draw queer folks?

So, how do we advance knowledge of trans experiences and practices? Well, first we need to accept and showcase that trans people really exist. The parallel here is obvious to the treatment of women of color during the Suffragette movement—white women such as Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony associated with African American women such as Sojourner Truth, but when it came time to recognize non-White people as equals, these first-wave Feminists failed. Fortunately, my center chose to value trans people. Staff quickly organized to make pins that would display our preferred pronouns, as well as a gay, nonbinary, or trans flag background on the pin if we chose to have one. We began introducing ourselves during icebreakers with our preferred pronouns:

Hi, my name is T, and my pronouns are they/them/theirs.

Hello, my name is S, and my pronouns are he/him/his

The assistant director at the time also discreetly called me to her office at one point and asked me if I wanted to change my name in the appointment system. She said that if anyone asked if I was a boy or a girl, her response would be, “Why does it matter?” Now, I know that the answer to this question very much matters. I understand that victims of sexual violence may not feel safe in closed spaces with members of the same or opposite sex. However, if anything, her response to me was something that I desperately needed to hear as a person who was questioning his gender. She affirmed my feelings, and her response gave me a better understanding of empathy, which arguably all tutors can benefit from. Not only was being trans acknowledged, it was valued, and I was loved for who I am, not only what I offered as a tutor.

I discovered, then, that when we make changes amongst our practices to show

that we accept one another, no matter where we come or how we identify, those changes can further the knowledge of non-normative identities and open up the possibility to evolve from a passive center to an active center of love. As Greenfield puts it, “love is *resistance* against oppression and the creative struggle for *justice, liberation, and peace* for all” (59). I truly felt loved by my assistant director when she called me into her office that day. She, and others, are responsible for the passion I have for writing center work and my belief that writing centers can create change in even the smallest of ways. In that moment in my assistant director’s office, I felt not only cared for as an employee, but loved as a person. Fortunately, too, my center made creative changes to become more inclusive and encouraging of our staff’s and our clients’ various identities. In fact, I distinctly remember how we all practiced using gender neutral pronouns so that we wouldn’t accidentally misgender our fellow non-binary tutors. Furthermore, when I used different pronouns during my transition, my coworkers and directors respected my preference without hesitation, giving me the opportunity to explore my gender and figure out what fit best for *me*. I feel like I should also note that after I graduated and briefly stopped working at my center, I heard that two new tutors had also felt comfortable enough to come out as nonbinary. Obviously, visibility and representation are valuable.

I find it important to note that being trans certainly isn’t a trend; rather, as I explained previously in this thesis, when we go our whole lives thinking that heteronormativity is the only option, we are blinded from seeing all of the other possible options. Here, I see a parallel to the power of intersectionality and Queer theory to expose corners of the world that was previously kept in darkness, or to use another metaphor, picking up increasingly finer brushes with which to paint humanity, perhaps with colors

we never thought we could access. Once we catch a glimpse of a non-normative option, it becomes clear: non-normative identities have always existed; they just weren't acknowledged beforehand. In this sense, too, my center had transitioned into a place that valued liberation and peace for its tutors.

Trans Practices in Action

Being trans is an action; it is an active subversion against heteronormativity whether that subversion is deliberate or not. For example, even if a trans person is consciously attempting to pass in public, they are still performing their gender in ways that challenge heteronormativity. Indeed, because trans people either openly or secretly challenge heteronormativity, they embody a type of tricksterism employed by women, the queer, and the colonized in order to resist oppression. Tricksterism is a form of power, and per Geller's *Everyday Writing Center: A Community of Practice*, "[tricksters] personify chaos, the disorderly order inherent in all systems" (16). Is it not chaotic to defy the sex one was assigned at birth? Surely, it is powerful to disrupt and defy societal beliefs about everything men and women *should* be and *should* feel about their bodies.

Furthermore, tricksterism is a creative process that imagines something other than the norm; it is "learning to unlearn, learning to be flexible in the face of newness" (21). Where traditional hegemonies dominate and subordinate others, those that are queer and trans are flexible and value the creation that results from the mixing of cultures and belief systems. In "Cultivating the Scavenger," Waite argues that subversive composition practices "[disrupt] ways of knowing that seem dominant, taken for granted, or obvious *and* [value] contradiction—what we might call messiness, fragmentation, or even confusion" (51). As I think of these three characteristics in my writing center

experiences—messiness, fragmentation, and confusion—I am reminded of my training as a tutor. There are some tutoring practices that seem absolute, given my experience learning from other tutors. Geller calls practices “familiar memes;” they are absolutes that “get passed among cohorts of writing tutors as gospel before they even interact with writers in an everyday setting” (21). In other words, there is the controlled training that comes from directors, and there is the “uncontrolled” training that comes from staff. These uncontrolled absolutes are the following: Tutors should be non-directive; we should not line edit papers nor should we write on writers’ hard copies because that writing can be perceived as plagiarism or cheating. I’ve also heard some lead tutors say that we should never even have to touch a pen. These seemingly dogmatic tutoring practices are narrowly predicated on a specific type of tutee who is cast as the generic student, irrespective of culture, gender, culture, socioeconomic status, much as the Feminist theories of Simone de Beauvoir and Betty Friedan were also predicated on a narrow demographic of women. This generic student is self-sufficient and motivated, and they have the necessary literacy skills to work independently, for the most part.

In contrast to the independent nature of the generic student, yet still subject to the effect of absolutism, in the spirit of Lunsford’s depiction of the writing center as a Burkean parlor, *all* writers and tutors *should* be able to learn and create meaning in a session via conversation, as long as those conversations are earnestly and honestly open (Carino 104). Some of the tutors I’ve worked with have agreed with this method of tutoring, claiming that the conversation should be *enough* to help writers become better writers, and any writing in a session is an obstruction to knowledge. In this sense, the center is not a *writing* center, but a center that *talks* about writing. Writers should also do

all, or at least most, of the talking, save the open-ended questions prompted by tutors. But, even so, writers should feel just as comfortable prompting questions as tutors do (36). For this type of writing center practice, however, the generic student is assumed to be confident and knowledgeable; they are to be self-sufficient and motivated just as the generic student described before.

While I understand the value of having some tutoring absolutes and assuming a generic writer in training—at the very least for the sake of uniformity or quality control, for lack of a better phrase—there are parts of me that never jived with these absolutes or characterizations of writers. And, in some cases, my tutoring was all the better for it. I can't begin to put a number on how often I have helped a student by writing on their paper or writing an outline for them as we spoke. There are plenty of times, too, where my student was too nervous to speak, and the session would end with me needing a glass of water because I had spoken so much. While some tutors flaunted that they never had to pick up a pen, I took pride in my ink-smudged hands at the end of the day, and to be clear, I never wrote in place of the writers. Rather, I wrote as they spoke, showing them that what they had to say was worth noting, worth writing. My tutoring practices were transgressive because I never felt the need to stick to absolutes, and the tutoring practices of my peers, the practices that reified the notion of absolutism did nothing more than maintain a static method of training that never evolved, that never imagined another possibility.

My center can't be the only tutoring or writing center with these types of experiences, so my solution to the problem of absolutes is to train tutors to be fluid and use transgressive practices. Capitalize on the messiness, fragmentation, and confusion of

writing. For example, staff could spend time during orientation meetings to break out and simulate writing center sessions. Experienced tutors could simulate a session, and instead of highlighting all the things that tutors *should* do in a session—the absolutes—show new hires the many different ways a session could be handled or show new hires the way each individual person. Spend time celebrating the different techniques each tutor brings to a session that isn't always taught as a basic tutoring practice. For instance, I learned from a more experienced tutor, M, how to help writers by taking notes and outlining their next steps throughout the session.¹⁸ M wrote during the session, instead of recapping after the session, to preserve valuable material that might be lost if not jotted down in the moment. She acknowledged that her method wasn't necessarily *approved*, but it was always very helpful for the writers she worked with. There were even times where the outline she was working on with the writer would get messy. If they did have the time to recap, she would cross out bullet points she made, or sometimes there would be fragments of sentences on the outline because she couldn't keep up with what the writer was saying. Either way, the session was written down and notes were made before the thoughts could get lost.

If tutors embody liminality, then it would follow that fluid, messy, and flexible tutoring practices should be encouraged by nature of the position. As I previously noted, writing center tutors exist on the borderland of student/teacher, just as trans people exist on the borderland of female/male. Furthermore, just as I, like many other trans people, have played around with my gender performance in order to figure out what fit *me* best (and not in the sense of trying on clothes or a hat), writing center tutors should gain the

¹⁸ I'll refer to this tutor as M for the sake of anonymity.

skills necessary to learn how to form a “tutoring performance” that fits them best. And, lastly, just as I might modify my gender performance depending on whom I’m around and how I want to be perceived—I find myself “bulking up” and remaining emotionless around men more than women—tutors who engage in trans practices will likewise be able to modify their performance based on how they wish to affect a writer. For example, if the writer seems particularly stressed, a tutor might become more hands-on and engaged than they would be with a writer who seems more confident. That sort of modification seems obvious, but for some of the tutors I’ve worked with in the past, it can be hard to modify what one does when one feels there is only one *right* way to be a writing center tutor, only one way to perform the role of a tutor.

Trans Theories as Enlightenment

While Trans theories enable writing centers to raise awareness of the trans community and encourage Trans practices for writing center tutors, Trans theories can be more abstract than concrete, too. I argue that Trans theories and perspectives are most useful because they can help tutors become more conscious of their behavioral choices and how those choices can affect others. Also, Trans theories can reveal to even the most “diverse” person that they still privilege normative identities and uphold dominant hegemonies, even tutors who believe that they are relatively aware and considerate of social justice issues.

I worked as a graduate assistant at the writing center during my first year of grad school, which just so happened my first year physically transitioning and undergoing HRT. At that time, I felt like I had to have been an expert in gender and other minority issues. Since I had lived twenty-three years as a Chicax woman, I believed I was well-

versed in women's issues and had experienced sexist, racist stereotypes like any other minority woman, so it was unfathomable to me that I would ever assume a stereotype about others, especially since I was a trans man and constantly thought about the way I performed my identity and how it impacted others.

Me? A typical sexist man? A racist man? The idea!

Well, needless to say I was naïve to think that I was immune from committing sexism or racism.

As a graduate assistant, I was asked to sit in on hiring interviews and ask prospective tutors interview questions and relay tutoring scenarios. One particular scenario involved a student paper written by a writer named Leslie. The writing center administrators and I made a habit of switching off who would play Leslie during each interview, and this time it was my turn. I looked at the interviewee and tried to remain in scene. "Hi," I smiled, "my name is Leslie." The interviewee looked like she wanted to laugh. To her, I assume, men aren't so open to playing women, and she had probably never had to talk to a man as if he were a woman, either. As I realized this, I thought, *What she doesn't know is that I'm a former woman who is a trans man coming off as a cis man who is playing a woman. That's even more of an anomaly.* As the scene went on, I found that I was performing Leslie as a stereotypical white girl. I had taken on a subtle valley girl accent and was moving my hands in a stereotypically feminine way even though I, myself, never moved my hands like that when I identified as a woman. I didn't just take on physical stereotypes, though. I also behaved the way I thought a stereotypical white girl would behave. When the interviewee asked a question about what I wrote, I played dumb, like an airheaded. Maybe even ditsy. When the interviewee made

suggestions, I became bossy, turning up my nose and acting like I knew more than her. At one point, my Leslie persona even contemplated asking if she could speak to the director.

The interesting thing is that I didn't have any of these realizations until the interview had finished. During the scenario, I felt as if I had played my part quite well, actually. It wasn't until I sat back and thought about the interview that I realized my actions and discovered the sexism and racism I had committed. I immediately questioned myself: Why did I behave this way? Why did I act white rather than Hispanic? What possessed me to think it was okay to act out negative stereotypes about women, and why did I assume Leslie was white when I know that the name Leslie isn't tied to race.¹⁹ More importantly, why did it seem like none of the other staff who were in the room felt as if I were being sexist or racist? Perhaps they did and chose not to take up my behavior with me. As someone who values the importance of identity performance and how it can impact others, I felt ashamed.

As I reflect on this experience even now, I don't think I would change the way I behaved because my behavior and the reflection that came after made me more aware of the assumptions I bring into situations, thus helping me "check" those assumptions. Anzaldúa labels such a step as *conocimiento*, a "spiritual activism that involves a constant shift of recognition with others...[it] is distinct from ego-driven positioning: it involves seeing from the perspective of the other (a material object or person) while knowing that one can act; in this sense it is rhetorical (Leon and Pigg 271). The action that we take is subversive; it is a moment that is only successful if we put the needs of

¹⁹ Leslie isn't even solely a woman's name know that I think about it, too.

another before our own; it is a moment that demonstrates our ability to consciously put our egos aside for the sake of another. Conocimiento is, then, an act of selflessness, care, and love towards another.

Isn't it a shame that loving a stranger, the Other, is revolutionary?

In “Transgender Rhetorics,” Jonathan Alexander describes a class activity that is similar to my Leslie experience. Alexander’s role-reversal activity simulates the experience of gender transition. In a sense, when I played Leslie, I briefly transitioned back from male to female, thus performing a uniquely trans experience. Adapted from Will Hochman’s “paired fiction writing exercise” from “Transactional Dynamics of Paired Fiction Writing,” Alexander’s activity is a paired fiction exercise, which helps students “[examine], as well as metacritically reflect on the process of gender/sex switching, even if only virtually, and what it might tell us about the narration and construction of gender in society” (58). Alexander’s exercise specifically asks students to construct narratives written by persons of the opposite gender/sex, and the narratives are prompted by narrative conflicts.²⁰ The students are asked to construct characters and their stories, and once the exercise is over, Alexander has students reflect on the narrative choices they made, as well as the metaphors and tropes they used. For instance, two of his male students wrote a story about a woman named Scarlet who resembles a film noir femme fatale and ends up getting arrested after she is drugged and her plan to kill a man goes awry (74-75). Alexander asks his students, why did you choose to portray her as a femme fatale if the story took place in the 80s? How did this strong woman with a “hard-

²⁰ I’m not a big fan of equating sex and gender, but we’ll roll with it for the sake of accurately describing Alexander’s work.

ass attitude” inevitably get naively drugged and duped by a crooked cop? The answers, Alexander believes, have to do with the ways that our bodies are perceived by others. In this case, the ways that women’s bodies were perceived by his male student. Alexander explains:

We also examined, in writing and analyzing those narratives, a sense of the gendered *body* and how gender finds itself written on—and read from—the bodies we inhabit and through which we both derive and articulate a sense of self. Those bodies, though, are never simply personal; they are profoundly politicized bodies, called to gender scrutiny, sculpting, and legibility that determine which bodies are male and female, powerful and weak. (70)

Interestingly, these assertions about politicizing bodies, composing identity performance, and assigning power and hierarchies come up any time we are in a situation with another person (e.g. writer/tutor, tutor/director, director/department chair), and I believe that this type of exercise would greatly benefit writing tutors who should use their liminality as a tool, rather than ignore their liminality and fall back on binary norms. During orientation meetings or whenever tutors have downtime, tutors could engage in scenarios that are similar to the Leslie scenario in interviews. Tutors could pair up and play out these scenarios, and then, together, they could reflect on their behavior during the scenario. Tutors could also be asked to reflect on their sessions once they finish. In addition to reporting what occurred during the session, it would be useful for the tutor to critically think about their actions. This type of reflection would encourage tutor *presence* in sessions since it is easy to work with a student and go on autopilot.

This modified version of Alexander’s exercise would be extremely useful for

tutors because it can help tutors learn to be more mindful of the assumptions that can be made in a writing center session, as well as the agency their liminality affords them. As liminal figures in the center, tutors should not be bound to absolutes or norms as strictly as others in academia, and while I admit that the writing center is a job experience that can help prepare tutors for like *after* college, I firmly hold that tutoring is more than a job. Like Greenfield argues, writing center work is an opportunity to be radical and revolutionary. Even if a director does not have the support to engage in radical practice, this type of exercise would still help writing center staff individually, and gradually, work against dominant hegemonies and gender discourses that reassert binaries.

Radical work does not have to be large, but it most certainly has to at least start somewhere. And, while this exercise simulates *transition*, too, it in no way attempts to show participants that briefly switching genders is comparable to the trans experience of socially and physically transitioning; rather, like any thought experiment of hypothetical question, this exercise asks tutors to become metacritical thinkers who are more aware of how their actions can affect others, as well as how their actions render them complicit to normative ways of being.

Conclusion

This thesis in no way attempts to prove that Trans theories are the best theories to use for composition/writing center praxis. Like all theories, this theory also reasserts norms and binaries that could further be deconstructed. For example, my experience as a trans man still places me in a binary; thus, a nonbinary approach to composition/writing center praxis, instead of trans, would be even more fluid and transgressive.

If you're familiar with the trans flag, though, it's made up of two baby blue

stripes on the top and bottom, two pink stripes next to them, and one white stripe in the middle. The baby blue represents the traditional color for boys; the pink represents the traditional color for girls, and the white represents those who are transitioning or consider themselves to have a neutral gender. So, in any event, nonbinary identities are very much a part of the transgender community, so it's not as if one community is better than another, each of these communities and theories—Feminist, Queer, and Trans—are all interrelated and add to one another. Like the painting I've discussed since chapter two, these theories paint the same picture, but the pictures are painted in simpler or more complex ways. None of them are wrong; they simply have less or more details, more or less breadth and depth.

Either way, this thesis has gone through some of the foremost authors in Feminist, Queer, and Trans theory, acknowledging how composition/writing center theory and praxis has been informed by said theories along the way. In chapter two, I delved into the work of Suffragettes, White Feminists, Black Feminists, and intersectional Feminists. I explored the gendered, racist, and classist language in past composition handbooks, discussed bell hook's transgressive pedagogies, showed how composition has become increasingly inclusive, and I've detailed the current-traditional origins of writing centers. In the third chapter, I went through the work of prominent Queer theorists like Rubin, Sedgwick, Rich, Lorde, Cohen, and Anzaldúa. I explained the difference between sex, gender, and sexuality, and detailed how Queer theory challenged heteronormativity by becoming increasingly *queer*. In the fourth chapter, I explained the social justice origins of the transgender community, and I explored the issues of fluidity and gender performance. To discuss these issues, I referred to the work of Trans and Queer theorists

such as Heyes, Bornstein, Anzaldúa, Serano, Stryker, and Stone. And, finally, I relayed my own experiences and drew from the work of Greenfield, Waite, and Alexander in order to theorize Trans composition/writing center praxis.

Implications

Even though I don't assume my work to be the be-all end-all of composition/writing center praxis, I hold that the implications of my work are certainly valuable and worthwhile for the field of writing center studies. I write with the hopes of making composition/writing center praxis more inclusive and globally aware than what it is right now, and I write with the intent of showing that there is more to writing center work than the writing, or tutoring, itself. The center may not be a home, as Grutsch McKinney acknowledged, nor is it a storehouse, garret, or Burkean parlor, like Lunsford described. Perhaps, the writing center is a possibility: a possibility to create and exchange meaning, a possibility to provide an open-minded space for writers and tutors alike, and a possibility for systemic change, gradual and large. Perhaps, I'm being too abstract here, but being abstract every once in a while is exactly the point. By giving ourselves the opportunity to reflect, ponder, and reimagine other possibilities, we give ourselves the chance of "dislocating," as Boquet puts it, and doing something revolutionary.

Furthermore, Gillespie and Lerner's description of the writing center as a scientific laboratory is still tied to the scientific binary of fact/fiction (154), but a Trans writing center approach welcomes fiction as fact, for if practices are truly fluid, then they cannot be restricted, and who's to say which practice is the absolute truth?

Circling back to my comments about Denny's "faces" at the very beginning of this thesis, Trans theories can help writing centers create and maintain more than a single

face, which is incredibly valuable since the world is made up of billions of unique faces. The face of the center is far more diverse than a straight cis white woman or man, and it is incredibly challenging to envision a more inclusive face, or faces, if a single face is the only one present. In addition, Denny's "faces" brings forth the opportunity for writing centers to face themselves. Writing centers, too, must look in the mirror and face what they see. Are we mobilizing and facing traditional ways of being? Are we advocating for something new that is more reflective of the world we live in today? Like I shared previously in this chapter, I had no *real* idea of what being transgender meant until I met a trans person at my writing center, and I often think about where I would be now if I never met K. Would I still identify as a woman? Or, would I have eventually learned what it meant to be trans and arrived at where I am today? I honestly have no idea, but I am immensely grateful for being exposed to non-normative genders and ways of being. Even more, I'm grateful that my center had accepted those who are normally on the fringe and celebrated their existence, which has certainly always been there even though it was hardly ever seen. Moreover, I think about other tutors who are like me, and I imagine that other writers who attend the center could be like me, too. Where would that tutor be if my center wasn't participating in advancing knowledge of trans people? Where would that writer be if my center didn't give its tutors the opportunity to proudly perform our identities? We cannot open the closet door if it is locked from the outside.

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