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Mapping the Subject:
Exploration of Identity Construction through
Autobiographical Reflection

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“To deny the importance of subjectivity in the process of transforming the world and history is naïve and simplistic... Those who authentically commit themselves to the people must examine themselves constantly.”
- Paulo Freire, *The Pedagogy of the Oppressed*

Introduction

Reflecting on the last two years of my life I have come to understand that certain identities figure prominently for me. How I choose to represent myself, under what conditions and for what purposes these categories serve me are the areas in which I will explore. Why I embrace certain labels and reject others I hope to make clear through an interrogation of self. How I have come to (re)construct my identity will be made clear through autobiographical reflection. The three sites of inquiry, designations in their own-right, each contribute a fraction of the whole for which I am searching. Making sense of, desiring coherence to – threading a particular strand so as to lessen the fractured nature of my multiple identities is what I hope to achieve. I realize that by concentrating on three specific parts of my subjectivity, I will be drawing on and overlapping with other aspects; this is at once intentional and at the same time, unavoidable. There are risks and challenges in selecting these particular identities; they pose the challenge of positionality in that they illuminate the complexity of being a subject, as others would not have. By delving into my own herstory I am consciously probing for latent and possible contradictory meanings. This is not to imply that I believe that I will encounter Alia’s true *essence* or for that matter, the *authentic* nature to my person. Rather, my autobiographical exercise is about exploring the imbrication of my many selves.

I have treaded different paths before settling on the course of self-excavation, the contours traversing different geographical locations. I believe it is important to outline the journey of my most recent identity formation as it aids in illuminating my topical choice and gives the reader/self an initial platform from which to gaze. In posturing my identity as valid terrain for theoretical exploration, I have found it necessary to examine why identity categories are of significance. Various theoretical frameworks differently position identity, valorizing it at times, debunking it as an ideological construct at others. I have found the path through this literature, unnerving and exciting, comforting in my ability to locate my

subjectivity concretely within a certain group and at the very same instance, resentful with the knowledge that stability within a category is an illusion. My desire to excavate a unified, coherent self seems almost childlike after spending the time with post-structuralist literature. I thought that at the core lay an authentic, genuine self, an Alia that was waiting to be unearthed. This notion seems passe with the privilege of hindsight. Therefore, I ponder the connections I have attempted with an essentialized identity, the claim I have sought utilizing essence as a “privileged signifier” (Fuss 1989: xiii). Why have I decided to focus on my race, sexuality and disease as sites of identification, why have I claimed membership in these categories, which limit and restrict my mobility? Do I have the ability to reject the classification of white, is my lesbianism authentic, am I really an alcoholic? Are these identities stable or are they simply buoys for which I cling out of a need to legitimize a synchronous subjectivity?

The notion of essentialism has been highly criticized by Post-structuralists who find fault in grasping to the belief that there en-lies a True, natural and stable essence to identity, such as, woman, white, lesbian. The purity or originality for which the sign essence circulates is what Diana Fuss has referred to as a pedagogical issue, who has the privileged platform from which to speak (1989: xi-1). In selecting three locations within my subjectivity, I masquerade with the notion that these positions are stable and at once coherent. I am reminded however, that such play is dangerous and I may even be considered a “social fascist” (Chang Hall 1993:222). But was I not born an alcoholic, how could I possibly be responsible for such abhorrent behavior if it were not a part of my constitution? Have I in fact been a product of my environment, governed by my experiences rather than my nature? The voices I use which deem me essentialist are not meant to disregard my herstory or establish my subjectivity as immutable. Rather, I claim instead what Gayatri Spivak (1987) calls a “strategic essentialism”, or the deployment of essence in specific circumstances as to carve out a place from which to claim critical knowledge.

Seemingly in opposition to essentialist assertions are constructionist claims concerned with the production and organization of difference, a rejection of any pre-given or natural state. Whereas essence refers to some kind of ‘real’, it would appear that constructionists have managed to “displace essence into the realm of the social” and relocate the gaze elsewhere (Fuss 1989: 2-6). In order for constructionism to be effective, there must be an

already existing, stable state from which to begin, thus constructionists have slid in their positioning, employing simply a more sophisticated form of essentialism. Where then is the theorist to travel, the ground around her seems messy and divided by opposing yet intertwined positions? Would it make sense to deconstruct my path through the quagmire, instead dislocating once and for all my subject position?

Michel Foucault's definition of a subject as, "not the speaking consciousness, not the author of the formulation, but a position that may be filled in certain conditions by various individuals" (1972:115), asserts strong opposition to essentialist and constructionist claims of identity. According to this post-structuralist's view, subjectivity is assumed differently according to ideological circumstance. Fuss furthers our understanding of the subject position by explaining the notion of "double-reading"; when the subject is caught within and between at least two constantly shifting subject-positions, old and new, constructed and constructing. She elaborates by speaking about these positions as conflictory and multiple in their meanings (1989:33, 98). But what then happens to the subject, where does she disappear to, or was she ever even a she at all - is she able to do anything, is her agency intact or does she become a victim to an all encompassing ideology? Our goal it would appear is to unravel the web of ideology, which would suggest a specific subject position 'outside' the ideology, a subject that has the capacity to alter ideology? According to Sue-Ellen Case, "most of the work on the subject position has revealed the way in which the subject is trapped within ideology and thus provides no program for change" (1992:294-295). However, Case, in-line with de Lauretis' "subject of feminism", poses an alternative to such a residential position, naming the "female subject" as self-determinative and conscious of herself both inside and outside heterosexual ideology. She is thus capable of changing her positioning in order to realign herself in an ideology which is "*not* so defined, but in progress" (1987:18).

Arriving in such a dismally alterable space, an 'unplace', is not the most satisfying experience; but to begin the move through the stratum of my subjectivity has become a necessity. I am following in a manner similar to the black lesbian feminist bell hooks. I am choosing to resist from the marginal space of difference inwardly defined; my very presence is therefore an act of disruption, as a lesbian, as an articulated alcoholic, I am on the outside by choice, the margin nourishes me because I choose to remain outside (hooks 1990:15,149-150). Subsequently, if we are able to navigate such locational instability, how then are we

able to progress with the notion of identity? Can identity even be engaged with or have the post-structuralist work of ambiguating categories taken this possibility out of our hands? The notion of difference according to Fuss has replaced identity and therefore removed self-presence from the whole affair (1989: 103); but then what is to be said for *experience*, my domain of exploration and agency, restriction and repression?

Experience becomes constitutive of identity in that it constructs and is constructed. While experience may provide individual truth, it is the assumed knowledge that is derived from such *experience* that I claim multiple identities. These are acts of exclusion, in that the authority I assume from my *experiences* depends on the lack of referentiality of others and at the same time seeks legitimization from those *like* me. White, lesbian and alcoholic are the three identities I choose, all of which constitute part of but do not exist independently from one another, in contributing to my Identity. I capitalize Identity in this case to indicate my over-all person, Alia with each of her identities, many of which will not be specifically enumerated in this project. The complexity of my subjectivity is immediately liberating, a purposeful shift from a strictly unitary notion of self. In theory, I can imagine the limitless expanse to the criss-crossing nature of my identities. Instead, I find myself clinging to a rather fixed sense of what it means to be white, lesbian and alcoholic. I can envision how these identities overlap, I can articulate connections between and among them; but I find it difficult to step outside the illusion of privilege I equate with this secure location. I am terrified to risk the further breakdown of my Identity – I feel my feet stepping away from each other, timidly tip-toeing from my center – why are they deserting me now – why have I chosen these identities to break open my subjectivity – what makes me jeopardize loss? These questions run through my head as I attempt to figure out why I cling to three specific categories; for security, for a coherent sense of who I am – for closure on time past?

When I choose the identity categories white, lesbian, and alcoholic I consciously cordon-off my ties with other women; I am defining parts of who I am, by excluding who I am not. Identity acts as a fortress under siege that is protected by denying connection with others and over-simplifying connections with our own (Chang Hall 1993:221). These acts of naming may be read as desperate attempts at stabilizing my different identities into a coherent whole. Accordingly, white, lesbian alcoholic may also be interpreted as locations on the map – areas of unknown depth, resource, pleasure and pain. Selecting these three sites has meant

relegating other identities to the margin; necessarily propping-up race, sexuality and addiction, but at the same time fully aware that issues of class, gender and nationality to name just a few can not be absent from my discussion. These particular identities pose risks and challenges of positionality, but in doing so they particularly illuminate the present complexity of being a subject.

My arrival: How I got to here and why I *think* I stayed

The first time I traveled to South Africa, I was meant to be killing time. My destinations were Kenya and Tanzania; the former the part of Africa that I had begun to grow acquainted with on a previous trip. I wanted desperately to get back to there, to experience, to explore and most of all to lose myself. I was running - away from the North, away from what I perceived to be constraints and away from the wreckage I had caused. What better place to come to than the “dark continent”- I could do whatever I wanted here, I could be whom ever I pleased – there was not anyone to question my motives and there were plenty of *problems* for me to find a solution. I came to Africa with the ‘save the world syndrome.’ What I found in South Africa was very different; I figured out how to save myself.

I am not Black, I am not African, I am not from the South – I come from the North, in South Africa, as a white lesbian, I am Other. When I attended Smith College in the United States and studied Cultural Anthropology, I was taught that the Other existed somewhere out-there, ‘in the bush’, away from the metropolis – in *Africa*. My first adventure to Africa was for archaeological purposes in Kenya. I endured the long, arduous hours in the karrari sun, but the Turkana people were with whom I was intrigued. These were the people that I had learned about, or so I thought; living out of the ‘grasp of civilization’, ‘seemingly untouched by modernity.’ I told myself then that I would be back, not in an archaeological capacity; no, that was not exotic enough, I would return to study and ‘help’ these unique peoples.

The following summer I returned to East Africa, this time Tanzania, where I arranged to help build a school in a rural southern village. Although I was to be affiliated with an aid organization, I felt as though I was very much on my own – armed with the cultural sensibilities I had so astutely acquired from texts, I was convinced this knowledge of mine would solve all the villager’s worries. No, I had never spent more than a few days alone in a

rural African village, but I had Anthropology, I *knew* what these rural dwellers needed and for that matter what they did not. I felt obliged to ensure that their culture would be untouched, uncontaminated by Western influence. I never asked the people of Pommern what they wanted – they were ‘exotic’, they were ‘other’, did they not want to remain that way? I’ve wondered why I was not hammered over the head with a brick, preferably one that we used to help build the school. How had my interest in different ways of living raged into my mission to save the people of Pommern from the evil West? Of course these are rhetorical questions, finding their place in my psyche of three years future – redundant as they may seem, they are the reason I came to South Africa to peruse my studies.

The University of Cape Town was where I initially settled to earn my Master’s in Social Anthropology, but after just a week I decided that Anthropology was not my correct path. I have to admit that I had been struggling with my location within the discipline of Anthropology for some time. The choice to continue was made without resolution. My concern had developed while I was at University as an undergraduate. In one of my Anthropology classes, a professor of mine was contemplating *de-professionalizing* because of what she saw as unethical Anthropological practices and the inability for her to find a place within the discipline that did not further “otherize” the people she was working with and trying to “help”. While I was at Smith College, I chose not to look seriously at this vexing problem. Later in South Africa, I decided to apply to the University of Cape Town and completely sidelined these thoughts. I justified my position in an African university by believing that my approach was ‘less-colonial’ and would be less intrusive to native cultures, as I would be educated in a similar context to the one I would be working in. In retrospect, my rationalization was a mere act of avoidance, both from serious anthropological concerns, as well as from myself. Instead of searching-out avenues through the problem of “speaking for”, “working with/for” and “maintaining culture”, I tried to abandon Anthropology altogether. I thought that the African Gender Institute was the answer to my problems – ahhhh, *development* - I had arrived. I knew enough about “respecting” culture; I knew the mistake’s anthropologists had made in the past – how hard could it be?

My naivete did not get me far, in fact, my relocation in the African Gender Institute, not initially, but as I got sufficiently entrenched in the Master’s course, taught me that what I had most feared in Anthropology was true across the board. There was not a single answer to

my questions of how to do respectful anthropology, what development meant or for that matter how to be an ethical worker in the field. There was a set of complex histories working among each other that helped to create the contexts that we were studying. Various competing theorists sought to establish themselves and their particular notions as the universal way forward – I found myself growing skeptical and helpless. How was I, a white, Western lesbian going to be of any use in Africa? How did my experience fit, why should I be listened to? I felt as though I was bringing the *wrong* issues to bare and that my concerns were irrelevant in the African context. Most importantly I felt exposed. How was I to *help* other women, understand other women, and know other women if I resided in darkness and confusion regarding the power of my skin color, the evolution and consequent positioning of my lesbianism and the impact of my alcoholism? Marnia Lazreg forcefully denounces my positioning in South Africa, “this world is ‘worlded’ by others who do not include themselves in it as a subject of study” (2000:29) – I take up your challenge Ms. Lazreg and turn the white Western middle-classed woman probe upon myself.

Headed off at the pass: Changing directions with emotional tolls

My choice of topic has evolved out of a previous project, which dealt with other white lesbian alcoholics in Cape Town. Initially, my project included five interviews with womyn whom I met at Alcoholics Anonymous, all identified as lesbian and white. I thought that by speaking with these womyn I could understand their experience of these identities and possibly come to terms with my own. So I set-about my task - tape-recorder in hand, notebook close by and made sure I lugged along my feminist tool bag. I was not going to make the same mistake I had made in previous interviews – these were going to be different. I was going to listen with all of myself, I was going to let the conversant speak for herself, I was going to be a good feminist and have the conversation take-shape around the womyn I was speaking with. *Right...* My first conversation went smoothly; since it was with a good friend of mine, I did not expect a lot of new information, nor did I concern myself with the emergence of different power dynamics. I left that interview feeling stable and competent in my ability to listen and in helping to create and maintain a conversation that flowed from the

womyn I was speaking with, as opposed to myself. The second conversation however, veered from that course and completely altered the direction of my entire project.

I rarely find myself in a conversation where I am unable to speak – in this conversation I was rendered silent. I rarely find myself defending my sexuality as a lesbian – in this conversation I found myself fighting for my ‘lesbian position’; I try not to have people speak for me – in this conversation I did not have any control. This second conversation distressed me; it unhinged my notions of a proper feminist approach by forcing me to reconceptualize the process of exchange between the conversants. I had wrongly assumed that I could hand-over my “control” in the conversation dynamic and an honest, gentle story would be given in return. This approach may seem naïve, I was and I still am unsure of the negotiation of power within these situations. I did not take into consideration the effects a previous relationship would have on the current conversation; I had not fully internalized how much this womyn’s opinion of me mattered. Rather, I let her tell me exactly what she thought of me in regards to my alcoholism, my sexuality and the color of my skin – I did not intervene – I just listened.

After my interview, after many spilled tears and the question rerouting itself but never changing, “why are you doing this Alia,” I decided that the focus of my project was simply too broad and needed to be revised. I found that I needed to define what my goal was in order to answer the ‘why’. Although I had come to South Africa with a multitude of preconceived notions, all of which have NOT materialized, I thought it was time to decide what I wanted to get out of my experience instead of the other way around. I would no longer interview white lesbian alcoholics in Cape Town; this was a roundabout way of figuring my own identity formation. I would instead try to be more direct in my approach and converse with myself, through others, and through my own autobiographical writing, in an attempt to understand my subjective composition as white/lesbian/alcoholic.

In distinguishing such a course I have determined the cause of acknowledging subjectivity in all her facets of utmost importance. The decisions made to deconstruct the self, to move with theoretical judgment through specific and general positionings were bold and vital. Through this process I am questioning what it means to write as Other, as Other – I invert the gaze. I specifically locate who, where, why and how I come to this endeavor. I chart my journey as the process, making palpable the emotive aspects of my project.

Unacceptable are the boundaries and limitations traditional scholarship places on the Master's Thesis. I step outside, not expecting exoneration, simply laying the foundation for the scholar-subject present in all her work.

Why my approach is viable

My project is deviant - I am violating the traditional boundary between scholarship and personal life - my defiance is intentional. Kate Millet reminds us that telling the truth is what feminist writers are supposed to do – in recognizing that there are many “truths”, I step forward with my personal truths – these are the truths that I can speak of - these are moral and courageous acts. Feminists have demonstrated that starting with one's own experience can help to break the masculinist perspective by redefining and reinterpreting scholarship that has excluded or ignored women (Evans 1979; Bell 1983; Reinharz 1992: 263-265). This position violates traditional notions of “objectivity” and distance. Starting from and choosing to use as *topic*, myself, I am elevating my own experience and directly challenging traditional “objectivity.” I have chosen my experience as it has helped me define my research question, as a blending of personal trouble and intellectual inquiry. By establishing my topic as overtly personal, I am following the lead of my feminist foremothers. In particular, looking to the work of Minnie Bruce Pratt and the deconstruction of her racialized white southern lesbian identity in her collection of essays, *Identity: Skin Blood Heart*. She speaks to her own implication in some of the racial injustices that she is trying to undo. We gain truth she tells us, when we choose to expand our constricted eye, an eye that has only let in what we have been taught to see (1991:34). Pratt's statement articulates how the personal can play an integral role shaping the questions we bring to our work, whether it be a thesis topic or in our lives as activists. Furthermore, the “epistemology of insidersness” allows for a broader understanding in the connection of my life and work, by leveling out the boundaries between the two. Although mainstream research practices view personal experience as irrelevant and possibly contaminating to the “objectivity” of a project, utilizing my personal experience from a feminist perspective, acts to repair the projects “pseudo-objectivity” (Reinherz 1992:259). I engage my own experience as it may begin to correct the “passionless-objectivity” that plagues so much social science research. The personal origin of my thesis question demonstrates my need to fight against the “alienating effects of the academy.” As part

confessional, autobiographical exploration, and interview analysis - studying phenomenon that occur in my own life – I choose to violate oppositional public/private discourse that characterizes non-feminist practice. This is best accomplished through the use of the first person; I will be able to engage with both the external reader, as well as myself in hopes of maintaining a reflexive piece.

I insist on placing an emphasis on the *process* of my work; where the reverse has traditionally been the case, my focus is of a particular personal and emotional involvement. I (re)connect the process with my mobile product, grasping outside the boundaries of “acceptable” thesis writing. Particularly because the traditional masculinized culture of the academy has a propensity to distance emotional responses, to normalize and rationalize the character of work produced, I seek to repair the disjunction between the emotional nature of my personal life and the highly formalized closed approach the academy encourages. Black lesbian feminist Barbara Christian, urges such a reconnection by looking at the links between language and experience; affirming, “what I write and how I write is done in order to save my own life”. She further declares, “our sensuality is intelligence, that sensual language is language that makes sense” (1990:343). This so called “spurious fracture” between personal and academic work is one in which I hope to restore, through recuperating “emotion for criticism”, I am thus avoiding the push to hierarchies one form of response over another (Kilcup 1998:6). At the very same time, I find myself wrestling with guilt in selecting a topic that allows me the latitude to explore my subjectivity – I find myself treading furiously, enmeshed in an academic culture that has previously punished me for my deviance.

Narrative method

There are various labels used to speak of the method I’ve chosen: oral/life herstory, case study, interview, biographical interview, and personal narrative (Reinhartz 1992:129). For the purpose of coherence, I primarily use the term narrative method. Within the social sciences, the narrative approach or the study of lives has long been considered one of the best ways to study individual’s experience of themselves. Ruth Ellen Josselson in her book, *Making Meaning of Narratives: The Narrative Study of Lives*, describes narrative research as

a hermeneutic mode of inquiry, where the process of inquiry flows from the question. This is a question about a person's inner subjective reality and in particular, how she makes meaning of a particular experience (1999: X). The narrative is then a resource for creating an internal, private sense of self and plays a major role as a resource in negotiating and conveying that self to others (Linde 1993:98). The narrative helps to initiate and maintain personal identity. This takes place through organizing one's life story; past life, current situation and imagined future all playing a part in contributing to the articulation of the lived experience. The recapitulation of past experiences ordered into my present realities' makes the narrative one of the most appealing ways for me to understand my experience of identities. The narrative form also provides the descriptive example, grounds the concept in metaphorical rather than logical prose and illuminates the meaning of our experiences (Price 1999:17). Finally, in constructing a life narrative, we produce a textual structure that underscores the mixture of acting and suffering which constitute the very fabric of life. It is this conglomeration that the story attempts to reconcile in a creative way (Ricoeur 1991 in Nielson 1999:49-50).

The preceding descriptions make clear how narrative can be useful in understanding individuals' lives. As narrative based qualitative research attracts more practitioners, the desire to standardize and regulate the 'process' grows. My approach to narrative, both in the telling and in the way I will analyze my story differs, as this process is jointly about 'me' and involves 'me'. Whereas feminists have outlined a path through interviews with others about others, I am navigating a less traversed course. By concentrating on my narrative and on myself as the subject of inquiry, I pay strict attention to two factors at the same time. It is important that I listen to my foremothers' advice, going about research in manners that will be the least damaging to others. At the same time, I need to bare myself in mind in this process. I will be part of the interview pair, exposing sensitive details of my life. It is interesting to invert the interview dynamic, to think of the level of exposure I face. In the past I have not placed myself in this position, I have simply thought that if I tried to create a safe environment for conversants to speak than they would be completely comfortable. Reversing the dynamic illuminates my responsibility not only in the situation that will come when I am interviewed, but how I need to reconceptualize my interactions in the future. I am wary

however, of following a specific course, as every research situation dictates context specific sensitivities. I bare accountability as a feminist to the body of knowledge that precedes me.¹

My responsibilities as a researcher in employing the narrative approach are many. To begin with I need to employ my skills as a good listener, both to my interviewer and to myself. In the past, when the narrative approach has been used, the researcher imposed themselves on the conversant and the information in three ways: theme selection, ordering the questions and wording the questions in the language of the researcher (Bauer 1996 in Hollway 2000:31). Contemporary feminist's methods instead look to the narrative approach in an open and changing manner, allowing the story told by the conversant to flow in a more personalized form. Whereas the question and answer type interview has the tendency to suppress information, the narrative approach may well work with the conversant in soliciting her story. By using the narrative approach, I realize that the story being told is a part of a pre-existing reality and at the same time is being created for the first time (Hollway 2000: 31). Accordingly, it will be important to listen for repetitions, absences and the (re)telling of my narrative.

The narrative I will be telling has to do with my life as a white lesbian alcoholic. I originally thought that it would be possible to separate my "drinking narrative" from my "coming-out" story; but previous interviews demonstrated that it is very difficult to disentangle the two stories. Jointly telling my stories as one will indicate how these personal identities are interwoven. The "coming-out" story is one that many white lesbians share with each other when we meet for the first time, when we are trying to make sense of our places in society and in some of our cases, when we are coming to terms with our alcoholism. Adrienne Rich speaks to this need as a counter to a sort of "cultural imperialism", which she defines as the decision made by one group of people that another shall be cut-off from their past, shall be kept from the power of memory, context and continuity. This is why lesbians, and lesbian alcoholics, meeting, need to tell and re-tell their stories.

¹ I claim the feminist position as a broad point of methodological reference and a tool for subjective change. I do not claim a specific feminist position as I maneuver about the landscape of my subjectivity; rather the sanction *feminist* aids in establishing the space necessary for subjective comprehension and transformation. I modestly use this strategy to recreate and reposition my subject. The *feminist* does not dictate, but only to permit each character her own complex and expressive role. In the case of the subject I, feminism is used as critical opposition to hegemonic norms of masculinity and patriarchy which pervade acculturated academic expectations.

The stories of my alcoholism and my “coming-out” are told again and again, in pieces, and are narratives that I re-visit on a regular basis. Whether I am in the privacy of my partner’s company or I am participating in a meeting of Alcoholics Anonymous; these are two stories that I have told, create and in many ways shape and reconstitute on a daily basis. Wendy Hollway asserts that the narrative method has a clearly defined beginning, middle and end; I do not necessarily agree with regard to the alcoholic’s story. One of the ways we speak to our lives as alcoholics in AA is through the telling of “what happened, what it was like and what it is like now” (Big Book). Although the “what it is like now” refers to the time in sobriety that we are ‘now’ living, it is by no means an ending. In many cases it is exactly the opposite - the beginning - but at the same time can signify, if I were to relapse, the absolute End. The narratives of sexuality are hard to bring closure to as well. Whether we speak to experiences of homophobia or how I negotiate my sexuality daily – the safest place to ‘end’ the narrative is not with an ending at all, but with the acknowledgment that what I am speaking about is the present.

‘Special’ story reading: Lesbian autobiography and recovery narrative

I have chosen to elaborate on specific characteristics of lesbian autobiography and recovery stories, both pertinent to a partial understanding of the subject in her experience as white/ lesbian/alcoholic. My intention is not to give an overview of each genera, in selecting specific aspects from these narratives, I am able to provide one map, many of which will follow from the conversations I will have with others about myself. This loose framework may assist in an understanding of my own stories. By utilizing varying modes of telling, my subject begins to further becomes illuminated. I have chosen these narrative styles for their representative benefits. This is not to say that each story I tell will neatly fit into one or both of these categories. To the contrary, depending upon with whom I am speaking, my story will be different. I will not always be speaking about my “coming-out” or my “recovery”. I am attempting to focus my narrative on the last two years of my life; I am doing so in an attempt to understand these identities – alcoholic and lesbian. My whiteness fits into the rubric, but I am not exactly sure how and where – I am not even always *white* – it is important that I recognize that I do not reside in a monolithic category, I am uniquely multiple in my

subjectivity. The narratives of lesbian autobiography and recovery bare relevance to my work as I have utilized them in personal study to better communicate my experiences as a lesbian/alcoholic.

To begin, a clarification of what I mean by the term autobiography becomes necessary. This term usually refers to the telling of one's own story, I am choosing to extend the definition by what Carol Boyce Davies refers to as replacing the authoritative "I" with the unstable "we", thus calling into question 'who' the speaking subject is (in Watson 1992:3). I find this description beneficial for it speaks to how "autobiography" can be used within my work as a lens to speak with conversants. My personal voice is an integral component of my work, I am not able to fully disengage, nor do I desire this separation. Through my intentional entanglement with my work/life/race/sexuality/recovery I am questioning implicitly the relation of self to experience, researcher to researched and the production of knowledge itself (Probyn 1993:105). Although autobiography is often criticized as a search for individual identity, I do not agree with this as a denouncement. Subjectivity plays a determining role in how I position myself oppositionally, in part determining actions or politics depending on the situation. This is a concerted choice to submit myself to the throes of academic criticism, in the words of bell hooks:

I have been working to change the way I speak and write, to incorporate in the manner of telling a sense of place, of not just who I am in the present but where I am coming from, the multiple voices within me. I have confronted silence, inarticulateness. When I say, then, that these words emerge from suffering, I refer to that personal struggle to name the location from which I come to voice—that space of my theorizing ("Choosing the Margin as a Space of Radical Openness", 1990: 146)

Observing hooks's call, Bidy Martin references *This Bridge Called My Back: Writing by Radical Women of Color*, edited by Cherrie Moraga and Gloria Anzaldua. This seminal work by both lesbian and straight women of color, is a type of lesbian autobiography. Martin describes it as, "an attempt to attend to the irreducibly complex intersections of race, gender and sexuality, attempts that both directly and indirectly work against assumptions that there are no differences within the "lesbian self". That lesbian authors, autobiographical subjects, readers and critics can be conflated as such" (1996: 150). Although not all lesbian autobiography is as sensitive to the multitude of experiences and identificatory practices in which Moraga and Anzaldua bring together in *The Bridge*, the mere act of writing as a lesbian

is an act of resistance essential to our own survival (Segrest 1985:101-102).). I realize that the work I am referencing is more than fifteen years old. I believe however, these comments to be relevant in the context I am speaking, as the need to define myself as lesbian remains pressing within the academy as well as in my daily life. I aim to broaden identificatory structures, such is the case in *The Bridge*; my subjectivity thus located, now becomes “divided and immersed” as I am presented with/become involved in telling/hearing of my story as well as the responses to the questions I pose. Of final note is Martin’s assertion that “the strategic deployment of identities through (re) conceptualization” (1996:140-2), helps in an understanding of identity as multiple and contradictory. The notion of conflicting and perhaps clashing notions of identity wrapped up in narrative will most likely be difficult to digest. I will need to work against a desire for linear coherence and instead grow comfortable with seemingly unstable, shifting, and multiple notions of self.

Secondly, recovery stories or narratives have been of value in coming to comprehend personal experience. The term ‘recovery’ has become synonymous with Twelve-Step programs such as Alcoholics Anonymous, where people from all walks of life have learned to cope with different addictions. Recovery stories involve personal change, a looking-inwards towards personal pathology, personal shame and personal problems (Plummer 1995:98). The telling of a recovery story usually involves a clear transformation of the self from a secret and shameful past, to a public proclamation of the “new self”. Recovery stories impose a specific narrative structure; what it was like, what happened and what it is like now. They differ from “coming-out” stories in that it is the very nature of self-help culture not to make them political (Plummer 1995:106). Although this view of recovery narrative denounces actions and tellings of past experience with addiction, such an activity has proved useful and rewarding in my personal recovery. In naming myself as an alcoholic I am “resisting”; I am the subject, no longer the object defined by the non-alcoholic, I define my own reality. I am shaping this new identity, I name my herstory by telling my story (hooks 1993: 67-77).

Four women, their notions, and how they legitimize my project

In reading I am choosing to actively engage with text. These are decisions I make prior to picking up a specific book and are (re)negotiated throughout the process. The manner in which I appropriate textual meaning may depend on my current mood, if I feel the author is speaking to me, can I understand the piece - I find it very difficult to admit to the later of these possible barriers. The most important interpretive strategy available to me is my heart. When I ask myself how this text makes me feel, I am able to begin the probe that will lead me to a sense of engagement necessitated by this exercise - how are these women utilizing theory to speak of their experiences? I have chosen to look at the work of four North American authors, one black and three white, which approach the task of writing autobiography differently. Each woman utilizes theory differently, sometimes quite explicitly, in most cases she interweaves it in her text, and the reader is not able to distinguish between how she feels and what she is theorizing. I do not find this meshing of the personal with the theoretical problematic. I am in fact inspired to create a work, which demonstrates such a crafting of my emotional and intellectual subject.

Gayle Pemberton's work, *The Hottest Water in Chicago: On Family, Race, Time and American Culture*, was the first book I chose to examine. As I greedily turned the pages I found myself searching for her racial revelations. Was she going to tell me how it felt to be a Black woman in North America? Is her narrative about how it was to grow-up in the segregated Mid-west of the 1950's and 60's, in a working class family? Was she going to illuminate how black people responded to each white person who approached him or her with tales of their racist relatives? After reading nearly half her book, I came to understand that I was asking the wrong questions. If I was supposed to be attempting to ascertain her use of theory to speak of experience, why had I closed my ears to hear only a black reflexive tale? I had fallen into the trap Pemberton had spoken of so many of her white colleagues; I was viewing her less an individual than as an anonymous representative of the black people (1992:251). I found it difficult to change my approach, but necessary if I wanted to attempt an understanding of Pemberton's autobiographical style.

The main theme that resonated with me throughout her work was her notions of vision. Pemberton speaks to mental, emotional as well as physical types of vision; all of

which play a significant role in her familial upbringing, life as a professor with “terminal wanderlust” and as a black woman who grew up bearing the weight of the tumultuous 1960’s. Pemberton’s visions are multiple, cloaked by two specific African-American literary figures. Both the work of W.E.B. Du Bois, his use of “double-consciousness” and Ralph Ellison’s discussion of the inability of liberal minded whites to see with blackness, in *Invisible Man*. By employing these texts in her own life story, Pemberton is locating herself within the resistant canon of African-American literature. She thus defines herself as a black woman and an American, but with careful attention to the delicate and often precarious position this places her. Pemberton utilizes metaphor to describe the bind she often finds herself: “a mental ghetto as well as an environmental one”(143). Thus illuminating the reader to the space she feels she occupies in America as a black woman. Finally, I find Pemberton’s notion of ‘self’ contradictory and at times problematic. This is not to imply that I expect individuals to present a unitary self. This would in fact be a troublesome depiction as well – it is interesting to note however, that Pemberton presents herself as a black woman who is ‘authentically’ Black, as she no longer touches chemicals to relax her hair (38-39). It is as though Pemberton needs to capitalize on an act she takes in order to define herself, would her sister not be black if she were to apply such a process to her hair? Does Pemberton pointedly define her Blackness in this manner, essentially essentializing this aspect of her identity?

The three other authors I will look at are white, Southern and lesbian. Dorothy Allison, Minnie Bruce Pratt and Mab Segrest all of which are from the same generation, coming of age and actively engaging in feminist, racial and or lesbian politics of the 1960’s and 1970’s. I find this point crucial to an understanding of why these womyn speak from an impassioned position, why they are choosing to write differently. Unlike Pemberton who is a member of the dominant sexuality and who chooses not to address heterosexuality, these white womyn, although privy to white race privilege, chose to engage with their sexuality and race in various ways so as they may better come to terms with their herstories and futures.

Dorothy Allison’s collection of essays *Skin: Talking About Sex, Class and Literature* resonates most clearly for me, as she creates a sense of wholeness of self by bringing together/speaking of her most “shameful” and taboo subject matter. Allison asserts the need for context, the imperative to establish where she is coming from and why, in order to set the scene in her writing and daily life. This means elaborating on her sexuality, her desires her

fantasies and how she is a lesbian, in an anti-lesbian world. Allison utilizes her pain, the sexual abuse and trauma that she survived by her stepfather, as an entry point into her politics as a lesbian feminist writer from the South. She locates her story as unique yet at the same time part of something greater than herself – “I want to be seen for who I am, not denied, not simplified, not lied about, refused or minimized” (1982:180). Allison’s work is about exposure – of herself as a lesbian, of her sexual abuse and of her working-class status in Southern as well as American society.

Allison situates herself as a poor white Southern lesbian – these positionings of class, geographical origin, and sexuality provide the reader with conduits from which to enter an understanding of her experiences. Allison chooses language that is deliberately common and disturbingly harsh. By explaining the sexual abuse she endured and survived from her stepfather, she is speaking to ideas that are seen as “too dangerous, too bad to invite inside our heads”, she is choosing to go against the silences that people expect and sustain in painful and vulnerable moments (1994:173). Thus, Allison’s work demonstrates a specific desire, both within herself and her family but also in the reader – that of healing. By utilizing her life as the grounds for her work, Allison clarifies that there are not distinct lines between theory and experience; revealing to the reader that theory is best based on usefulness.

Minnie Bruce Pratt, a white lesbian Christian-raised Southerner employs a similar theoretical technique to Allison in writing of experience. Whereas Allison teases her reader, tantalizing her with sexually explicit thoughts and events in order to demonstrate how her sexuality is an integral part of her identity; Pratt creeps north, not away from an erogenous zone, but with, probing as well into our hearts. Pratt uses sexuality as her primary trope; it is her lesbianism that has brought her so much pain as well as incredible joy. Pratt chronicles her journey through her marriage with a man, losing her children to the patriarchal system that does not value women who love women, to discovering her power as a white Southerner who can see differently and thus begin to act differently. Pratt’s work teaches me that it is the complexity of my own existence that will help me to understand Others – that in order for me to move forward, I must be willing to move out of my privilege. The privilege she speaks of is the white color of my skin and how it acts as “currency” in the United States. I have the choice to try to understand what it means for me to *have* and *use* this source of power; I have the choice to be vigilant with myself, to reposition myself, from what she quotes Maya

Angelou as calling the “moving from the unknowing majority into consciousness” (1992: 29). I read Pratt’s work as a challenge, a call to action. She exhibits through autobiographical reflection how her experiences as white Southern Christian lesbian have formed and shaped her understanding of her positioning in the United States, by acknowledging that these identities are themselves unstable. “So often we act out the present against the backdrop of the past, within a frame of perception that is so familiar, so safe, that it is terrifying to risk changing it even when we know our perceptions are distorted, limited, constricted by that old view” (1983:33).

Mab Segrest is also a white Southern lesbian, but instead of using sexuality as her main trope, she employs literary techniques to explain the place of the ‘lesbian’ in Southern literature. Through her reading of various Southern female authors, Segrest finds that white women who do not follow the ridged code of Southern hyper-feminized domesticity are outcast and depicted as degenerate. Segrest describes a walling off of specific beliefs to preserve “safe selves”, Southern whiteness, what she labels the “segregated heart”, or the “creation of the grotesque”(1985:26). This notion of protection is prominent throughout her essays. Segrest however chooses to confront the tradition that places her at the margins because of her lesbian sexuality. She chooses a shift to the personal voice to act, to clarify the connections between feelings and ideas so as to re-claim, from fear the literature of her life (1985:14,140).

In her collections of essays, *My Mama’s Dead Squirrel: Lesbian Essays of Southern Culture*, Segrest identifies two white Southern womyn that she believes are lesbian because of the way they write. This is not an act of “outing” aimed to harm these authors; rather, Segrest is searching for mentors, attempting to discover a “self and home in a culture soaked in human slavery” (1985:105). Here Segrest speaks of two issues that underpin her collection of essays. The desire for “gay role models” made clear with the conversations that she has with Barbara Deming, a long-time gay activist; and how she tries to understand what it was like to be a “out lesbian” in the 1950’s. Segrest travels this path attempting to comprehend how the invisibility of the closet can prevent “gay role models” from being conceived of at all, much less as differing in their sexuality.

Because Segrest is a product of white racist Southern culture, she feels the need to revise her position, or be purposeful in her implication in the present. In being a lesbian, in

experiencing life as Other, she defines her oppression by analogy with African Americans. “I knew in my soul something of what it is to be a *nigger*” (1985:234). In this statement, Segrest is not claiming she has experienced slavery or knows exactly what it means to be African American in the South. She does however know that it is vital to be “real” about her position as a lesbian, true to herself in her writing as well as in Southern circles, as she is part of the underclass. Segrest does not wallow in white liberal guilt; she maintains an aggressive stance towards what Frantz Fanon has termed the “decolonizing of the self”. This continual act is about digging oneself out of the past, figuring where she fits into the maintenance of oppressive situations, such as employing an African American woman as a domestic, but not acknowledging her beyond that role. Segrest views this denial of African American existence as similar to the denied position she resides in as a result of her lesbianism.

Finally, Segrest attempts to render the position of lesbian natural and self-evident, linking her work on anti-racist projects with the work of her Southern lesbian foremothers. This connection results in what Bidy Martin has described as a challenge to “reconstruction’s that make lesbianism the origin and end of a coherent tradition, a reconstruction that too often represents a lesbian-feminist tradition (from the perspective of white lesbian feminists) in such a way as to suggest that the problem of racism was ‘discovered’ at a particular point in a fairly linear herstory” (1996:160). Although Martin’s words offer harsh critique, it becomes important to assert how embedded in racist thinking we really are. Segrest is able however, to make visible the need to act backwards in a sense, figuring where we have stood in the past and how we can stand anew in the present as actively combating racist and homophobic discourses.

Being asked, speaking to and why these may seem like plane ‘ol conversations

The process that I have begun: probing inwards, privileging the personal/emotional and servicing theory based off my experience as opposed to an abstract conception of experience demonstrates how I have localized my efforts along feminist lines. As opposed to gathering information from a set of informants through the interview process, I have decided to select four people to interview me. This inversion of the traditional social science scenario circulates a different set of power relations. To begin with, because of the pre-existing relationships I have with each one of these individuals, hopefully there will be a greater

comfort in the interview setting. Initially I had planned on providing the interviewers with a set of questions before our scheduled meeting. That way I thought they would have the ability to choose from the list of twenty questions, five or six which interested them. I thought that this would give them the opportunity to ask me questions that are not on the list. I assumed this would facilitate a smooth and productive interview. However, after speaking with one of my advisors, I came to understand that I was in fact reproducing the unequal power relations that I was aiming to reduce. Thus, reluctantly at first, but knowing I was proceeding more ethically, I contacted each of my hopeful interview candidates and asked them if they could ask me their own questions. I was concerned with this imposition, I thought by asking for them to do this task, I was expecting or burdening these individuals. Fortunately I was not denied and each interviewer came prepared. Furthermore, in attempting to alter the traditional interview process, I hope to create an open dynamic between us. My aim is to create a more flowing exchange as opposed to a strict question and answer session. The ability of my interviewers to ask me whatever they please places me in a vulnerable position. I have little choice in declining a response. However, because I know each one of these people to some degree, I am confronted with an emotionally debilitating question, I feel that my response will benefit an understanding of my identity construction.

In choosing my interviewers, I tried to bring together a diverse group of individuals thinking that diversity in race, sexuality, nationality, gender and age would lend itself to different interview scenarios. The first interviewer I selected, Kristen, is my lover. I have chosen her because of the intimacy we share and our ability to create a safe space, which we can explore, my white lesbian alcoholic self. She is the most *like me* when it comes to this project, as we have in common our race, sexuality, and life experiences in the United States as well as coming from similar socio-economic positions. Hopefully this will help to bridge our exchange. The second interviewer I chose is also North American, gay/white/alcoholic and shares similar socio-economic positioning. I am acquainted with him from attending AA meetings in Cape Town. Unlike other interviewers, he is a few decades older, in his late 50's. The primary reason I have asked him to interview me is because of how forthright he is in speaking about his non-monogamous sexual interactions; this may make speaking about deviant sexuality, of which we share a more capricious affair. Thirdly, I have asked a friend of mine I met in Cape Town who knew me before I got clean and sober. She passionately

identifies as Black butch South African. Our socio-economic positioning is different; this may account for variation in the way we speak to each other and the type of questions she chooses to ask me. I am not meaning to imply that the other interviews will be congruent because our socio-economic positions, rather, I am attempting to pre-empt the possibilities of difference in the interviews and why they may occur. My final interviewer is a black Xhosa woman who is South African and identifies as poor. She and I are Master's candidates and have become acquainted over coffee. Each one of these individuals has granted me permission to use their real names; I have done so graciously.

Coming back after all this time: The now

The ensuing section speaks to the present, the now, as I re-enter this project from a protracted leave; move of continent, home and setting in which the first part of this work was conceived and the interviews were conducted. How does one unite the partition of temporal, geographical and emotional splintering? Is there a space that lies in waiting for the return of the hands to the key-board and the heart to the task - the possibility that such a distance can be construed as a positive personal placement, bringing crisp, fresh insight? I sit pondering the current *place* I am residing, no longer *staying* as they say in South Africa; I am now on the other side of the globe. Here at "home" in the United States, secured at least for the time being in the North East; I am finding it necessary to re-educate myself. The formidable project I have outlined as my Master's Thesis continues to take on greater meaning and supply me with far more challenges than I had expected. I have not been able to escape the information, my data as they call it; my subjectivity is performed daily. I am a part of the process, entrenched as the object of study, positioned as *the researched*, at the same time, the subject. Determining my roles, choosing voices and preserving self continue to be my greatest stumbling blocks.

By returning to the interviews that transpired nearly three months ago, I am haunted by the voice that was and *is* - how much change can take place in such a short time? Did the word lesbian role off my tongue that easily - was I always that eager to discuss my alcoholism, why is it race has not been a part of my conversations since I have been in the United States? These are but the beginning of the rapidly accruing enumeration of thoughts that inevitably run through my head as I jot notes - listening to both subjects, then, just the

one I am attempting to deconstruct. I have looked for the Other inside myself, this is what I understand to be “critical distance”, the space necessary for which I may deepen the investigation of my subjectivity. At the same time, demonstrating a reflexive position entails an extensive exploration on an analytical level of the nature of the interview process, specifically, the interview dynamics and their determining role in the expression of my subjectivity.

The first interview was the longest, nearly two hours; and during the transcription process made me very angry. I felt as though Lerato took advantage of the interview setting to drill me on how entrenched I was in white middle-class American feminist rhetoric, how my privilege disallowed my vision of any Other. I felt as though Lerato expected me to see her as she saw herself, yet I was not granted this same vision; instead I was to see the subject through her eyes. This interview was tense, I found myself slipping away from the conversation when she started to tell me her story. I have realized that this was not a beneficial place to locate myself, but the frustration and anger I progressively felt has made it difficult to engage on a fully productive level with this interaction. My expectations leading into this interview held that she would speak to me as raced and as alcoholic; however, there was not a mention of this second part of my subjectivity. Furthermore, due to the highly formalized nature of our exchange, probably due to our simultaneous positioning as Master’s students within the same department - (all be-it, positioned very differently) - our interview focused primarily on my “lesbian lifestyle”, “coming-out” and my position as a “white/middle-classed/Western woman”. All of which were in relation to Lerato as a black/poor/ South African woman.

The main issues of contention present in this dynamic were the labeling of identity, the power/responsibility to see/read identity, and judging when this power becomes oppressive. In an almost quarrelsome fashion, Lerato and I debated how she saw me, how I identified and conversely how she identified and how I “labeled” her. From the outset I was confused about her asserted identity as a poor South African woman, I did not “see” her as such; and this inability of mine proved to demonstrate how my vision was constructed along class lines I had acquired in the United States. But also, and more to the point of this exercise, my initial narrow vision to part of her identity showed how easy it is to lapse into comfortable zones of

readily readable identities; I could not at first see Lerato as poor. This issue of reading an identity was ever present and was brought to the fore with regard to my lesbianism.

Lerato: *"People just don't see it, rather as something I can say to you, I am a lesbian, it is a disclosure, you don't read it...it's an assumed or veiled thing, yeah, so it's not something that is literally a secret."*

Alia: *"You choose not to see it."*

Lerato: *"Yeah...I didn't know how to see it, I didn't, like you say, have a reference point to identity um, anyone as a lesbian except for when they named themselves as a lesbian."*

Although I was at first taken aback with Lerato's statement on how she could not "see" me, it became clear when I switched our positions; seeing her as poor and me as lesbian. Our identities began to be excavated - mine with the narrative of my "coming-out" as a lesbian and Lerato's as a poor woman in explaining "where she came from." These explanations made it easier to understand her as a poor woman - and she me, as a lesbian. I have come to consider our conversation as a space opener, one that allowed for my exploration of the Other inside the subject I. Through an understanding of how Lerato saw me, in part as lesbian, but only after I pointed this out to her, (proved it to her really,) it has become clear how I have used my lesbianism to create a named difference.

Next, our interview was laced with an undercurrent of angst, keeping me on the edge of the couch. I fiddled with my shoelaces, while Lerato probed on how I thought the Gender Studies course had progressed.

Lerato: *"Do you think any, like, queer issues, obviously not, have been dealt with in gender studies. Do you think they have?"*

Alia: *"No I don't. I have tried to push for sexuality to be included in the race/class/gender with organizational development theory course, but no."*

Lerato: *"How do you see that?"*

Alia: *"Well, at first Lerato, when I came over here I didn't feel that by me being a lesbian, that involving my lesbianism in my work was valid, I didn't feel it was valid because I am coming over to Africa, 'basic needs' are what we are dealing with, right?" (Tone of sarcasm)*

Lerato: *"Yeah."*

Alia: *"That's what the literature tells us, sexuality is something that "developed" Western nations deal with. Now this is literature written both by Western feminists as well as by Third world black feminists, feminists in the South. So, in particular one article...she said something to the effect of, 'how can these Western lesbians bring their lesbian agendas, to the South, there isn't a place for it here? First of all, we don't have lesbianism here.' So, there is a denial of sexuality."*

In the above diatribe, I attempt to justify my articulated position as lesbian within the Gender Studies course. Despite the Gender course reading and many other publications I have sorted through, which I found the assertion of my identity as a lesbian unproductive and unwelcome, I fought to challenge these scholars by placing my subject in the equation. In the interview with Lerato as well as in the classroom setting, I stated my difference with every chance I got, protesting to what I viewed as an absence, my absence in the discussion. Therefore, the exchange with Lerato was enlightening. I came to appreciate how I played up my lesbian difference to possibly demonstrate an empathetic stance for those who are oppressed by class/race biases. Also, as lesbian was one of my stated identities coming into the interview dynamic, the interview process helped in transforming an understanding of this identity from a site of difference into a space of commonality. I was able to begin to engage with Lerato as someone with whom I shared more than a simple course load. My understanding of our obscured difference, our mutual positioning as agents who name our difference and if we chose, deny other's theirs, illuminated a fruitful discussion.

The final area Lerato and I struggled with was race, how she saw me and why that was important. Towards the end of the interview I became anxious, worried we had not covered the ground necessary to unearth the subjective elements I wanted to write about. I showed Lerato what I consider one of the 'markers' of a white/western/middle class lesbian, pointing to the tattoo on my ankle:

Alia: *"That stands for womyn protesting."*

Lerato: *"Um, huh."*

Alia: *"... This fist here was originally part of the Black consciousness symbol of protest."*

Lerato: (points to the fist) *"...this for me is amandla, so I mean, I thought it looked like a weird symbol to have on you."*

Alia: *" 'Cause you saw me as white?"*

Lerato: *"White and you had an amandla symbol on your foot. And you had the symbol for woman and I thought, ahhhh."*

This ink marker of mine served to further the discussion surrounding my lesbianism but also speaks to how concerned I was with Lerato's opinion of me as a white lesbian. By showing her the tattoo, aligning myself with the Black consciousness movement in that I understood at least a basic tenet, I was seeking Lerato's approval as a Black woman. Although I spent a good part of the interview describing the dynamics of my "coming-out" as

a dyke and how I no longer saw myself as a heterosexual, the main issue I wanted to discuss was race. It was race, what I have previously referred to as whiteness, that I sought to examine in this interview, and how whiteness related to being black. Before this interview and not really until I came to understand the literature, did I see whiteness as anything other than oppressive or more powerful than Black. I had created a hierarchy of difference, black below white, black in opposition to white; and I felt burdened by this conflict, that I was somehow responsible for the weight of oppression caused by racism. Consequently, I believe that I came into the interview hoping to be absolved of the “white guilt” that seemed to plague me. How I thought Lerato was going to achieve this, why I thought it was her duty, has in part to do with how much weight I placed on our difference. The interview ended with Lerato stating; that I was, “an amazing white person” and that she has “never engaged with anyone white on such a level or seen a white person as willing to engage with their own biases and values.” I am still uncomfortable with the overt contradictions that were a part of both the interview, as well as the above analysis. I stated in the final sentences of the interview, “sometimes tensions create greater knowledge of and in ourselves,” it is my aim to embrace rather than further fret with my contradictory identity expressions.

Mike was the second person who interviewed me. This time I found that a different subject surfaced. At first, I became unsure of my project’s direction and sensitive with his choice of language. The discomfort with the experimental quality of my project surfaced during the beginning of the interview and I believe filtered through our conversation, although it did not have a debilitating effect. This uncomfortability seemed to result in self-censorship on one issue, why I was attempting to surface my raced identity was sidelined, specifically within the South African context. We in fact did not speak to our commonality as white North Americans; I was color blind in this interview, choosing not to speak of race. Overall, my *essence* began to be unleashed, the narrative of my active alcoholism and evolution in sexuality clearly emerging in ways that spoke to the difficulty I had in coming to terms with my lesbianism, especially during my marriage to a physically abusive man.

The notion of femininity ran strong through the interview with Mike. He questioned in a roundabout manner if I saw myself as a proper girl and where I had learned to be “strong, assertive and articulate”. I felt conflicted in speaking to him, on the one hand I wanted to sound “articulate” and self-assured in my subject presentation, but I also sought to let down

that guard and speak more personally. Instead I spoke as though we were in a room of Alcoholics Anonymous, short in my descriptions and stiff in a lack of emotional content. Right from the beginning I found myself steering the conversation. After Mike clarified what I was attempting in my project, I jumped in by taking up the idea of 'voice', an independent and self-sufficient womyn, and how the role I play as a lesbian/alcoholic conflict dramatically with societal expectations. Mike questioned at what point I thought I had come to understand that power of mine, at what point the conflict had become present.

Alia: "In terms of awareness of that kind of power, it plays into my alcoholism. One of things that I used to love to do was go into a bar as a womyn, by myself, and feel that power and drink by myself. I would sit there and read and drink and it gave me a sense of, it gave me a sense of strength... To be in a setting usually surrounded by men, it wasn't to pick up men, to do anything but to be by myself and to read, um, but I was definitely taught not to do that. As a womyn, to drink in public is... bad."

With a retrospective gaze, insight can be a pleasant result, but the above comments were made about a time towards the end of my active alcoholism, when I was still 'using'. They can be spoken of and benefited from now, but only with the privilege of hindsight. The ability to see how I have assumed certain roles in different times, my sobriety permits this vision. Mike's question of how I saw myself in the role of a "different type of girl" is one I can grapple with as a result of the passage of time, from the role of champion swimmer, to heterosexual married wife attending an all women's University, to full-fledged dyke life. Of course the former outline of my herstorical trajectory is by no means that linear, as Mike and I discussed, I struggled with drug and alcohol addiction during the two first stages and on into what I have labeled my dyke life. Consequently, these parts of my life have been about many roles, both deliberately assumed, unwillingly so in others.

The discourse I learned in Alcoholics Anonymous rings so clearly in these passages because of my association with Mike, we know each other from The Rooms, and also, how I have come to view my subject now, away from active alcoholism. In the interview with Mike, unlike any other, I spoke about what it was like to drive along the back hill roads of western Massachusetts, a bottle of whisky nestled between my thighs and a joint burning recklessly in the ashtray. He felt my story when I spoke of the freedom and relief I thought I felt when that fermented liquid caressed my throat – he too had experienced similar pleasures. I felt safe in speaking with Mike, even though we did not delve into race, the content of the

dialogue Mike and I carried drew out the two prominent “coming-out” narratives, which contribute in part to shaping my subjectivity. I was further affirmed in my announced location as a lesbian/alcoholic after this interview, thereby making up for the discomfort that I had initially experienced.

One of the unique aspects to the conversation between Mike and I was the discussion of my competitive swimming and how this 13 year constant had contributed to my subjectivity.

Mike: *“Do you think, I’m curious about your competitive swimming and how that has formed your identity...but also limited your identity? I mean the energy it took to stay at that competitive level and what you gave out in order to do that, and what all of that may have done?”*

Alia: *“...It was no accident that drugs and alcohol went directly during and filled the space post swimming, um, yes, I believe swimming in a way retarded my subjective growth, but I didn’t really have the for-sight to think along those lines. What Alia wants and needs, other than, is there enough food in my stomach to perform in the pool? Am I getting to bed early enough, is my homework done - scholastics always came pretty easily, I would do my work and it would be done well and that’d be it. Also, I didn’t have to put effort into training until later in the kind of post-pubescent time when it actually hurts when you are training hard. But definitely, I think when I was a competitive swimmer a lot of my energy was used up.”*

It is interesting to gaze back at the way in which I used to spend my time - moving expertly forward in the water, feeling the adrenaline gush through my system. This excerpt reminded me of those years, it also instigated a process of coming to terms with what I have become as a result of, but more specifically since I quit swimming. A competitive swimmer is not one of the present identities I would claim, but in the past this is how I exclusively identified. I see that past subject slot as terribly confining, is it no wonder I moved so fluidly into a life of addiction, was that simply what I had been living all along, just not realized because it was sanctioned as sport? My dialogue with Mike brought back memories of how I used to perform, it also helped me to realize that the positions I claim now, white, lesbian and alcoholic are really no less restrictive and perhaps need to be reconceived more broadly.

Along the lines of essentialized identity, Mike and I spoke of how the “gay/queer” people here in Cape Town were very different than they were in the United States. We talked about gay white Capetonians with regard to naming. Mike asserted that his “70 or 75 year old friend in Malibu hated the word dyke, absolutely...don’t dare use it around her”. As a result he did not know what to call queer women. I brought up the idea that it was probably a

generational propensity to utilize certain labels, he agreed. The conversation went further to speak of what I called myself in Cape Town.

A: *"For me the word dyke and queer are run of the mill. Not necessarily here, here among, I think, lesbians in Cape Town, I don't know as much about the gay men, but they are about 15 years behind the times. They missed out on the wave of white middle class American feminism and um, not to say that butch femme is passe, from what I understand it's very much the 'in' thing to do. To call yourself a dyke, here, you just don't do that. You're gay, maybe a lesbian, but you are gay... The terms are loaded they mean so much."*

In the above statements I essentialize queer womyn in Cape Town, I cordon off their ability to identify with certain names and ways of being because they differ from what I have conceived as 'correct' lesbian behavior. In effect, I have located the truth of Capetonian white middle class lesbians in their sexuality, through the act of naming and disregarded the circumstances that help to create part of their assumed identities as gay. Although Mike and I chuckled over these comments of mine, I am rather ashamed to have been privy to such stringent judgment, classifying individuals based off of my criteria. I have found that claiming specific identities for my subject had been empowering. In this interview with regard to my sexuality and alcoholism, as the former was the case with Lerato, I need to remember that this is a privilege, one that I can not rescind from others, as this would move to delegitimize my positions.

The third interview was with Janine, previous housemate and friend from my first visit in Cape Town of September 1998. As I have mentioned, Janine knew me while I was still abusing drugs and alcohol. I thought we would discuss possible changes in how she saw me now, if there were any. Instead, the comfortability and ease that accustomed our interactions while living together, was replaced by how our "friendship had been broken". Janine spoke about how disappointed she was in me, how she had seen me as a different type of white person, much as Lerato had, and how my move to Camps Bay, (a wealthy, primarily white area in Cape Town,) had changed her view. Our conversation revolved around how I was "just like other white people from America", that my move had been a move away from her, away from "her people", a racist move. I found our conversation illuminating in my subjectivity as a raced person in that I was forced to place myself in opposition to Janine, a black butch South African. I was asked to describe why I was uncomfortable in a mixed, "unsafe" neighborhood – I began to engage with my whiteness. Janine and I did not speak to our shared queer sexuality, nor did we speak to my alcoholism as I had assumed.

The interview with Janine brought the present into focus in a disturbing way. The exchange we had would not have taken place outside the confines of the interview situation. Perhaps this can be viewed as helpful in that the setting was documented and I may now work to disentangle myself from the emotional mess I found myself in during and directly after the interview. Janine challenged me on numerous issues as I stated above, not the least of which were light or inconsequential to the present task. My fear as a white womyn was released at the beginning of our dialogue, I think in an attempt to let her know what I wanted to uncover for my project. In previous conversations, Janine and I had spoken about how race worked in our individual lives, how it effected the way we moved, what we thought, and how we interacted with others. With Janine I had had a special relationship with regard to race-talk. My ease carried into the interview, but this time I spoke of my racialized fear. In doing so, I came to realize that she was uncomfortable, for the first time I noticed that she was not as receptive as I thought she had been. Retrospectively, this was not the first occasion for her discomfort, I believe it was the first time I noticed her in the dynamic though. Before I had “let my mind blab in regards to race...thinking it was because I felt safe enough and I felt, meaning that I didn’t think you’d get mad at me or call me on my shit.” Janine had previously listened, not articulated a judgment, but heard me for what I was feeling. In the interview though, Janine did not grant such latitude and instead came armed with questions pertaining to my presence in South Africa. She specifically asked, “what I knew of South African History.”

Janine: *“South African society is of an incredibly complex nature, have you in your personal capacity explored that?”*

Alia: *(Long Pause) “I don’t think there has been a very formalized nature to my exploration, it’s been... First of all coming over here and acknowledging that complexity is hard, very hard. You know, whether it be driving along and being asked for food or money or walking along the streets in Obs and having people come up to the door. Um, the difficult position I decided to put myself in regards to having domestic help, um, it’s been something that I have, I don’t know, when I hear the word history I think books, I think...the second thing I think of are people’s individual stories.”*

Janine: *“Um.”*

Alia: *“It’s been hard for me to kind of hear different people along the way. Um, it’s been hard for me to listen to white South Africans. I kind of lump them as that, even though I know there are differences and various histories; that the stereotypes that go along with white South Africans as being racist, as being um, scared of change, scared of loss of power um, and then the stereotype I have. I mean, there are the stereotypes I have of black South*

Africans as being poor and disadvantaged and, but at the same time, what is a black South African? What is a white South African? I mean it's experiencing, or choosing to experience it; a lot of it has been a choice of moving over to Camps Bay, has almost been a choice to disengage with much of what I was experiencing. Um, it's been very hard emotionally to feel all of the hardship that was going on around me. I don't know. I'm searching for a specific instance that really affected me. One day I was downtown with Susan for a class, we were at the Granary for an exhibit and afterward we were driving to my car and then there was this black guy being beat over the head with a brick and I lost my shit, I was..."

Janine: "I remember you coming home."

Alia: "I was totally shocked for two days, I didn't know what to do with what I was feeling... Present day experiences, where people are as a result of history... I've been scared I think to explore too much because it would mean... I have found that once I begin to look at my positioning as a white person here, what it means for me to be coming over as a white person from the States that inevitably comes out of looking at other white South Africans. I look at the circles I and they run in, going to Health and Racquet and Melissa's, they are these privileged segregated white um, exclusive areas. Choosing to spend my time in those areas 'causes I feel a kind of safety there and I first questioned that safety and then chose not to."

Janine: "Why?"

Alia: "It was a choice to ignore the material conditions of those around me. Because the further and further I got in my studies the more fed-up I got with the nature of 'development' and what white people have been doing."

Janine: "Rather patronizing!"

The preceding excerpt speaks again to my propensity for essentializing identity outside myself. In describing white South Africans as well as black South Africans, I am unable to locate the spaces in-between, not just in terms of skin color and racial identification, I fail to recognize the range and diversity of experiences that are South African. This is to say, in speaking about South African history with Janine, I denied her herstory - her position as a black South African. I find this difficult to say, for when I look at Janine I see a womyn with skin lighter than my own, but here again, this is how she identifies, not how I choose to see her. Over the range of our discussion, I grapple with the issue of racialized identity in such a way as to eliminate the possibility for subjective identification outside the unnamed realms of black and white. In my above conception of white, there is not the possibility for positive positioning, I do not permit the white South African and by extension, myself as white, to be anything but a negative in the South African context. This is a disturbing location to place myself, and further guarantees fissures with regard to inter/intra personal race relations. I neutralize any move for agentic prospects, according to the above discourse - I am the racist white.

In desiring to move forward, I must not only become responsible for the claim to essence, but also obtain a vision for this progressive stance. To declare myself racist, (interestingly enough I am asked this question in my final interview,) does not absolve accountability with regard to Janine or my subject. Such a stance is anything but helpful, if but a way out from the introspective analysis that needs to take place in order to understand why I feel as though I am this unpleasant racist being. I do not wish to become preoccupied with seeing myself as such, but perhaps the position becomes worthy if it were to aid in an appreciation of my subject as something other than, “fearing lose of power and control”? I do not want to see my subject as the one who has come to Africa to make development happen, nor do I want to be misunderstood by Janine as “a betrayer of her people”. This interview brought into focus how I am able to be both, depending on the perception of the gaze, and how through my own agency, I may alter such a view.

The final interview with Kristen was by far the most emotionally challenging. We blurred the personal with the academic/political, eliminating a secure space altogether. In actuality, Kristen and I had two interviews, the first conducted after Lerato’s, but this interview was not recorded, resulting in a redo. The interview with Kristen covered numerous aspects of my subjectivity, ranging from religious practices as a child, my Syrianness, remnants of memory, social class, and Alcoholics Anonymous. The content however was contained differently than other interactions. Here, my voice wavers throughout the conversation, at times there is an emotional distance to my analysis of “do you think you are racist”, other times, my voice is soft, timid and vulnerable. In the interview as well as with the transcription, there was a constant state of discomfort. This was a performed task, unlike the first interview we had had; this exchange was laden with judgment, extra-knowledge and obligation. Unlike the three previous interviews, this took on a transparent quality; as Kristen had helped me to transcribe the others and knew their content, absences as well as what gripped me about them. This provided her a privileged stance in regards to my emotional positioning and granted her the ability to probe where others had not been allowed. During the interview we discussed tangible discomfort, blurring aspects of the speaking process and the interview listening - in an attempt to dissolve boundaries. Unfortunately, this merger created more distress than benefit, my attempt at transparency somewhat failed.

In my lapsing attempt at a unified self, I grasp for an unencumbered subject, one who strictly delineates identities that are organized and clearly defined. My subjectivity is not as trite as the concept of a linear design may project; but the activity of reducing my subjectivity in such a manner speaks to the difficulty within the confines of this text to express my complexity. The last interview came to embody the difficult, contradictory nature to the task I am so desperately trying to accomplish. On the one hand, I have been trying to deepen my understanding of my subject as discordant in her subjectivity, but at the very same moment I have cordoned off and manipulated specific ways of being, which deem my subject righteous in her actions as white/lesbian/alcoholic. These dual positions create confusion and angst, making analysis of the discourses present in the dialogues with my interlocutors very hard. Especially in the interview with Kristen, I found that not only was my position as a confused white/steeped in AA rhetoric constructed, I did not seem to know where to go with this hearty information.

The exchange with Kristen, in some cases like the one with Lerato, touched on the issue of class and how I define my subject in relation to my social-economic position. Whereas with Lerato, I was a “privileged/white from the States,” with Kristen there was the challenge to why I used the term “middle class.”

Kristen: “Um, in Lerato’s interview, as I’ve spoken to you about before, you used the term middle class. I don’t understand that. Why don’t you want to talk in that class, to Lerato, as upper class? Why don’t you use that terminology with Amina, why don’t you use that terminology with Jane? Or do you use that terminology with them, is it a Lerato specific thing?”

Alia: “No, it’s not Lerato specific, in the first paper I used the term upper-middle class.”

Kristen: “How do you define yourself as that?”

Although the words concern class, the issue at hand has more to do with the power to name; and conceive of myself differently than I am necessarily seen by others - even my lover. In the interview I juggled back and forth with Kristen over the issue of what class I belonged in and how I ‘should’ name myself. But the way I chose to represent my subject in the end was not amenable to her; it confused her. The push to justify my alleged position resonates when applied to white, lesbian and alcoholic individually and in chorus. Even though the privilege to label my subject is present, given that I have agency to do so, I struggle with this freedom, at times negotiating some names over others to avow my space.

Alia: *"It's an uncontested site, too. I can call myself middle class and I don't have to unpack it, it's safe, and in that sense it is false, by me saying that in all these interviews, and with me not unpacking that in the thesis."*

Kristen: *"Do you think you'd be judged?"*

Alia: *"I do. I do."*

Kristen: *"By them?"*

Alia: *"But it's also, I think I would have to be more judgmental of myself as a result of kind of um..."*

Kristen: *"Why don't you want to go through that?"*

Alia: *"'Cause I'm going through it in so many other areas. With my alcoholism, with my lesbianism, with my whiteness and I don't even think I've done that sufficiently. You can only do so much, I just think it's not something that I can address right now."*

When it came down to justifying my use of the label middle class, and by extension white/lesbian/alcoholic, understanding what I am ready and capable of deconstructing and what needs to be left intact for the time being, is where I have finally rest. Following, within the borders of this work, it has been useful to essentialize certain categories so as to maintain a sense of stability when the boundaries of different identities are shifting and being broken down. Whereas these interviews have not offered a clear, singular definition of white, lesbian or alcoholic, the narratives present voice patterns of being that in different circumstances represent white/lesbian/alcoholic. The dialogue with Kristen offered insight into what it meant for me to claim status as white in South Africa, why she thought I "hated men" and "how my Dad's reading of a child's version of the Bible at dinner had affected me?" These seemingly tangential topics forced a deeper engagement with my subjective whole; I was not allowed to skate along in obscurity with white/lesbian/alcoholic.

Subjecting myself to intensive investigation, each interview encapsulated a piece of the subject, edifying select aspects of my subjectivity, glossing over or completely ignoring others. Summarizing interview content and absence lends itself to a deeper engagement with the allotted material. In comparing for example, why Lerato did not speak to my alcoholism in the same vein as Janine's silence, perhaps I can better grasp the visible importance of this identity outside the subject. I was at first surprised that neither individual questioned my identity as an alcoholic. Seeing now that the primary reason I chose these two to interview me was because they are black, why should the seemingly inconsequential identity of alcoholic be spoken about? I must take responsibility for placing myself in racial opposition to Lerato and Janine, this is largely how they received me and as a result, my disease was

muted. On the contrary, Mike and Kristen both spoke to my alcoholism, Mike more so than Kristen, but understandably so because of our meeting in the Rooms of AA.

Interestingly, the interview with Mike that addressed both my lesbianism and my alcoholism failed with regard to a racial discussion. This interview, unlike all three others did not mention color, privilege, power or fear; attending instead to the linear progression of my attraction and later “coming-out” as a lesbian and my obsession and consequent addiction to drugs and alcohol. The conversation with Mike in effect avoided, although it would seem unconsciously on the part of my interviewer, the obvious visual commonality the two of us have, yet were unwilling to speak about. As white North Americans our propensity to ignore racial dynamics, especially in personal conversation speaks to the assumed privilege both of us take for granted. In the setting of Mike’s high-rise living room overlooking the sea, we chose not to positively engage, and rather colluded with the oppressive status that ‘white’ many times takes in the South African context. The absence of a racial discussion in this interview is disheartening, would Mike and I have been able to speak of race, perhaps we would have been able to work-through or reconstitute a more positive notion of what it means to be queer/white North American in Cape Town?

Whereas Mike and Lerato were both anxious to explore my lesbian identified experience, Janine and Kristen did not mention our shared queer sexuality. Understanding why Kristen did not give attention to sexuality becomes clear when looking to the previous interview she and I conducted, as it covered how and why I came to claim lesbian as one of my defining characteristics. As for Janine, our mutual identification as dykes went ignored in the heated context of our racial discussion. Sexuality was not a part of our interview due to her eagerness in locating my rationale for “being” in Cape Town. Thinking back I had not expected a long discussion of my lesbianism with Janine. She and I had had many previous conversations about our “coming-out”, I assumed though that she would at least touch on my lesbianism, as this was one of the sites that I had articulated as important to my project.

In the course of analyzing these four interviews I have found that racial opposition - black/white - has played a determinant role in topic choice. Although Lerato did first concentrate on my “coming-out” as a lesbian, this was only because of the difference this identity represented. The bulk of our conversation revolved around race or was infused with a racial undercurrent thereby making our interview primarily about the conflicting nature of her

blackness and my whiteness. Secondly with Janine, race headlined as our interview circulated around South African history, my “white” reason for coming to South Africa, and “how white people from America are all alike.” I ponder the possibility of setting myself up for such an extensive racial over-haul, had I honestly believed that delving into my raced identity was going to be a smooth and pleasant occasion?

Finally, the four interview scenarios were not at all what I had envisioned. The greatest of hopes were placed on these un-timed, seemingly unstructured, emotionally ungratifying exchanges. Through these conversations I assumed my subjective contradictions would be adheased, that the “true” subject would be revealed. Such high expectations have burdened deconstructive exploration; a departure point has been useful, but a coherent, unified subject an unrealistic and undesired end. However, each of the four interviews I participated in established a unique dynamic that drew on aspects of my subjectivity. I have briefly looked at the dialogues as they play a part in understanding the constitution of the subject in these scenarios. I stress that these interviews, throughout their processes: speaking with, transcribing and subsequent listening and note taking, were an emotionally draining, and difficult endeavor. Conflicting forms of identity were presented depending upon the interview pair, this in large part was do to the people I engaged with, the questions they asked and the expectations I had prior to these interactions. The complexity of my subjectivity was revealed, at times polymorphous and fragmented while in the very same setting, seemingly coherent with an alarmingly linear quality. Also, there inlay the assumption that knowledge ‘was’ based on experience and thus could be articulated in the interview setting. Thus, the interview process itself came under review as a site of constituting knowledge.

Finding another entry: A different path through interview analysis

The braiding and then unraveling of my narratives during the interview process has aided in a broader understanding to the complex nature of my subjectivity. The fear of forcing, prioritizing, “doing violence” to relations between categories, which have internal relations (Hollway 1989: 21), plagues further analysis. But instead of becoming stalled in the uncertainty of self or stuck in a ‘hermeneutic circle’, I have chosen to examine how race, lesbianism and alcoholism have/do temporally and geographically affect my subjectivity. The main thrust of my analysis will circulate around the notion of *herstory* - my *experience*, and

how this activity creates, maintains and (re)establishes identity. I have chosen a different route through the always daunting and relentlessly disturbing task of subjective analysis; a path that incorporates various modes of 'telling' and knowing, a different way of communicating with the self/reader. This course of analysis respects that reality is not singular, acknowledges that 'knowing' takes place on a multitude of layers and that there is never a final product to be attained. I find the need to reject the discourses that I have articulated prior to analysis of my interviews. In order for an analysis there must be a rejection of the discourse articulated during the interview (Hollway 1989:36). This assertion is disturbing as the subject, "I", is denied. I heed Hollway graciously, as a guideline, not mandatory course of action; these are my stories, experiences that respectively begin to reveal my subjectivity. I choose narrative out of the possibility for the qualities that may be too slippery for others to grapple with - it is narrative that acts as a "sinuously plastic form capable of subtlety as well as power. It has the hold it does because its basic form reflects the symbiosis of time and the tides of our lives and our perception of their imposing reality" (Stanley 1993:214).

My narratives are interpretations creatively constructed and already full of assumption prior to analysis – they are a telling of experience and action, but also, in that very act of telling, meaning is given to them. Acknowledging that narrative is a "fuzzy" (re)constitution follows the format I have deliberately chosen for this work. In performing an analysis of my subjectivity, it is important that I do not deny the simultaneity of voices and identities present. These acts may seem disruptive to the task of uncovering an authentic *essence*. I consciously chose this disharmony and chaos; it amplifies my contradictions (Fuentes 1997:129) yet attempts to attend to the irreducibility of my subjectivity. Inconsistencies are just as important in the stories presented as consistency. The trend or push for individuals to present themselves in a coherent rational manner is strong, but it is important to notice the contradictions so as to illuminate my subject-position (Hollway 2000:58). I risk being counterproductive, chopping up my identities may leave me lop-sided and in an unclear state.

The circumlocutious fashion I have adopted, swishing in and around personal account, interview text, and theoretical analysis may destabilize the boundaries between my whiteness, my lesbianism and my alcoholism. This dramatizes the inseparability of the subject, and speaks to the desire to explain and understand the roles these identities play in my

subjectivity. I strive to speak at multiple subject-positions, the very act of telling becoming a force of dislocating belief in stable subjects and essential meaning. In this journey I refuse a “static notion of self” (Saldivar-Hall 1999 in Anzaldua 1999:5), by attending to the writing process in a disparate manner. Even though I heed Butler’s cautionary note, which assumes that a theory which insists upon the inevitable fragmentation of the subject appears to reproduce and valorize the very oppressions that we are working to overcome (1990:327); I prioritize the heterogeneous discourses of identity that transverse my body. My narrative has multiple intersections, numerous ways in which the subject is apart of yet *separate* from one another. Rigidity in structure may mean death - I am not willing to take that risk. Instead, the “result” of my work is a hybrid creation, a merging of past, present, to be; here is a re-imagined, renegotiated text, not a co-option of ‘masculine’ form.

The following punctuated section is the analysis of the interviews I conducted in Cape Town, South Africa. The delineated portions are classified to provide the reader/subject a sense of continuity through the process of subjective uncovering and understanding. I will briefly outline what each one of these areas will entail to aid in our adventure. Firstly, **L-E-S-B-I-A-N, drink, olive toned: Coming to understand subjectivity**, is dedicated to setting up differing, though intertwined identities which are dynamic aspects to my subject. These sites are active and are determined through a herstorical glance, which is personal as well as inclusive of chosen Others. Next, **Saying it loudly: Coming in**, I look at the ways I have vocalized my identity as an alcoholic/addict within the context of Alcoholics Anonymous and stated my sexuality as lesbian/dyke. I view these acts as coming ‘into’ the fold of AA rhetoric and literally into The Rooms where the meetings are held. **Loaded words and possible meanings** and **Black, white, blushing red all over: Talking on “race”**, both look at the ways I take on, negotiate and manipulate names that describe my identities and contribute to my subjectivity. The former is a broad approach to terminology, the latter concentrates on race and my uncomfortability as white. Finally in **Always combinations**, I continue to grapple with my position as a raced white and how the discourse of ‘Black fear’ has become wedged into the subject’s psyche. How I take on these so-called fears becomes a conversation, admitting feelings, attempting to dispel false, unfounded beliefs and finally by being watchful of my dominance.

L-E-S-B-I-A-N, drink and olive toned: Coming to understand subjectivity

The definitional trajectory of lesbian identities is broad and diverse depending on geo-historical context and political climate. Whereas traditional projects may provide an overview of lesbian identities, I do not believe that this is the best approach for my task. Instead, I will attempt to weave through the different notions of lesbian as they have evolved in my life. I do not mean to imply that I have covered the gamut in terms of lesbian identified experiences. I engage with theory on a more personal level, the interviewing process helping to underscore the notion lesbian in terms of my identity. Throughout the narrative of my recovery, my identity as a lesbian has become apparent. I have not however always assumed the 'lesbian position'. In fact, there have been periods that I have refused the term lesbian all together. I do not believe that any single notion of lesbian is determinant of how one subjectively identifies – this would imply a sense of seamless coherence in the private and public self that is hard to locate.

Looking back helps in understanding the present. The post-Stonewall era has seen the rediscovery in roots, a preoccupation with identity and the building of communities in opposition to the mainstream. Arlien Stein in her work, *Sisters, Sexperts and Queers: Beyond the Lesbian Nation*, speaks to the brand of 1970's feminism in the United States, dominated by white middle classed women, and how they sought to uncover and examine the intricacies of "woman" oppression. She goes on to explain how the white women's movement was laden with rigid and exclusionary standards based on color and sexuality - an example, the woman-identified-woman. The 1980's were divided by sexual practices, who was an authentic woman-identified-woman, lesbian or butch, may have been determined by her choice to "penetrate" participate in sado-masochistic activities or use sex toys. She concludes with the 1990's, as the time of bringing a renewed effort to "discover" how embedded in culture our actions are (1993:xv). Following, the dawn of the 21st century has not reconciled these categories, what the names lesbian, woman-identified-woman, butch, dyke or queer mean, remains to be a subjective exercise, often determinant of generational positioning and or political location. Where then have we come in the last thirty plus years – has lesbian herstory simply been that which is relegated to the margins, begging the question, am I for real?

Alia: "Its almost like I'm, I'm trying to carry-on with my own herstory, in terms of a kind of lesbian trajectory or a lesbian continuum, um, and drawing on that to define myself."

The above statement was made in the interview I had with Mike; my assertion addresses the personal desire to resolutely contain this aspect of my identity. I appreciate Fuss' declaration that there are no such things as transcultural, or eternal categories, but to state that everything is contingent on time and place is to deny the role of herstory. I need herstory because I struggle to claim space in a culture that refuses to recognize my sexuality, which cannot see me as anything but perverted. Establishing permeable boundaries, but restrictive areas none-the-less helps to solidify my existence - prove that I am real. Identity therefore employs essence, but circulates with different herstories, acknowledging the simultaneous pull of competing discourses. Identity is thus historically constructed as well as historically provisional. Homosexuality and by extension lesbianism as a so-called condition and therefore identity of certain bodies, is a production of particular historical moments. The lesbian subject, the alcoholic as well as my white raced position are constructed aspects of my subjectivity, rather than naturally occurring (Fuss 1989). Although these conflicting standpoints may seem paralyzing, it is necessary to move through/with the discomfort these theoretically divisive positions create to understand a role *herstory* has played in shaping my subjectivity.

"Like much older wiser exiles, we never opened our conversations with questions about our beginnings. Information about previous life just seemed to filter through or got filled in years later. We used our bodies, our actions, our costumes, the close proximity of our lives to tell our stories" (Nestle 1987:68). An articulated or named identity can be dangerous and almost always as Nestle's comment shows, demands memory. In coming to understand how discourse is productive, I am able to make visible the contradictions among and within them - the term identity, specifically discourse dependent. My subject is a subject in process, constantly constructing provisional identities, using alterity as power; she is one who claims a herstory, a site from which she can begin to understand her placement. Development and growth can not happen without a herstory; who is and who is not becomes a collective attempt at locating a desperately desired herstory. I am cautioned in the use of collective memory, it may deny at times the complexity of individual experiences' - this is not my intent. Rather

the activity of locating and producing my herstory and my positioning in a broader lesbian context, alcoholic setting or location as raced white, I aim to follow in the steps of Judith Halberstram. In the introduction to the intellectual autobiography of Ester Newton, Halberstram speaks to picking our queer way to a theoretical understanding of our histories of unbelonging, embracing memories of dislocation and dysphoria (2000:x). I too felt a similar connection in my conversation with Mike, journeying with him through my voiced identity, both as a lesbian and alcoholic.

Alia: "When I think of the notions of lesbian I think of monogamy, I think of long-term, I think of womyn loving womyn... It's essentialized in that nature and to talk of that is very bad, to be fixed in and honed in on one specific thing and on one specific identity. It's not post-structuralist in any sense of the word - it's not good, it's not open... The womyn I was friends with in San Francisco would consider the term lesbian: frumpy, Birkenstock and androgynous."

Joan Nestle's ground breaking work, *Restricted Country*, traces the contours of her butch to femme lesbian identified experience, highlighting her historical and emotional journey with her sexuality. Nestle speaks for the need in having a social herstory like others, in order to know that "we are not accidental, that we too know we have grown with the currents of time". Mab Segrest too, searches for her predecessors; by naming select white female Southern writers, corralling these lesbians into herstory, she is able to establish a base camp from which to plow through dangerous territory. Her work may in itself be threatening, in that she takes the liberty to reveal these women's sexuality now, when they chose not to be as articulate. This emphasizes the need for identities to be historicized, along with experience. Following, throughout the majority of her work, Nestle, a self-identified Jewish working-class femme, locates her unique positioning in relation to heterosexual women. Viewing sexuality as "lesbian frontier", Nestle posits her subject in opposition to the category heterosexual. Her marked status has at times been alienating, but has also provided a shared sense of understanding in what it means to be Other. In response to Monique Wittig's famous statement, "I am not a woman, I am a lesbian," Nestle concurs, "I too belong to a different geography... the two worlds are complicated and unique" (1987:106).

Conceiving my text I have chosen not to employ the term “woman”² as I have a crisis with the meaning as it pertains to my subject in Western culture. I follow in accordance with Nestle’s assertion, referencing Monique Wittig’s philosophical stance on “woman”, as not a denial of material circumstances of her body but a denial of historical circumstances into which her body and for that matter, most female bodies have been pegged. By asserting that, “lesbians are not women” Wittig is attesting to the notion that “woman” is a categorization which is constructed within patriarchy, therefore rendering woman and women meaningless outside this subordinate condition. Heterosexuality is a political regime that tends to become naturalized; therefore, constructionists such as Wittig view difference as a social construct. In attending to lesbian as a privileged experience from which women to have a potent position from which to speak, hetero-normative assumptions denouncing her existence become destabilized. Lesbian then becomes what Bonnie Zimmerman has referred to as “transcendental signifier”, placing herself in a unique location to critique heteropatriarchy (in Munt 1992:7).

Saying it loudly: Coming in

Biddy Martin warns us of the freedom to speak freely of one’s sexuality, as it may mean risking subjugation to regulation and control (1987:140). My experience to the contrary, has shown that identity acts as a critical practice and mode of knowledge and an articulated identity becomes a potent location for subjective awareness and possible action. In my dialogue with Lerato, I explored how different words had been inhabited by various meanings over the course of my “coming-out”. I stated firmly how identity now is not as clear-cut and is more about relational standing than a single point.

Alia: “I guess for me as time went on, claiming an identity meant something more fixed. Meaning not that identity was more fixed, but that my position in relation to how one behaves with regard to a certain identity would be more fixed.”

² I have chosen to utilize the referent womyn. When this spelling is used I am referring to lesbian/dyke identified womyn. In the cases that I use women, I am doing so as to represent their assumed heterosexuality.

To wear my “lesbianism as a proud badge of difference” (Stein 1993:xiii) permits me the space to move more freely, out from the encompassing yoke of heterosexual discourse. Although ‘ways of being’ may be ranked, depending on the community in which I am circulating, I still maintain the power inherent in asserting a subjective location based on a name. I choose different labels depending on the context I am in. I am queer if I am speaking about my sexual practices within the classroom; I may be lesbian if I am referring to my relationship with my lover – these are deliberate acts which help to define my resistant position as a dyke. As a lesbian I constantly call into question and criticize the discourse of authentic femininity or ‘real’ woman. I step outside that prescribed role; I play with my gender, as do other women, other lesbians, Other individuals. Identity then becomes an “art form, at times a pastiche of meanings, affiliations and self-parody” (Chang Hall 1993:229).

My name is Alia and I am an alcoholic. I am here tonight to talk about why I've come to the rooms of Alcoholics Anonymous - to try to explain why I'm a recovering alcoholic - why I can no longer pick-up a drink or take drugs - why my life is different today than it was the last time I was in Cape Town nearly three years ago. I am not going to outline the herstory of my drinking and drugging, for I believe that our stories are all very similar. I would not be saying anything that you hadn't heard before, I wouldn't describe any feeling that any, if not all of you had felt at some stage in your active alcoholism. The hopelessness I experienced is what dragged me to these rooms - self-hatred forced me to make the commitment to a clean and sober life- and utter demoralization created the space inside me to begin to accept that I am an alcoholic. Although I have not had a drink or taken a drug for 930 days, I am and I will always be an alcoholic. This means that I have an allergy to alcohol and drugs- once I start, I cannot- nor would I want to stop- until I was dead. I have the disease of alcoholism- to treat my illness, I come to The Rooms of Alcoholics Anonymous to share my experience, strength and hope- so that it never becomes necessary for me to return to the "life" I left behind.

The italicized story-format used above is common to an alcoholic “coming-out” narrative, or referred to as “one’s story”: what happened, what it was like and what it is like now - told by alcoholics in meetings of Alcoholics Anonymous, of which I have attended in the United States and South Africa. Both in and outside these gatherings of women and men from all walks of life, I am frequently asked “how can you possibly be an alcoholic, you are so young... you don’t look like an alcoholic...?” When I first got clean and sober I would need to prove myself. I usually launched the quantities I consumed, how often I drank - how alcohol and drugs had been the most important part of my life – nothing would get between us. As I have achieved clean time, I find myself growing silent when I am confronted with

this issue. The stereotype of an alcoholic haunts me though, as the man on the street, which can't stop with his addiction. I am reminded of my own disease, stopped at a traffic light and a disheveled white man comes over with a sign requesting food in exchange for work. His face is pockmarked, around his nose the blood vessels are exposed and he wavers, trying to find a steady footing between the cars that contain disgusted people. He is not "I"- he is a 'she' sitting in front of these individuals, many of whom have lived this existence. I call into question their definition of alcoholic – I have not been 'there', but I am an alcoholic - am I really an alcoholic?

The term "coming-out" is seen as an "all-purpose phrase for the potent crossing and re-crossing of almost any politically charged line of representation" (Sedgwick 1990: 47-48). "Coming-out" narratives embody what Foucault identifies as a field of presence, statements formulated elsewhere and taken-up in discourse, acknowledged to be truthful, involving exact description, reasoning or presupposition (1972: 52-58). These are confessional acts, routinized and re-told. They do not however only tread in the territory of sexuality. As a lesbian, I "come-out", I do so as well as an alcoholic. These are acts that demonstrate my desire to step inside, come away from an ambiguous positioning. Identities may be built around sexuality as well as a disease/addiction. An experience becomes essence and the act of telling the stories hold it together. Hence, sustained acts of "coming-out" serve to legitimize my existence as a lesbian as well as an alcoholic.

In the "coming-out" narrative, the act of assembling the story becomes part of the story. Speaking as an alcoholic I am (re)creating and (re)establishing my herstory, my experience. As an alcoholic in speaking of how I used to drink and how horribly I used to feel, there is a connection made with other like subjects. While telling/speaking, I chose to reject the traditional membership requirements that in the past may have determined authentic lesbian (white/middle classed/North American) or alcoholic (white male). It becomes necessary to "redraw boundaries as they are ever-shifting" (Stein 1993:5), thus expanding the ways to be alcoholic/lesbian. At the same time, Martin critiques the practice of traditional, (read white/middle classed woman's,) "coming-out" narrative, as a genre of writing coupled with a way of reading that reduces and institutionalizes lesbian difference (1987:98). I add to this a way of telling, of which I am certainly guilty of in the interview process. When asked, "When did you first know you were a lesbian?" – a question posed by both Lerato and Mike --

“Were there any turning points?” My response is initially negative, in the interview itself I push against their request to streamline my sexuality. However, as the interviews progressed, I became willing to share how I came to identify as lesbian – outlining the compact narrative that was far too neat to fit the confines of my truth.

By self-prescribing a lesbian identity, I essentialize the category lesbian for which it applies to my subject, recognizing that this move is exclusionary. My aim is to assert a connection with womyn who have come before me and identified as lesbian, woman-identified-woman, dyke, or involved in romantic love between womyn. As Joan Nestle reminds us, “memory and herstory are people’s gift to themselves. For an oppressed, hated people, it is the place where the collective soul takes refuge”(1987: 185). By naming the unspeakable, attending to the silences and absences regarding my lesbian life - this readable narrative, bounded by the context of its representation, is an attempt to locate my subject in this diverse herstory. Finally, the notion of nominal essence Fuss explains refers to the ranking and labeling of things not according to the real essence in them but the complex ideas in us (1989:24). Therefore, the use of a lesbian identity charted through the “coming-out” narrative may lend itself to subjective explanation, a mechanism of management that allows for placement within an identifiable context, rather than without a herstory.

The World Health Organization defines addiction as “a pathological relationship to any mood-altering experience that has life long damaging consequences.”

Although I selected alcoholic as one of the determinant identities in shaping my subjectivity, I have struggled with the notion of mobility in relation to the term, as well as with the discourse of Alcoholics Anonymous. The above statements about my alcoholism and recovery are rooted within the discourse of AA, they are determined by and continue to define an aspect of my subjectivity. When I speak of my experience with drugs and alcohol, I remember. The process of recall begins to shape itself into a narrative, a place, the safe location of now.

Recovery is about working on the mind-set that was numbed through the abuse of alcohol. Recovery is like traipsing up a slippery, icy mountain – as long as I am steadily moving forward I will make it – but the moment I stop moving, the moment I become complacent – I run the risk of falling backward – or worse – relapse. The act of relapsing, going-out, falling-off the wagon, a slip - all refers to a recovering alcoholic’s worst fear- going back out or returning to drinking/drug abuse. If an alcoholic relapses, she may never get sober again.

Although she may be able to sustain her drinking for a brief time, the disease of alcoholism is a progressive disease. If my alcoholism goes 'untreated', I run the risk of relapsing and greatly increase the danger of killing myself. Or, I could fall further into the hell that I have struggled so desperately to climb out of. It is easy to forget what it was like when I was drinking, I become comfortable with my sobriety— vigilance in my recovery process is imperative if I want to maintain and grow in my recovery.

From the time I took my first gulp of alcohol to my last drunken stupor, nine years almost to the day were consumed. I use the term alcoholic subjectively to refer to a past as well as a present state of being. Before I stopped abusing drugs and alcohol, I was an “active” alcoholic. Now, in recovery, I am still an alcoholic, sometimes referred to as an alcoholic in recovery. Alcoholic is the term I identify with, as there are others like me who I have listened to in the rooms of Alcoholics Anonymous who have had similar struggles in their lives with drugs and alcohol. Our stories, told in meetings, are not exactly the same, but they share the commonality through which the term and the identity play into my subjectivity. These include the inability to put liquor down – never knowing when to stop drinking, waking up repeatedly and feeling dreadfully hung-over, needing to get sick – simply because I could not stop! Secondly, the term recovery is used to speak of alcoholics who abstain from drinking and abusing drugs and who are committed to replacing bad behaviors, habits, attitudes, and thoughts with new ones (Mitchel, 1999:155). A specific meaning for the notion of recovery is hard to establish, as the process is different for each alcoholic.

Alia: *“What I recall of my bottom is Northampton, it was and is something I have to keep with me in order to remember what it was like. It’s so easy for me to access that memory, it’s right with me all the time.”*

Kristen: *“Is it something that you have to work on, to keep with you all the time?”*

Alia: *“It is always there, it’s always there, it’s something that I don’t try and forget.”*

The above quotes are from part of the interview with Kristen. She and I spoke briefly about my memories as an active alcoholic; she was baffled as to why I insisted on not forgetting, on knowing how I used to feel. bell hooks testifies to the feat of remembering, how it becomes part of a cycle of reunion, a joining of fragments, “bits and pieces of my heart that the narrative” makes whole again (1989:158). This working for memory, maintaining scenes, experiences that establish my identity as an alcoholic, requires that I remain within the framework of AA. The narrative of my days of abuse are numerous, they float among each other within the subjects body, they are below the surface, entrenched, as is her placement

within the manner of thought that keeps her sober. Alcoholics Anonymous is a confining institution, a narrow space that allows little movement for an alternative definitional strategy. This essentialized position however, allows a sense of safety among peers, rejecting the difference between the active alcoholic and those of us in recovery. The question that I am left with, how does one define themselves outside a discourses that has been so determinant in their subjectivity? How does one step away from, “come-out” of AA? Is this move a necessary act in order to (re)define one’s identity in relation to alcohol? Or is the greatest stability found in aligning my subject with those that are already deemed Other?

On a broad level, subjectivity according to Wendy Hollway acts as a non-unitary and non-rational product of both discourse and experience (1994:230). In some cases the pull of one may over-ride the lived activities of the other, but measuring such divisions is not useful to this project. In the case of my alcoholism, the intersection of discourse and experience play heavily in establishing addiction as part of my subjectivity. Although Foucault speaks about the double bind of simultaneous individuation and totalization of modern power structures, and how in order to subvert we should not discover but refuse who we are; I find it challenging to disown such an identity – difficult to step away from the discourse of Alcoholics Anonymous that has provided an avenue to move through and away from the abuse of drugs and alcohol. If I negotiate confrontations with disciplinary power structures, when I say I am an alcoholic in a non-alcoholic setting, am I not already accomplishing this? I am comforted by the lyrics to a song that strums itself out in my mind at times through this project – “I’m not an addict baby, that’s a lie...”

The first time the silky, smooth substance touched my lips, the first time I swallowed the potent mixture, the first time - I fell hard. I should have known then, should have known that something that created such an altered outlook in my perception of reality, that permitted me absolute ease, was harmful - I should have known then. No one ever told me though - what was too much. No one ever spoke to me in a concerned manner about my obsession with drugs and alcohol. But, I knew – I felt the hole deepening inside, I saw my hands shake when I went to take notes in class, I knew I couldn't sleep at night without multiple bong hits and endless drowning of bottles. This was my secret though, no one could know, that would ruin the strong, perfect image of Alia. I chose not to listen. Years passed, not conscious of what I might be doing to my body, my mind or my relationships. Not wanting to know. To drink was to escape, to flee Alia and all of her insecurities. Social gathering: ensure that I down four prior to leaving the house. Parties: make certain that there will be enough, but really more than enough, for there was never any telling how much I would consume, how much I would need – never enough.

My alcoholic identity may be invisible to many, but the common language or discourse utilized in The Rooms brings together community with shared experience. “Are you a friend of Bill’s?” – ways of speaking, sets of relations with others, utilizing language markers to recognize one another, styles of representation to establish connection with *like*. I mock the speech patterns around narratives of drinking, I find myself employing similar phrases in regards to the now of sobriety and how life ‘in’ addiction used to be. I perform the AA discourse in as much as the reenactment provides me stability. This approach to my addiction is not bounded, the way my body is lived depends on location – a bar setting, not condemning others for drinking responsibly – with a masseuse who’s breath baring down on me reeks of booze, possibly a dropped line about my sobriety – maybe not. I am warned however, the single constructions I establish surrounding alcoholic/lesbian and white, in the manner of Butler, compel our belief in its necessity and naturalness (Butler 1999:140). However antiquated this view may seem, I require some sense of stability in order to move forward with my subjectivity.

Pursuing a progressive positioning, I look to the recent work of Mab Segrest which although does not answer whether essence is appropriate, her experience in The Rooms provides a relevant stance from which I may deduce subjective assurance. In “The Souls of White Folks,” she depicts her experience in 12-Step programs for Overeaters. Segrest, in demonstrating concern for a lack of politicized agenda in The Program, grabs my attention, in that I too have encountered difficulty, which has contributed to my/her sense of floundering with the discourse of AA. She goes on to explain how the 12-steps have provided her a path to personal/emotional recovery, but the suffering incurred from her addiction has not just been a personal issue. The pain she experienced and the confusion she still finds herself in are not uncommon; rather they are about larger cultural ills - homophobia, racism and sexism - far greater issues than the 12-Steps are able to conquer. Segrest lastly asserts that addiction is a community issue, and without the acknowledgment on individual levels, there will be no relief or place to conceive us without such crutches.

Loaded words and possible meanings

The bowery bum represents all that is most feared and despised about drunkenness... (Newton 1984, 2000:177)

Subjectivity becomes constituted in part through refusing some labels and claiming others. All categories are contextual, contested and contingent (Scott 1991:68). I call for a language to describe my subject, I insist on my existence. Naming within my narratives endeavor to establish, claim and negotiate group membership. My "coming-out" narratives are an attempt to establish my worthiness to membership, the names that follow are the currency used to maintain status and communicate my desired subjecthood. My naming acts as a counter hegemonic move destabilizing dominant representations of addict/dyke/white. As a self-identified alcoholic, I insist upon an identity through the means of an emancipatory politics. I work against fixed identifications and cultural templates that may be assigned oppressive positions (Smith 1998:435). I announce the power to appropriate specific meaning to the names I claim; this is proclamation of the power to name in constructing my subjective universe, as well as ties with others who identify similarly. I insist on holding on to specific subject-positions, despite the shifting tides of postmodernism. However, such visibility has been hard won, the more visible we become the more, unstable our subject-positions become (Fuss 1989: 89-90). My resistant positions differing between and among contexts contribute to the shared sense of Other. I name my own, for if we cannot, "we are cut off at the root, our hold on our lives as fragile as seed in a wind" (Allison 1994:17).

Subsequently, the rejection or reclamation of negative labels through "reverse discourse" (Foucault 1980) can be viewed as an important strategy in resisting hegemonic heterosexuality. The use of the term white and "the coming-out" narrative demonstrate the engagement of this language transformation. Claiming oneself as a sexual subject, rather than being branded as a perverse sexualized object is a vital form of sexual agency (Patton 1989 in Farquhar 2000:224). Boundaries become blurred into other selves with the shifting of names. By employing the resistant position dyke, I discursively position myself within and between

discourses, demonstrating an active sexual agency. Following, different labels are equated with different ideal dykes or lesbians, deeming some ways of being lesbian, white, alcoholic better or more appropriate than others. This accounts for my strategic deployment of names; markers and even signs employed depending on the climate of the situation.

Shaving my head was not about becoming a proper dyke, although I wonder, I do look more like a queer lesbian now – I am eyed by others “batting for the home team” - a move to become a more authenticated lesbian – perhaps? Maybe a letting-go of the protection heterosexuality had to offer?

Shorthand labels such as lipstick lesbian, diesel dyke, SM dyke; work to police rather than broaden the terrain for ‘lesbians’ to locate themselves. This may solidify their position, reproducing rather than deconstructing difference. The act of naming may work to locate the “truth” of an individual in her sexuality. These verbal/visual markers can act as a creation of coherent personal placement in a lesbian trajectory. Of note, the term queer when applied in conjunction with lesbian or alone, may be theoretically trendy, embracing what sets us apart, or an act of resistance to regimes of the normal. As a queer lesbian, I appropriate signs and markers of gender, a new breed of lesbian? No, I still maintain exclusionary practices, I strategically deploy identity; perhaps now though, I search for other ways my life is mediated by different identities. This is not to say I do not question my actions. I am at times paralyzed by certain statements, as was the case in the interview with Mike when he asked:

Mike: *“Do you think your marriage was a cover for your lesbianism?”*

At first I did not have a response for him, instead I launched into how and why I saw myself as a feminist, even before I met my ex-husband. Following this explanation of my herstory as a high school feminist, I continued to explain how lesbian, how naming myself as such has worked as a form of resistance to the damage caused in that heterosexual institution.

Alia: *“When I use the word lesbian I am thinking more holistically...I am thinking about the ideas of what I pair with lesbianism. I pair my partner and I pair feminism.”*

Politics do not necessarily derive from experience, but in the development of my identity as a lesbian, naming myself as a feminist has weighed heavily in how I have come to identify as a dyke. This has not always been an articulated reality, the interview process in

fact, helped to facilitate this personal knowledge; specifically, the politics of naming in relation to my subjectivity, as a dyke, an alcoholic and as white. The act of naming, or how the subject utilizes resistant acts to (re)create a sense of selfhood that transcends “regulatory regimes” plays an integral role in self-representation. Basing politics on an identity, on a name, may derive out of tactile necessity; but in the process one must become conscious of the voices chosen, whom they collude with and to what they aim to subvert.

Deciding who we are is also deciding who we are not. Identity requires the maintenance of difference, pointing to commonalities, but also creating boundaries. Determining who has authentic membership becomes an act of border patrol. To be made visible, recognized and acknowledged is to have ones likenesses reproduced, to become an authority as an outsider. Identity then becomes not only an inclusive, joining process, but an exclusionary practice as well. The exclusion of others creates a core inner group, this inner space, a sanctum, is where connections can be produced or dismantled. By naming, in essence a singling-out process, the subject runs the risk of suppressing the complex subjective intersections that constitute her subjectivity; focusing on one named reality may cause others to waver and disappear.

Language acts as a tool to gain and define power, it becomes a mechanism through which I can determine and define the subject. My articulated presence as white raced/lesbian/alcoholic creates disruption, a naming of despised identities, as “what isn’t named is often more permeating than what is” (Rich 1986:112). The naming process is routinized, regulated, performed and repeated. These moves may be deemed profitable or debilitating depending on the subject’s vantage point - for to be ‘out’ is to be in, inside the realm of the visible (Fuss 1991:3). This bind makes an attempt to (re)establish a sense of belonging and power difficult to locate. Risking outsider knowledge, naming, may then act as a confessional device, bringing an accepted subject into the fold. At the same time however, language can reinscribe essentialized notions of race (Gates 1985 in Fuss 1989:76-78), rendering identity reconceptualization difficult, unless identity is abandoned all together?

There in lies, a transitory and shifting notion to what is in a name. My subjective utilization of different labels is determined by my ontology - in certain situations, with certain peoples. “She has the fear that she has no names, that she has many names, that she doesn’t know her names. She has this fear that she’s an image that comes and goes, clearing and

darkening, the fear that she's the dream-work in someone else's skull" (Anzaldúa 1999:65). Speaking as a lesbian, of sexuality, is an act of survival. As a lesbian I am stepping into power (Pratt 1991:127), as an alcoholic I become empowered to remain sober; as a raced white woman I am disempowered or no longer operate blindly, as though I am not affecting anyone. In this later act of naming, race becomes important too, to those whom society does not racialize. I am reminded, "white people don't have a monopoly on power, black people don't have a monopoly on race" (Mama 1995).

Black, white, blushing red all over: Talking on race

Naming the subject white, is an acknowledgment to the participation within hegemonic discourses of power. Whether this is an active role or if the subject is resisting such a positioning, can be determined by the use of the raced term. I speak of race in relation to or as a mirrored identity, that which I am not. What is white? When I am marked by my olive skin, mediated by its pale luster, and my social identity is contingent and in part determined by my racial characteristics? Subjective disclosure as white, lesbian, alcoholic, "works as an affirmative form of resistance and functions as a politically efficacious phantasm" (Butler 1989:308). I assert who I am thereby resisting who I am not; I am considered Other all in the matter of speaking - "I am honkie/dyke/addict." Thus the meanings of my identity may change with the utilization of different terms, making it possible to conceive of my subject differently (Scott 1991:67).

Fuss describes how post-structuralists have "located" or (re)located difference to the space within identity to the spaces between identities (1989:103). This revised view demonstrates how difference is seen as competing for dominance within the subject. Dispirit selves, continuously engaged, creating dispirit subjects – Despite these challenges I maintain discordant subject positions - My deviant sexuality and addiction place me in the difference school. I question though, the security this difference provides. If (re)conceiving my subject is in fact the goal, then my challenge lies not only in (re)presenting her differently, but acting differently – not hiding. This may mean a reading away from a coherent notion of what it means to be white, a reading against recognition of the raced condition of my subject. Too

often we act out the present against the backdrop of our past, within a frame of perception that is so familiar, so safe, that it is terrifying to risk challenging it even when we know our perceptions are distorted, limited, constricted by the old view (Pratt 1992: 28-32). I chose to live with my contradictions despite being punished. I have become willing to name enemies within myself. I delve deeper into my interviews probing for greater knowledge of my raced identity.

Inclusion in the category alcoholic, lesbian and white is about exclusion; who is authentically woman loving woman, who is in recovery, who possesses race privilege? – I naturalize these categories with the equation of the personal with the political, in a policing manner. As a lesbian I expect to resist dominant ways of being, heteronormativity- I also expect other alcoholics who name themselves as such to practice sober living. But what is to be said for white, my whiteness? By placing white, along with lesbian/alcoholic, at the center of my project, I risk what Michael Omi terms the “reification of whiteness”, or the assertion of whiteness in a position of normative luxury, a seemingly fixed raced location as passive observer. Ruth Frankenburg in her recent piece, “The Mirage of An Unmarked Whiteness,” defines what she considers the hallmarks of whiteness. She explains that locations of seeing, structural advantage and normative or unnamed cultural practices are deemed white. Also, whiteness may be displaced within class or ethnic namings, modified by other axes of relative advantage or subordination and historically constructed – although not making it unreal. Finally and often overlooked, the inclusion in the category white is often contested (2001:76). In the subjective process of naming my own whiteness, the categorical dipping I find myself partaking with regard to Frankenburg’s definition is disturbing. On the one hand, I can administer race to organize my reality, naming my race, understanding race as a process. It becomes quite difficult though to remove myself from hegemonic discourses with regard to race.

In the exchange with Lerato, I wrestled with how my white race determined how she saw me, and how I saw myself. I was both sarcastic in speaking about my whiteness, at times calling myself a “honkie” thinking it would help to reduce the racial tension between us. I do not think this named (re)conceptualization was beneficial in our conversation, although it began to deconstruct from the outside and demonstrated a reconstruction inside the subject

“I”. I was still adamant with aim to uncover what Lerato really thought of me; perhaps this would broaden the places from which I could see myself?

Alia: *“I wanted to be able to talk about how you see me... Because it is always about how white people see black people, it’s never about how black people see white people and it’s never about how white people see themselves... And I thought that by talking to you I would have a greater understanding of how I saw myself as a white womyn, that I could understand myself in more than the context of my power, ‘cause I don’t always have the power when I am talking with you, I’m not always the one with the reigns, the one in control...”*

Lerato: *“But this is the perception that you carry, this is the perception you might have... There is a part of me that questions, granted you may assume you would be the one holding the power reigns, ‘cause you are white, but why haven’t you been able to assume...”*

Alia: *“That you hold the power reigns because you are Black?”*

Lerato: *“And also that maybe there isn’t a power struggle between the two of us? Even though we are different races. Why do you assume that there is a power struggle between us, why is that your starting point?”*

I risk maintaining fissures when collaborating to suppress my various identities. I am a white alcoholic lesbian – one person, many labels. I attempt to bring the color of my skin into focus, a difficult task, to step outside the subject and view the ease with which I am granted physical movement; yet struggle with naming my raced advantages. Although I have been racialized as white at birth thus granted cultural gifts, access to an identity as human (Bennett and Friedman 1997:51), Foucault reminds us that identity pivots on discourse, but subjects are not subject to definite conditions of existence (1972:95). The color of my skin is whitish, more olive really, but color is not the only issue at hand. The reason I have a darker complexion is because my Grandfather was Syrian. In the interview conducted with Kristen, she wondered why I did not pay more attention to this part of my identity.

Kristen: *“Alia, why does Syrian hit as number five in mentioning your other identities?”*

Alia: *“I’m not half, so it isn’t enough, which I know is not... No one ever told me this but I have this notion that half is enough, one-fourth isn’t enough...in my household Syrian was never part of who I was, I was just a white kid from Denver.”*

The neo-abolitionists view whiteness with an aim to eliminate the conditions of its own existence – getting rid of whiteness altogether. From this theoretical position, whiteness is that which it is not- a lack of cultural distinctiveness and authenticity, one that whites attempt to fill the voids with cultural appropriation or what bell hooks (1992) has called “eating the other.” Through cultural appropriation historical connections to racial prejudice and

discrimination are denied (Rasmussen, Klinenberg, Nexica, Wray 2001:10). However, it must be remembered that culture does not belong only to those who are racialized, as neo-abolitionists would have us believe – the trap I have snared. This romanticizes the notion of Other while solidifying the dominant location whiteness works to retain. Continuing with Kristen, I further infuse whiteness with power as I refuse to weight my ethnic heritage.

Alia: "There is a part of me that wonders why I don't acknowledge the part of me that isn't white, that I don't speak to my Syrian-ness?"

To reconcile this question, I first must become willing to engage with more than the three enumerated identities. A deeper engagement with race – “my Syrian-ness”, would perhaps lessen the sense of “white guilt” I bare. Seeing myself not as a victim, but as empathetic to Other’s positions would act to realign my subject’s negative raced outlook.

In and out of the interview process I carry myself - two Black women, two white people – none of them resembling each other. I understand the reflexive self, the self who can see herself among others, she who becomes able to participate in experiences of her own creation. There is not a single truth to my subject, not one experience is her total – the process of naming experience is only partial. Leigh Gilmore suggests then that experience can be viewed as a series of alterations, repositions in relation to sameness. The temporality of experience is not viewed as additive or linear but potentially transformative. In this respect, identity may be seen as nomadic (Braidotti 1994 in Fuentes 1997); experience mediating subjectivity and thus my multiple identificatory positionings. Although I am in a position to (re)invent my subject, I am not let off the hook when it comes to the unconscious performance of whiteness, what Frankenberg has refereed to as “whiteness not seeing itself seeing, whiteness falsely claiming transparency” (2001:81). Contemporary social theorists attest to race as a category of analysis and mode of lived experience, written on the body, rooted in culture, but not biology. Thus, I can not change my “race”, how other’s see me, but I am capable of acting in a manner that does not correlate with a sense of entitlement.

Always combinations

The postmodern insight that subjectivity is discursively produced and is not some inner essence is the reminder that the autobiographical “I” is always the bi-product of a set of mediations (Hollway 1997:169). In recognizing that the conditions of my subjectivity are simultaneously the result of personal as well as structural factors, we can understand how another sign always mediates experience. My race – privileged North American citizen/lesbian-white skin/alcoholic-invisible. Where as experience may then act as a legitimizing platform from which to articulate one’s knowledge; it can also work against the subject delegitimizing her position. For, experience may be duplicitous, already occurred and yet to be produced, an indispensable reference, yet never simply there (Culler 1982 in Fuss 1989:114).

This was the case in the discussion with Janine, she doubts experience as creating my beliefs and motivating my actions.

Janine: “...I’m not entirely sure that your fear comes only from that...”

Alia: “No...I know that fear is racialized...um...as a white womyn, fear of black men and I know that a lot of that has to do with how I’ve been socialized, not what I’ve been told explicitly... I don’t, it’s gross to kind of excavate where these emotions come from because I can’t specifically pinpoint... I mean I can think about readings about Black men being lynched in the South in the States because they were assumed to be looking at a white womyn in the wrong way. But how does that translate into my experience, how do I bring that fear to South Africa with me?”

Instead, the racist discourse I articulate refuses the complexity of existence that lay outside my restricted gaze. I acknowledge my raced position. My eyes are constricted by dominant discourses only allowing myself that which I have been taught to see. Experience has taught me to see in a specific manner, incorrectly – but in understanding how I have learned to see, it becomes apparent how experience acts a gateway into ideology (Fuss 1989:118). Further speaking with Janine, I manage to express a similar position.

Alia: “How does one engage with whiteness if you don’t engage with Black, Yellow, Red?”

In acknowledging my positioning in relation to others, in locating my racial identity, I find again that my whiteness acts a speculum of my identity, that which I am not. The

interview exchanges with both Lerato and Janine are evidence supporting my uncomfortable position as white; pointing out the privilege I have accrued due to my raced position, power I have grown complacent with. Adrienne Rich confesses to whiteness as a site of privilege that has always been there for her to peel back into (1986: 102 my emphasis). I question my dependency on my raced position. Has my whiteness become an all-encompassing phenomenon, too pervasive to see? Does the sense of my own importance as a white womyn mar my positioning with entitlement and obscure the possibilities for subjective reckoning?

Lerato: "*Alia, do you think that being lesbian, or um, sort of allows you some kind of better understanding as opposed to a white heterosexual woman, um, of black people?*"

In conversation with Lerato, she gently asks about the possibility for coalition between herself as a black woman and myself as a lesbian. At first I am taken-aback, unsure of how to respond to equating oppression evenly. Lerato does have a helpful point, pushing me to take responsibility for my ranking tendency. Her unifying declaration also serves to point out that by celebrating my difference without attention to my dominance I get myself into trouble. Similarly, claims to difference conceived in terms of different identities have operated as interventions in "facile assumptions of sisterhood, thereby masking the operation of a hegemonic referent" (Martin 1996:139). I deconstruct my experience with the aim of unraveling hegemonic constructions of my existence. Surveillance occurs by normalizing select bodies, determining others to be grotesque. The body is thus parceled out and policed through discursive systems and on multiple levels of each discourse.

In closing, it is useful to look at the work of Cherrie Moraga. She does an excellent job of preserving her subject in her work, *Loving in the War Years*. In refusing to delineate, carve-up or massacre the experience of her body, she creates connection, recreates identities; no longer looking at them in negative contradiction but with a sense of embraced complexity. She rejects the notion of universal sisterhood, and asserts the need for coalition and the ability to come together on our "difference"; by stating: "How simple to fall back upon rehearsed racial memory" (Moraga 1993:64). It becomes imperative to (re)conceptualize identity without abandoning it altogether. This does not mean I abnegate my whiteness, rather, I must attempt a coming to terms with the multivalent and conflicting discourses of power that attempt to align my subject a dominant position with regard to race.

Playing with experiences done: Wrapping it all up

I have attempted to ground my work in a historically specific present that displays the complexity of difference and the way I maneuver through and with this difference. Although the unspeakability of my work has been conditioned both socially and culturally, I choose to write against the traditional universal subject, I have stepped outside 'male' representations of individual selfhood. The demarcated zones of acceptable scholarship are denied in my work. I do not respect masculine norms, which deny my subject agency to name and act in and with my work. These digressions may be dangerous, may act to discredit the quality of my work- these are the risks I assume. In seeking to remedy the disjunction between my personal and academic life, this project has been about pleasure rather than moves of an obligatory nature. This is not to say that I have remained comfortable through the process. I have moved in and around multiple subject positions, the very act of writing as resistant to dominant modes of subjective representation. There have been instances to pause and assess the damage- have my assertions been too strong, am I too ridged in my analysis, have I exposed too much?

Joan Scott speaks to "experience as at once already an interpretation *and* in need of interpretation" (1991:69). Looking across and through my subjectivity with an almost x-ray quality, I have come to understand that it is impossible to use identity as a heuristic to obtain *identity*. I have questioned my motives repeatedly in this process; risking essence when I thought such a theoretical stance would aid in stable ground from which to comprehend my subjectivity. The kaleidoscope of experience my narratives spanned aided in reasoning with subjectivity as socially mediated; determining the identifications I make as mobile and attempting to work against static binary modes of being. Identity has acted as an ubiquitous point of departure, a target for narrative opportunity (Smith 1993:183). But this process, the seeking, has meant losing the notion of a coherent, unified "I."

To claim an identity according to Stuart Hall is to place myself in the narrative of herstory. I have targeted my narratives to discover this herstory, my herstory in the larger schema. By exercising narrative to render my experience intelligible, it becomes clear that no single narrative accounts for my experience. Rather, my narratives shift demonstrating a plurality of voice and attitude. I have attempted to open myself to the deeply disorganized

state of my real history as I gleaned it in bits and then tried to construct them into an *order* (Said 1999:6); in this process I have come to appreciate memory's non-sequential habit. I now understand that a coherent identity only comes through suppressing others and that writing the Truth about such experience, events and emotional entanglements means convincing myself that I will be the only reader of this work.

I am wary of lived identities as "complicated fictions essential to my social function" (Munt 1998 in Newton 2000:208). But I can not deny my narrative - my body - shaped by how I live in her. I will not deodorize my writing, instead I find my voice in the muffled crevices Western society attempts to impose on me. My narrative depicts complex and contradictory identities. Have I become a mish-mash of accumulated roles, what Gloria Anzaldua has called the "constellated self, limping along with it's broken limbs" (1990:xv)? Or has the telling of narrative unleashed avenues of understanding, dormant due to "societal fictions" which may otherwise act in suppressing my subjectivity? They both carry equal weight in determining my current positioning; I have split, come undone – but with these fissures have come new openings, freshly carved spaces for which I may explore beyond white/lesbian/alcoholic.

Aligning the narratives derived from the interviews, I am struck with the abundance of similarities and pleased with the discontinuities. I view the interviews as sources, sites where insight has been culled into a deepened interrogation of my subject. Upon first glance the personal exchanges between Lerato, Mike, Janine and Kristen respectively provided a dull subject, rather cemented in her subjective identity. However, through further insight and comparison of the individual interviews, the subject "I" has emerged, although uncomfortably at times, less than solidly situated. I understand this newly located position not to be hazardous to a better understanding of my subjectivity. To some extent, beneficial, due to how each interview helped to bring out specific aspects of both the previously enumerated identities white/lesbian/alcoholic, also to the more ambiguous markers that I chose to sideline in the scope of this project. Each interview dynamic and considered content has weighed differently on my approach to analysis, there have been desperately long hours which I have contemplated excluding them altogether, rejecting what I blurted out, wanting to rescind the emotions I had displayed. But I recognize that these interviews played a pivotal roll in the way I utilized theory. I chose theoretical engagement over emotional exploitation in hopes of

salvaging at least part of the subject, a bit of the coherent "I" that embarked on this journey months ago.

This project has provided my subjective herstory illuminated through the act of naming, identities in their own right, as well as categorical enumeration within white, lesbian and alcoholic. My experience has placed me in relation to these categories, in a discourse of the personal. The critique of what I am is at once the historical analysis of the limits that are imposed and an experiment with the possibility of going beyond them (Rabinow 1984 in Quinby 1992:306). The names utilized, pointedly selected, become essential to establishing the ground from which to transform impossibility into possibility, allowing questioning of the investigating subject without paralyzing him (sic) (Spivak 1985, 1987:205). I realize my stiff approach to naming in regards to race, sexuality and addiction, and how this stance may appear to the strict postmodernist, counterproductive in realizing the subject in all her variants. To the contrary, each time I have selected a label, marker or term, the move has been achieved through strategic positioning both in relation to myself as well as with Others.

(Re)configured notions of her/the subject/I

Trinh T. Minh-ha in addressing the confluence of difference and identity speaks of the search for sameness that post-colonial women may find herself challenged with. I too have fallen into the trap of seeking an identity that is part of the "lost, pure, true, real, genuine, original, authentic self, often situated within a process of elimination of all that is deemed 'other', supercilious, fake or corrupted..." (1987:371). Present in my mind at the inception of this project and fleetingly throughout, this notion colluded with the delineation of my identities. However, the multiple confluences through which my subjectivity is embodied do not allow such an enlightened position. Instead I use my body as a battleground for the practice of theory (Soloman 1993:212), accessing my own pain to justify my writing. I speak on my terms, validating familiar modes of expression so as to maintain sanity. In this manner, writing has served as what Lee Quinby has called a ritual of exorcism that helps to drive the fear away. "My lesbianism is the avenue through which I have learned the most about silence

and oppression and it continues to be the most tactile reminder that we are not free human beings” (Moraga 1983: 52).

I am a maverick, a bandita on the horizon seeking places where I can rest for moments, reassess my multiple positionings, determine further course of action – my lesbianism/alcoholism/raced white are not my sole lived realities. My subject is mobile in her identifications; an outlaw that only borrows from the masculine line of history that precedes her. As an outlaw, practicing such genera, I am in-tune with a politics of location and the discourses of particular situations- the interviews I participated in with four others is part of this non-individualized authorship. Locating my work in the tradition of outlaw genera, enables what Karen Kaplan calls a deconstruction of ‘master’: white, straight, Western - revealing the power dynamics embedded in the production, distribution and most especially reception of this project. This affirmative positivity of my subject creates new spaces for future, forward-looking subjectivity (de Lauretis 1987 in Smith 1998:438 my emphasis).

Throughout this work, I have held on to the unreality of race while adhering tenaciously to its real effects (Frankenberg 2001:73). This has meant that I carry a fiction with me, that when I utilize the term “race”, I do not believe in it. In understanding that whiteness is constructed externally and has internal ramifications, I have realized how when unmarked, whiteness becomes a “white delusion.” It is vital that I carry the weight of color with me, however pale it may seem. For until I stepped away from my whiteness, (if this feat has been accomplished the verdict still remains,) I had never realized how much power “white” color had. At the same time I bare emotional tolls for being dominant - but the pain of dominance is always qualitatively different from the pain of subordination (Segrest 2001:45). This knowledge imposes responsibility, the tensions created within ourselves expanding the knowledge of my position in relation to myself as well as with Others.

Posturing myself in a reality free of addiction over the last two and a half years has lead to subjective (re)creation. I am not an active alcoholic, I am an alcoholic in recovery. What it means for me to be *in recovery* though, has evolved through the process of this work; I question the utility of Alcoholics Anonymous as a continuing beneficial discourse. Interrogating my position in AA and the way the discourse of AA functions in my life as a result of this work, I have become able to conceive of the subject differently, still as alcoholic, but not necessarily inside the boundaries of Alcoholics Anonymous. I will continue to affirm

the term alcoholic in determining my subjectivity. I now look to alcoholic more broadly, not fearing my placement or belonging within The Rooms as much, as alcoholic has become more inwardly defined, less as though there is property at stake.

Finally, I have mapped out the subjective process by which I have arrived for the time being, lesbian/white/alcoholic. There are disrupted and dissimilar subjects present. This process is akin to “going back”, what Adrienne Rich demonstrates in *Blood Bread and Poetry*, as searching the shadows of her existence. I have been granted a myriad of vantage points, but the views sometimes make me feel as though I have seen “for too long and from too many disconnected angles – that I am split at the root” (Rich 1986:122). This dissected state has been useful in I have come to embrace states of perpetual subjective (re)intergration; aiming to assert my identities plural as they constitute my subjective whole. In the words of Dorothy Allison, “I will not be denied, simplified, refused or lied about;” as the masking of roles exacts tolls on the body (Anzaldua 1990:xv), expenses I have already paid. I choose then, to “wear my skin only as thin as I have to, armor myself only as much as seems absolutely necessary. I try to live naked in the world, unashamed even under attack, unafraid even though I know how much there is to fear” (Allison 1994:250). I speak of private information – I do not opt for silence. Yet, I am at times baffled and confused. Where do I locate the necessary distance to critically analyze my experience? Has my unconscious goal been about disengaging emotion and employing theory? To the contrary, I have moved theory into action, found it in the eccentric and wandering ways of my daily life (Pratt 1995:22). I desire with my subject, not away from her. But still, I am warned of the suspect nature to ontological knowledge, at worst pathologized (Simmonds 1997:227-228), still, I insist on an assertive embodied reality – loud and fearless.

Finding closure

One of the reasons I came to this project was because I could not reconcile the representations of the Other. In this work I have situated myself at times as Other so as to legitimate my speaking. In this attempt I have promoted polyvocality, listening and hearing what most of the time has appeared to be an encumbered subject. She is not silent, though her

weighted identities may bare, I act as agent, writing my herstory, narrating my story. I play my own character, multiple and complex, generating my own unauthorized experience. But in writing the final section of this project, I have come to question how successful I have been in accomplishing greater subjective illumination. Have I, through interview narratives and autobiographical reflection achieved an enhanced sense of my subject's *essential* identity? Did I assume knowledge of identity to be there for my excavation? What did I expect but conflicting and dynamic representations of identity? Gazing at the preceding analysis, jumping around from alcoholic – lesbian- white – with these identities as they shape and inform my daily actions; I have to emphatically state YES! I have arrived at least for the time being, in a space that provides relief as well as brief stability.

Moving around, both psychically as well as physically have acted to shift my trajectory of emphasis, different perspectives highlighted at varying locations. I have called for connections between lesbian/white/alcoholic, through interviews and analytical self-inquiry; this process has been about probing self-disclosure and painful contemplation with regard to future positioning. But out of this pain and at times anger; I learned a great deal with regard to personal assumption, goals and the burden of the subject. I now understand that containing a two-year segment of my life was rather out of the question, the compound burden of each identity weighing too heavily, the singular conceptualization too much still. In this respect my project fell short, timing not being in order; however, the aspects of my identity, "coming-out" process, that were not contained in that frame were more than relevant and thus aided in overall subjective conceptualization.

Also, speaking of multiple identities within the confines of a linear project has at times been debilitating. Excavating voices unheard or thought to be lost has challenged me to remember and conceive differently of my subject- myself- both in and outside the interview setting. Incertitude resonates throughout - how do I confer the necessary respect on each identity without being reductionist? Do I give precedence to one identity in order to explore others? In posturing white/lesbian/alcoholic as primary identities, signifiers of the subject I wish to explore and grow acquainted with; I have marked-off territory, I have set-up boundaries and constructed a reality that prior to the interviews did not exist. In effect, I rendered myself partial from the start, inauthentic in what I could possibly voice. My interviews framed my world and created boundaries on the project, but they are not the total

of this work. In tandem with the interviews have been my narratives, told differently in the interviews and then elaborated upon and told differently still in the body of this work. They are not lies, reconstructed truth perhaps, but most importantly these narratives are my experiences, my subjective truth.

Looking back at my interviews for the umpteenth time, my eyes rest on the second to last interview. This heated exchange with Janine brings a sense of closure to the text. In the interview I stated to her that my move from bohemian Observatory to the predominantly white suburb of Camps Bay in Cape Town South Africa, was about “turning the gaze inwards.” This statement permits me to recall how I have practiced perseverance in the face of a discontinuous subject in writing/creating this project. I have moved around geographically, staying in different locations, always questioning though if I was/am home? Before I arrived in this “concluding” space, I had conjured the belief that being in the United States of America- “my home” would somehow bring my project full circle. Somehow my physical placement would tie my subject into a digestible portion. Instead, I have the distinct feeling of “not being home”. Biddy Martin and Chandra Talpade Mohanty explain this feeling as “a matter of realizing that home was an illusion of coherence and safety based on the exclusion of specific histories of oppressions and resistance, the repression of difference even within one’s self” (1986:1995). In the interview I posed my move to Camps Bay as a negative, I felt guilty, ashamed for moving away from what I had come to confront. Choosing instead, I thought, not to push at my racial comfort zones. Now I realize my physical move allowed me to accomplish this thesis, emotional and psychic work leading to an appreciation in the false, though at times necessary belief in Alia’s true essence. I have also learned in the course what it is like to live and work in an environment where I am questioned, this has forced me to commit a sort of self-interpolation – the pre-project Alia forever altered.

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