

**Furious Females:  
Women's Writing as an Archive of Anger**

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## Abstract

Longstanding political, social, and academic debates surrounding women's anger have followed a distinct pattern. On one hand, critics disparage women for writing and speaking in an angry voice, casting them as bitter, irrational, or they assign them the pejorative "angry feminist". Women often respond to these critiques by defending their anger, and reframe this emotional response as a legitimate response to oppression. Despite the utility of this intervention, this debate has given rise to a binary structure where a woman's anger is either a legitimate response to oppression, or an irrational emotional response. As a result, the alternative functions to women's anger remain largely unexplored. Working against binary logic, this dissertation aims to reframe this debate, and answer the following questions: what are the alternative functions for women's anger outside of the binary terms of this debate? How can literary representations of anger complicate this conversation? Drawing from affect theory, intersectional feminist theory, discourse analysis, feminist discourse analysis, philosophical discussions about emotion, feminist literary theory, and ongoing debates surrounding nostalgia, this dissertation explores the function of anger within contemporary Canadian and American women's literature.

Before undertaking literary analysis in subsequent chapters, this dissertation first develops a methodology of "imperfect alignment" to account for the tensions between affect theory and discourse analysis, the theories and methods that guide this research project. The second chapter explores the ways anger allows liminal subjects to come into view in Feinberg's *Stone Butch Blues* and Morris's *A Dangerous Woman*. Chapter three explores the ways anger can interrupt and complicate compassionate reader responses to gender based abuse in Sapphire's *Push* and Mosionier's *In Search of April Raintree*. Chapter four explores

the ways anger and nostalgia allow subjugated groups to link anger to domestic violence in Joyce Carol Oates's *Foxfire* and *We Were the Mulvaney's*. Finally, this dissertation concludes with a brief analysis of feminist critiques of reason, and locates the findings of this project in relation to this scholarship. Ultimately, this research project nuances debates surrounding anger, and poses alternative readings of this emotional response.

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## **Introduction: A Brief History of Anger**

The tropes of the madwoman in the attic and the angry, irrational feminist remind us that women who display anger are perceived as out of control deviants who must be silenced, ridiculed, or shut away. These stereotypes are contributing factors that allow the epithet “angry woman” to function as a derogatory term. The ongoing use of this pejorative is a significant social trend that not only targets individual women; it also undermines the institutions, political alliances, and social processes that validate women’s anger. For example, this characterization of angry women as irrational or bitter informs ongoing backlash against feminist educators and Women’s Studies programs, on the premise that this course of study is turning female students into “angry young women” rather than critical thinkers (Hoff-Sommers 235; Lehrman 64). According to Barbara Tomlinson, the dreaded “angry feminist” is a powerful social trope, as she argues, “the ‘angry woman’ as a despised cultural stereotype can easily be deployed to ridicule and discount the motivations, claims, and evidence offered by women about their status” (87). This derogatory term exists alongside numerous other stereotypes that casts a woman who refuses to mute her anger as a “bitch” or a “shrew” (Thompson et al., 312). These images, social constructs, and the positioning of anger as antithetical to critical thought illustrates the reality that women must watch their tone and mute their anger when they engage in public debate, or when speaking in public at all.

This is hardly a new or emerging phenomenon, rather, the unwritten social rules governing the expression of anger are the product of longstanding philosophical debates that impact both men and women, albeit in very different ways. For example, medieval psychologists not only called for individuals to stifle their anger in most situations, they also

argued that people should develop mastery over all of their emotional responses (Kemp & Strongman 403). It is important to note that this call to control emotional responses was directed at men, as these thinkers wrote for a male audience (403). That said, when these thinkers explored the topic of women and emotion, they largely believed that women were naturally inclined to feel and express uncontrolled anger when compared to men (402), a trend that continues to this day. This is particularly noticeable in anti-feminist critic Christine Hoff-Sommers's juxtaposition between anger and critical thought. In this case, when she warns her audience that both Women's Studies programs, and feminist educators more broadly, breed angry women rather than critical thinkers, she reiterates the logic that aligns women (particularly feminists) with irrational anger, and away from reasoned debate. While there are a number of popular texts that follow this logic and develop similar arguments, I draw specifically from Hoff-Sommers's work as her text is widely read, and has had a significant impact on the terms of the debate surrounding the utility of Women's Studies curriculum (McDermott 670). Further, the widespread popularity of Hoff-Sommers's anti-feminist text also illustrates the reality that the derogatory "angry woman" continues to be a prominent feature in the discursive landscape surrounding women's anger and feminism, particularly as the latter currently exists as a political position that contests patriarchy.

Thomas West is deeply critical of this logic, and explains, "too often our responses to anger are ones of dismissal or avoidance- *disengagements*, in effect, for the political. But anger is not always something to be avoided or dismissed or answered with more anger; it is not always a bad thing" (50). For West, anger is not symptomatic of mental illness or an inherent predisposition to rage, but rather, is a force that can initiate discussion about social difference, and functions as an important step towards social change (51). Many prominent

feminist thinkers share this perspective. For example, Audre Lorde famously asserted that anger gives rise to political strength, and foregrounds structural oppression within feminist groups (124). West and Lorde's interventions are indicative of a broader and ongoing trend where theorists and activists revisit anger and explore the ways it intersects with structural oppression and social identities. These theorists ultimately work to re-frame anger as a legitimate response to marginalization and a productive social force. Taken together, Hoff-Sommers's comments, Lorde's assertion, as well as the significant debate these interventions have sparked, indicate that emotional responses such as anger are particularly fraught territory for feminist thinkers, whereas men's anger tends to be more socially coherent.

Sara Ahmed explores this trend in her text *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, and she reminds us that the conflation between feminism and irrational anger is a longstanding phenomenon. Ahmed explains that this line of reasoning has significant political consequences, as "the reading of feminism *as* a form of anger allows the dismissal of feminist claims, even when the anger is a reasonable response to social injustice" (177). Ahmed revisits this discussion in *The Promise of Happiness*, and explains that feminists are socially produced as angry "killjoys" not only because they refuse the happiness that depends upon the suffering of others, but also because they are politically committed to mapping the ways dominant notions of joy erase the marginalization of subjugated groups (67). In this case, the term feminist takes on negative connotations, and functions as an insult bestowed upon women who refuse to ignore the suffering of others. Like the pejorative "angry woman", this use of feminist as a derogatory term ultimately trivializes the social inequality and structural violence that informs feminist theory and practice (Tomlinson 87), and causes feminist tempers to flare from the outset. This trend also fuels the social climate

where any woman who voices her anger, regardless of her relationship with feminism, is at risk of being accused of being a feminist, or even worse, an “angry feminist”, a “man hater”, or a “feminist killjoy”.

While feminist thinkers try to resist contributing to the oppression of others in the pursuit of their own joy (and are thus socially produced as irrationally angry), they continue to be subject to intense pressure to mute their anger. Social scientist Cheryl Hercus became painfully aware of this double-bind following in depth interviews with 45 self-identified feminists about their perceptions of, and roles within, the women’s movement. In the wake of her study, Hercus reflects that

even women who identify as radical feminists - as some of the women reported here do- often feel constrained to perform emotion work to ensure that their feminism does not ‘upset’ anyone. If this work is not performed voluntarily, then partners, friends, colleagues, and acquaintances highlight the deviance of the offender and remind her to get her feelings into line. It is her duty to cry at the sad romantic movie and to laugh at the sexist jokes- in short, to accept the constant positioning of women as subordinate and inferior without comment or action. (53)

Here, Hercus illustrates that feminists confront the same emotional obligations that many women face, and goes on to outline the ways “getting along” with others means that feminists must mute their anger and reaffirm women’s subordinate social status. Even though Hercus argues that anger stemming from a deep sense of injustice was a central organizing force for social movements, and many feminist activists viewed this anger as “an

appropriate emotional response to violence” (52-3), Hercus asserts that women continue to report incredible pressure to mute their anger.

While Ahmed and Hercus usefully explore the tremendous social pressure for women to conceal their anger, as well as the impact that the ongoing conflation between feminism and anger has on feminists and non-feminists alike, this discussion also illustrates that debates surrounding women’s anger often play out within a limiting binary structure. On one hand, this trend and the corresponding construct of the “irrational, angry feminist” illustrates that critics implicitly and explicitly forbid women from being angry, and ultimately frame anger as an “unwholesome passion” (Hoff-Sommers 237) that must be avoided. On the other, Lorde and Tomlinson’s analysis suggests that women often respond to these critiques by defending their right to be angry and pointing towards the factors that causes their tempers to flare (Tomlinson 87). Within this framework, critics berate women for expressing anger in public, and women respond by asserting their right to this emotional response. Not only do the parameters of this debate detract attention from broader social factors that give rise to women’s anger, these discussions locate anger as either an irrational and unwarranted response, or as a legitimate response to oppression, leaving other functions and causes of anger unaddressed. Patrice McDermott argues that this bifurcated logic ultimately “forces feminists into positions of reacting to, rather than initiating, a public debate about the legitimacy of their cause in terms that have been defined for them” (670). Using anger to subvert this logic may not be a sound political strategy, as McDermott goes on to explain “it is not a good idea to express anger simply because someone says that you should not; that still allows the other side to dictate the terms of the debate” (88). In the case of women’s anger, it is clear that while feminists usefully respond to these criticisms (or shout back in

anger), the binary structure of the debate continues to be dictated by anti-feminist thinkers and grounded in hegemonic norms. While thinkers dating back to Aristotle have discussed the links between anger and injustice, Ahmed's statement about feminist killjoys and Tomlinson's analysis of the terms of this debate begs the following questions: what are the functions of women's anger that are obscured or erased within this binary structure? What form might discussions of anger take if women did not have to assume such reactionary positions from the outset?

Exploring the possible functions to women's anger outside of binary thought is an important project, as Patricia Hill Collins argues that binary logic is a central feature of ongoing oppression. According to Collins, binary thinking locates people, places, or things into separate categories based on their alleged difference from one another. Within these terms, one side of the binary is not only distinct from the other, it is inherently opposed to it. Collins argues that within this logic

whites and Blacks, males and females, thought and feeling, are not complementary counterparts- they are fundamentally different entities related only through their definition as opposites. Feeling cannot be incorporated into thought or even function in conjunction with it because in binary oppositional thinking, feeling retards thought and values obscure facts. (77)

Collins explains that these relationships are rarely illustrative of two opposing but equally important values, but rather, "these concepts invariably imply relationships of superiority and inferiority, hierarchical bonds that mesh with political economies of race, gender, and class oppression" (78). Within this logic, not only is "rational thought" privileged over emotional responses (which also implies that emotions are completely irrational), productive

discussions about how to use emotions to generate knowledge are impossible as feeling is located in opposition to knowing. Elizabeth Grosz reminds us that when we think of bodies and subjectivity outside of these dualisms and binaries, new ways of understanding corporeality, sexuality, and differences can be developed and explored (vii). Ultimately, the terms of this debate foreclose new analysis and approaches that would make sense of alternative functions for women's anger. My approach to anger is thus guided by Grosz's and Collins's analyses of binary thought. Although I will address binary thinking in this dissertation, I do this to contextualize my analysis of anger, which ultimately aims to think about bodies, identities, and emotions when they are not limited by these ways of thinking.

Anger merits scholarly attention as West argues "the social and political dimensions of anger remain largely under theorized as they relate to issues of social difference, conflict, and learning" (42). Following West, paying attention to anger, particularly the anger of marginalized groups, allows for a more nuanced understanding of the ideological underpinnings of conflicts (43). As a result, while this dissertation will begin to answer the research questions I have posed above, my aim is also to complicate the terms of ongoing debates surrounding women's anger. There are many important venues through which feminist thinkers can, and have, explored anger. However, for the purposes of this dissertation, I will posit alternative functions for anger as they appear within my archive Canadian and American women's literature. Literary works by women are an ideal departure for this analysis; Canadian and American women have a long history of using the novel as a means to express themselves in spite of social rules that silence them, and as a forum to interrogate these unwritten rules from the outset. However, it is also important to note that my analysis of my primary sources departs somewhat from traditional literary analysis. In

this dissertation, I will study the novels that comprise my archive using a feminist analysis and exploring how they fit within the current Canadian and American social climate. I will also focus on the characters' anger rather than the anger at play in other formal elements of each of my primary sources. Ultimately, I read each novel as a case study of the ways anger can function, map the ways the characters deploy anger within each text, and explore how this anger interacts or intersects with other emotional responses.

Feminist scholars have begun to explore the intersections between anger and the novel. For example, Barbara Tomlinson writes at length about textual vehemence, which she describes as “the tactical deployment of what often registers in public rhetoric as anger” (89), and the ways this anger foregrounds the impossibility of “neutral” science or “objective” knowledge (90). For Tomlinson, this is an attractive rhetorical strategy for many female authors. As she explains

textual vehemence or anger may appear in arguments of social critique asserting that current or historical conditions and policies are not desirable, not equitable, but damaging, demeaning, despicable, divisive [...] textual vehemence can convey a sense of moral responsibility- and of moral revulsion- demonstrating the importance of the stakes of the debate. It can operate as a battle cry or rallying cry, drawing together into action those who already agree or who have been swayed by the argument. It can appeal to those who have not been reached by other methods. (110)

The utility of what Tomlinson terms “textual vehemence” has led many women to take the pen, to write about what causes their tempers to flare, and to forge connections with political allies. This is particularly noticeable in a U.S. context, as many middle-class women took to

writing at the end of World War Two when they returned to the home. These women used fiction as a medium to express their concerns, to question the practices that excluded and marginalized them, as well as to ensure that their preoccupations did not go un-discussed. For this group of emerging female authors, literature was a forum for their political goals, and writing allowed them to create communities in face of the increasing isolation inherent to newly developing middle-class norms (Joannou 2). These communities eventually merged with the growth of consciousness raising groups in the Women's Movement (3), and gave rise to a surge in publication of feminist theory, fiction, and philosophy during the second wave of feminist thought (Green 33). According to Naomi Scheman, the various modes of expression that women adopted at this moment in feminist thought are inextricably tied to women's desire to voice their anger, and are connected to their other political activities. Scheman explains "within the parameters of the wider feminist movement, feminist consciousness raising groups gave women the space to name their anger along side of other women who do the same" (185). This move to fiction as the site of self-expression is perhaps unsurprising, as "narrative has a privileged ethical relation to culture and to readers" (Friedman 698), and like consciousness raising groups, novels are accessible to a broader audience than theory or philosophy.

In light of this history, a number of female literary critics have explored the ways women deploy anger in literature, and have published anthologies of feminist analyses of women's writing. These anthologies largely critique the aforementioned construction of feminist anger, and in an attempt to disrupt the notion that feminist anger and meaningful writing are mutually exclusive, the editors of these anthologies illustrate the multiple ways women deploy anger strategically. Deirdre Lashgari's edited collection *Violence, Silence and*

*Anger: Women's Writing as Transgression* and Maroula Joannou's *Ladies, Please Don't Smash These Windows* are notable examples of such work. In light of McDermott's analysis however, these anthologies reaffirm the terms of the debate where anger is either irrational or rational and strategic. While I do not dispute the importance of these anthologies and of this approach (in fact, this scholarship has set the groundwork for my dissertation), my own research hopes to explore the functions of anger outside of these binary terms. Rather than illustrating that women can deploy anger as a legitimate reaction to oppression *like* men, and rather than analyzing how women write back to a phallogentric center in order to displace it (Lashgari 3), this dissertation will explore the function of anger when women define the terms of this debate from the outset.

### **A Brief History of Anger**

Before undertaking a dissertation that aims to problematize bifurcated discussions about anger, it is important to map the longstanding nature of this debate, as well as key interventions therein. The social incoherence of both women's anger, and the unintelligibility of the anger of other marginal subjects, dates back hundreds of years. The logic that informs this debate is both based on and reflects binary thinking that creates and reinforces distinctions between reason/emotion, mind/body, higher/lower order, and ruler/ruled. This rationale functions as the grounds upon which the binary male/female relies. Binary thinking is integral to many social institutions, and is the basis for the dominant model for sexual difference in the Western world. Within this model, the vast range of possible genetic combinations and social performances of both sex and gender are isolated within two mutually exclusive categories: male and female (Fausto-Sterling 3-5). When men and women are grouped into two distinct categories, other assumptions about reason, emotion,

intelligence, and social role, are assigned to each group. This process is noticeable in philosophical debates about anger, as well as those regarding emotional responses more broadly. In this context, emotions are ascribed biological roots, and women are often framed as men's emotionally volatile counterpart. For example, Kemp and Strongman explain that a handful of medieval thinkers assign biological roots to emotional responses, and thought that women were more biologically predisposed to feel anger than men (402-3). The assumption that women are inherently more emotional than men by virtue of their bodily differences is a hallmark of a broader philosophical trend where men occupy the privileged side of the gender binary, and are aligned with mind and reason, and women become the receptacle for emotional traits.

These distinctions between men and women are grounded Aristotle's assumption that man is the original human form, and woman is his subordinate, sub-human counterpart. According to feminist philosopher Nancy Tuana, "one of the most basic gender assumptions found throughout the philosophical Canon is the tenet that man is the true form of humanity; that is, masculinity is equated with humanness" (9). Erica Harth explores the relationship between this line of thought and binary logic, arguing

where the binary signifying system has prevailed, the feminine has been constructed as the 'marked' gender. In the oppositional pair 'man/woman', 'man' is both the universal human and the particular male; 'woman' is a particular case of universal. She is an inflection of the norm, as the inflected form of a noun can be said to be the 'marked' complement of its uninflected, 'unmarked' stem. (1)

As previously discussed, binary thinking is also characterized by the ascription of positive and negative values to each side of the binary, and this way of organizing and making sense of the world “necessarily hierarchizes and ranks the two polarized terms so that one becomes the privileged term and the other its suppressed, subordinated, negative counterpart” (Grosz 3). As such, because woman functions as the “marked” or deviant half of this binary, woman also operates as the receptacle for other negative traits created within subsequent binaries (Harth 1). Simone de Beauvoir is deeply critical of this trend, and explains that this logic is common within philosophical discussions ranging from morality to education, as these explicitly or implicitly position women as “incidental, the inessential as opposed to the essential. He is the Subject, he is the Absolute- she is the Other” (xvi). According to Grosz, “as a discipline, philosophy has surreptitiously excluded femininity, and ultimately women, from its practices through its usually implicit coding of femininity with the unreason associated with the body” (4). This construction of sexual difference often goes unnoticed or uncontested because the binary between male and female exists within a vast and interlocking web of oppositions, that rely on and reaffirm a system of values so pervasive they seem to function as given (Cantrell 9).

Ultimately, the binary thought that informs many canonical philosophical treatises culminates in a construction of men as aligned with the mind, and women with the body. As a result, the authors of these texts describe men as evolved, rational, moral, and capable of participation in public life, particularly politics. Conversely, women are aligned with the body and function in terms of lack; they are less evolved, less rational, and less moral. Through this logic, men can function in the public sphere by virtue of their capability to think rationally, whereas women are relegated to the private sphere because they are not

capable of reason (Tuana i). Because they see women as less capable of rational thought, many of the fathers of Western thought identify women's "natural" place as the private realm. This conceptual exclusion of women from the public sphere has significant consequences, as Tuana explains

Western philosophers developing social or political theory unquestioningly accepted the division between the public realm of politics and the private realm of familial relations. They saw the public realm, involving the power of ruling over others, as the arena of the rational and limited it to those who were superior in reason and virtue. In turn, they considered those relegated to the private realm as capable only of a limited and inferior virtue, and labeled them as the 'naturally ruled'. (*History* 87)

It is also important to note that the notion that some groups are "naturally ruled", as well as assumptions about race, class, and geographic location all inform the social and political order depicted by many prominent theorists where entire races and classes are grouped into hierarchical groups with white, European men at the apex. Although these ways of discussing women are naturalized and deployed in order to justify unequal distributions of resources and power, my focus in this dissertation is how these bifurcated ways of thinking, as well as the alignment of women with the body, irrationality, immorality, and the private realm, impact representations and social understandings of women's anger.

The notion that women are "naturally ruled" by virtue of their biological differences is illustrated in Aristotle's discussion of the nature of men and women's souls, which he described as the product of the differing reproductive functions of both sexes. For Aristotle, women's bodies and their reproductive roles are the source of their inferiority. In contrast,

Aristotle saw the able-bodied man as the standard type, as average, and as indicative of the mean. As a result, any physical difference that deviates from this norm is a sub-human monstrosity. Within this logic, women's differences from men function as naturally occurring defects (de Beauvoir xvi). While women are not the only monstrous beings, they are the first of these to appear in history (Wilson & Lewiecki-Wilson 13). For Aristotle, women have obvious shortcomings (mental, emotional, and physical) when compared to men (Tuana 23), and on the level of the soul, these differences render women more prone to emotional outbursts than her male counterpart. Aristotle held that because women are ruled by their emotions, they cannot make reasoned arguments that would allow them to distinguish between right and wrong. As a result, men must not only exclude women from the realm of politics and practical wisdom, they must also rule over women to maintain public order, and to help them control their passions (Tuana 29).

In *The Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle explains that anger is a morally sound emotional response under a particular set of circumstances, as he explains, "the man who gets angry at the right things and with the right people, and also in the right way and at the right time and for the right length of time, is commended" (101). Conversely a man whose anger does not comply with these norms is foolish (101). In order to account for the ambiguity of these guidelines, Aristotle explains that the correct time, duration, and target for anger is informed by social norms surrounding emotional responses. As such, Aristotle commends men for adhering to these norms, and explains that individuals must avoid displays of emotion that transgress these unwritten social rules (103). Because Aristotle claims that women are unable to distinguish between right and wrong, we can infer that this is due, in part, to women's perceived inability to judge what is a legitimate source for their

anger, the correct amount of time to be angry, the right people at whom to direct their anger, or they are unable to express their anger in the right way. In this case, through their alleged lack of moral reasoning, women are more likely to express anger at what Aristotle might deem *the wrong* things, for *the wrong* time, in *the wrong* circumstances.

This framing of anger resonates to this day, as feminist philosopher Marilyn Frye argues that critics often condemn women for being angry with inconsequential or unimportant issues (or, in Aristotle's terms, "the wrong things"). Frye argues

it is a tiresome truth of women's experience that our anger is generally not well received. Men (and sometimes women) ignore it, see it as being 'upset' or 'hysterical', or see it as craziness. Attention is turned not to what we are angry about but to the project of calming us down and the topic of our 'mental stability'. (85)

Frye explains that a set of unwritten rules governs how people interpret women's anger. Specifically, others will successfully interpret a woman's anger if she is angry in spaces that are coded as female (such as the kitchen, and in child-centered spaces) or in situations where she is expressing maternal concern for other people (for example, being angry about child poverty). For Frye, "so long as a woman is operating squarely in a realm which is generally recognized as a woman's realm, labeled as such by stereotypes of women and of certain activities, her anger will quite likely be tolerated, at least not thought crazy" (91). If we study Frye's discussion of anger in light of Aristotle's analysis, it is clear that Aristotle's notion that there are "right" or "proper" targets and duration for anger continues to deny the legitimacy of women's emotions, and rearticulates her relegation to the private or domestic sphere. According to Frye, acceptable targets of a woman's anger can be people, events, or

policies that pose a risk to the sanctity of her private sphere, or threaten a woman's role as "Mother/Caretaker/ Conserver/Helpmate" (Frye 91). In this case, women who comply with these social norms are commended (or socially produced as good mothers, supportive wives, admirable citizens). Conversely, women who transgress these rules and express anger in the public realm, or who target their anger at "masculine" institutions such as politics or war, are silenced, ridiculed, and subjected to significant criticism.

Vectors of identity such as race and class also inform the dismissal of women's anger, as it is more difficult for racialized or poor women to make a claim to anger than it might be for their white or middle class counterparts. This trend is not only reliant on the distinctions between reason and emotion, it is also embedded within our social structures. According to Thomas West, the "reasoned" arguments of those who occupy positions of privilege represent their general ease and familiarity with the dominant conventions of politics and debate, and signals the faith these individuals have in a system that relies on these protocols (48). According to West, because marginalized groups have difficulty accessing wealth and education, it is sometimes an arduous process for them to acquire and develop the skills that would allow them to participate in "reasoned" debate. Further, subjugated groups might also have important reasons for being skeptical towards the knowledge produced within this paradigm, as well as for disdaining the overarching social system that relies upon it (49). If we extend West's discussion of reason to Aristotle's discussion of morality and emotion, it is clear that marginalized groups are less able to make a claim to "reason" (or might refuse to make such a claim from the outset) because the privilege of the ruling class depends upon their production as unreasonable or inferior. Further, the targets of this anger might be the dominant majority and ongoing hegemonic

norms, thus this anger transgresses Aristotle's rules for emotional expression. In his discussion of race and anger, West goes on to explain

many whites are not accustomed to Black anger, especially collective Black anger and, consequently, are unable to understand it in any kind of political sense; a common response is to dismiss it as dangerously irrational [...].

Whites are not accustomed to dealing with such anger and politics precisely because structural arrangements make it so they don't have to. (47)

A poignant example of this trend is the ways in which racialized women, like feminists more broadly, are socially produced as irrationally angry, which erases the roots of their anger. According to Melissa Harris-Perry, stereotypical representations of Black women have given rise to the images of the welfare queen, the urban teen mom, and Jezebel. Each of these tropes is underpinned by the corresponding image of Sapphire, the quintessential black woman who is brash, loud, angry, and emasculates black men. Harris-Perry explains that the trope of Sapphire, unlike other stereotypes of Black womanhood, has not been the subject of significant scholarly analysis because irrational or uncontrolled anger is a central feature of these other stereotypes (88-89). Often denied educational opportunities and wealth that would allow them the social privilege of making "reasoned" arguments, Black women in the United States are silenced through these ongoing stereotypes. In this case, these representations of Black women not only inform social policies (Jordan-Zachary 25), but they frame Black women as inherently angry, rather than angry about a particular set of circumstances. This is a critical distinction, as Sara Ahmed reminds us that when others recognize a person as angry *about* something, they are recognizing the root or the cause of that anger. However, when a person is framed as simply angry, this erases the cause of the

anger, and blames these individuals for acting in a way that does not conform to social norms (*The Promise of Happiness* 66-67). In this case, the social production of Black women as irrationally and inherently angry erases the circumstances that might cause their tempers to flare, and aligns them with the body, distancing them from the mind and from reason.

The distinctions between reason/emotion, men/women and mind/body articulated by Aristotle are also key components in Descartes's discussion of knowledge. In fact, the Cartesian tradition has been more influential than any other in establishing the groundwork for philosophical debates surrounding knowledge, reason, and subjectivity (Grosz 10), and continues to inform the devaluing of women's anger. The Cartesian ideal is underpinned by binary thinking, as are characterized by distinctions between the mind and the body, as well as between reason and emotion (Tuana 38). In this case, Descartes privileges the mind over the body and nature, as the mind is the tool through which a person can find "Truth" (Grosz 6) whereas the body, and thus emotion, lead to error. Feminist philosopher Nancy Tuana explains that "in the Cartesian view, the soul or mind is an indivisible mental substance- a thing which thinks. By this limiting the mind to cognitions, Descartes has excluded emotions from the realm of the mental" (38). In this instance, although Descartes explains that "the soul has its principal seat in the little gland in the middle of the brain" (*The Passions of the Soul* 37), locating the soul and the metaphorical (and biological) "driver" of the body, Descartes believes that the mind has more potential to access Truth than emotions (Tuana 38). Descartes goes on to explain that the mind must rule over the emotions, and like Aristotle, explains that this gland in the brain gives individuals the ability to control their emotions through reason (Descartes 36). While Descartes acknowledges that some people may be more adept at exercising control over their emotions than others, no person is so

weak that they cannot control their passions without guidance (47). Further, like Aristotle, Descartes attributes the difficulty that some individuals (but not necessarily women) experience in controlling their emotions to differences in the strength of the soul, and explains

there is no doubt that those in whom the will can naturally conquer the passions most easily and stop the accompanying movements of the body have the strongest souls [...] proper weapons are firm and decisive judgments concerning the good and evil [...] the weakest souls of all continually allows itself to be carried away by present passions. (46)

Descartes also briefly touches upon anger, and like Aristotle, is critical of individuals who allow themselves to be carried away by their rage, describing them as servile, prideful, and infirm (128-129). Descartes explains that those with a weak soul are more likely to lose control over their emotions and be overwhelmed by anger, and thus need guidance from those in possession of stronger souls (129). By privileging mind/reason over emotions/body, and by stating that some people can control their passions through with the guidance of others, Descartes legitimizes the subordination of individuals who are coded as prone to emotional excess to their rational counterparts. If we read Descartes's discussion in light of West, Harris-Perry, and Frye's arguments, it is clear that this logic continues to circulate not only through the privileging of reason over emotion, but within the mutual exclusions between emotions and knowledge, the ways women's anger is socially incoherent in public spaces, as well as the ways the subordination of marginalized groups is legitimized through a reliance on reasoned debate.

The notion that women are “naturally ruled” by men is another significant theme in Western thought. For example, in his treatise on education *Emile*, Jean-Jacques Rousseau speaks to a hypothetical young girl named Sophie about the course her life will take when she marries Emile: “when Emile became your husband, he became your head, it is yours to obey; this is the will of nature” (459). While Emile and Sophie are allegedly distinct and equal, Emile rules over Sophie because Rousseau believes that this is the way nature intends it. Rousseau draws upon the distinction between reason and emotion to justify this rule, and explains that Emile is a male and is thus aligned with reason. Sophie, his emotional counterpart, provides him with emotional guidance (Tuana 47). This is further illustrated in Rousseau’s discussion of religion, where he explains that women are unable to determine which religious doctrines to subscribe to. Unable to judge for themselves, women must adhere to the religious beliefs of their father, and then to those of their husband upon marriage (*Emile* 1322). Rousseau goes on to state that women are prone to becoming religious zealots because they are unable to “assign limits to that faith by evidence or reason” (1323). Unable to make reasoned decisions about religious beliefs or to establish parameters for living according to these convictions, women must defer to patriarchal figures for guidance. In this case, reason must rule over emotion, and because women lack reason, Emile rules over Sophie, and she defers to him in many of her decisions.

Immanuel Kant also articulates the gendered binary between reason and emotion. While Rousseau draws from it to outline which sex must guide the other, for Kant, the distinction between reason and emotion has a significant impact upon his theory of moral actions. In *Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals*, Kant argues that for an action to have moral value, it must be performed from duty rather than inclination or desire (35), and goes

on to outline imperatives that individuals can follow in order to act as moral agents (26). For Kant, feelings that might appear to have moral value such as sympathy, caring, and love, actually hinder the actions of a moral agent. Tuana explains that for Kant, “it is not necessary that moral persons be without affect, but they must be able to suspend their feelings in order to base their action on obedience to the universal law of morality”(59). Although Kant does not directly write about women here (although it must be acknowledged that elsewhere Kant argues that women are incapable of making moral judgments), if we study his discussion of moral actions in light of the ongoing philosophical trend where women are aligned with the body and emotions, it is clear that this logic can be interpreted as precluding women from moral action because they make decisions based on emotions rather than reason. Simone de Beauvoir sums up these ongoing trends, and remarks that “woman has ovaries, a uterus; these particularities imprison her in her subjectivity, circumscribe her within the limits of her own nature. It is often said that she thinks with her glands” (xxi). On the other hand, men are not reduced to their biology, but rather their bodies function as a direct connection with the outside world, from which he can view and judge objectively (xxii). For de Beauvoir, the fathers of philosophy have firmly reduced women to their biology, aligned them with the body, produced them as irrational and thus naturally ruled, and excluded them from the public realms of politics and moral judgments. While a broader synopsis of the ways canonical works of Western philosophy discuss and devalue women and emotion is beyond the scope of this dissertation, this brief historical sketch illustrates the longstanding nature of these debates. Further, if we compare them to Lorde, Frye, and Hoff-Sommers’s analysis, it is clear that the distinctions between reason, emotion, mind, body, public, private, critical

thought and emotional volatility, continue to carry important social significance, particularly as they inform understandings of women's anger.

### **Bitterness, Irritation, & Mental Instability**

Despite ongoing feminist critiques of the philosophies described above, these entrenched ways of thinking continue to plague women, limit their ability to express anger in public, and make it difficult for others to recognize women's anger as a legitimate response to oppression. Feminists and activists have devoted considerable time and energy to discussing the problems that women confront when they express anger, and have mapped the ways these problems shift and change based on race, class, gender, and sexual preference (Tomlinson 89). Despite ongoing contestation, critics continue to re-frame and debase women's anger as complaining, as bitterness, as irritation, or dismiss it as the symptom of a woman's mental illness. Similarly, feminist thinkers working within an academic setting have written at length of the ways critics devalue their work as clouded by bitterness and irritability, and cast them as the hostile critics of sacrosanct works that ought to be revered (Felski 1; Silver 341). Lynn McFall explores this phenomenon, and outlines important distinctions between anger, irritation, and bitterness. It is also interesting to note that McFall's analysis indicates that Aristotle's discussion about the right time, length, and target for anger, as well as the dualism between mind and body, continues to circulate in these criticisms of angry feminist thinkers.

According to McFall, bitterness denotes a "refusal to forgive and forget. It is to maintain a vivid sense of the wrongs one has done, to recite one's angry litany of loss long past the time others care to listen or sympathize" (qtd. in Campbell 146). Further, when critics accuse a woman of bitterness, they rearticulate the associations between women and

the body (in this case with the sense of taste), and distance her from higher order faculties such as reason. Dismissing an angry woman as irritated or irritable has similar results, as irritation is also bodily sensation associated with the skin (Ngai 186). However, a charge of irritability also risks erasing women's emotional responses entirely, as Sianne Ngai explains that irritation occupies such a marginal status in the realm of emotional responses that it often falls from the realm of emotional experience entirely into the realm of physical or epidermal sensations (184). As such, a charge of irritation or irritability not only serves the same function as an accusation of bitterness, it also risks erasing the reality that a woman is forming any kind of intellectual or cognitive response from the outset, reframing her affective response as a bodily state. This misrepresentation of women's anger has significant political consequences. Not only does it silence the emoter and erase the root of her anger, it also places blame upon a woman for failing to act in a socially acceptable way (Campbell 51), or, in Hercus's terms, for failing to get along with others.

Another notable trend is that women's anger is often conceived as mental instability and is discursively produced as mental illness such as depression. Marilyn Frye observes "it is my being a woman that reduces the power of my anger to a proof of my insanity" (16). Following Frye, Ruth Bankey explores this social trend, and explains

the feminine, and consequentially women, have been pathologized as unstable, deceitful, naturally inferior and irrational. This is a recurring theme within traditional Western medical practice. And while twentieth-century medical practice has attempted to dispel itself from this patriarchal legacy, traces and ghosts of this pathology remain and are re-inscribed onto contemporary subjectivities, identities, and bodies. (38)

Bankey goes on to explain that ‘hysterical’ is commonly applied to women’s behaviors to evoke an image of woman out of control rather than a female who produces sound cultural critique (40). In fact, the links between women and emotional excess were medicalized to the extent that, within the lecture halls of nineteenth century medical schools, the bodies of ‘hysterical’ women were put on display to show how women needed the guidance of a ‘rational’ medical or scientific system for care (40), rearticulating longstanding notions of unstable women as ‘naturally’ ruled by reasoned (medical) men. Eighteenth and nineteenth century European doctors committed women to asylums for transgressions including uncontrolled temper and sullen or wayward disposition, with the hope that being shut away would help women regain control over their passions (Showalter 48). Ultimately, doctors hoped that medical treatment would help these emotionally “excessive” women comply with social norms surrounding womanhood and femininity (49). Although the charge of mental illness of which Frye speaks is historically and socially distinct from the phenomenon of committing women to asylums for excessive emotions, it is clear that there are important similarities between the two. The logic that informs these acts of incarceration is the same as that which guides more contemporary accusations that a woman’s anger is symptomatic of her mental instability. This logic is also informed by binary thinking, as Elaine Showalter goes on to explain that in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, psychiatrists held that “women were more vulnerable to insanity than men because the instability of their reproductive systems interfered with their sexual, emotional, and rational control” (55). Showalter attributes this trend to the longstanding association between women and madness that is couched in binary thinking. Within existing bifurcated systems of language and representation, women are usually associated with “irrationality, silence, nature, and body while men are situated on the

side of reason, discourse, culture and mind” (4). This construction culminates in depictions of women as more prone to madness, mental instability, or depression than men (4).

Although hysteria is no longer a fashionable diagnosis, Frye and Bankey’s analysis indicates that women continue to feel the effects of this diagnostic pattern.

It is also difficult for women to express anger, and have it be taken up as such by others, because women’s anger is often only socially coherent when it occurs in the private sphere. While the strategy of dismissing an angry woman by questioning her mental stability or dismissing her as irate or bitter overtly conceals and erases the roots of her anger, the social coherence of women’s anger within the private or domestic real is a more implicit example of this erasure. According to Campbell, emotion is an important part of social interaction. For anger to catalyze social change, it must occupy a role in the public realm, rather than be relegated to the private sphere or ignored altogether (54). Campbell goes on to explain that the uptake of anger is a complex process, as the methods individuals and groups use to express emotion are diverse and changing. Possible hallmarks of emotional expression include, but are not limited to, gestures, expressions, and vocalizations in varying tones. Campbell argues that expressions of emotion must be interpretable (that is, others must recognize them as markers of an expression of anger), or else this emotional response will likely be ignored or misunderstood. Like West, Campbell explains that for anger to be comprehensible, individuals must have adequate resources to express their emotions, and others must interpret these emotions in ways that do not distort their meaning (55). Although the interpretation of any emotional response is a complex social process, when we explore Frye’s analysis of the ways women’s anger is interpreted in relation to Campbell’s framework, it is clear that this process is particularly fraught for women. As previously

discussed, Frye notes that a woman's anger will be taken up more successfully by others if she is angry in spaces that are coded as female, or in situations where she is expressing concern for other people. Where Campbell illustrates that emotion must have a space in public so that it can be interpreted without distortion, Frye argues that women's anger is often relegated to the private sphere, and is more comprehensible therein. When women transgress the boundaries between public and private, and voice their anger outside of the domestic realm, their anger is more likely to be distorted. Frye also echoes Campbell's assertion that there are many ways for a person to communicate emotion, however, Frye also explains that the successful uptake of a woman's anger by another person is complicated as each individual has a different understanding of who a woman is or what she must do (93). Consequently, when the methods a woman uses to express emotion are not congruent with another person's conception of womanhood, or do not adhere to hegemonic standards of femininity, it is likely that the woman's anger will be misinterpreted. Many women are keenly aware of the obstacles they must surpass in order for their anger to be taken as such by others, and admit that they will carefully monitor where, when, and with whom they express anger (Hercus 45) rather than risk being misunderstood.

Finally, women have known for a long time that voicing their dissatisfaction with a set of circumstances or events can result in an accusation that they are merely complaining. Like the aforementioned ways that critics dismiss women's anger, the dismissal of anger as complaining is a longstanding strategy that critics use to dismiss a woman's anger. For example, when Florence Nightingale wrote of her frustration with the limited vocational opportunities available to women, she reflected "Christ, if he had been a woman, might have been nothing but a great complainer" (qtd. in Showalter 65). Decades after Nightingale

expressed her discontent with the ways women's anger (particularly anger that is expressed in the public sphere) is framed by others, literary scholar Brenda Silver echoes Nightingale's logic, and asserts that her career as a feminist literary theorist has given her the distinct impression that "men write cultural criticism but that women who criticise their culture only 'complain'" (354). Similarly, feminist thinker Rita Felski notes that feminist literary critics are sometimes held as complaining women who have made careers of belittling great works of art, and are located in opposition to their non-feminist counterparts, who appreciate works of art for what they are (1). These ways of dismissing women's anger often intersect with one another, as Felski reflects that she has often been depicted as "bitter, hostile, resentful [...] and utterly irrational" (1) for choosing to voice her anger in public spaces such as university classes and within the parameters of her theoretical works. This ongoing dismissal of women's anger in multiple forms has culminated in the reality that feminist thinkers struggle to find a voice with which to speak in the public realm (Silver 341). As a result, despite the many victories of the women's movement, it is still not socially acceptable for women to show anger (Hercus 53).

Feminist thinkers have written at length about the social and political consequences of this devaluing of women's anger. According to Frye, there are important differences between mental instability, irritation, and anger: "situations that generate anger, as opposed to those which merely make you feel displeased or depressed, are those in which you see yourself not simply as obstructed or hindered, but as wronged" (85). Anger can be the result of injustice or oppression, and accusations of mental instability or bitterness detract from the circumstances that give rise to anger, blaming a woman for transgressing social norms surrounding femininity. For Naomi Scheman, these unwritten rules that govern how women

express their emotions can cause tremendous psychic damage. Scheman explains that in order to be angry, a person must recognize their own emotional response, and trust in their ability to judge that a set of circumstances have given rise to an angry response. Scheman argues that this act of judging can be tremendously difficult to undertake from a position of dependency, particularly when one's wellbeing and happiness depend on pleasing others (178). As such, the stakes can be tremendously high for marginalized groups to express anger about their status, and after a lifetime of ridicule for speaking out of turn, subjugated groups may be less likely to have faith in their judgments. This social conditioning begins at a young age, and has a devastating impact on women as they enter adulthood. Brown & Gilligan argue that young girls often feel comfortable voicing their emotions, but by the time they reach adolescence, they have learnt to mute their anger. They conclude that this emotional self-policing is a product of the enormous pressure to be "perfect" girls, that is, feminine, demure, and calm (qtd. in Thompson et al., 314). Given these ongoing social trends, reframing women's anger outside of binary logic is an important project, as Silver argues that by becoming angry, a person passes a judgment and works to make themselves equal to the person they judge, and assert the validity of their own perspective (363). As a result, anger can function as a means through which women can work towards equality.

### **Alternative Functions of Anger**

In the chapters that follow, I will explore alternative functions for women's anger outside of the binary logic explained above. Within the parameters of this dissertation, I understand anger to be an emotional response that is both a cognitive and physical reaction to a particular set of circumstances. Anger can take many forms, can arrive suddenly, dissipate quickly, or can function as a constant emotional presence. In light of the

aforementioned debates, I understand anger as an affect that has many functions and origins: it is a reaction to injustice, as an appraisal to a set of circumstances, an unconscious force, or the product of considerable mental deliberation. Further, anger works in tandem with other emotional responses, and can be paired with sadness, compassion, longing, and other reactions. Anger can function as the tie that binds communities together or as a wedge that drives them apart. This diverse understanding guides my doctoral research, and each chapter explores the ways anger functions within my archive of Canadian and American literature written by women.

The first chapter of this dissertation, entitled “Theories/Methodologies” maps the theoretical framework and research methodologies that will guide my analysis, and I explain why I have chosen to use the terms affect and emotion interchangeably. In this chapter, I outline the ways my discussion of anger in subsequent chapters is grounded in affect theory, intersectional feminist theory, discourse analysis, and feminist discourse analysis. It is important to note that there are tensions between my choice of theories and methodologies that must be addressed. As such, in the first chapter of this project, I also develop a methodology of “imperfect alignment” to account for the tensions between affect theory, which emerged as a response to perceived shortcomings of affect theory (Terrada 3), and discourse analysis, which is guided by poststructural assumptions about language. In the opening chapter of this dissertation, I also outline why I have chosen to focus on literature, and will account for my use of potentially problematic terms such as “woman” or “women’s writing”. Specifying these terms is particularly necessary in this case, as I include Leslie Feinberg, a prominent feminist thinker and activist who eschews gender categories altogether, into an analysis of women’s writing.

The second chapter of my research project is entitled “Anger, Normalcy and the Erasure of Liminal Identities.” Here I explore the social processes through which liminal figures (that is, individuals who fall in between the binaries male/female, able/disabled, attractive/unattractive, sexual/asexual, etc.) are continuously erased, and the ways anger can bring their suffering into sharp relief. The erasure of liminal subjects is a prominent theme in both Lesley Feinberg’s 1993 novel *Stone Butch Blues* and Mary McGarry Morris’s 1991 narrative *A Dangerous Woman*.

Feinberg’s narrative follows protagonist Jess Goldberg, who lives between male and female gender assignments, and suffers considerable violence as a result. From a young age, Jess is drawn to markers of a male gender performance, and ultimately self-identifies as she-he rather than male or female. Because Jess lives between the identities upon which normative subjectivity depends, this violence is continually erased by the people who surround her, which leads to increased abuse. Following a traumatic rape and suspension from school for transgressing the administration’s unwritten racial segregation policy, Jess leaves school at the age of 16, and moves to Buffalo, and befriends a group of stone butches and femmes and seeks work in Buffalo factories. Her new community shares in her suffering, and values her gender identity. Although Jess finds refuge and support within this new community, Jess continues to suffer unspeakable cruelty at the hands of the police, her fellow factory workers, and strangers. This violence is continually erased due to her liminal status, her tenuous employment, and her lack of social visibility. In the wake of escalating police abuse and informed by a desire to explore her identity, Jess eventually moves to New York, and seeks hormone therapy and surgery to live as a man. Jess continues to feel alienated from her body in spite of this transition, and eventually moves into a gender-neutral

body that best reflects Jess's identity. Despite the horrific abuse Jess suffers, the close of the novel is hopeful, as Jess emerges from the subway into the bright sun and participates in a labor movement rally, suggesting that Jess will find new allies in this social movement.

Like Jess, McGarry Morris's protagonist Martha Hogan also suffers tremendous abuse, which is erased because of her ambiguous mental illness that leaves her in a liminal space between able and disabled. Because of her invisible condition, she is also framed as simultaneously sexually salacious and as asexual, as capable and incapable of living independently. The narrative opens when Martha is an adolescent, and her male classmates lure her into the woods to sexually assault her. The novel then moves forward in time to follow Martha as a 32 year-old woman, who is working at a local dry cleaning business, and rents a room at a boarding house. The text follows Martha as she struggles to control the symptoms of her ambiguous illness, which includes uncontrolled bursts of anger. Because of her oddities, Martha loses her job at the dry cleaners, becomes fixated on her former co-worker Birdie, and falls in love with Mack, her aunt's handyman and eventual partner. After she loses her job, she is unable to support herself and Martha moves home to live with her wealthy aunt Frances. Although Martha tries to adhere to social norms, the people who surround her torment her for her inability to follow socially normative scripts. Martha's illness is exacerbated as Frances begins a romantic affair with Mack, and she falls into a deep depression when her imagined best friend Birdie no longer wants to continue their friendship. In the wake of this emotional turmoil, Martha leaves her aunt's home, wanders the streets of her town, and eventually kills Gesto, her former co-worker and Birdie's partner, in a fit of rage. In the closing pages of the novel, Martha is on trial for murder, and learns that her brief sexual relationship with Mack has resulted in her pregnancy. Ultimately,

Martha's lawyer and her aunt refuse to believe that Martha has consented to sex, choosing to believe that Mack raped Martha. The novel closes in an ambiguous way, as the verdict, and Martha's eventual fate, remain unclear.

As a result of their liminal status, both Martha and Jess are continuously excluded (either by force or by choice) from the social construct of normalcy. Drawing from Judith Butler's discussion of "livable lives" in *The Precarious Life, Frames of War*, as well as *The Psychic Life of Power*, I contend that Jess and Martha's liminal status forces them into the realm of unreal subjectivity, which repeatedly erases the violence they suffer. Although extending the parameters of what we socially understand as normal to include unreal figures like Jess and Martha, or eliminating this construct altogether, might seem to be logical remedies to this erasure, I explore the role of anger in both texts, and posit an alternative means to account for these histories of violence that departs from this emotional response. Specifically, Jess and Martha respond to violence, to their liminal status, and to their ongoing exclusion from the frame that delineates social norms with expressions of anger that range from subtle to overpowering. In both texts, these moments of intense anger occur just as this normative frame is being re-articulated to exclude them by people in positions of authority, by hegemonic notions of sex or gender, or by dominant institutions. I contend that because Jess and Martha's anger occurs at moments when this frame is rearticulated to once again exclude them, this emotional response can alert us not only to the moments when normative frames are rearticulated, but that their anger also makes Jess and Martha visible. Ultimately, I contend that if we focus on these moments of anger, histories of violence and oppression that would otherwise go ignored can come into focus.

The next chapter of my dissertation is entitled “Compassionate Readership: The Politics of Anger and Suffering”, and explores the ways anger complicates compassionate reader responses to graphic violence in Sapphire’s 1996 novel *Push* and Beatrice Culleton Mosionier’s *In Search of April Raintree*, which was published in 1983. Sapphire’s narrative follows her Black, illiterate teenage protagonist Precious who has grown up in extreme poverty in Harlem, New York. From the age of three, Precious is sexually abused by both of her parents, and as a product of this abuse, she is the mother of two young children by the time she is sixteen years old. Marginalized at school and by social services, the novel opens as Precious sits at school, trying to learn math, and reflects that she is nearly in high school even though she cannot read. Precious has an altercation with the school’s principal, and she soon begins to attend an alternative school, Each One Teach One. In spite of ongoing abuse at home, Precious flourishes at Each One Teach One, where she learns to read, write, and express herself through poetry. After the birth of her second child Abdul, Precious can no longer bear her mother’s abuse and she flees home, only to find that she has nowhere to go. With the help of her teacher Ms. Rain, Precious accesses social services, lives in a half-way house, cares for her son, and sets her sights on postsecondary education. Ultimately, Sapphire’s novel also functions as a staunch critique of work-for-welfare policies, which would trap Precious and her children in a cycle of poverty and lack of education.

Mosionier’s text follows a similar narrative trajectory, but plays out in a Canadian context. This novel follows Métis sisters April and Cheryl Raintree, who initially live in extreme poverty, and are removed from their home by social services before they are five years old. The sisters are repeatedly separated from one another, and grow up in a series of foster homes, some of which are supportive and loving, whereas others are deeply abusive.

Because Mosionier's protagonist April can pass as white, she continuously denies her Métis heritage, marries a wealthy man, and dreams of living like "a real white person". On the other hand, Cheryl is an outspoken supporter of Indigenous people, and possesses incredible intellectual abilities; as a child, she re-writes history texts to accurately reflect Métis heritage and European settlement. These divergent political stances cause tension between the sisters: where April chastises Cheryl for embracing her cultural roots and being an outspoken supporter for Aboriginal rights, Cheryl is deeply critical of her sister for embodying and reproducing racist assumptions about Aboriginal people. Over the course of the novel, both girls deal with racially motivated violence, and their relationship deteriorates because of their vastly different perspectives on their Métis heritage. Cheryl struggles with addiction, survives an abusive relationship, whereas April is violently raped, and contends with the racism of her husband's family. Once April leaves her husband and relocates to Winnipeg to rekindle her relationship with Cheryl, she learns the extent of her sister's suffering. In the end, April is unable to prevent her sister from committing suicide, but she learns that her sister has an infant son Henry, whom she commits to raising. Like *Push* and *Stone Butch Blues*, the novel ends on a hopeful tone, as April sees the Métis people as *her* people.

These texts can be interpreted in divergent ways; on one hand they set the stage for compassionate reader responses, but on the other the racial stereotypes at play in both texts can also allow readers to justify withholding their compassion from the female protagonists. In this chapter, I draw from Martha Nussbaum and Lauren Berlant's discussions of compassion, and explore how anger can complicate this debate. On one hand, Nussbaum argues that compassion builds a metaphorical bridge between two people who might not share another connection. For Nussbaum, compassion functions as a gift that one person

can give to another. On the other, Berlant argues that compassion erases the specificity of the suffering of others because a person cannot escape their own subject position, and is a gift that does little to remedy social stratification. In this chapter, I contend that while compassion might build Nussbaum's metaphorical emotional bridge between the reader, for the Raintree sisters, and/or Precious, compassion might also erase the specificity of their suffering. Further, in light of the graphic descriptions of violence and the discussion of racial stereotypes at play in both texts, readers may also opt to give or withhold the gift of their compassion. I extend Berlant and Nussbaum's discussions and contend that while compassion has many benefits and useful political functions, it can also be a limiting affective response as it allows a person to prop themselves up as a moral actor under the premise that they have identified oppression, and are now displaying the correct social response. It is important to note that I am not arguing that compassion necessarily leads to complacency, nor am I arguing that my reading is the only analytical possibility. Rather, I develop this critique to underline the limits of compassion, and to complicate debates about this affective response, which have largely adhered to a binary structure whereby it is useful or limiting. However, if we focus on anger in both texts, we can usefully complicate these debates. Both novels follow a similar narrative pattern: once the author has set the stage for compassionate reader responses, both texts then describe graphic and disturbing violent incidents. Precious, Cheryl, and April express intense anger after this violence, and in the wake of this abuse, they go on to imagine themselves as white, middle-class, physically attractive, or as famous, identifications that they imagine will protect them from harm. I contend that this anger and longing interrupts potentially compassionate reader responses that might erase the specificity of April and Precious's suffering. This anger goes beyond

interrupting racist stereotypes, as it also interrupts the potential moral propping of the reader that is made possible through compassion, reminding them that they likely benefit from some sort of social privilege that protects them, to some extent, from harm. Ultimately, I contend that by reading anger along side of compassion, the anger of marginalized groups can help us account for the shortcomings of compassion without dismissing compassion entirely.

The fourth chapter of this research project is entitled “Writing the Past and Memory Keeping: Linking Anger and Nostalgia to the Home”, and it explores the intersections between anger and nostalgia in Joyce Carol Oates’s 1993 novel *Foxfire* and *We Were the Mulvaney*s, which was published in 1996. *Foxfire* follows a group of young women who band together to create the girl gang FOXFIRE (Oates’s capitals). Maddy Wirtz is the novel’s narrator and official memory keeper, and the narrative trajectory is comprised of Maddy’s notes, old journal entries, and personal recollections of her youth, which she combines to give voice to FOXFIRE’s history. Led by Legs Sadovsky, the founding members of FOXFIRE Rita, Maddy, Legs, and Goldie form the gang to protect each other from gender-based violence, to enact vengeance upon the men who do them harm, and to escape their violent homes. Set in 1950s upstate New York, the girls contend with violence and abuse that is not only gendered, but is also the product of their positioning as young women from a poor or working class neighborhood. The town’s inhabitants do not look favorably upon the gang, particularly in the wake of their theft of a car, and ensuing police chase, and Leg’s confinement to a correctional facility. Once Leg’s sentence has elapsed, the gang members purchase a run down house in order to live as an all-women’s commune, and they commit crimes to pay for their daily needs. As the gang increases its numbers, tensions

grow among the members, particularly surrounding the issue of allowing racialized women to join their group. FOXFIRE ultimately disbands following a failed kidnapping, and Legs is never heard from again.

Similarly, Judd (the family's youngest son) is the narrator of *We Were the Mulvaney's*, and as he chronicles his family's history, he also gives voice to his family members' multiple and contradicting perspectives. This narrative traces the downfall of the prominent Mulvaney, which is comprised of patriarch Mike, his wife Corinne, and siblings Mike Jr., Patrick, Marianne, and Judd. The narrative traces the family's demise in the wake of Marianne's rape. Unable to face his daughter following her assault, father and patriarch Mike Mulvaney sends Marianne to live with a distant relative, and refuses to speak to her once she has left home. In her absence, the family's grief overshadows Marianne's suffering, and the novel eventually centers on Patrick's plot to abduct his sister's rapist. The family eventually becomes estranged from one another: Mike Sr. develops an addiction to alcohol, Corinne and Judd suffer domestic abuse by his hand, Patrick attends Cornell and does not return home, and Marianne moves from one place to the next, eventually marrying and having children. As in *Stone Butch Blues*, *Push*, and *In Search of April Raintree*, the novel ends on a hopeful note. In the final pages of this narrative, Mike Sr. has died, and the remaining members of the Mulvaney family have come together for a family reunion. *We Were the Mulvaney's* and *Foxfire* have similar narrative styles, as neither follows a linear chronology, but rather, moves forward and backwards in time, and from one perspective to the next in order to chronicle the history of an insular group.

In this chapter, I explore the relationship between anger and nostalgia. Through the use of a multivocal narrative, the motion between past and present, and through discussions

of the home, Oates weaves nostalgic elements throughout both texts. Feminist thinkers have argued that nostalgia leads to idyllic recollections of the past, and further conceals domestic violence that is already hidden from view. However, I contend that nostalgia allows Maddy and Judd to include themselves into a history from which they are largely excluded. Rather than re-constructing the idyllic home through nostalgia, Oates uses it to foreground the abuse that is often concealed within the domestic realm. Specifically, in both texts, Judd and Maddy deploy nostalgia to distinguish between dominant accounts of their respective traumas (gleaned through either newspaper articles, common perceptions in their communities, or dominant narratives about violence against women) and their own recollections, which depart significantly from these dominant discourses. Both narratives are characterized by intense anger, as both the protagonists, as well as those who surround them, voice anger not only at the multiple injustices they face, but also at the erasure thereof. In this chapter, I argue that rather than function as a yearning for a time or place that is long past (or that did not exist at all), nostalgia enables an emotionally complex form of remembering. By deploying nostalgia to look at and chronicle the past, and by using nostalgia to interrogate dominant accounts of past events, Maddy and Judd are able to link their anger to the trauma and oppression they experience. Rather than rearticulate the ideal of the home, this chapter illustrates how subjugated groups can use nostalgia to look to the past and link their anger to the violence that is sometimes concealed within the home, and to interrogate the construct of the idyllic home altogether.

Following these chapters and to conclude this project, I will briefly touch upon feminist critiques of reason, which inform this dissertation as a whole. Each of these chapters works against binary thinking, as bifurcated distinctions between men/women, mind/body

and other binaries ultimately support the primacy of reason, and the devaluing of emotion, that continues to inform the dismissal of women's anger. Feminist thinkers have invested a significant amount of time and energy to critiquing reason, and following in this tradition, I draw from these debates in my conclusion to illustrate that working against binary thought sets the stage for new and nuanced discussions about women's anger. My aim, like that of the feminist thinkers whose work is integral to my research, is not to argue that emotion functions *like* reason and is a way of knowing, as this logic merely substitutes one centre of knowledge for another. Rather, I hope to illustrate that anger, like reason and other forms of knowing, is one of many important ways of interacting with and responding to the world. It is also important to note that although my dissertation explores alternative functions of anger, this is not an exhaustive study. For every subject position, geographic location, and political context, there will likely be a corresponding expression of anger that can function in any number of ways. Given the impossibility of conducting an exhaustive study of the ways anger can function outside of binary thought, my aim in this dissertation is to begin to explore alternatives to this logic.

While I outline the reasons that have led me to focus my analysis on novels written by women in the theories and methodologies chapter of this dissertation, it is also important to account for why I chose the texts that form my archive. This is significant because at first glance, they seem relatively unconnected, with the exception of their common origin in Canada and the United States. Taken together, my primary sources function as an example of Derrida's concept of an archive, which he describes at length in his lecture and text "Archive Fever". Derrida's analysis of archives engages with Freud's understanding of the archive, and its relationship to psychoanalysis. While Derrida's discussion of the intersections

between the archive and Freud is beyond the scope of this dissertation, Derrida's discussion allows me to account for the ways the primary sources in this dissertation fit together. According to Derrida, there is a fluid relationship between the archive and the materials encompassed therein: an archive takes shape through its contents, as well as in relation to external bodies of knowledge that inform it (14). For Derrida, an archive underlines the importance of one narrative, act, or sequence of events by including documents that recall a particular set of circumstances while suppressing others through their exclusion. Through this simultaneous process of inclusion and exclusion, "the archivization produces as much as it records the event" (17). Derrida goes on to explain that archiving texts or other artifacts is an act of repetition, and that the content of an archive and the story an archive might tell is not only distinguished in part by the texts it excludes, but is also accomplished through a repetition of the themes and texts located within the archive itself. As a result, while an archive both creates and tells a story, it cannot make a claim to truth or impartiality, as the archive cannot exist outside of the event or events it remembers. Specifically, an archive is not an objective means of recording the past, nor is it a linear historical account. Rather, an archive shapes and narrates a particular story from a specific perspective. Ultimately, Derrida's discussion centers on the contradictions and tensions between the production and maintenance of an archive as a "true" representation of the past, and the reality that there can be no objective truth from the outset (59).

Many affect and Queer theorists have drawn from Derrida's notion of archive to inform their own scholarly work. For example, Ann Cvetkovich draws from Derrida's discussion of the archive to inform her book *An Archive of Feelings*. Cvetkovich's builds her archive using a diverse collection of primary sources such as novels, performance art, and

music. For Cvetkovich, these sources function together as an archive of Queer trauma that specifically maps the ways trauma intersects with other emotional responses and states. Cvetkovich's archive and her analysis are guided by the conviction that studying the present can both transform how we analyze the past, as well as historicize sexuality in new and important ways (10). Informed by Derrida's analysis of archives, Cvetkovich cautions the reader that her archive is not exhaustive in content, nor does it give rise to an all-encompassing survey of feelings. Rather, Cvetkovich's scholarly work foregrounds examples of

how affective experience can provide the basis for new cultures [...], an exploration of cultural texts as repositories of feelings and emotions, which are encoded not only in the content of the texts themselves but in the practices that surround their production and reception. (7)

Similarly, affect theorist Sara Ahmed describes the collection of primary sources that comprise *The Promise of Happiness* as an archive, but unlike Cvetkovich whose archive centers on trauma, Ahmed's collection explores various conceptions of happiness, or emotional states that can be read as manifestations of joy. Ahmed explores these "happiness scripts" in order to map the ways they intersect with notions of unhappiness, and her archive "takes shape through the circulation of cultural objects that articulate unhappiness with the history of happiness" (18). Here, Ahmed's diverse archive underlines the reality that happiness is not only inextricably linked with unhappiness, but that joy, sadness, and longing circulate within cultural texts, and varies based on specific historical contexts. Finally, in *The Queer Art of Failure*, Queer theorist Judith Jack Halberstam uses archive to denote a group of cultural texts (such as novels, films, comics, and animation) that can tell a story, denote

social trends, and communicate a range of emotional states and responses related to failure. Halberstam locates her “archive of failure” in relation to other archives, such as a “camp archive”, a “gay archive” and an “archive of feminist melancholy” (110) in order to map the ways these varied texts can function as alternative modes of success rather than simply as examples of a failure to thrive. Ultimately, Halberstam’s discussion interrupts the notion that failure is necessarily a negative outcome, and explores the ways our inability to reproduce or adhere to dominant conceptions of success can actually function as alternative sites for happiness, fulfillment, and political promise.

Following Ahmed, Cvetkovich, and Halberstam, and drawing from Derrida’s analysis of the archive in “Archive Fever”, I also frame my research project as an archive. My archive explores alternative functions for anger, maps ways anger connects to, and is impacted by, other emotions and affects, and ultimately connects anger to broader social conditions and issues. Because Derrida maintains that an archive is characterized by acts of repetition and exclusion to tell a fragmented and incomplete story (or, tells one of many possible stories), it is important to underscore the way my dissertation follows this motif. Through the repletion of fragmented narrative patterns, graphic depictions of violence, and multiple, contradicting claims to truth, the novels that form my archive illustrate that anger is tied to other emotional states such as nostalgia, trauma, and compassion, as well as ongoing political battles and social movements. I exclude male expressions of anger (specifically male authors) because I am particularly interested in the way the novel can function as a venue through which women, or individuals located in relation to the identity woman, engage with anger outside of ongoing debates surrounding the legitimacy of their emotional responses that I have mapped in the introduction to this dissertation. My archive is also

solely comprised of North American writers, not because anger in other geographic locations is unimportant, but because global position has a significant impact of the ways women express anger, what shape this anger takes, and the theories and methods that might usefully guide a study of anger. Divergent global positions have varying histories of colonialism, violence, cultural norms, and societal expectations that lead to trauma and anger being manifested in very different ways. It would be impossible to speak coherently about violence as it appears in the novel without limiting the geographic scope of this project. I have also chosen these texts because the trauma that the characters in these novels face is inextricably linked to Canadian and American social norms or policies, such as the idyllic domestic sphere, work for welfare, the Indian Act, normative identities, and emerging neo-liberal notions of work and success. I am particularly interested in texts by Oates, Sapphire, Feinberg, Morris, and Mosionier as these writers explore suffering that dominant institutions and ways of thinking often re-frame as the product of the poor choices, poor work habits, or personality defects of marginalized groups. Ultimately, my desire to foreground alternative functions of anger is guided by Cvetkovich's work that focuses on forms of trauma that are obscured within dominant discourses. As Cvetkovich explains:

I write about the lesbian locations rather than more obvious sites of geopolitical catastrophe classified under the rubric of trauma: war, genocide, the Holocaust. The feelings and events that draw my attention don't necessarily command the national and transnational publicity that that such traumas generate. In fact, these kinds of affective experiences that I explore here are lost in discourses of trauma that focus only on the most catastrophic and widely public events. (*Archive 3*)

Guided by Cvetkovich, I have chosen to frame my dissertation as an archive because my primary sources allow me to explore alternative functions for anger in a way that is not necessarily limited to linking anger to oppression, but that also does not foreclose that type of analysis. Moreover, by studying the anger of the protagonists in my primary sources, I am able to use each novel as a “case study” to explore the ways anger can function outside of binary logic without foreclosing the possibility for further and divergent analyses of women’s anger.

I have chosen to explore each of the novels within this dissertation as “case studies” for a number of reasons. Sociologist John Gerring explains that most case studies seek to elucidate the features of a broader population, and that ultimately, they are about something larger than the case itself (345). For Gerring, a case study is an analysis of a single work or example of a broader phenomenon, and is a method that is growing in popularity among scholars in fields such as political theory, which are not usually associated with this way of conducting research (341). Ultimately, Gerring defines a case study as “an intensive study of a single unit for the purpose of understanding a larger class of (similar) units” (342). Following Gerring, I understand the primary sources that comprise my archive as case studies, as they function as examples of phenomenon (gender based violence along the lines of race, class, ability, and other markers) that allow us to consider how these might operate among broader populations. While the instances of violence and anger are specific to each author and each narrative, they do point towards broader trends within Canada and the United States, such as government policies like Work for Welfare and the Indian Act, the links between race and poverty, and the widespread nature of sexual violence. Although each novel functions as one specific instance of anger within the novel, my analysis of the cases

that comprise my dissertation explores these novels in light of feminist debates surrounding anger. Ultimately, I hope that my research suggests that these individual cases are also part of a broader trend where women use the novel and other creative genres to explore anger.

My archive is comprised of relatively recent literature for a number of reasons. I hope that by re-visiting contemporary manifestations of anger, and exploring how they interact with and complicate other emotional states, I can not only begin to make sense of suffering that is often ignored, but also develop new methodologies to explore anger. As an archive, my primary sources explore alternative functions for anger from varying subject positions: queer, Black, Aboriginal, and middle-class, among others. While there are notable exclusions (such as immigrant writing, and protagonists who are approaching old age), this collection attempts to map diverse subject positions or case studies within a North-American context. Further, I hope that my decision to include a variety of subject positions will underscore Derrida's assertion that an archive is not an objective representation of the past, but rather a fragmented re-telling of events. In this case, the multiple and sometimes conflicting examples of anger, and the ways this anger interacts with other emotions, reaffirms Derrida's claim that archive tells a fragmented and incomplete narrative of the past.

A significant instance of thematic repetition within my archive is that of sexual trauma and rape, as well as the relationship between this abuse and ongoing discussions of feminist anger. My decision to include novels that graphically depict sexual violence, but that also map the ways sex, gender, race, class, and ability inform this abuse, foreground the specificities that are lost in an ongoing conception of sexual violence as universal female threat, which I will further discuss in the third chapter of this project. One of the stories this archive tells through the inclusion and repetition of diverse female voices is an

understanding of sexual violence s an act or a set of actions that are manifested in differing ways, and the modes of thinking that obscure or erase this violence.

### Organizing an Archive

My choice to include many of my primary sources in this archive goes beyond simply the commonalities between these texts' narrative patterns, themes, geographic location, and the use of characters as case studies of anger. My hope is that this dissertation will also add to existing literary scholarship about the texts that form my archive. As I prepared each chapter, I was consistently surprised by the gaps in scholarship surrounding many of the texts in my archive. For example, there is little literary criticism addressing McGarry Morris's novel *A Dangerous Woman*. This proved to be a startling discovery; not only did the New York Times review *A Dangerous Woman* in 1991, the influential newspaper declared that Morris was "one of the most skillful new writers at work in America today."<sup>1</sup> Later that year, *Time Magazine* listed *A Dangerous Woman* as one of the top five novels of the year<sup>2</sup>. While this praise alone might not make *A Dangerous Woman* a likely candidate for scholarly analysis, Morris has also been nominated for prestigious awards such as *The National Book Award*<sup>3</sup>, and the *PEN/Faulkner Award for Fiction* for her previous work. Moreover, Morris is the author of eight critically acclaimed novels (as well as other plays and short stories), the most recent of which was published in 2011. Finally, Morris's relevance to the American cultural landscape is evidenced by the popularity of her work: many of her novels (including *A Dangerous Woman*) have been made into feature films, and

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.nytimes.com/1991/01/04/books/books-of-the-times-longing-to-be-normal-but-never-acting-normally.html>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,974599,00.html>

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.nationalbook.org/nba1988.html#.Ub9LtxwcPw4>

*Songs in Ordinary* *Songs in Ordinary Time* appeared in Oprah's book club in 2007<sup>4</sup>, illustrating its potential to reach a wide audience.

Whereas *A Dangerous Woman* is not discussed by literary critics, scholars have devoted considerable energy investigating Lesley Feinberg's text *Stone Butch Blues*. While I outline the scholarly discussions about this text in the second chapter of this dissertation, and flag the ways these discussions ignore the role of anger in this text, it is important to provide some background information about Feinberg, and explain why I have chosen to discuss *Stone Butch Blues* along side of Morris's text. Lesley Feinberg is an American writer, public speaker, and activist, whose novel *Stone Butch Blues* won the American Library Award for Gay and Lesbian Literature<sup>5</sup>, as well as the 1994 LAMBDA Literary Award for excellence in LGBT literature<sup>6</sup>. Feinberg is a prominent and influential speaker and activist, acting as an outspoken advocate for transgender rights, workers rights, and various anti-capitalist organizations. I decided to study *Stone Butch Blues* and *A Dangerous Woman* together as they both explore the egregious gender based violence that liminal subjects face when they eschew or cannot reproduce normative gender roles. Where Morris's text explores the ways feminine norms exclude women who are unattractive, mentally ill, and unable to replicate domestic ideals, Feinberg's text maps the violence of imposing these gendered assumptions onto individuals from the outset. Where Feinberg clearly illustrates the horrific violence that gender outsiders face on a daily basis as they eschew hegemonic norms, Morris details the ways many women are unable to replicate these norms, in spite of their best efforts to do so.

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<sup>4</sup> <http://www.oprah.com/oprahsbookclub/Marry-McGarry-Morris-Book-Songs-In-Ordinary-Time>

<sup>5</sup> <http://transgenderwarrior.org/about.html>

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.lambdaliterary.org/interviews/06/01/interview-with-leslie-feinberg/>

Taken together, both texts show the multiple and contradictory ways gender and sexual norms police bodies, the ways these norms render some individuals susceptible to extreme violence, the ways these norms erase the violence that underpins their very existence, and the range of affective responses that occur once this exclusion takes place.

The third chapter of this dissertation engages with Sapphire's *Push* and Beatrice Culleton Mosionier's *In Search of April Raintree*. Prior to the release of *Push*, Sapphire was best known as an American poet and performance artist, and her work received widespread critical acclaim. In fact, Sapphire began writing *Push* in relative secrecy, until a literary agent came across the first 100 pages. Sapphire's literary agent prompted a bidding war between publishing houses, and Vintage Publishing finally paid Sapphire an advance of \$500 000 to complete this novel<sup>7</sup>. Financed in part by Oprah Winfrey, *Push* was made into a movie entitled *Precious* that debuted at the prestigious *Sundance Film Festival* in 2009. Sapphire's second novel *The Kid* follows *Precious*'s son Abdul following his mother's death from AIDS. While I briefly sketch Sapphire's background when I map the autobiographical elements in *Push*, it is also important to note that like *Stone Butch Blues*, critics have yet to discuss the function of anger in this text. This is a significant gap in research, as I will explain later in this project, the stereotypes that plague Black women in the United States portray them as inherently angry and irrational, and these stereotypes characterize the political landscape against which *Push* is written.

Similarly, there is an important body of scholarly work surrounding Aboriginal author Beatrice Culleton Mosionier's novel *In Search of April Raintree*. Like debates surrounding *Push* however, these scholarly debates have yet to explore the function of anger

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<sup>7</sup> <http://www.standard.co.uk/lifestyle/how-author-created-film-character-precious-through-her-own-sexual-abuse-6735992.html>

in this narrative. While I explore the biographical elements of this text in the third chapter of this dissertation, it is important to add that like *Push*'s reception in the United States, this novel is widely popular in Canada. Teacher's guides that accompany *In Search of April Raintree* are widely available in print and in digital format, foregrounding this novel's longstanding place within Canadian secondary school curriculum. In fact, the *First Nations Education Steering Committee* (FNESC) recommends a number of resources that will help educators teach *In Search of April Raintree* within the parameters of grade 12 English classes<sup>8</sup>. Moreover, like Sapphire and McGarry Morris, Culleton Mosionier is also the author of other literary works, such as a play and a short film. I have chosen to discuss these texts together as they emerge from similar traditions of postcolonial and post emancipation writing that chronicles both the horrors of colonialism and slavery, as well as the lasting psychic, cultural, emotional, and physical devastation that followed. While both texts graphically depict the suffering of young racialized women in Canadian and American contexts, I have chosen to include these texts into my archive as they both explore the ways government policies such as Work for Welfare and the Indian Act deploy longstanding stereotypes and blame racialized women for their suffering. Moreover, both texts have similar narrative styles, and use intertextual elements to locate the stories of racialized women in relation to, and against, dominant historical accounts of slavery and colonialism, as well in relation to counter-narratives thereof. Specifically, *Push* features lengthy intertextual nods to Langston Hughes, Alice Walker, and follows a narrative trajectory that pays homage to Tony Morrison's novel *The Bluest Eye* and Walker's *The Color Purple*. *Push* also explores trauma such as the American AIDS crisis, and points towards some of the

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<sup>8</sup> <http://www.fnesc.ca/curriculum/english/efp12/resources>

tensions within the civil rights movement by juxtaposing Farrakhan's black nationalism with Ms. Rain's gentle reminders to Precious that a fight for justice cannot succeed when it is informed by homophobic or violent beliefs and actions, which are reminiscent of Audre Lorde's feminist praxis. Similarly, *In Search of April Raintree* addresses the longstanding impact of residential schools and the Indian Act, foregrounding the devastating ramifications these have had on the Métis, whose exclusion from this act did not make them immune to the horrors of colonialism. Moreover, Cheryl's school assignments and re-writing of her primary school history textbooks foregrounds an alternative Métis history that is continuously elided by dominant accounts of settlement. Like Precious's journey to literacy, Cheryl's counter-narratives are significant acts of rewriting history that I wanted to include in my archive.

My decision to focus on Joyce Carol Oates's *Foxfire* and *We Were the Mulvaneys* is motivated, in part, by the relative absence of literary criticism of these works<sup>9</sup>. Like the other texts in my archive, this is a gap in knowledge and scholarship that needs to be addressed. However, it is also important to note that many of Oates's other texts have given rise to considerable scholarly discussion, and this gap might be attributable to the sheer volume of her work. Oates has written over 50 novels, 36 collections of short stories, 36 children's books, as well as plays, volumes of poetry, and works of non-fiction. Oates is a very prominent American author. She has won the National Book Award for her 1969 novel *Them*, and has been nominated for the Pulitzer prize three times between 1992 and 2000. Oates has taught at Princeton since 1978, and some of her former students, such as Jonathan Safran Foer, have gone on to be critically acclaimed authors<sup>10</sup>. I have chosen to study *Foxfire*

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<sup>9</sup> I will explore the literary criticism surrounding these two texts in the fourth chapter of my dissertation.

<sup>10</sup> <http://paw.princeton.edu/issues/2013/03/06/pages/4813/>

and *We Were the Mulvaneys* together as they both use a fragmented narrative style, they explore and disrupt idyllic or utopic constructions of the domestic realm, and they feature angry female characters and/or an angry narrative tone. Moreover, I have included these texts into my archive as they emphasize a common theme within all of the texts I explore in this dissertation: the abuse and violence that is often hidden within the domestic realm. This is particularly important within the context of my archive as women's anger is often most coherent within the parameters of the home. Ultimately, this chapter illustrates that the home often gives rise to women's anger, which is an important step in disrupting the construct of the utopic domestic realm. While angry responses to domestic abuse disrupt constructions of the home as the site of domestic bliss, *Foxfire* and *We Were the Mulvaneys* extend this reading. Finally, the theories of nostalgia that I use in this chapter explore the links between this form of remembering and the home, suggesting that nostalgia is an ideal means to interrogate, rather than reaffirm, this construct.

Finally, it is also important to note that my choice to focus on anger is politically motivated. Barbara Tomlinson argues "strategies of textual vehemence continually deny readers the comfort of positioning themselves as outside of the problems [they] challenged" (100). Even though we might not feel that we are directly contributing to the erasure of liminal subjects, to racism, or to homophobia, anger reminds us that we are, in some way, implicated in the suffering of others. Further, anger also foregrounds the reality that although we give our compassion or work for social change, we are all implicated in a matrix of power, privilege, and oppression that renders some people more visible than others. As long as we are willing to listen, anger, particularly anger outside of binary logic, can force us to confront this reality.

## **Chapter 1: Theories and Methodologies**

This research project nuances the construction and function of anger in contemporary Canadian and American women's fiction. Drawing from affect theory, feminist theory, and guided by an intersectional analysis, I contend that the novel can function as a productive space where women can express anger outside of dominant ways of thinking that trivialize or ignore this emotional response. In this chapter, I will outline the theories and methodologies that will guide this project, and discuss how I will account for the tensions between them. Once I have located my research within the broader parameters of affect theory, feminist discussions surrounding anger, and feminist methodologies, I will discuss how these theories and methods comprise the framework will guide my research. Finally, I will outline why I have chosen to dedicate this research project to literary analysis, and explain why the novel is an important and productive venue for women to voice anger.

### **Intersectionality**

Before outlining the theories and methodologies that guide this research project, it is important to note that my doctoral research is grounded in an intersectional analysis. Intersectionality signals the notion that subjectivity is constituted by mutually reinforcing vectors of race, gender, class, and sexuality (Nash 2). Simultaneously a theory and a methodology, an intersectional approach views social categories such as gender, race, class, and ability (among others) as intersecting, shifting, and experienced by individuals and groups in differing ways. In her analysis of feminist identity politics, Kimberle Crenshaw proposes intersectionality as a means to account for individuals and groups who identify with more than one identity category (178). For Crenshaw, an intersectional approach allows individuals to locate their subject positions at the intersections of various social categories

rather than privilege one facet of their identity, or one political alliance, over another.

Identifying individual subject positions is a complex process that involves more than simply locating an identity within the parameters of the discursive categories male/female, Black/white or heterosexual/queer. Rather, when identities are understood as a matrix where one vector intersects with and complicates another, a more complete picture of a person or groups' social location emerges. For Crenshaw, an intersectional approach to understanding oppression is an important step in the process of accounting for difference within political alliances, as "ignoring difference within groups contributes to tension among groups" (178). Crenshaw goes on to explain that an effort to understand identities and subjectivities as intersectional should be a key tenet in both feminist and anti-racist theory and politics (179). In relation to this dissertation, an intersectional approach will allow me to account for the significant role identities such as race, class, sexuality, and ability play in the contradictory reception of women's anger that enable some women to express anger while others have considerably less freedom.

It is also important to address the problematic nature of the term woman, particularly as I purport to explore the ways women deploy anger within the novel outside of the construction and policing of binary oppositions such as male and female. In her analysis of gender and embodiment, Iris Young uses the term feminine strategically, arguing this term points towards the

structures and conditions that delimit the typical *situation* of being a woman in a particular society, as well as the typical way in which this situation is lived by the women themselves. Defined as such, it is not necessary that *any*

woman be ‘feminine’ - that is, it is not necessary that there be distinctive structures and behavior typical of the situation of women (144).

For Young, the term feminine underlines a particular set of assumptions and behaviors, within a particular context, at a specific point in time. While a woman does not necessarily have to exhibit feminine behavior, she nonetheless lives in relation to the actions, privileges, and oppressions encompassed within and linked to this term. Within the parameters of this dissertation, my use of woman departs from Young’s discussion of feminine; I understand woman to designate a set of social expectations, behaviors, ways of living within one’s body and moving through the world that inform a person’s behavior and experiences. While individuals may work to escape or transgress normative gender identifications, they continue to live in a social world that polices gender. As a result, it is very difficult to escape the expected behaviors and traits assigned to each side of these (allegedly) mutually exclusive gender categories. These expectations thus have an impact on both individuals who self-identify as women, as well as on those who are violently located within this category by others. Problematizing the term woman is particularly important as I discuss Lesley Feinberg’s text *Stone Butch Blues* in this dissertation. Feinberg, as well as her protagonist Jess Goldberg, eschew normative gender categories and prefer to exist in the liminal space between male and female. For Feinberg, this is a political choice, as sie<sup>11</sup> states:

Each person should have the right to choose between pink or blue tinted gender categories, as well as all other hues of the palette [...]. I am a human being who would rather not be addresses as Ms. Or Mr., ma’am or sir. I prefer

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<sup>11</sup> Feinberg prefers gender-neutral pronouns such as sie, hir, and ze. As a result, when discussing Feinberg’s work, I use these pronouns.

to use gender-neutral pronouns like *sie* (pronounced like ‘see’) and *hir* (pronounced like ‘here’) to describe myself.” (1)

My choice to include Feinberg is also political, as *Stone Butch Blues*, as well as Feinberg’s broader work, poignantly portrays the extreme violence that *sie*, and other gender outsiders, face on a daily basis. In this case, my use of the term *women* points towards an inescapable set of expectations and social norms rather than an identity that aligns with an individual’s own gender identification. Within this dissertation, I will discuss women’s anger as they live within the confines of, or in relation to, the category “woman,” as they are repeatedly and violently located within this binary structure, and as they are confronted with dominant expectations of who a woman is, and how she should behave. Like the category *woman*, other axes of identification also function as axes of oppression that give rise to anger. While I acknowledge the importance of deconstructing hegemonic terms such as *woman*, to regard this category only as a discursive category (rather than deploying this term strategically) might ignore the abuse individuals and groups suffer in relation to this category.

### **Affect Theory**

One of the theoretical perspectives that guides my dissertation is affect theory, which emerged as a response to poststructuralism and the linguistic turn that currently characterizes a great deal of social science research (Phillips & Hardy 3). Although I do not locate my dissertation along side of other scholarly projects within the field of affect theory, this emerging approach, as well as the work of many theorists in this field, are central to my analysis of women’s anger. Ultimately, affect theory will allow me to conduct a more nuanced analysis of my primary sources, using them as “case studies” as examples of alternative functions of women’s anger. According to Patricia Clough, a handful of theorists

and cultural critics made a turn to affect theory in the mid 1990s in response to what they claimed was a shortcoming within poststructuralist theory and deconstruction. Where poststructuralism de-centers the notion of a unified subject by understanding subjectivity as formed through socially constituted categories and norms, affect theory focuses on the affective responses lived by individuals within the parameters of these discursive constructs (Terrada 3). Patricia Clough notes that there is considerable tension between these two theories; if emotional expression depends on subjectivity, the death of the subject points to a death of feeling (2006). In order to account for the role emotions play within our daily lives, affect theory aims to bring emotional responses (or the lack thereof) back into the fold that has been de-centered within poststructural thought. Margaret Wetherell explains that a focus on affect

brings the dramatic and the everyday back into social analysis. It draws attention to moments of resentment, kindness, grumpiness, ennui and feeling good, to the extremities of distress that can result from ill use, and to the intensities of ecstasy. Interest in affect opens up new thinking about nebulous and subtle emotions like *schadenfreude*, or mixed and ambivalent phenomena such as reluctant optimism, intense indifference, or enjoyable melancholy.

(2).

As a result, affect theory will allow me to explore the function of anger outside of the distinctions between “good”, “bad”, “legitimate” and “illegitimate” emotions, and to foreground the ways anger is subtle, overpowering, linked to violence, a passing response, and multiple other functions. Wetherall goes on to explain that affect theorists are sometimes critical of previous research that centers on discourse, and rather, aim to focus on the

relationships between emotions and already formed objects such as institutions, identities, economies, and classes (3). By using affect theory, I am able to explore the links between anger and these objects rather than simply see anger as a response that is produced through discourse. Guided by affect theory, I can map the ways anger interacts with these objects rather than simply see it as an emotional response to them.

While affect generally points towards a focus on emotional states or responses, it is important to note that theorists define affect in varying and contradictory ways. For example, Brian Massumi grounds his analysis of affect in Spinoza's discussion of the same term, and explains that affect is unconscious, autonomous, and un-represented by language or other means of signification (25-27). Conversely, emotion designates affects once they have been named, signified, and circulate within the realm of discourse (27-28). Massumi reiterates these distinctions, and the necessity thereof, by asserting "it is crucial to theorize the difference between affect and emotion. If some have the impression that affect has waned, it is because affect is unqualified" (28). For Massumi, affect exceeds what people can know explicitly, and thus falls into the realm of the obscure, the less known, and the ways bodies respond to the world and to other bodies. In contrast, emotions designate the ways culture, discourses, consciousness, and subjectivity organize bodily states that have registered, that is, that are conscious (219; Wetherell 59). Similarly, Gregory Seigworth and Melissa Gregg see affect as inseparable from corporeality, however, they also explain that affect and cognition cannot be completely separated because thought is both embodied and emerges from the body (3). Because affective states are continuously changing, the bodies that emote these affective responses are also in a continued state of becoming (3). As a result, there is no definitive origin of affect, but rather it operates in the midst of what they term *in-between-*

*ness*, the feelings that circulate around, beside, or between both human and non-human bodies. Affect is thus the name that Seigsworth and Gregg give to the

visceral forces beneath, alongside, or generally *other than* conscious knowing, vital forces insisting beyond emotion- that can serve to drive us towards movement, toward thought and extension, that can likewise suspend us (as if neutral) across a barely registering accretion of force-relations, or that can leave proof of a body's never less than ongoing immersion in and among the world's obstinacies and rhythms, its refusals as much as its invitations. (1)

Other affect theorists build upon Massumi and explore the distinction between cognition and emotion. For example, Megan Watkins argues that affect is the biological component of emotion, and explains that “affect operates independently, accumulating as *bodily* memory that, while both aiding cognition and inducing behavior, and may evade consciousness altogether” (279). Although some affects might be entirely unconscious (and thus distinct from cognition), unconscious emotional responses still have an impact on a person's body, as these originate from within the body.

Margaret Wetherell maps the utility of affect theory, and argues that this approach has the potential to produce rich and nuanced social analysis, as “affect, unlike emotion, is something that has not yet been closed down, represented, labeled, communicated, shaped and structured” (59). Here, the distinctions between affect and emotion seem to be manifested in a way that distinguishes between mind and body: emotion signals a response that is cognitive and has been named (as anger, for example) whereas affect precedes language, signification, and occurs at the bodily level. Although this brief synopsis illustrates that

thinkers are not consistent in their distinctions between mind/body, shaped/unshaped, and affect/emotion, they do write at length about the distinctions between the three.

Although affect theory creates spaces where theorists can explore affective responses and the influence these might have on bodies, as well as how these responses influence relationships between bodies, I am reluctant to embrace the distinctions between affect and emotion. My reluctance is informed by recent scholarship in affect, where thinkers refuse these distinctions, and use terms such as feelings. For example, in her text *Depression: A Public Feeling*, Ann Cvetkovich acknowledges the utility of affect theory, and explains that projects that are grounded in Deleuzian thought have extended the vocabulary that theorists can deploy to explore embodiment and disrupt Cartesian distinctions between mind and body. However, Cvetkovich goes on to explain that she prefers to use the term feeling rather than using affect and emotion because the former is “intentionally imprecise, retaining the ambiguity between feelings as embodied sensations and feelings as psychic or cognitive experiences” (4). Similarly, Margaret Wetherell is critical of Massumi’s distinctions between affect and emotion and explains that the notion that we can draw a distinct line between affect and signification might be impossible. For Wetherell, affect is inextricable from meaning making, as affect folds bodies and meaning/language together (20). While it is important to note that Massumi conceives of affect and emotion as two sides of a coin (and thus distinct but inextricable from one another), my own use of affect follows Wetherell and Cvetkovich and blurs the lines between affect and emotion. Specifically, this dissertation focuses on anger, which, following Massumi, would be classified as an emotion as it is named, represented, and labeled. However, anger has many forms and functions that evade or escape this signifying process. As such, to name it an emotion erases this complexity, but

to locate it within the realm of affect ignores the considerable literature studying and signifying anger, as well as the political utility of this emotion once it is named. Further, this dissertation aims to complicate binary thinking and dualisms, and locating anger as either an affect or an emotion within the separate realms of the mind and the body will undermine this goal. Consequently, although affect theory will enable me to engage with various representations of women's anger outside of dualisms that would privilege rational thought over emotions and embodiment, I will use affect and emotion interchangeably in order to underline my belief that anger is both a cognitive and a bodily function. This strategy will enable me to explore the complex social functions of anger, and to build upon emerging work of affect theorists like Sara Ahmed, Margaret Wetherell, and Ann Cvetkovich who acknowledge their debt to Massumi and his contemporaries, but refuse or complicate the distinction between affect and emotion.

Sara Ahmed's analysis of affect as "sticky" is particularly relevant to my theoretical framework as she foregrounds the interplay between affect and embodiment, exploring the relationship between bodies and the space that surrounds them. Ahmed draws from Freudian analysis to explore how repressing emotions makes the "sticky", that is, how emotions adhere to bodies, construct subjectivities, move from one body to the next, as well as become "unstuck", creating gaps, distinctions, and impasses between subjects (10-15). Ahmed explains that emotions allow us to draw boundaries between subjects and objects (10), and argues, "affect is what sticks, or what sustains or preserves the connection between ideas, values, and objects" (50). Ahmed's use of "sticky" is useful within my work as the body of each female protagonist in my primary sources is coded somehow as Other; they are racialized bodies, young women's bodies, bodies that are "almost beautiful", or bodies that

fall into the liminal space between gender assignments. Once these bodies have been coded as deviant, not only is their anger likely to be dismissed as mental instability, but also other ideas about race, class, ability, or gender “stick” to them and obscure the roots of this anger. Ahmed’s discussion of affect will allow me to explore how relationships between individuals and groups are made possible through shared affect (or, using Ahmed’s terminology, how these bodies might “stick” together) as well as how anger renders some alliances an impossibility.

The female protagonists within my primary sources experience violence in very different ways, and build differing alliances depending on where they are located within a matrix of domination. Iris Young’s discussion of the gendered nature of embodiment can be usefully applied to Ahmed’s discussion of “sticky” affect in order to account for these differences. Young departs her analysis from the position that there are commonalities that are found among women’s experiences of embodiment. While there is no “essence” that women share, Young explains that these common threads are historically specific, and she focuses her analysis on the embodiment of women in the contemporary western world. According to Young, women are located as Other in relation to men, which denies them the subjectivity, creativity, and autonomy that their male counterparts often enjoy. Despite functioning as a man’s Other, Young also explains that a woman is necessarily a subject capable of transcendence, and a woman knows herself to be imbued with many of the socially valued characteristics generally attributed to men. Women’s lives are thus complicated by the tension between existing simultaneously as a human subject capable of transcendence, but also as an object who is continuously denied subjectivity and the ability to transcend (144). Young uses the example of throwing to argue that a woman’s movements

are often characterized by a “failure to make full use of the body’s spatial and lateral potentialities” (145). Young explains that this failure is grounded in two co-existing ways a woman views and inhabits her body. She might lack the confidence to use her body to attain her goals, and she must constantly protect her body from harm (147). If we examine Young’s discussion in light of intersectional feminist theory, it is clear that a woman’s use of these lateral and spatial potentialities in the western world is inextricably tied to the color of her skin, her physical or cognitive abilities, her socioeconomic background, as well as her gender and sexuality. It is also clear that these diverse subject positions will lead women to have varying affective responses as they move through the world (or as their movement is limited).

Drawing from Ahmed and Young, I will explore how the “stickiness” of affect influences the ways in which the female protagonists in my primary sources use the space that surrounds their bodies as they try to reach their goals. As emotions “stick” to women’s bodies in varying ways, women occupy the physical space that surrounds them differently, causing these emotions to “stick further” or become unstuck. Within this research project, I contend that anger “sticks” to bodies, moves between bodies to complicate access to education, alliances, employment, and freedom to transcend. However, anger is also a complex emotion as it can also function as a catalyst for social change and a means to draw attention to subjection. In each of my primary sources, the female protagonist has survived traumatic sexual abuse. The “failure” to protect her body from harm informs how she regards her body, impacts how she uses her body, how she relates to others, and how discourses of Otherness “stick” to her. Further, the affective responses of the female protagonists to their life circumstances, social location, and physical assault “stick” and come “unstuck” as each

text progresses. Within my primary sources, I will explore how anger informs the relationships between the characters in the texts, how it moves between bodies and allows or limits the movement of bodies, distinguishes one body from the next, and is literally worn or inscribed upon bodily surfaces.

Departing from Ahmed's discussion of "sticky", I will also explore how discourses that erase women's anger "stick" to female bodies. Even though these discourses might be incongruent with the lived reality of a female protagonist, these ways of thinking and speaking attach themselves to their bodies, inform how others view them, and sometimes become "unstuck". For example, in relation to the social construction of emotions, medical discourses that frame angry women as irrational and prone to emotional excess (Frye 84) exist alongside of counter-discourses that frame anger as a legitimate response to oppression (Lorde124). However, while Audre Lorde famously asserts that anger can give rise to political strength and foreground structural oppression within feminist groups, the dominant medical discourse is difficult to disrupt as it emerges from a powerful social institution. While these contradictions show how discourse is socially constructed and in flux, social groups often take discursive constructs as "true" or "valid" when they are deployed and reaffirmed by powerful institutions, even when this "truth" obscures other potentially useful forms of knowledge (Ramazanoglu & Holland 89). While many women might feel angry as a consequence of gender-based oppression, this anger is often cast as "bitterness" or "irrationality" through competing discursive trends (Campbell 151), and many women admit to self-censoring rather than name and express their anger (Hercus 53). As a result, women might ignore or downplay their affective responses to violence because of the dominant construct of the angry feminist or the discourse of the irrational angry woman code anger as

socially unacceptable. Conversely, women might also easily recognize their emotional responses as anger through these discourses, strategically deploy the image of the angry feminist to serve political ends, or develop an ambivalent relationship to these constructs. By understanding how these discursive entities “stick” to bodies, I can account for the misalignment between lived experiences and the discourses that often shape them. Further, understanding discourses as entities that can also become “unstuck” accounts for the individual agency women can exercise in forming self-identities outside of inaccurate or partially accurate discursive constructions.

While there are many discursive practices that debase women’s experiences or blame them contributing to their oppression, for the purposes of my doctoral research, I will focus on discourses that downplay, erase, distort, or ignore women’s anger. While this is not an exhaustive list of ways of speaking and thinking that erase women’s anger (if such a list is even possible or desirable), the examples I have outlined in my introduction are particularly relevant to my doctoral work because they are informed by polarizing conceptions of productive/ unproductive responses, reason/irrationality, as well as ongoing distinctions between “good” and “bad” emotional responses. Sara Ahmed notes that “good” affective responses are those associated with social order and getting along such as happiness. In contrast, their “bad” counterparts such as anger give rise to strife and threaten social order. Ahmed points towards the alarming construction of angry individuals and groups who refuse to move past this “bad” emotion as backwards, unproductive, and responsible for discord. For Ahmed, this problematic way of understanding emotional responses ultimately blames subjugated groups for emoting “backwards” or “unproductive” affects, obscuring the injustice and the histories of violence that often give rise to these affective states. Ahmed

states that we must interrogate this construction, because the expression of these “bad” affects plays a pivotal role in reminding us of ongoing injustice. Ahmed argues, “the experience of being alienated from the affective promise of happy objects gets us somewhere. Affect aliens can do things, for sure, by refusing to put bad feelings aside in the hope that we can ‘just get along’” (50). In this instance, when oppressed subjects are asked to overcome their feelings or put aside their anger, they are also asked to uphold of the very hegemonic norms that limit their quality of life. This logic is also problematic as it implies that anger is necessarily “bad” and is antithetical to mutually beneficial social interactions. If we extend Ahmed’s analysis to the aforementioned discussion of feminist anger, and the tendency for this anger to be harshly criticized, it is clear that women are often required to put aside their “negative” feelings and allow gender-based oppression to continue unabated in the name of getting along.

Lauren Berlant outlines another example of the erasure of women’s anger in *The Female Complaint*. Here, Berlant discusses what she terms “women’s culture”, that is, the assumption that women share a body of experiences, interests, and desires, that communicates to them that they are not alone. The aesthetic backdrop for “women’s culture” is politico-sentimental, where structural inequity is framed simply as emotional suffering. The remedy for this anguish is not political transformation, but rather, lies in enabling women to fit into oppressive structures that already exist, or “a longing to feel better in terms one can already imagine inhabiting” (Cohen 334). For Berlant, this culture of shared affect perpetuates the notion that all people suffer in similar ways, and that citizens are unified through this suffering (35). Berlant explains that this sentiment has primarily been deployed by individuals who occupy privileged social locations, and is often used within attempts to

“humanize” those who make tenuous claims to citizenship, or live on the fringes of society.

In this case, sentimentality includes oppressed groups into existing social structures under the premise that everyone suffers, not only obscuring the specificity of this pain, but ignoring that some individuals suffer gravely at the hands of others. Berlant goes on to explain that these strategies

always traffic in cliché, the reproduction of the person as a thing, and thus indulge in the confirmation of the marginal subject’s embodiment of *inhumanity* on the way to providing the privileged with heroic occasions of recognition, rescue and inclusion. In this view, sentimentality from the top down softens risks to the conditions of privilege by making obligations to action mainly ameliorative, a matter not of changing the fundamental terms that organize power, but of following the elevated claims of vigilant sensitivity, virtue, and conscience. (35)

Following Berlant, when a woman’s anger is interpreted as a sign of universal female suffering (or as irrationality or bitterness that is uniquely female), the specificity of that anger is erased. Including an angry woman into the very social systems that oppress her or invalidate her experiences perpetuates marginalization, as the social systems themselves remain unaltered. Further, claims to universal female suffering operate on essentialist assumptions on what it means to be a woman, how women express emotion, and what that emotion can look like. Within this logic, the anger of oppressed groups that falls outside of these normative constructions is rendered incoherent, does not register, or is simply ignored. Within my doctoral dissertation, I will explore how the logic of universal suffering or sameness functions within my primary sources, how it is complicated by other emotional

responses such as compassion, and how anger allows the female protagonists to interrupt the very claims to universal female suffering that erase their rage.

Finally, my analysis of anger departs from past and ongoing feminist debates about anger, embodiment, and emotion. It is important to underline the reality that my doctoral research is indebted to feminist thinkers such as Frye and Lorde, as well as to sociologists and literary critics such as Cheryl Hercus, Patrice McDermott, Rita Felski, Brenda Silver, Sue Campbell, and Naomi Scheman, who are not affect theorists per se, but rather discuss emotion within the parameters of other fields of study. The long and interdisciplinary tradition of feminist scholarship, along with emerging theoretical perspectives such as affect theory, are rich and valuable sources of knowledge that have had a significant impact on my own thinking about emotions, bodies, and axes of oppression. Ultimately, my analysis draws from this scholarship to explore anger as a theme within my archive rather than map the ways the perspectives, approaches, and methodologies associated with affect theory inform my dissertation.

### **Methodology**

How can we make sense of the erasure and misconstruction of women's anger, particularly when this erasure continues despite obvious violence and oppression? What role do social institutions play in the social construction of angry women as irrational, bitter, or simply exaggerating the gravity of this violence? How does the anger expressed by the characters in my primary sources impact their lives, their embodiment, the way they move through the world, or the ways in which their movement is impeded? Finally, how does the novel function as a productive, empowering means to disrupt these constructions, and as an ideal site for women to re-frame the debate surrounding their anger outside of binary logic?

In order to answer these questions, the primary methodology that will guide this dissertation is discourse analysis, particularly Foucault's notions of archaeology and genealogy. It is important to note however, that my understanding of discourse is grounded in Foucault's texts *The History of Sexuality*, and *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, which are widely critiqued by feminist scholars. In order to account for these critiques, I will also make use of feminist discourse analysis within my doctoral research. My use of discourse analysis is further complicated as my theoretical framework is not necessarily compatible with this methodology. While discourse analysis departs from an understanding of experiences as constituted through language (Philips & Hardy 6), affect theory works to bring emotional responses back into the fold that is deconstructed within poststructural thought (Terrada 3). Although affect theorists do not necessarily locate their work in opposition to poststructuralism, Wetherell explains that many thinkers are drawn to affect specifically because it is *not* discourse: "affect seems to index a realm beyond talk, words, and texts, beyond epistemic regimes, and beyond conscious representation and cognition. In short, it is something unfamiliar in social science communities bored with at least 20-30 years of the discursive turn" (19). As such, I will draw from feminist phenomenology to explain how I will account for this tension, and I will ground my use of these theories and methodologies in Sedgwick's notion of reparative reading.

While discourse analysis and affect theory are but two of the many theories and methodologies that inform my doctoral work (and are perhaps not the primary analytical tools I use in this dissertation), they have had a significant impact on my thinking, and it is thus important to define discourse analysis, as well as to map the potential impasse between it and affect theory. Discourse is an elusive term to define. In *The Archaeology of*

*Knowledge*, Michel Foucault clarifies what he intends by the term discourse, explaining that it denotes a

group of verbal performances [...] that which was produced (perhaps all that was produced) by the groups of signs [...] also a group of acts of formulation, a series of sentences or propositions. Lastly [...] discourse is constituted by a group of sequences of signs, in so far as they are statements, that is, in so far as they can be assigned particular modalities of existence [...] discourse can be defined as a group of statements that belong to a single system of formation. (121)

For Foucault, discourses are shaped and altered by social practices, but also give rise to social norms that dictate which practices are socially acceptable. Further, they are decimated from apparatuses of power, and shape social relationships (Howarth 8). David Howarth explains that discourse is more than simply verbal utterances, but rather, “discourses are practices that systemically form the objects of which we speak” (7). Further, different social institutions or disciplines have their own discursive patterns, giving rise to divergent and often contradictory discourses. Consequently, discourses are not fixed or stable, nor do they exist in isolation, rather, they are simultaneously the source and site of struggle, as well as the location of constant contestation of meaning (Mills 16). Caroline Ramazanoglu and Janet Holland explain that Foucault is not preoccupied by what is true or not, but rather, with

how each discourse operates, its history and effects, and the connection between different discourses. He shows how ways of distinguishing between what counts as scientific, true or reliable are themselves consequences for

how scientific discourses are constituted in a particular way of thinking that decides what counts as knowledge. (87)

Within *The History of Sexuality*, Foucault explores the mechanisms that allow discourses to be absorbed and decimated by systems of authority such as psychiatry, medicine, and the church, as well as the role these institutions play in the construction of knowledge. For Foucault, these systems have tremendous power in constructing and reaffirming what is socially acceptable, utterable, or morally sound. As a result, social groups often take discursive constructs as “true” or “valid” when they are deployed and reaffirmed by these institutions even when this “truth” obscures other potentially useful forms of knowledge (Ramazanoglu & Holland 89).

The corresponding methodology of discourse analysis explores how discourse creates and shapes social realities, as well as the process through which social meaning is constituted and disrupted (Phillips & Hardy 13). Rather than depart from the perspective that social categories such as “woman” are given or natural, discourse analysis works “to explore how the socially produced ideas and objects that populate the world were created in the first place and how they are maintained and held in place over time” (6). Discourse analysis foregrounds the ways phenomena and identities are shaped by language, and explores how discourses are constitutive of any social world. It is important to remember discourses also exist outside of, and beyond, texts as extra-discursive practices. As a result, single texts, acts, and constructs are not meaningful individually, but are valuable through their interconnection with other texts, other discourses, and in relation to the nature of their production, dissemination, consumption, and reception. In light of this reality, the methodology of discourse analysis explores how discourses arise, how they are shaped, maps

how they change, and investigates the ways dominant institutions deploy and shape both texts and discourses themselves. Philips and Hardy argue “discourse analysis explores how texts are made meaningful through these processes and also how they contribute to the constitution of social reality by *making* meaning” (5). Because discourse analysis centers on the production of meaning, this methodology will allow me to explore how discourses give rise to constructs such as “the feminist killjoy”, the “angry Black woman”, or the “emotional, irrational, woman”, and their relationship to other discourses surrounding race, geographic location, and sex. Through discourse analysis, I can explore how discourses emerge both within texts, as well as through dominant institutions. Discourse analysis will allow me to read my primary sources as discursive units that can function as productive ways to call attention to the ways of thinking, speaking, and acting that erase women’s anger. Finally through discourse analysis, I can account for the formation of social norms and identities that give rise to the ongoing violence endured by the characters in my primary sources.

Foucault uses archaeology to describe the study of local discourses and the roles these play in the formation of knowledge. Foucault maintains that if we suspend pre-given ways of thinking and speaking, unseen objects and/or statements can emerge from within the discursive field. He goes on to explain that this process illustrates that reality and truth are not pre-given or universal, but rather, emerge from the interactions between the subject and discourse (8-9). The methodology of archaeology allows us to map the emergence of statements and objects from within discourse, and understands meaning as emerging from historical formations (Barker 96). Through archaeology, “man” disappears as a transcendent being, and truth, subjects, and knowledge become socially mediated and specific. Departing from this methodology, Foucault explains that genealogy aims to explore subjugated

knowledges that are marginalized by dominant discourses (Barker 31). For Foucault, once we understand how discourse gives rise to subjects, to history, and truth, we can explore the discursive field to find alternative knowledge that is often hidden from view. For the purposes of my dissertation, archaeology will allow me to map the ways dominant forms of knowledge and discourses frame angry women as irrational, mentally ill, and relegate them to the private sphere. Discourse analysis and archaeology will also allow me to explore the ways in which dominant modes of seeing the world, and the corresponding actions and social norms that emerge from these outlooks, erase the diverse roots of women's anger. Finally genealogy will allow me to study the ways subjugated knowledge emerges from within and in relation to dominant discourses, and to explore how this knowledge undermines, complicates, and interrupts the construction of anger as either a legitimate response to oppression or an irrational emotional response.

Despite the utility of discourse analysis, it is also important to acknowledge the shortcomings of this methodology. Janet Ransom argues that Foucauldian discourse analysis is widely used within feminist praxis as it points to the notion that there is no universal female experience or subject (135). However, Ransom also cautions feminist researchers that Foucault's analysis of discourse risks erasing the feminist notion that women are knowing subjects. For Ransom, feminist methodologies adhere to two key tenets: they call attention to women's varied experiences and epistemologies, and they are grounded in the notion that information is necessarily mediated through the biases of the researcher. As a result, feminist methodologies depart from the notion that there is no neutral vantage point from which an individual can conduct research. Further, feminist researchers often believe that it is not possible to study utterances or discourses in isolation from who is speaking (144). As a

result, the “view from nowhere” from which Foucault maps discursive shifts and changes, and his focus on utterances themselves without exploring who speaks “may itself be a construction of the male possibilities of knowledge” (Bordo 137). Further, Foucault’s discussion of sex and sexuality from an allegedly neutral position is too narrow in scope as it also ignores gender, and thus erases women (McCallum 80). Ransom asserts that feminism needs a discursive analysis where the speaker is present in the study of what is spoken (144), as Foucault’s analysis does little to disrupt the notion that some groups partake in the production of meaning, while others are merely spoken about.

In light of these tensions, feminist discourse analysis is an important methodology within this dissertation, as it will allow me to explore how women participate in the production of meaning, in the formation of discourse, and in the construction of counter-discourses. Scholars who use feminist discourse analysis work to account for the actions of individual speakers within the production of discourse, and also outline how discourses both inform and disrupt ongoing hegemonic norms. Feminist discourse analysis will allow me to account for the ways women live within discursive constructs, which are often incongruous with their individual experiences. Through feminist discourse analysis, I can understand how racist or class-based discourses operate, how they erase women’s experiences, and the multiple ways individual women resist these constructs. I will use discourse analysis as well as feminist discourse analysis within this dissertation as the former will allow me to study my primary sources in light of fluctuating discursive patterns and practices, and to explore the ways they deploy discursive categories such as “woman”. The latter will allow me to account for individual speakers or groups’ participation in the production of knowledge, as well as efforts these groups make to disrupt dominant discourses.

The tension between affect theory and discourse analysis also complicates my choice of methodologies within this research project. As previously discussed, while discourse analysis emerged following the linguistic turn that now characterizes social science and humanities research (Phillips & Hardy 7), affect theory calls attention to emotional responses as they are experienced by individual subjects or groups. The tension between discourse analysis and affect theory is symptomatic of a wider incongruence between poststructural thought and other theories or methodologies that rely on experience (including emotion) as the basis for creating new knowledge. While discourse and affect may not necessarily be congruent, Wetherell argues that trying to separate affect from discourse is a futile project, as “human affect is inextricably linked with meaning-making and the semiotic (broadly defined) and the discursive [...] the main things that affective practice folds or composes together are bodies and meaning making” (20). As a result, Wetherell develops what she calls a practice approach, which sees the individual as the site where multiple sources of information, both affective and discursive, merge (22). While this is certainly a useful intervention, Wetherell does not fully account for the tensions between affect and discourse, as well as the impact one has upon the other. While the body is certainly the site where affect and discourse merge, this framework does not fully explore the ways this merging is contradictory.

Like ongoing debates about the tensions between discourse and affect, feminist debates surrounding whether experience as the basis for knowledge can function as a valid way to produce knowledge have often played out in similarly opposing terms. This debate, as well as feminist interventions to this tension, can be usefully extended to remedy some of the tensions between discourse analysis and affect theory. Many feminist scholars weigh in

on the debate surrounding the role of experience in the production of knowledge following the linguistic turn. For the purposes of this dissertation, however, I will rely on Linda Martin Alcoff and Joan Scott's discussion of discourse and violence against women, and explore their interventions in relation to affect, to posit a possible solution to this tension. I rely on these two thinkers in particular as Alcoff and Scott's exchange follows the same trajectories as the debates surrounding affect and discourse I have previously discussed. I also draw from Alcoff in particular because I sincerely admire her desire to posit a useful solution to a complex theoretical dilemma, one that allows researchers to make use of poststructural theory without falling into a theoretical space where everything becomes a discursive construct.

In "The Evidence of Experience", Joan Scott warns researchers of the dangers of viewing experience as incontestable evidence of truth, and cautions them against using experience as the point of departure for an analysis of identities and oppression. For Scott, this approach not only naturalizes difference, but it also ignores how this difference is established, how it functions, as well as how it creates subjects (777). According to Scott

the project of making experience visible precludes critical examination of the workings of the ideological system itself, its categories of representation (homosexual/heterosexual, man/woman, Black/white as fixed immutable identities), its premises about what these categories mean and how they operate, and of its notions of subjects, origins, and cause. (778)

Here, Scott argues that experience is not the site from which knowledge is produced, but rather, experiences are created within the confines of discursive constructs. Scott points towards the importance of investigating how discursive categories shape subjectivities and

interact with discourse. Although Scott does not directly discuss emotions, these are similar to experience as they are also inextricably linked to discourse. Like experience, the complexity of affect is elided when emotions are read solely as the product of discourse.

Linda Martin Alcoff is critical of the notion that experience is a discursive product, and explains that although “poststructuralism has provided critically useful elaborations of how social meanings are produced and circulated, the pendulum has swung too far toward the elimination of experience’s formative role in knowledge” (252). For Alcoff, this “going too far” means that individual perceptions and experiences are elided as poststructural analysis focuses on how discursive constructs came to be. Alcoff draws from examples of date and marital rape to argue that these crimes occurred before they could be discussed with specific terminology. Once the terms became popularized, more women were able to make sense of their experiences and name the violence they suffered (256). In this example, Alcoff argues that experience is central to the construction of definitions of sexual violence- had women not experienced this violence and shared their stories, definitions of sexual violence would not exist. For Alcoff then, it is important to explore how discursive categories such as date rape and survivor are created and change over time, but we must also call attention to the lived experiences women have within, and in relation to, these categories. In order to make sense of the centrality of experience within discursive constructs, Alcoff proposes that discourse and experience should be understood as “imperfectly aligned with locations of disjuncture” (256), whereby “meaning is produced through the embodied actions of consciousness in the world, some of which involve linguistic practice and some of which do not. Social practice, and thus experience, is not the *result* of discourse, but the *site* where meaning is developed” (260). While Alcoff does not directly address affective responses in

her analysis of the turn to poststructuralism, affect can also be understood as a site where meaning is developed. Departing from Alcoff, and understanding discourse and experience (and thus affect) as imperfectly aligned, I will be able to account for the discursive construction of race, class, sexuality, and mental illness as they function in my primary sources, as well as the discursive constructs they create (such as the “fallen woman”, the “gender outsider”, the “dangerous woman”).

Audre Lorde and Romona Lofton’s discussions about anger provide useful examples of imperfect alignment. For example, Lofton deliberately disrupts the discursive construction of the inherently angry Black woman by using the pen name Sapphire. For Lofton, this image does not communicate an irrational, emasculating Black woman, but rather, evokes the “name of a strong black woman” (Cohen 1). Lofton speaks candidly about her rhetorical use of anger in her poetry, and in her more recent novel *Push*, and argues that women must use their anger and assertiveness to subvert these dominant understandings of Black femininity. For Lofton, the pen name Sapphire communicates “there is something very aggressive and assertive about being a female. We are taught to be very laid back and passive, but if we’re to survive, if we’re to move forward, we have to have that pushing energy” (interview qtd. in Rountree 141). Similarly, renowned Black feminist thinker Audre Lorde also addresses the topic of feminist anger, particularly the rage she feels when she is confronted with the racism of her white feminist peers. For Lorde, this anger is not irrational or an essential hallmark of Black womanhood, but rather, this emotion has tremendous political potential as it can alert feminists to social stratification within their midst (124-133). In these examples, we can read Lofton and Lorde’s discussions as evoking and complicating the familiar discourse of the angry Black woman. Affect theory allows us to foreground the

ways black women use anger and the impact this has on both their written work and their activist projects, as well as to foreground the reality that many Black women like Lorde and Lofton are, in fact, very angry as a response to the racism, sexism, and other oppressions. In this example, imperfect alignment foregrounds Lorde and Lofton's anger along side of both the discourses that render them easily recognizable as angry, while also showcasing their manipulation and re-appropriation of these discursive trends. Through imperfect alignment, I can account for the visceral feeling of anger that many women feel in response to oppression, while also exploring how discourse produces them as angry (and render them socially recognizable as angry), thus setting the stage for a more nuanced and intersectional analysis of that emotional response. Finally, imperfect alignment will allow me to underscore the ways emotional responses are raced, gendered, and aligned with class, while also foregrounding how individuals experience their emotions, or interact with the world through emotions, in relation to these categories. Imperfect alignment will allow me to view experience as informed by, but not limited to, discourse, and to explore how discourses shape how we feel and express emotions while acknowledging facets of these affective responses that might evade discourse altogether. Within the broader parameters of my dissertation, imperfect alignment will allow me to make sense of the experiences that women have within the confines of categories and identities, their affective responses, as well as the incongruence between these constructs and their own experiences.

Feminist literary scholars have begun to develop their own approaches to using discourse and affect in tandem. One important example of this trend is Barbara Tomlinson's text *Feminism and Affect at the Scene of the Argument*. Here, Tomlinson argues that affect within academic discussions of social justice is often policed through 'ideologies of style'

(that is, preconceived notions of how people ought to write and which emotions are ‘appropriate’ for academic discussion) that claim to be neutral but which actually reaffirm current power relations (2). For Tomlinson, this policing has a significant impact on the ways discussions of social justice (and affect) can play out, and our traditional reading practices often reaffirm this policing from the outset. Tomlinson thus sets out to transform current reading practices using a critical tool kit she calls “feminist socioforensic discursive analysis” (2). Tomlinson goes on to explain that feminist socioforensic discursive analysis signals an alternative way of reading that reshapes how we “construe, critique, and transcend the always already gendered nature of public and scholarly texts, to call into question their interpretation, their disaggregation, and the consequences of framing texts as ‘objective’ or ‘subjective,’ as ‘scientific’ or ‘political’” (3). Tomlinson’s approach puts a vast range of texts in conversation with one another, focusing specifically on affect and power, in order to discuss discursive patterns, systemic ways of shaping arguments, and of technologies of power (3). Ultimately, this methodology critiques the institutions of power, and maps the contours of feminist and anti-feminist debates to illustrate the ways deployment of affect is an exercise of power (3-4). Like Tomlinson, my approach explores the ways power informs the ways power operates, and the ways in which power relations allow some groups to make a claim to anger, and to frame this as a logical response to oppression, whereas others are discursively shaped as irrationally or inherently angry. My approach also shares Tomlinson’s focus on readership (particularly the chapter of my dissertation where I explore compassion and anger). However, while my dissertation is indebted to Tomlinson’s scholarship (particularly to her analysis of the trope of the anger feminist and her critique of reason and neutrality), my dissertation also diverges from Tomlinson’s approach. Within the parameters

of my doctoral research, I focus on alternative functions in the novel using, using each of my primary sources as a case study, rather than focusing on the seemingly ‘neutral’ reading strategies that reaffirm the unequal distribution of power.

My approach differs from Tomlinson’s for a number of reasons. As discussed in the introduction to this dissertation, the debate surrounding women’s anger is often couched in polarizing terms, where it is either a legitimate and productive response, or it is a negative and destructive reaction. While Tomlinson usefully explores the ways claims to neutral readership or debate obscures the ideological underpinning of neutrality itself, her method of “unmasking” the underlying effects of current reading practices can be read as an example of Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick’s discussion of the hermeneutics of suspicion, and her use of reparative reading. However, it is also important to add that Tomlinson departs from Sedgwick’s hermeneutics as she usefully proposes feminist socioforensic discursive analysis as an alternative set of approaches. Further, Tomlinson also posits alternative readings of social processes and texts that depart from suspicious readings. As a result, while I will outline the methodology of reparative reading below and explain how it informs my dissertation, it is also important to acknowledge the reality that my research is also inspired by Tomlinson’s commitment to pushing her analysis far beyond simply ‘unmasking’ the underlying ideological underpinnings of current reading practices.

Sedgwick defines the hermeneutics of suspicion as “a quintessentially paranoid style of critical engagement, it calls for constant vigilance, reading against the grain, assuming the worst case scenario and then rediscovering its own gloomy prognosis in every text” (Felski 3). According to Sedgwick, the hermeneutics of suspicion have become a mandatory epistemological path, guided by the imperative to uncover biases in texts, and is grounded in

the principle that we know in advance what we will find within our analysis. For Sedgwick, predicting research outcomes means guarding against surprises, as discovering something unexpected is indicative of the researcher's broader analytical shortcomings. This method forecloses alternative ways of knowing (and new things to understand), as the hermeneutics of suspicion construct these new forms of knowledge as surprises that both readers and researchers must anticipate from the outset (Sedgwick 130-131). In this instance, Sedgwick is not arguing for a return to "paranoid" as a pathologizing diagnosis, nor is she lamenting the absence of sophisticated or celebratory readings of literature. Rather, Sedgwick points to "the oddness of a critical stance so heavily saturated in negative emotion" whereby "the negative has become inescapably, overbearingly, normative" (Felski 3). Sedgwick explains that this type of critical analysis should be one analytical tool among many (Sedgwick 125), and locates her text *Touching Feeling* beside, that is, a place that works to go beyond analytical methods that aim to expose the underlying hegemonic norms, stereotypes, and other problematic features within texts. For Sedgwick, beside offers a location that is not characterized by binaries, and offers shifting and changing analytical possibilities (Felski 8).

The ongoing feminist discussions of women's anger that I outlined in the introduction to this dissertation are informed by paranoid reading. For example, theorists such as Nina Baym work to expose the gendered critiques of women's anger as they appear within theory ("The Madwoman" 45-59). In response to this scholarship, anti-feminist or post-feminist writers such as Hoff-Sommers attempt to uncover the follies of "gender feminists" (that is, feminist thinkers who show that gender is a social construct) and expose the ways "angry feminists" threaten the integrity of academia. Writers such as Susan Faludi then unmask Hoff-Sommers's claims to truth, and dismiss them as anti-feminist propaganda.

This debate follows a seemingly endless feedback loop of similar critiques and counter arguments, where each thinker attempts to “unmask” the follies or shortcomings of the analysis that she critiques. Ultimately, this style of analysis obscures new and nuanced ways of thinking about anger.

In order to create space for alternative readings that are not grounded in the hermeneutics of suspicion, Sedgwick suggests reparative reading. For Sedgwick, reparative reading is located “beside” paranoid textual analysis (rather than in opposition to it), and creates a space where alternative forms of textual analysis are possible. For Sedgwick, to read from a reparative, rather than a paranoid position,

is to surrender the knowing, anxious paranoid determination that no horror, however unthinkable, shall ever come to the reader *as new*; to a reparatively positioned reader, it can seem realistic and necessary to experience surprise. Because there can be terrible surprises, however, there can also be good ones. Hope, often a fracturing, even a traumatic thing to experience, is among the energies by which the reparatively positioned reader tries to organize the fragments and part-objects she encounters or creates. Because the reader has room to realize that the future may be different from the present, it is also possible for her to entertain such profoundly painful, profoundly relieving, ethically crucial possibilities as that the past, in turn, could have happened differently from the way it actually did. (146)

This approach is particularly relevant to my dissertation as I am not interested in exposing some writers as anti-feminist, nor am I concerned with unmasking hegemonic underpinnings of ongoing debates surrounding emotion. Rather, I hope to explore how anger is

complicated, extended, interrupted, or reaffirmed within my primary sources while building upon previous feminist scholarship. A reparative approach will allow me to explore how affect functions in varying ways within each text, and how it is imperfectly aligned with discourse. Further, reparative reading allows me to argue that my primary sources can function as productive ways to reframe the polarizing debate about women's anger, but also as venues to explore the ways in which women's writing brings attention to gender based violence.

### **Literature for Social Change**

Although I have outlined the narrative trajectories of my primary sources within the introduction to this research project, it is also important to explain why I have chosen to focus on the novel rather than other venues where women deploy anger. My decision is motivated, in part, because women have a long history of using the novel as a means to voice their political commitments, and to share experiences that might otherwise go unaddressed (Joannou 2; Felski 150). This is particularly relevant for racialized women, as Patricia Hill Collins explains that Black women in the United States have produced (and continue to generate) knowledge through creative writing, essays, or music. According to Collins, Black women often turn to creative forums because dominant groups and forms of knowledge production often exclude racialized women (5). These exclusionary practices takes many forms; for example, bell hooks argues that traditional methods of producing and sharing knowledge such as theory are often inaccessible to racialized and poor women because of the use of complex language and jargon. hooks is deeply critical of this trend, and argues that matters of style as well as intent and content must be considered as women engage with feminist theory. For hooks

there will be no mass-based feminist movement as long as feminist ideas are understood only by a well-educated few. The educational needs of the undereducated women must be considered by feminist activists if the written word remains the primary medium for the dissemination of feminist ideas.

(113)

Although hooks is discussing feminist theory, many branches of critical theory are also characterized as difficult reads (Silver 341) that are sometimes incomprehensible for individuals who do not have access to post-secondary education. Not only does this language prevent subjugated groups from partaking in the production of knowledge, it also impedes these groups from critiquing the knowledge produced about them, as this information is inaccessible from the outset. As a result, oppositional voices are excluded, preserving the illusion that dominant narratives are accurate because there are few dissenting voices. This exclusion is not a simple oversight, but rather, “the seeming absence of dissent suggests that subordinate groups willingly collaborate in their own victimization” (Collins 4). Through these creative forums, Black women can write themselves back into historical narratives, or create counter narratives that speak to their own experiences (10). As governments and social institutions continue to erase the experiences, and the very existence, of marginal groups (for example, in a Canadian context, the new short form census does not acknowledge the existence of multiple racial groups in Canada), creative forums are increasingly important tools to insure that the experiences and minorities who are excluded from dominant institutions continue to be documented.

Although the novel is not universally accessible, I have chosen to focus on literature as a means to explore alternative functions of anger as my primary sources are characterized

by a narrative style that is not weighted down by jargon and abstract terms. As a result, these texts are more accessible than other written forms, and because they are written for a wider audience, the political messages therein are more likely to resonate among women with similar experiences or political commitments. I have also chosen to focus on the novel as this literary genre creates a space for women to fashion self-representations that are congruent with their reality. Creating relevant and sensitive narratives about the experiences of marginalized groups is a politically important project, as is pursuing literary analysis of these works. In his discussion of knowledge/power, Foucault argues that readers must interrogate who is empowered to speak about particular topics, and continuously question the locations or institutions that validate these utterances as true (55). Collins echoes Foucault's call to interrogate dominant social constructions, and argues that many of the representations of Black women are racist constructs fashioned by dominant social groups who have more power to construct knowledge (and thus "truth") than marginalized groups. As such, these portrayals have had a devastating impact on racialized women. For Collins, as subjugated women commit their experiences and self-definitions to paper, they are able to interrupt dominant narratives that distort or ignore their experiences. Further, by partaking in acts of self-representation, Black women not only reject what has been said about them within dominant ideologies, they are also disrupting the power imbalance that allows them to be defined by dominant groups from the outset (125). For Collins, these self-definitions are essential to the survival of minority groups (123), and although she is speaking specifically about Black female writers, artists, and singers, Collins's comments can be extended to female writers more broadly. By using the novel to fashion their own narratives and self-

representations, women from diverse social locations can make tremendous inroads in validating their experiences.

The novel is also a logical place to explore women's anger as women have a long history of using the novel as a venue through which to express anger. Gayle Green traces the rise of the feminist literary movement in the United States, and explains that following the Second World War, many middle-class women enjoyed new opportunities for work and financial independence. However, these women were also under substantial societal pressure to conform to a domestic ideal that valued their dependence on men, and emphasized their place in the home (9). According to Green, this ideal thwarted the ambitions of many women, and urged them to abandon their careers and return to the home (9). A handful of middle-class women thus turned to fiction in order to critique this social trend, to question the practices that excluded or marginalized them, as well as to write more accurate representations of the negative impact this ideal has on their psyches (Joannou 2). For these women, writing was rooted in political concerns, and in an effort to create communities. These writing projects and communities soon gave rise to consciousness-raising groups within the broader parameters of the second wave of the Women's Movement, and some of these texts took on a distinctly angry tone (3). As a result, women wrote numerous novels within the second wave of the Women's Movement in Canada and the United States that addressed feminist themes (Green 33). Although Green is discussing novels written by women who generally had middle-class concerns (more specifically, hooks argues that racialized women were not forced back into the home as the survival of the family depended on their paid labor), Collins's analysis of Black women's writing illustrates that women who lived at the margins of society also took the pen. The texts I have chosen exemplify this

ongoing trend, as they address and explore the women's marginalization and anger along the lines of racism, sexism, homophobia, transphobia, incest, poverty, and mental illness.

The novel is also an important venue to explore alternative functions of anger as works of literature can function as historical documents. Foucault explains that the document is of increasing importance within dominant institutions that function as locations from where truth is produced and re-produced (56). For Foucault, these documents are varied, and include (but are not limited to) books, written accounts, registers, acts, buildings, institutions, laws, techniques, objects, and customs (7). Once information is committed to some form of document, it is more likely that it will function as the basis upon which new truths are built. Foucault explains that what we understand to be a document can change over time, and the roles documents play in the construction of history are also in flux. Where documents once signaled an attempt to preserve what men have said or done in order to trace a linear progression of history, these have given way to more fragmented recounts of events. Foucault argues that "history is now trying to define within the documentary itself unities, totalities, series, relations [...] history is the work expended on material documents that exists, in every time and place, in every society, either in a spontaneous or in a consciously organized form" (7). As such, once stories of oppression and struggle are committed to paper, they can shed light on experiences and perspectives that are lost within dominant historical accounts and documents.

Within this emerging and fragmented understanding of history, there is increasing room for counter narratives written by marginalized groups who had either been misrepresented within the production of documents, or ignored entirely. Within this research project, I contend that as voices of dissent speak through the novel, these texts can function

as important documents within a shifting historical context that will commit subjugated knowledge and experiences to historical memory. For example, Barbara Foley explains that for many subjugated groups, the novel functions as a place to document history. Foley draws from the example of what she calls Black literature (literature about the experiences of African Americans) to argue that many of these novels are grounded in events that occurred, or are based on documents that existed outside of these narratives, or that pre-date them. According to Foley, this combination of fact and fiction is an important element of African American writing (390), as it calls attention to racial oppression, and foregrounds the horrors of racism and colonialism when other dominant forms of chronicling history obscured or justified them (393). Further, the novel continues to tell a story long after the author is gone, preserving her words as the author intends. Although new interpretative methods will inevitably emerge, the words of the author will remain intact. Finally, because novels are firmly entrenched both within dominant institutions such as universities and also within the broader parameters of popular culture and politics, the novel can function as a means to ensure that voices from the margins who suffer under conservative paradigms are committed to paper, telling “better stories” of women’s lives (Holland and Ramazanoglu 38) than many dominant historical accounts.

## Chapter 2: Anger, Normalcy and the Erasure of Liminal Identities

Normal is a contentious social construct that continues to impact how ideologies and identities are formed, contested, and re-articulated. The Oxford English Dictionary defines normal as “the usual, average, or typical state or condition”, indicating that the term normal points towards something that is commonly occurring, and that often goes unnoticed.

Lennard Davis problematizes the notion that normal is something that is typical or common, and explores how this concept informs how bodies are socially produced as normal, as well as the political ends this serves. According to Davis, a normal body is one that adheres to notions of progress, industrialization, and the consolidation of power of the highest social classes (49). For Davis, normal bodies are those that comply with capitalist ideals, which reproduce the workforce both through labor and offspring. Similarly, Rosemary Garland Thomson explains that within capitalist ideology, normal has come to signify “young, married, white, urban, northern, heterosexual, Protestant father of college education, fully employed, of good complexion, weight and height, and a recent record in sports” (8). While both theorists underscore the capitalist underpinnings of what is socially produced as normal, it is also important to note that ideals of normalcy are also informed by binary thought, as each characteristic Garland-Thompson and Davis argue is indicative of normalcy is constituted by its opposition to another mutually exclusive trait. Following Garland-Thompson’s examples, Queer, colored, disabled, and poor or unproductive bodies are the abnormal Other to their normative masculine, productive, and heterosexual counterparts. While these supposedly undesirable or abnormal traits are commonly occurring, they are socially intelligible in so far as they exist in terms of mutual exclusions. Consequently, Others like women and people with disabilities who are relegated to the undesirable side of

normative binaries are often socially visible, particularly when they occupy a socially marginal status, and adhere to hegemonic conceptions of how Others ought to function.

In *Frames of War*, Judith Butler explains that normative frameworks such as those discussed above shape how we see our bodies, how others perceive us, and how governments distribute resources and protections. For Butler, hegemonic notions of normalcy establish which bodies the state works to protect, offers resources, and which abnormal bodies pose a threat to the survival of their normative peers and ultimately to the state itself (53). For Butler, ideologies of normalcy ultimately produce some bodies as real, that is, worthy of resources, protection, and in the event of death, warrant mourning. In opposition to these real bodies are abnormal Others, whose injury or death goes unnoticed, or is even celebrated when these bodies pose a threat to hegemonic norms. Butler's discussion of real bodies is similar to Davis's description of normal bodies, as both physical entities adhere to linear narratives of progress and productivity. Further, like Garland-Thomson, Butler explains that unreal subjects are racial, sexual, and bodily Others whose lives do not adhere to dominant narratives of progress, productivity, and nationalism. Butler expands her discussion, and goes on to explain that this negation of unreal subjects is a continuous process:

if violence is done against those who are unreal, then, from the perspective of violence, it fails to injure or negate those lives since those lives are already negated. But they have a strange way of remaining animated and so must be negated again (and again). They cannot be mourned because they are always already lost, or, rather, never 'were' and they must be killed, since they seem to live on, stubbornly, in this state of deadness. (33)

In *Precarious Life*, Judith Butler argues that when real bodies face violence or negation, the public will react with outrage, and will respond to this violence with retaliation or impose legal consequences. Conversely, when unreal bodies experience similar violations, the state or the public will either fail to notice, or will react in celebration as these bodies pose a perceived threat to the dominant social order (32). This process is poignantly illustrated in memorials and public forms of grief such as obituaries or monuments, which delineate which bodies occupy a space in the public sphere, and which must remain undiscussed and unmarked. Butler draws from the example of the often invisible violence against Queer groups or racial minorities, and contrasts this with the highly visible and mourned violence enacted against male soldiers or police officers to illustrate which bodies are socially produced as real, and thus worthy of grief or mourning, and which bodies are denied this status (33). Butler notes that the losses that subjugated groups endure, such as losing loved ones to AIDS, or the erasure of racial and Queer Others in the wake of 9/11, are not only unmarked, but that they are unmarkable, as they conflict with dominant ideologies, nationalist narratives, and ideals of what constitutes subjectivity (35) and thus must be expunged from collective or national memories. In light of Davis and Garland-Thompson's analysis, it is clear that the bodies Butler contends are erased from public memory are those which stand outside of the white, middle-class, heterosexual, and able-bodied subjectivities that constitute the norm. For Butler, the centrality of the normal body culminates in the production of a public that is "created on the condition that certain images do not appear in the media, certain names of the dead are not utterable, certain losses are not avowed as losses, and violence is derealized and diffused" (38). Ultimately, the lives that cannot be mourned or publicly grieved are what Butler calls unreal- further, and the violence enacted

upon these bodies fails to capture widespread public attention because, in a sense, unreal bodies do not exist, and thus cannot be violated. By erasing the violence enacted upon these unreal subjects, dominant groups can consolidate their power, continuously rearticulate who fits into the public sphere, and dictate who is left behind.

Butler complicates her analysis as she argues that the forming of real and unreal subjects is an ongoing process. Because social norms are in flux, they must be continually rearticulated in order to establish and maintain their hegemony (11). To make sense of this process, we must explore how subjectivities form, shift, and continue to change (163). This ongoing articulation of normalcy not only makes real subjects visible, it continuously produces unreal subjects as abnormal or threatening. In this logic, bodies are either visible or invisible, normal or abnormal, erasing the multiple ways people can exist between and beside these bodily norms. In light of this erasure, it is important to ask, what becomes of the liminal figures who evade categorization within the binary structure of normal/abnormal, real/unreal, or visible/invisible? When Queer, racialized, and female bodies are erased, or visible insofar as they live according to their subordinate status, what happens to individuals and groups who exist between the polarizing distinctions between, for example, male/female and able/disabled?

The violence endured by these liminal or unreal subjects, the inherent violence of this erasure, the ongoing expulsion of unreal subjects from normative frames, and the deep attachment these liminal subjects have to normative frames are prominent themes in Leslie Feinberg's *Stone Butch Blues* and Mary McGarry Morris's *A Dangerous Woman*. Feinberg's protagonist Jess Goldberg self-identifies as between male and female gender identities, and the narrative trajectory follows Jess as she comes of age as a young butch against the

backdrop of blue-collar upstate New York. Jess transitions from female to male, and eventually moves into an identity in between binary sex assignments. As a result of Jess's gender ambiguity, she is excluded from the "normal" male category as well as from its undesirable "female" counterpart. Because Jess is located outside of socially coherent gender identities, she is vulnerable to unemployment, police brutality, homelessness, and multiple forms of violence. While Jess eschews normative gender identities, she remains deeply tied to social and gender norms, which is illustrated by her pursuit of a middle-class lifestyle, her marriage proposal to her femme partner, her continual preoccupation with her appearance, fashion choices, and domestic projects. Similarly, Morris's protagonist Martha is a liminal figure who has a troubled relationship with normal. Martha suffers from an ambiguous and undefined mental illness, which leaves her prone to compulsive behavior and fits of rage. However, where Jess pursues some markers of normalcy and eschews others, Martha is haunted by her exclusion from a normative identity, and obsessively pursues idealized feminine norms such as finding a male partner, creating a clean and organized living space, and forging intimate friendships with other women. Martha's erratic behavior, combined with her social anxieties and careless appearance, locate her in a liminal space between mentally-ill and well, beautiful and ugly, as well as independent and dependant. As a result of her liminal status, the people who surround Martha reframe the violence she suffers as the product of her voracious sexual appetite or her result of her bizarre behavior. Within the parameters of this narrative, it is clear here that the people who surround Martha believe that if she did not have such strange mannerisms, or such a hot temper, she would not be subject to ridicule and abuse.

Given the ways hegemonic norms function to exclude liminal subjects from social privileges and erase their suffering, my analysis of Feinberg and McGarry Morris's texts in this chapter will explore debates surrounding normalcy along side of Butler's analysis of unreal subjectivity as, within the context of both narratives, the two are inextricably linked. In the following chapter, I will explore the social mechanisms within *Stone Butch Blues* and *A Dangerous Woman* that render the protagonists in these texts unreal while allowing other characters considerably more visibility. Following Butler's concept of unreal and grievable bodies, I will argue that Jess and Martha's relationships to the social construct of normalcy force them into the realm of unreal subjectivity, which repeatedly erases the violence they suffer. Although broadening the parameters of normalcy to include unreal figures like Jess and Martha, or eliminating this construct altogether, might seem to be logical remedies to this erasure, I will posit an alternative means to account for these histories of violence that focuses on affective responses to exclusion from frames of normalcy, rather than working to dismantle the concept of normal itself. Specifically, Ann Cvetkovich explains trauma "refracts outwards to produce all kinds of affective responses, and not just clinical symptoms" (19). The trauma inherent to being socially produced as Other, and the corresponding affective responses to the process, brings liminal figures into contact with the people who surround and oppress them. This process and contact catalyzes many emotional responses from these unreal or liminal figures, including rage (Butler, *Frames* 34). Trauma as the site of affect is an important theme in both narratives, as Jess and Martha respond to violence, to their liminal status, and to the ongoing re-articulation of social norms, with expressions of anger that range from subtle to overpowering. This rage is central to my analysis, and I contend that because Martha and Jess are continually produced as unreal

subjects, they feel intense anger when they come into contact with more visible subjects or when they are continually excluded from these norms. I will argue that anger emerging from this contact, and from the corresponding re-articulation of normative frames that excludes them, can function as the means through which these subjects become visible. Ultimately, this anger not only calls attention to the seemingly invisible process of rearticulating social norms, it also foregrounds histories of violence and oppression that might otherwise go ignored

### **The Making of the Unreal Subject**

While Butler centers her discussion around Queer and racialized others, her analysis of unreal subjects can also be extended to include individuals whose subject positions locate them outside of binary categories. For example, excluded from identities such as male and female, or able-bodied and disabled, Martha and Jess occupy subjectivities in between the binaries that delineate who is normal and who is not, which ultimately erases their existence. As non-subjects, these figures function like Butler's unreal subjects; they cannot be violated because they evade normative ways of classifying bodies, and thus symbolically do not exist. Specifically, Martha Horgan, the protagonist in Mary McGarry Morris's novel *A Dangerous Woman* is located between allegedly opposing identities and thus functions as an unreal subject. Martha is both mentally ill and well, beautiful and not, independent and dependant, salacious and asexual. Martha lives her daily life filled with small rituals, a disruption to which causes her to fly into a frenzy (Morris 51). Following the death of her father, she moves out of the lavish home she shared with him and her aunt Frances, and tries to form an independent life for herself. Ill equipped to live independently, Martha soon loses her job and moves back to her aunt's home. As Martha has a joint household with her wealthy,

attractive, and able-bodied aunt Frances, she must now contend with her aunt's critical gaze, and when compared to her aunt, Martha's liminal status and unreal subjectivity become clear. Martha exhibits behaviors that stand in stark opposition to her aunt's normative actions and good manners. Where Frances is a member of an exclusive country club, and socializes with prominent members of her community with ease, Martha mutters to herself, thumps her chest when she speaks, flies into fits of anger, and lulls herself into a catatonic state when she is upset (250). Although Frances knows that Martha suffers from an undiagnosed illness, she also believes that Martha can will herself back to health. For example, when Frances's friend Julia approaches Martha about living in Harmony House, a group home for people with mental disabilities (168), Frances refuses to acknowledge that Martha's unusual behavior could be resolved by anything other than "a good harsh dose of reality" (113). Standing in opposition to her aunt Frances, the exemplar of female normalcy, Martha comes to see her inability to control her oddities as a personal failure, thinking that "there were people in this world who were the Unloved, and she was one of them. That it might be just that simple, that immutable, was, in a strange way, almost a relief" (Morris 75). Despite exhaustive efforts, Martha is unable to adhere to what her aunt thinks are normal behaviors, which, in turn, foregrounds her illness. However, Martha is also able to care for herself to the extent that she could live independently given the necessary support, which stands in stark contrast to dominant narratives of people with mental illnesses as entirely dependent on familiar or state support. As a consequence of her status as both mentally ill and not, Martha's illness is not acknowledged in any meaningful way, and instead becomes fodder for the taunts of her peers, and basis for her aunt's belief that Martha could emulate her own normative behavior if she chose to.

While these are emotional and psychological aspects of Martha's identity that render her vulnerable to abuse, these differences are also inscribed upon her body, locating her in a liminal space between hegemonic norms of femininity, and the asexual and unattractive status forced upon people with disabilities (Linton 65). As a teenager, Martha was, in the eyes of her peers "bright enough and certainly pretty enough to pass for normal, but everyone knew she was about as odd as they come" (Morris 7). The people who surround Martha think of her as "pretty good-looking, you know, considering" (217), or as a woman who has a beautiful face beneath the thick glasses she wears (279). Martha's attempts to conform to hegemonic notions of beauty inevitably fail, as in one instance she burns the hair when she attempts to curl it before a party (18). On another occasion, and she submits to a makeover and haircut at the mall, Frances exclaims "Cut! Martha! You got shaved! Like a dog in the heat!" (192). This inscription of psychological difference on her body, coupled with the comparison between herself and a dog, leads Martha to see herself as fundamentally different from other women. Moreover, Frances's accusation that her niece looks like a dog in heat foregrounds the ways Martha is framed as sexually available through her mental illness. These cruel taunts led Martha to compare herself and her social life to that of a three-legged cow she once saw in a field:

That three-legged cow was born that way. My father was talking about it one day to Frances, and I could tell the conversation was really about me, so I went down the mountain and saw the cows coming back to the barn. They were kind of coming along, swishing their tails, you know, like cows do, and then I saw this cow, the three-legged one, kind of limping along off to the side, and when she came to the barn door, one by one all of the other cows

would bump her. And she just stood there while they did it. Finally they were all in and she just stood there until Mr. Patterson came and swatted her in.

(Morris 262)

Like the cow with a missing limb, who quietly accepts abuse as though it was a natural part of life, Martha sees the abuse she suffers as the inevitable product of the mental differences she cannot hide, in part, because these are inscribed onto her body and written into her sexual desires for everyone to see. Because she resides within the liminal space between mentally ill and well, and between attractive and undesirable, she escapes signification as a human, and is repeatedly aligned with various animals. As a result, the ways her illness is manifested on a daily basis, as well as the unrelenting harassment she suffers because of her symptoms, often go ignored.

Finally, Martha functions as both a woman with an insatiable sexual appetite, and as emoting no sexual desire. For example, a group of male classmates assault Martha when she is a teenager, and her father and aunt decide it is best not to press charges. In the end, Martha's attackers go unpunished, and that night is remembered in the town's collective memory as the evening when Martha willingly followed the boys into the woods, knowing what was going to happen. In fact, the historical memory of that night continued to frame Martha as a willing participant in her assault until "there grew over time the rancorous certainty that she had probably instigated the whole thing, not only that, but (and some say they knew this for certifiable fact) that she actually had relations of one sort or another with every single one of those fine [i.e. "normal"] boys" (Morris 8). In this case, the public that Butler explains is created through the exclusion of certain stories and events (*Frames of War* 38) is consolidated by the exclusion of Martha's suffering. Her assault is replaced with tales

of Martha's obsessive behavior, and the construction of the boys as good, noble, and acting upon "normal" urges (Morris 7). This erasure is ongoing, and as Martha ages, her aunt Frances explains to Mack that the town's collective memory of Martha consenting to the assault "is understandable. Don't forget, Martha can be rather bizarre" (220). However, this image of Martha as sexually voracious is contrasted with the ways her aunt also denies her sexuality, and this contradiction is perhaps most evident in the way her aunt perceives her as both a dog in heat and as an essentially asexual person. For example, when Martha learns that she is pregnant at the close of the novel, Frances and her longtime partner Steve refuse to believe that the pregnancy could be product of anything other than rape (357). This reaction foregrounds the contradictory nature of Martha's subjectivity, specifically, that she has monstrous sexual urges but that she is also asexual, she is always consenting but also unable to consent. As a result of these contradictions, Martha's grief at the loss of her independence (marked by her job and by her room at the boarding house), her trauma following her assault as a teenager, her sexual desire for Mack, and the relentless teasing she suffers at the hands of others in her community are understood as the product of her oddities rather than the culmination of years of abuse.

Like Morris's protagonist, Leslie Feinberg's main character Jess Goldberg lives within the gaps of normative frameworks, which sets the stage for her existence as an unreal subject. Jess is located within a matrix of racial, class, and religious identities that not only isolate her from many women's groups, they also leave her outside of racial and social alliances. As a child, Jess reflects:

I didn't want to be different. I longed to be everything grownups wanted, so they would love me. I followed all their rules, tried my best to please. But

there was something about me that made them knit their eyebrows and frown. No one ever offered a name for what was wrong with me. That's what made me afraid it was really bad. I only came to recognize its melody through this constant refrain: 'Is that a boy or a girl?' (Feinberg 13)

Jess begins to explore alternative gender performances, and when her parents find her trying on her father's suit and tie, they send her to a psychiatric hospital (21). Following her stay in an institution, Jess must attend charm school and make weekly visits to a psychologist (23). While Cat Moses argues that this scene is contradictory with Jess's working class background (5), this narrative incongruity can also be read as Feinberg's attempt to foreground the processes through which Queer bodies are produced as deviant, regulated, subject to psychological trauma, and cast outside of social norms. Further, this sequence of events illustrates the lengths to which some families will go in order to ensure their children reproduce heterosexual norms, as it is clear that a stay in a psychiatric hospital is beyond her parents' financial means. Reflecting upon her past, Jess thinks that although she is not a man, "charm school finally taught me once and for all that I wasn't pretty, wasn't feminine, and would never be graceful" (23). Rather than form Jess into a respectable female subject, charm school teaches Jess that she is forbidden to perform a male gender, and a failure at performing a female one.

Jess comes to exist within the liminal space between racial and religious alliances in her high school. As a teenager, Jess was excluded from many social groups because "almost half the school was white, Jewish, middle class. The other half was Negro and working class. My family was Jewish and working class. I fell into a lonely social abyss. The few friends I had in the school were from families who worked to make ends meet" (40). Jess thus suffers

a double exclusion: the lines that divide groups and alliances in her school have completely foreclosed her existence- she is an uneasy fit among the working class Blacks, and from their affluent Jewish counterparts. She is also excluded from cliques of young women, as well as from male dominated sports culture. Jess's ongoing gender ambiguity exacerbates her social isolation, and classmates target her with cruel comments such as "is it an animal, mineral or vegetable?" (24) when she passes them in the halls. Jess reflects that only a handful of her classmates and teachers see her within something other than criticism and scorn (25). Unable to bear more abuse, Jess runs away to Buffalo and finds a community of butch lesbians and their femme partners with whom she identifies and feels at home. Jess's gender ambiguity is transformed from the basis of her exclusion to the grounds upon which she can form alliances. Empowered by these new community ties, Jess begins to take pride in her self-identification as he-she, which, as Feinberg explains in *Transgender Warriors*, signals both a hybridity of male and female traits and foregrounds the social incomprehensibility of these terms:

The hyphenated pronouns illuminated a limitation of pronouns in the English language. 'She' and 'he' are customarily used to describe *both* the birth sex *and* the gender expression of an individual. But 'he-she' and 'she-male' describe the person's gender expression with the first pronoun and the birth sex with the second. The hyphenation signals a crisis of language and apparent social contradiction, since sex and gender expression are 'supposed' to match. (97)

This self-identification also speaks to Jess's working class background, as Cat Moses explains that he-she is a term most widely used by working class Queer groups in the United

States in a response to their fraught political relationship with radical lesbian groups. According to Moses, the term lesbian became a consciously politicized identity for some women in the United States during the 1960s. In this context, lesbian designated a female identified female, and excluded the butch/femme alliances that characterize Jess's social network and her desire (6). Feinberg foregrounds this exclusion through a scene where The Daughters of Bilitis prohibit Jess and her partner Theresa from attending meetings on the grounds that butches like Jess are "male chauvinist pigs" (135), and femmes like Theresa suffer from false consciousness by adhering to hegemonic conceptions of beauty (136). This rejection indicates that while Jess does not identify as male, she is not welcome in spaces coded as female such as public washrooms (Feinberg 59), and women's groups. Despite her strong ties within the butch-femme community, her commitment to social justice, and her growing alliances with labor movement organizers, this rejection reminds Jess that she continues to exist within the vulnerable space between genders, and suffers tremendous abuse.

Jess's liminal gender and unreal status also render her vulnerable to unemployment, limits her access to healthcare, and leaves her susceptible to state violence and abuse. Further, because of her unreal status, it is very difficult for Jess to access the resources that would allow her to flourish and function as a normative (or productive) subject. Butler explains that real bodies are maintained through support, access to resources, and enabling conditions. When individuals access the resources that ensure their safety, wealth, and health, they do so within a matrix of social and political norms (*Frames of War* 21). Because Jess functions as an unreal subject, the matrix of social and legal norms maintains its hegemony by excluding her, making her access to these resources impossible. For example,

where Jess cannot work in female dominated fields such as secretarial work, her status in the male dominated factories is always under threat, as many of her male co-workers taunt her with comments such as ““you fucking he-shes. You stole our jobs” (Feinberg 142). Jess reflects that while men can blame their unemployment on the butches in the factories, and women can exclude her from female dominated professions, she has no one to blame for her tenuous hold on employment (142). As an outcast from both male and female identities that form the labor market, Jess is continually at risk of unemployment, which makes it more difficult for her to access the other resources that Butler explains sustain life such as health care and police protection. This is evidenced when a stranger attacks Jess late at night, and she staggers into the emergency room. Jess cannot receive care because she does not have medical coverage, and thus makes up a name and a health insurance number (259). When she emerges from unconsciousness, Jess learns that her broken jaw has been wired shut, and hospital policy dictates she must fill out a police report. Jess flees the hospital before her lies can come to light, but given her lack of health coverage, is also forced to remove the wire herself with only whisky as an antiseptic, and cannot consult with a physician to manage her pain or prevent infection (260-264). Over the course of her narrative, Feinberg makes it clear that because of her unreal or liminal status, Jess is caught in a self-perpetuating cycle where she cannot access healthcare, which exacerbates her inability to find stable work, which prevents her from entering the union, which in turn exacerbates her inability to access healthcare.

Feinberg also problematizes normative gender performances, and foregrounds the ways these identities render some people visible at the expense of others, when Jess decides to undergo hormone therapy and remove her breasts in order to pass as a man. Jess admits to

her friends that she prefers to live in between genders as a he-she, and that her transition is motivated by her need to survive. In one instance, she explains to Theresa “I don’t feel like a man trapped in a woman’s body. I just feel trapped” (159). Here, Jess foregrounds the reality that it is the two-sex model and social stratification, rather than her physical form, traps her and limits her mobility. After she begins passing as a man, Jess realizes that the ongoing threat of violence she felt as a he-she has now been replaced by the constant fear of being outed as not a “real” or “authentic” man (173), illustrating the widespread conflation between biological sex and gender. Further, where Jess was an unreal subject because she was neither male nor female, she continues to exist in a legal liminal space because she does not have the documents to prove that she is male, leading her to reflect “I felt like a non-person. Even outlaws probably had more ID than me” (175). Here, it is documents and an altered physical form that would function as markers of maleness, further illustrating the important distinctions between sex and gender. As she passes as a man, Jess also feels a deep sense of alienation, as though “no one really sees me or speaks to me or touches me” (213).

In her analysis of Jess’s transition, Cat Moses explains that Jess

has modified her body as a way of dealing with economic hardship (unemployment) and harassment, but it remains clear that the external surface of her body does not dictate who she is. She is comfortable in the space outside of gender binaries, but the world continually tries to roust her from that space and keep her firmly constrained by class divisions. (7)

Jess ultimately decides to cease hormone treatment, and settles back into the liminal space between male and female, only for the cycle of abuse and poverty to continue.

### **The Making of the Normal Subject**

While both Jess and Martha function as unreal subjects, they also remain deeply attached to the conceptions of normalcy that continue to exclude and marginalize them. Despite their common identity as liminal subjects, Jess and Martha adopt different strategies to become normal, and thus real. Where Martha works to emulate the norms dictated by her aunt (but repeatedly fails), Jess is more selective about which normative traits she tries to embody. However, because Butler illustrates that social norms are continuously in flux and necessarily exclude “abnormal” Others, for Jess and Martha, attaining normative status is an impossible project. As a result, Martha and Jess repeatedly (and perhaps inevitably) fail in their attempts to fashion themselves as normal or real subjects. These failures are hallmarks of an overarching trend where social norms necessarily exclude liminal or unreal subjects, giving rise to tremendous abuse. Queer theorists and critical disabilities scholars have developed various strategies to disrupt the centrality of hegemonic norms and the violence therein that Jess and Martha contend with on a daily basis. While these strategies (which I will outline below) are valuable political interventions, my objective here is to explore Butler’s claim that this exclusion produces rage, and to explore the functions this anger might serve. As such, in this chapter, I aim to explore how anger can bring unreal or liminal subjects into view rather than focus on disrupting social norms themselves. This is important within the context of my dissertation, as my choice of methodologies suggests that my intention is not to unmask how social justice projects that extend or deconstruct normative frames will inevitably fail, but rather, to engage with different frameworks for interpretation (Sedgwick 140). Consequently, in the following section, I will outline various efforts by Queer theorists to disrupt what is socially produced as normal in order to contextualize my own reading of affect in *Stone Butch Blues* and *A Dangerous Woman*. I will ultimately

propose an alternative framework that is less reliant on engaging with normalcy itself (but that still accounts for the social significance of normalcy) that is guided by Jess and Martha's anger as they are continuously excluded from the norm.

Critical disabilities scholars explore the concept of normal as it exists within policies and at law. According to Davis, within the parameters of the American Rehabilitation Act, disability is a term that points towards the limitations individuals face as they try to fulfill their daily activities. For Davis, and within the parameters of the act, disability includes learning difficulties, invisible impairments such as arthritis, and serious illnesses such as cancer and AIDS (8). Davis goes on to explain that while many people exist without impairments, the longer a person lives, the more likely they are to become disabled (9). Due to the inevitability of disability, Davis argues that disability is actually more normal than we might believe (11). By pointing towards the inevitability of disability, Davis illustrates that like its normative counterpart, the disabled body is also commonly occurring, or even inevitable. Further, like the Garland-Thomson and Linton quoted above, Davis's analysis illustrates that, much like our hegemonic conception of normal bodies, disabilities are socially produced, in this case through inadequate infrastructure, policies, and social norms that limit the mobility of people with disabilities. Davis's discussion of disability can be read as a call to simultaneously interrogate social conventions surrounding normal bodies, but also as an effort to extend current understandings of normalcy to include all forms of disability.

Debates surrounding normalcy have followed a similar trajectory in Queer theory, and many Queer theories have turned their analysis to the ways in which Queer subjects are socially produced as deviant. For example, following Foucault, Cheshire Calhoun explains

that the supposedly timeless loathing of homosexuality is not timeless at all, because the creation of homosexual subjects is a relatively new phenomenon (71). Similarly, Feinberg's text *Transgender Warriors* gives a brief historical overview to illustrate that divergence from the heterosexual model is a longstanding phenomenon, and before the production of the homosexual as the object of loathing, Queer subjects have been respected and revered across time and geographic locations. This line of thinking foregrounds the reality that gender performances and sexual orientations that transgress heteronormative boundaries are common, and that these identities and desires have not always been socially produced as abnormal or deviant (101). This theme is particularly prevalent in many of Feinberg's texts. Not only does *Transgender Warriors* foreground the times and places where transgendered people were honored and valued, *Stone Butch Blues* opens with Jess's letter to Theresa, remarking that people have been transgressing heterosexuality "since the dawn of time" (2). Feinberg's collection of essays *Trans Liberation*, makes repeated reference to times and places where transgendered people have been honored. Finally, Feinberg's most recent novel *Drag King Dreams* explores the devastating consequences of homophobia and transphobia, as the protagonist reflects "we knew why we were angry people. I'm angry 'cause I get treated like less than human all the time. Vicky was angry 'cause she got treated less than human half the time" (224). Not only does this motif foreground the political utility of extending the parameters of what we understand to be normal to include Queer bodies, but this ongoing theme in Feinberg's work, and the corresponding anger at the oppression transgendered people suffer, reminds readers that bodies that are socially produced as deviant are confronted with violence and oppression that often goes ignored. This pattern

also indicates that *Stone Butch Blues* continues to be an important text to discuss, as these issues are clearly unresolved.

While Feinberg has embarked on a project that can be read as a move to normalize trans bodies and attractions, Queer theorist Michel Warner's political action has followed a different trajectory. Warner argues that subjugated groups have a long tradition of contesting social norms, and this struggle indicates that marginalized groups must retain a deep suspicion towards all understandings of health and identity that express the tastes of the majority. Warner explains

it is ironic, to say the least, when we are not told that our aspiration should be to see ourselves as normal. No doubt gay people regard this as the ultimate answer to the common implication that being gay is pathological. No, they want to insist, we're normal. But this is to buy into a false alternative [...] normal and pathological are not the only options [...] people who are defined by a variant set of norms commit a kind of social suicide when they begin to measure the worth of their relations and their way of life by the yardstick of normalcy. The history of the movement should have taught us to ask: whose norm? (59)

Warner echoes Davis's assertion that bodies are produced normative or abnormal within a matrix of legal, political, medical, and cultural narratives that justify the exclusion and the pathology of "abnormal" bodies from their normal counterparts. Informed by binary logic, this exclusion produces the "abnormal" body as a repository for social anxieties surrounding identity, vulnerability, and control (Garland-Thomson 6). Given these trends, Warner argues that gay rights and Queer social justice projects must renounce claims to normalcy, as these

simply broaden who can be “normal” without dismantling the logic that excludes some people from the norm altogether. For Warner, this disavowal extends to renouncing normalizing institutions such as marriage, which he contends police the norm, and function as the pillars of normalcy while also reaffirming state control of desires and identities (59).

It is important to approach this debate using an intersectional approach, which illustrates the ways other identifications such as race and class allow some individuals to express same sex desire and alternative forms of gender expression, while limiting the freedom of others (Feinberg, *Transgender Warriors* 80; Moses 3). On one hand, Warner is able to use his own position of privilege as an academic to critique institutions like marriage, whereas Feinberg poignantly portrays the hardships that a person suffers when they are continuously denied access to these frames of normalcy. Where Warner is rightly critical of institutions such as marriage, Feinberg points towards the limited rights that gender ambiguous couples (particularly tenuously employed couples) can access because they cannot legally wed (*Trans Liberation* 79-87). This debate ultimately foregrounds the reality that deconstructing “normal” is a project that is pursued in relation to a certain amount of social privilege, and is a project undertaken from a place where one’s subjectivity will remain intact if normal no longer bears social significance. While I take the argument that we must always work to disrupt these regulatory systems from the outset, Feinberg’s detailing of the hardships Queer communities endure because they cannot marry in many location within the United States, find secure employment, and access health care in *Trans Liberation* reminds us that an empty stomach or a dangerously ill partner often take precedence over jamming the ideological machinery that generates social norms from the outset. Despite these limitations, Queer theory and critical disability studies remind us to pursue the project

of interrogating hegemonic norms, particularly as they regulate bodies and identities. Further, Queer theory continues to offer us a useful framework to explore emotions along side of sexuality, as Ann Cvetkovich explains “in investigating sexuality, it is also often investigating affect, capturing the sensibilities and desires that circulate in the vicinity of sexual acts, practices, and cultures (47). Because sexuality and affect inevitably intersect, sexuality and the sexual violence that Martha and Jess experience give rise to significant emotional responses that can alert us to subjectivities that are continually erased.

Butler proposes an alternative strategy to those outlined by Warner and Feinberg, and centers her analysis on the ways some bodies become and remain visible while obscuring others. As previously discussed, in *Frames of War*, Butler explains that socially produced norms play a central role in framing some lives as worthy of mourning, and in the erasure of others (3). Butler asserts that these norms are continually in flux, and figure prominently in the process through which some subjects are recognized and others ignored (4). Butler argues that these frames are not static, but rather,

the frame that seeks to contain, convey, and determine what is seen [...] depends upon the conditions of reproducibility in order to succeed. And yet, this very reproducibility entails a constant breaking from context, a constant delimitation of new context, which means that the ‘frame’ does not quite contain what it conveys, but breaks apart every time it seeks to give definitive organization to its content. (10)

Within the continuous process of breaking from context in order to rearticulate their own parameters, these frames continuously change (11); the emerging frame is slightly different from the one that preceded it. Butler explains that within this ongoing process, we can catch

brief glimpses of the people and places that have been obscured by the frame as it breaks from itself to be reformed (12). In this case, the moments where the normative frame goes through this process of breaking and re-articulation, liminal or unreal subjects become visible, even if it is only momentarily. Butler goes on to explain that the question of whose lives are regarded as mournable, and which are included into the frame of what is visible, returns us to the question of the regulation of affect. For Butler, if we accept that emotional responses are regulated through interpretive frames, then we can begin to make sense of the reasons why we greet the loss of some lives with sadness or rage, and others with indifference or even righteousness (42). Because emotions are a central component of this process, if we seek out the anger of marginalized or liminal groups that arise in relation to these frames, the suffering, histories, and political strategies of subjugated groups can also come into view.

Like Butler, Judith Jack Halberstam proposes an alternative to ongoing political strategies that center on normalcy itself, and her discussion of failure, along with Butler's analysis of the ongoing breaking and re-articulation of normative frames, can allow us to call attention to the anger of unreal subjects, and ultimately foreground their suffering. In *The Queer Art of Failure*, Halberstam argues that current understandings of success are couched in capitalist scripts of wealth, ability, merit, and heterosexuality (2), hallmarks that are the same as those markers of normalcy discussed above. Although Queer communities are constantly excluded from these understandings of success (or are unable to replicate them), Halberstam explains that these failures may provide new insights into experiences that are ignored within the binaries of normal or abnormal, or success and failure. Halberstam argues

under certain circumstances, failing, losing, forgetting, unmaking, undoing, unbecoming, not knowing may in fact offer more creative, more cooperative, more surprising ways of being in the world [...] In fact, if success requires so much effort, then maybe failure is easier in the long run and offers different rewards (2-3).

Halberstam explains that while individuals and groups often react to failure with a host of “negative” affects such as disappointment or despair, failure also sets the stage for these negative affects to “poke holes in the toxic positivity of contemporary life” (3). Like Butler, Halberstam illustrates the potential for “negative” affects to tell alternative stories of success or suffering. While I differ from Halberstam in my understanding of affect outside of binaries such as “positive” and “negative”, Halberstam’s discussion of affect is central to my analysis of liminal subjects. Following Butler and Halberstam, I contend that as normative frames break and re-form, or as unreal subjects fail to adhere to normative scripts of success, the anger they might express foregrounds histories, experiences, successes, and identities that might otherwise go ignored.

### **Producing Dangerous Woman**

The people who surround Martha continually position her as abnormal, and her continual exclusion from normative frames becomes the condition upon which the normative identities of others rely. At the beginning of the text, the omniscient narrator describes Martha as “muttering to herself, and chasing little kids if they so much as looked at her, which they were bound to do, of course, kids being kids” (Morris 7). The logic of “kids being kids” suggests that the cruel taunts the children direct at Martha are an indicator of that normalcy, and Martha the abnormal Other, is a deserving target. In this case, the frame that

delimits what “normal” children do relies on the positioning of Martha as “abnormal”, and the children assert their normalcy at Martha’s expense. This abuse has a tremendous psychic impact on Martha, and she muses that she

had never been all right. Never. No- always the butt of everyone’s jokes perfect strangers children were the worst nipping at her heels like savage dogs all the way along the streets calling her name so that it had become a NAME, a bad word, MARTHORGAN a taunt synonymous with boogeymen and bums and crazed old women in unpainted, crooked houses. (37)

As a teenager, Martha continues to function as the abnormal Other at whose expense people can maintain their claim to a normative identity. For example, while attending high school, Martha was consumed by an obsessive crush on her classmate Donny LaRue, calling his house repeatedly and leaving notes in his locker (2). Donny’s friends eventually lure Martha into the forest under the premise that Donny wants to meet her there, only to assault her. Martha’s aunt Frances blames Martha for causing the assault by asking “What did she expect, going into the woods with them” (3). The boys’ parents echo this sentiment, and argue that Martha “started it, and the boys had only done what any normal boys would have” (3). Like the children’s taunts, the frame that delineates who “normal” boys are, and what they do, depends upon the erasure of Martha’s experiences of violence. This erasure is possible because Martha exists as an unreal subject, and thus cannot be assaulted. Once Martha’s father and lawyer decide not to press charges, the collective memory of this event in some inexplicable way that defied all reason and logic, Martha had somehow asked for it that she had brought it on herself with her attractive

figure and her particular ways [...] and there grew with time rancorous certainty that she has probably instigated the whole pitiful thing. (8)

The markers of what normal boys do have so fully obscured Martha's experiences that people joke that Martha Horgan's voracious sexual appetite and strange behavior pose a threat to any man who crosses her path (8). In this case, the frame that constructs normal teenage boys as feeling uncontrollable sexual urges is re-articulated in a way to exclude the inherent violence of this belief. Ultimately, this frame excludes Martha through the logic that she is the one who poses a threat to men, and Martha's assault is completely obscured.

As an adult, children and teenagers continue to harass Martha. Due to her "headlong stride and the long swing of her arms" (25), Martha's difference is audible from a distance and children shout "Marthorgan" (25) in her wake. While this abuse fills her with rage, Martha's involuntary angry responses such as throwing rocks and running away always deepen her shame. This abuse is so widespread that Martha sometimes believes that she is to blame for her suffering, and reflects "a grown woman pegging stones at boys. She was the one ashamed" (Morris 25). After a lifetime of taunts and abuse, Martha has come to expect insults and injuries, and like the people in her town, she also understands them as her fault. In an effort to end this abuse, Martha works to attain all of the signs of what she thinks are characteristic of normalcy and a happy life such as living independently, having friends, and falling in love. In her analysis of these and other markers of happiness, Sara Ahmed explains that happiness

works as an idea or aspiration within everyday life, shaping the very terms through which individuals share their world with others, creating 'scripts' for how to live well. We can think of gendered scripts as 'happiness scripts'

providing a set of instructions for what women and men must do in order to be happy, whereby happiness is what follows being natural or good. Going along with happiness scripts is how we get along: to get along is to be willing and able to express happiness in proximity to the right things. (59)

These scripts that Martha attempts to follow outline what constitutes a good life, and are the same as those described above by Halberstam as examples of success that often exclude subjugated groups.

Martha's inability to follow these scripts is foregrounded when she tries to develop friendships with other women, such as when Birdie invites Martha to a Tupperware party. Martha prepares for the social gathering by reading directions printed in a women's magazine about how to be a good conversationalist (Morris 17). This magazine article functions as both a literal and figurative happiness script as it instructs women on how to interact with others, and implies that following these rules will culminate in joy and future social invitations. The Tupperware party itself also functions as a happiness script; when Martha enters the party, she crosses into an idyllic domestic realm where women buy plastic storage containers that can hold kitchen goods and their "lacy unmentionables" (20). The rows of plastic storage pieces (and the salesman's brief statement that these containers can store the markers of heterosexual desire) lined up for sale evoke the image of domestic bliss, informed by heterosexual love and sexuality, children, and a female presence in the home. At the party, Martha falls into a daydream about the kind of life that is signified by purchasing the most elaborate Tupperware set on display, and she thinks "a set like that meant order and peace and her own kitchen, her own life" (22). Martha tries to partake in the capitalist underpinnings of this script by purchasing the items, imagining these plastic storage

containers against the backdrop of her own kitchen, which she shares with a spouse. However, as a single woman renting a room in a boardinghouse, Martha is located in opposition to this script from the outset, and the other women cruelly remind her that because she lives alone in a small room, and has no use for the elaborate collection of storage containers. In particular, Mercy Reardon laughs at Martha's desire for the items, and buys them instead. In the wake of Mercy's actions, Martha feels herself excluded from the normative frame she believes will bring her happiness, and angrily reflects as Mercy buys the set, that she is taking something significant from her, an egregious insult from a woman who "already had a husband, three children, one side of a duplex, and her own car" (22).

As Mercy attempts to pay for the items, Martha flies into a rage and rips her check into tiny pieces, then tries to run from the party (23). In this case, the frame that denotes normative femininity breaks when Mercy buys the set away from Martha, and leaves Martha on the outside of this frame. Once she has handed over the check, Mercy takes ownership of the Tupperware collection, and reaffirms her place within the idyllic domestic realm. Despite Martha's effort to buy her way into this framework through the purchase of the Tupperware set, Mercy's actions once again force her outside of feminine social norms. Here, we can read Martha's angry ripping of the check as the instant when the frame reforms, forcing Martha out of view as the spectacle of her rage, and the assumptions that surround her, take center stage. However, as Martha rips the check (the symbolic marker of Mercy's ability to purchase the hallmarks of middle-class womanhood), she angrily contests both her exclusion from this frame, and her inability to reproduce these happiness scripts from the outset. In this case, Martha's angry ripping of the symbolic representation of the normative domestic frame

not only foregrounds the reasons why she is angry, this rage also brings the moment at which the normative domestic frame breaks and reforms into view.

The most poignant examples of Martha's failed attempts to fit into the parameters of normalcy occur when she works to form intimate relationships with men. Over the course of the novel, Martha becomes infatuated with Mack, her aunt's handyman, and they begin a secret affair. In the closing chapters of the novel, Martha is bedridden and learns that she is pregnant, and wanders the streets in a daze. Martha finds herself at her former boarding house, where the elderly tenants refuse to let her in because Martha's disheveled appearance and erratic behavior leads them to believe "the stories were true. Martha has become a dangerous woman" (286). Martha eventually wanders to Birdie's house, stabs Birdie's partner Gesto, hides in Mr. Weilman's home, and is arrested and put on trial for murder. The contradictory nature of Martha's subject position is revealed at the trial, and it is here where the most distressing aspects of Martha's unreal subjectivity come into play. Martha's lawyer Steve Bell is adamant that she must have an abortion (against her will if necessary) in order to illustrate that Martha is the victim of rape, and has stabbed Gesto in self-defense. Frances pleads with Martha to terminate her pregnancy because she cannot possibly bear the burden of Martha's baby. Where Martha was once unable to be violated, or always consenting, in the wake of the murder, her family and legal council cast her as unable to consent, or not consenting. As an unreal subject, Martha's lawyer and her aunt frame Martha's reality for her, and build Martha's defense on the assumption that Gesto raped her. However, no one has actually asked Martha why she stabbed Gesto, who fathered her child, and whether her pregnancy is the product of a consensual sexual relationship.

It is important to note that while Martha wants to carry her child to term, and sees her pregnancy as the product of the love and affection, the argument can also be made that Martha's pregnancy is the product of sexual violence (an accusation that is problematically couched in the notion that Martha is suffering from false consciousness, and rearticulates the construction of individuals with mental and physical disabilities as individuals who cannot or should not engage in sexual relationships). While the question of whether Martha consented to Mack is important (although impossible to resolve, as Morris clearly articulates the unequal power dynamic between Mack and Martha, but also makes clear that Martha is a consenting sexual partner) this debate also obscures the discursive trends that erase Martha's subjectivity from the outset. If we explore Martha's pregnancy along side of her assault as a teenager, it is clear that Martha is located in the liminal space between autonomy and dependency. This discursive contradiction effectively renders her an unreal subject whose suffering cannot be grieved. According to Butler, discursive constructs do not necessarily give rise to unreal subjects, but rather, people can also become unreal subjects because they escape the discursive limits of what is held as human intelligibility (*Prearious Life* 35). As simultaneously always consenting because of her attractive figure and bizarre behavior, but also as desexualized and unable to consent because of her mental illness, Martha's sexual desires and experiences fall outside of the discursive limits of what is possible. Consequently, not only do her innumerable experiences of violence go unnoticed or erased because they evade normative frames from the outset, Martha is cast as an unreliable witness to her own life and choices. As an unreal subject, Martha cannot be raped, cannot consent to sex, and her subjectivity is the grounds upon which others can make claims to normative identities. As an unreliable witness to her own life, Martha's suffering is eclipsed by her

aunt's, who does not want to raise Martha's child if she is incarcerated, and Mack's guilt at the prospect that he may have abused of the power he has over Martha. Finally, because the people who surround her understand Martha as a dangerous woman, she is rearticulated as simply angry rather than angry about a particular set of circumstances, and her suffering goes ignored.

In this sequence of events, Martha's anger during the trial signals the moment when the normative frame rearticulates to exclude her, and foregrounds Martha's experiences that have, to date, been erased. As the trial proceeds around her, Martha is determined that no one will know that Mack is the father, and resolves that "they could do what they wanted, but she wasn't going to betray Mack. Never! She wanted Mack to know that she would keep their secret as long as necessary" (Morris 350). As Steve Bell pleads with the judge to consider Martha's crime as an act of self-defense, the normative feminine frame that includes motherhood, heterosexual relationships, and love is being reformed to exclude her. While Martha has conceived a child with a man she loves, others with more social visibility and power interpret this as a violation rather than a success. However, Martha's angry vow to keep her secret foregrounds the moment when this frame breaks and is rearticulated, and also illustrates her perception that she has consented to a sexual relationship and longs to keep her child. This angry vow signals to the reader that although Martha's relationship with Mack is troubling, she exists as a sexual being and can give and withhold consent as she sees fit. While the baby might not function as a "success" as Halberstam intends the usage of the term, her pregnancy does signal the reality that Martha's desires are more complex than simply the longings of a deranged woman.

### **Anger and Success**

Like those at play in *A Dangerous Woman*, normative frames are continuously in flux throughout *Stone Butch Blues*. Like Martha, Jess feels intense anger at the moment when these frames are re-articulated to exclude her, and this anger points towards the moment when normative frames re-form at her expense. However, where Martha's anger signals the complexity of her suffering, Jess's rage also foregrounds alternative forms of success. For example, when a recession causes a slump in factory employment, Jess and her friends are forced to live on unreliable temp work and unemployment insurance. Edwin, Grant, and Jan soon decide that their employment situation has become critical, and they agree that altering their gender performance might improve their job prospects. Sitting in Jess's kitchen, the foursome try on wigs and makeup, and Jess ruefully reflects "four stone-butches trying on fashion wigs. It was like Halloween, only it was creepy and painful. The wigs made us look like we were making fun of ourselves" (143). This exercise eventually culminates in a shouting match where Jess declares "nobody's gonna hire me with that fucking wig on. And makeup's not gonna do it, either. I need a bushel basket to hide who I am" (144). In this example, the frames denoting which bodies can earn a living in highly gendered spaces have been broken and rearticulated to exclude Jess and her fellow stone butches. Where hegemonic markers of femininity allow some women to make a claim to normative female subjectivity, working to replicate these markers foregrounds the butches' identities as gender outsiders. As they attempt to perform as women, Jess and her friends are confronted with the reality that they are excluded from both sides of the gender-binary, and thus from both male and female dominated spheres of the workforce. Where Jess and her friends previously found work in the factories, the frames that dictate who can access factory work have been re-drawn through the recession to exclude them. Further, the image of masculine women trying

on fashion wigs reminds Jess that the frames that denote normative gender performances continue to preclude them from female dominated professions within the highly gendered blue-collar job market. Jess expresses anger following her failure to be employable, and feels deep rage at the notion that finding work depends on adhering to hegemonic gender norms. This anger not only signals Jess's unreal status, it soon sets the stage for a new closeness between Jess and Edwin. Specifically, following this argument, Edwin reveals to Jess that she had begun a transition into a male body (145). This new closeness then allows Jess to admit that she is considering the same transition, and allows her and Edwin to speak candidly about their relationships to their bodies and the violence that surrounds them. Following Ahmed, Edwin has recognized Jess as angry about her vulnerability to unemployment and abuse, and Jess's anger at their failed gender performance and tenuous employability points towards a shared struggle. In this case, Jess's anger signals to Edwin that she is suffering abuse and frustration, and Edwin's rage shows Jess that she is not alone in her struggle. Ultimately, while they continue to be excluded from normative frames, their anger at their shared liminal status allows them to support one another, whereas Martha, who often stands alone in her suffering, continues to feel isolated despite (or perhaps because of) her anger.

Jess suffers the most heinous violence at the hands of those whose responsibility is to protect her- the teachers at school, her parents, and most notably, the police. This ongoing violence is not only symptomatic of Jess's unreal status, but also, in each of these assaults, the normative frames that denote subjects worthy of state protection and respect are violently rearticulated in order to exclude her. Jess first experiences sexual violence as a teenager. One afternoon, Jess sits in the bleachers and watches cheerleading tryouts, marveling at the

differences between she and the blond girls on the field (40). As Jess tries to leave, a group of football players surround her and rape her, calling her “bulldagger” and “Kyke”, indicating that the assault is motivated by both racism and homophobia. Following the assault, the boys’ coach tells Jess to “get out of here, you little whore” (41). In this instance, the frame that denotes who occupies a female body that merits protection re-forms to exclude Jess. This instant also foregrounds a fundamental contradiction in Jess’s identity: although she is excluded from this frame, she is also deeply impacted by gender based violence, and is subject to the same attacks that haunt many women. However, as an unreal subject (not a female, but still subject to violence against women), Jess’s abuse is erased through both the coach’s and the players’ slurs, which frame her as either the willing participant in her own assault, or as bringing the violence upon herself through her sexual orientation or her racial difference. Ultimately, these slurs and Jess’s corresponding suspension foreground the ways normative frames continue to exclude her as a means to protect the men who abuse her. As a gender outsider, the majority of her teachers do not consider Jess as a student who merits protection.

Jess reacts to this violence in anger, deliberately breaking her school’s unwritten rules about racial segregation as she seeks solace among her Black friends at lunch, and ultimately quits school rather than face suspension for this transgression (44-45). Although the football players go unpunished for their crime, Jess’s anger leads her African American peers to recognize her suffering. Jess soon finds acceptance among some of the Black students who surround her (43), and eventually identifies allies among some of the teaching staff who see her as a future poet or labor organizer (45). In this case, each articulation of normative gender continues to preclude Jess from making a claim to the protections

associated with a normative identity. However, we can link failures like these to a vast range of alternative successes (Halberstam 92). This sequence of events not only foreshadows Jess's involvement in the labor union, through her anger, Jess succeeds in establishing connections with others who share her political aspirations.

This trend continues after Jess leaves school and relocates to Buffalo. Upon her arrival, Jess immediately befriends a Butch-femme community, whose experiences of state sanctioned violence and personal stories teach her "to fear the cops as a mortal enemy" (29). Because she transgresses gender identities, Jess develops the certainty that "it was going to happen to me. I knew that. But I couldn't change the way I was" (53). The police repeatedly arrest Jess when they raid the gay-bars she frequents, and she vividly recalls her first sexual assault by police, where an officer forces her head under toilet water filled with feces, rapes, and sodomizes her (62-63). This assault mirrors the one on the football field; not only are the sports field and the prison locations of heterosexual male power, her assailant calls her "bulldagger" and "pervert", erasing the violence he enacts upon her. Like the football coach, these insults locate Jess outside of the normative frame that delineates which women merit protection, and occur at the moment when normative frames are violently rearticulated to exclude Jess. Jess is also victim to several brutal arrests and assaults over the course of the text, and like her first experience, she is never charged with a crime (nor has she committed any), but rather released after a night of terrible abuse (65). The homophobic slurs that accompany each of these assaults indicate that Jess's gender ambiguity and butch gender performance pose a perceived threat to hegemonic forms of masculinity and the gender binary. These rapes and slurs function as the moment when normative gender frames re-form to exclude Jess, as she is raped because she is a woman performing a masculine gender, and

denied the protection that her normative peers often enjoy. According to Halberstam, butch masculinities are troubling because they remind us that masculinity is an untenable ideal. Through the figure of the butch female, we are confronted with the impossibility of mutually exclusive gender identities (100). By raping and abusing Jess, and then naming her as an outsider to normative identities, the hyper-masculine figures of the police officers, the football players, and the coach, are able to rearticulate normative masculine identities for themselves at Jess's expense, and exclude Jess from both normative male and female frames.

In the wake of these assaults, Jess feels incredible anger, which is clearly evidenced when she contemplates hormone therapy even though she prefers to live in the liminal space between male and female. Before she begins her transition, Jess's partner Theresa remarks to her that "there's so much going on in your heart it scares me sometimes because I'm afraid you'll explode if you don't have some sort of safety valve. I think anger is real hard for you. Maybe your own rage scares you" (Feinberg 150). In this case, Jess's transition is not motivated by a desire to feel at home in her body, but is rather a means of survival, and the culmination of anger following years of abuse. As she begins hormone therapy and surgically removes her breasts, Jess is soon able to slip into the frame of normative masculinity, enabling her the pleasures of flirting with women openly (182), and a trip to the barber (172). The ease with which Jess moves through the world when she passes as a man not only indicates that she has moved into the frame that delineates normativity, it also shows the untenable nature of these frames from the outset, as Jess is not a biological man, nor does she feel at home in her new body once she is able to pass. It is also important to note that Jess has a tenuous hold on her place within this frame, as passing does not grant Jess many of the privileges that male bodies enjoy. Because Jess does not have

identification, she makes use of men's washrooms and other private spaces, and feels constantly at risk of being "discovered". Further, Jess has grown so accustomed to ongoing police surveillance and brutality that she cannot simply stop being frightened despite the changes she has undergone. This ongoing fear, combined with the incongruence between her new physical form and her desired identification he-she, as well as the threat of violence should she transition back into an ambiguously gendered body, form the basis of the Jess's anger. For example, when Annie accepts her advances thinking that Jess is biologically male, Jess reflects

A powerful rage rose inside me. Why was I so angry? This was what I wanted, wasn't it? To be able to be myself and yet live without fear? It just didn't seem fair. All my life I'd been told everything about me was really twisted and sick. But if I was a man I was 'cute'. Acceptance of me as a he felt like an ongoing indictment of me as a he-she. (178)

In this case, as the frame of hegemonic masculinity is articulated to include Jess, she feels enraged knowing that she has had to circumvent her own desire to live as he-she in order to function as a real subject and become visible. In this case, Jess's anger signals her inclusion into the frame rather than her exclusion from it. However, this anger foregrounds the fundamental incompatibility between her identity and normative genders, as well as the violence inherent to the frame itself.

In her analysis of affective responses to failure, Judith Halberstam argues that anger, discontent, bitterness, and other allegedly "negative" affective responses can shatter hegemonic constructions of success and failure (110). For Halberstam, the failure to attain markers of normalcy that are dictated by capitalist ideologies can signal new ways of being,

or can function as a rejection of these norms altogether. This is clear in *Stone Butch Blues* as Jess's anger illustrates that overarching understandings of what counts as success are only available to her when her body is incongruent with her identity and desires. Once Jess transitions into a gender-neutral body, she is once again vulnerable to abuse and her suffering goes ignored. This is particularly noticeable at the end of the novel, after Jess has transitioned into a gender ambiguous body and goes to a women's health clinic. Where she was once able to move through public spaces freely as a man, she now faces harassment at the clinic. One doctor tells Jess that she is not a woman, and Jess responds by swearing at the doctor, her face "purple with rage" (235). Another doctor soon walks in, and gives Jess the medical attention she needs. Following Ahmed, the compassion this doctor shows illustrates that she sees Jess as angry about a set of unjust circumstances, rather than as merely angry because her Otherness renders her inherently irrational. Ultimately, this recognition allows Jess to access medical care (235). While Jess falls outside of the frame of normative female bodies dictated by the women's health clinic, her anger allows her to find a potential ally among the medical professionals whom she generally tries to avoid.

These alternative successes are also present in Jess's personal life, as Feinberg often juxtaposes instances of violence with descriptions of Jess's domesticity and supportive friendships. For example, when Jess leaves the clinic and goes to her apartment, Feinberg describes the extensive renovations Jess has made to her home, as well as Jess's purchase of new clothing and towels because she enjoys the sensation of the new fabrics against her skin (236-237). In another instance, following a particularly gruesome attack, Ruth shows that she is a supportive and caring friend as she nurses Jess back to health (262-265). Although the assault and the doctor's claim that Jess does not belong at the Women's Clinic force Jess

outside of normative gender frames, her anger at the moments when normative frames reform to exclude her also point towards alternative successes, such as feeling at home in her ambiguously gendered body (as illustrated through the tactile pleasure of fabric against her skin), and her supportive community of gender-outsiders. This juxtaposition between the violence Jess suffers, and her relative domestic bliss in the private sphere, points towards the joy that can come from adhering to domestic scripts of happiness, but by complicating them by eschewing their heteronormative aspects.

It is important to note that Jess's rage mirrors Feinberg's own anger, and this affective response also points towards the erasure of subjugated groups from dominant historical narratives. In his history of the riots at the Stone Wall Inn, which figure prominently in *Transgender Warriors* and are alluded to in the bar raids in *Stone Butch Blues*, David Carter sheds light on the participation of marginalized Queer groups in the gay rights movement. Carter explains that while gay and lesbian rights groups have a long and relatively well documented history, many witnesses and participants in both the riots and subsequent rallies reported that many of those who suffered the most extreme police violence were vulnerable groups such as drag queens and the homeless street youths (162-163). This relatively unknown aspect of the riots, and the use of anger as a vehicle for social change, reflects Feinberg's own experience as ze vividly recalls the emotion ze felt when, as a person who self-identifies as between gender categories, suffered repeated harassment and abuse. Feinberg candidly reflects:

Why was I subject to legal harassment and arrest at all? Why was I being punished for the way I walked or dressed, or who I loved? Who wrote the laws used to harass us, and why? Who gave the green light to the cops to

enforce them? Who decided what was normal in the first place? [...] this is how my journey began. It was 1969 and I was twenty years old. As I sat in a gay bar in Buffalo, a friend told me that drag queens has fought back against a police bar raid in New York City. The fight had erupted into a four-night-long uprising in Greenwich Village, the Stonewall Rebellion! I pounded the bar with my fist and cursed my fate, for once we had rebelled and made history and I had missed it! I stared at my beer bottle and wondered: have we always existed? Have we always been so hated? Have we always fought back?

*(Transgender Warriors 9)*

Feinberg reflects that learning about these events made hir more certain about why ze was angry (xiii). For both Feinberg and hir loosely autobiographical protagonist Jess, the constant exclusion from normative frames and the subsequent harassment after being deemed abnormal is the source of their anger. This anger ultimately functions as the catalyst for Feinberg to explore and rewrite dominant historical narratives in order to include the ongoing presence and reverence of trans people into dominant historical narratives. According to Butler, emotional responses such as anger and rage have tremendous political potential (*Frames of War* 39). This potential is clear in Feinberg's work, as hir writing is motivated by anger, and this affective response has alerted us to alternative ways of being and successes that had previously been erased.

Although telling stories of alternative successes is an important part of social justice projects, Halberstam also foregrounds the potential drawbacks to this strategy. For Halberstam, telling unknown stories and their subsequent memorialization has the tendency to "tidy up disorderly histories" (*The Queer Art of Failure* 15) by selecting what is important

for public memory, and re-casts messy and contradictory historical events as linear narratives of progress and victory. Rather than participate in this erasure, Halberstam advocates for a form of forgetting that actually gives rise to new memories that are complex and contradictory, rather than replicating neat historical accounts of Queer lives (15). Both Feinberg and Jess's anger call attention to significant stories and histories of abuse that must not be forgotten. Not only do these stories and emotions destabilize frames of normalcy that we take for granted, they also point towards examples of what Halberstam calls failures, such as Jess's supportive community of gender-outsiders who share in her grief, and revel in her victories. Further, *Stone Butch Blues* explores the messy and sometimes contradictory role of transgendered activists within the gay rights movement, and underlines the tensions among political factions that continue to fight for gender based equality.

## **Conclusion**

Taken together, *A Dangerous Woman* and *Stone Butch Blues* illustrate the devastating violence that occurs when individuals either cannot adhere to hegemonic notions of normalcy, or refuse them from the outset. It is important to note that as Jess and Martha seek out markers of normalcy through domesticity, employment, and monogamy, they do not necessarily question these pleasures themselves, but rather they interrogate the unequal distribution of wealth, security, and social services that exclude them from normative frames from the outset. Both texts illustrate that anger can call attention this social inequality, and both narratives foreground the political impact of erasing this affective response. More specifically, in Morris's text, Frances and Mack continuously erase the source of Martha's anger, and by extension erase the violence she suffers. At the end of the text however, Mack finally recognizes that Martha's angry and sometimes incoherent rants signal her love for

him and the abuse she suffers, rather than reducing Martha's complex emotional responses to the product of her disability (358). Despite the whirlwind of controversy that surrounds her, this recognition allows Martha to feel at peace as she sits in the courtroom and watches the trial unfold around her. This scene stands in juxtaposition to ongoing erasure of Martha's anger throughout the narrative, which ultimately indicates both the necessity for subjects to be seen as what Ahmed calls angry about, and foregrounds the psychic damage caused by this erasure.

Feinberg's text concludes on a similar note. In the final pages of *Stone Butch Blues*, Jess emerges from the subway station into the sun, and participates in a labor rally where she speaks of the violence she suffers as a he-she (296). The close of the novel suggests that Jess will continue to experience violence, and thus continue to be angry, but that she is finally recognized as angry about rather than simply irrationally angry. In this case, Jess functions as what Ahmed calls "the unhappy Queer", that is, a Queer figure who is dissatisfied that the "forms of recognition [that] are either precariously conditional, you have to be the right kind of Queer by depositing your hope for happiness in the right places (even with perverse desire you can have straight aspiration), or it is simply not given" (106). The unhappy Queer speaks out against this lack of recognition, and interrupts the ways Queer figures are continuously erased or forced to adhere to normative social scripts. Although it might appear contradictory that Jess eschews normative frameworks while simultaneously pursuing markers of a middle-class lifestyle such as decorating her apartment, and the sensation of expensive fabric against her skin, a focus on anger illustrates how difficult it is for unreal figures to access these pleasures from the outset. For Jess, the very project of building a home for herself and participating in monogamous relationships is a political act, as she is denied access to middle

class life and marriage from the outset. Finally, because organizers in the labor movement, as well as peers in gay rights activist groups, recognize her anger as a reaction to oppression, she is able to use her emotions to forge new alliances, and fashion her own successes that transgress domestic and heteronormative scripts.

While anger allows Jess and Martha to become recognizable when normative frames shift, change, and reform, Melissa Harris-Perry argues that visibility on its own does not solve social inequalities. For Harris-Perry, marginal and stigmatized groups have limited opportunities for accurate recognition, and she goes on to explain that

individuals denied access to the public realm or whose group membership limits their social possibilities cannot be accurately recognized. An individual who is seen primarily as a part of a despised group loses the opportunity to experience the public recognition for which the human self strives. Further, if the group itself is misunderstood, then to the extent that one is seen as part of this group, that “seeing” is inaccurate. Inaccurate recognition is painful not only to the psyche but also to the political self, the citizen self. (38)

While Jess and Martha’s anger points towards histories of violence, they continue to be part of despised groups, and this social construction of marginal subjects as despicable objects (or as not existing at all) will continue to threaten their accurate recognition. Following Harris-Perry, visibility without social reform may do little to alleviate the plight of gender outsiders and those who suffer from mental illness. However, Morris and Feinberg’s narratives illustrate that recognition can function as a meaningful starting point for social justice projects, and anger is a means through which marginal subjects become visible. Further, by foregrounding untold stories of abuse, both texts ultimately work towards accurate

recognition and the protagonists' anger can function as the catalyst for social change. Taken together, *Stone Butch Blues* and *A Dangerous Woman* illustrate the potential for anger to call attention to unreal subjects and the social conditions that give rise to their liminal status, but also foreground the imperative for dominant groups to recognize anger as a response to violence.

### **Chapter 3: Compassionate Readership: The Politics of Anger and Suffering**

In the previous chapter, I have explored the ways liminal subjects suffer violence because they fall in between (or outside) or normative identity categories. In the chapter that follows, I will expand upon that analysis, and explore the ways these normative categories offer some women protection from harm, while rendering others far more vulnerable. The following chapter will also explore the ways readers might respond to this suffering with compassion, and will ultimately map some of the ways anger can complicate this response. Before undertaking my analysis of *Push* and *In Search of April Raintree* it is also important to underscore the reality that compassionate reader responses are but one of many possible reactions to these texts. My focus on compassion, and critiques thereof, is not intended to function as an assertion that there is only one way to read and interpret these texts. Rather, one of the aims of this chapter is to explore the social mechanisms through which compassion becomes a likely response from the outset.

According to Black feminist thinker Melissa Harris-Perry, “the internal, psychological, emotional, and personal experiences of Black women are inherently political” (5). While Harris-Perry centers her analysis on the experiences of Black women in the United States, the same is true for Aboriginal women in Canada, whose lived realities are also highly politicized through gendered and racially motivated violence. The experiences of both of these groups are further politicized as they are mediated by pervasive cultural stereotypes that are located at the intersections of race, class, and sex. These tropes have given rise to inaccurate public images that blame racialized women in Canada and the United States for creating the conditions that have led to their suffering, and are the target of ongoing activist projects to interrupt them. Julia Jordan-Zachary explores the public images

of the welfare queen, the urban teen mother, and Jezebel, foregrounding the impact these stereotypes have had on the psyches of Black women. For Jordan-Zachary, the racist assumptions that Black women are sexually available, have uncontrolled fertility, are lazy, angry, simple minded, unwilling to work, and leech government resources have been recycled and re-deployed since emancipation, and currently operate in the form of these familiar tropes (46). In a Canadian context, Barbara Godard explores the longstanding images of the squaw and the Indian princess, and maps how these circulate as dominant representations of Aboriginal women. According to Godard, these images create dichotomous distinctions between Aboriginal women. On one hand, the princess is aligned with the earth, spirituality, is powerful and nurturing. However, the princess also poses a threat to white men because she embodies all of the imagined traits of the new world such as progress and intelligence. The squaw functions as a counter image to the princess, and figures as a “witch healer medicine woman, the seductive whore, the drunken stupid, thieving Natives living in shacks on the edge of town, not in a woodland paradise” (189). Aboriginal and Black women have developed various strategies and political projects to resist and interrupt these images. For example, poet and novelist Sapphire argues that women must use their anger and assertiveness to subvert these dominant ideals, and explains, “there is something very aggressive and assertive about being a female. We are taught to be very laid back and passive, but if we’re to survive, if we’re to move forward, we have to have that pushing energy” (interview qtd. in Roundtree 141). Sapphire’s assertion illustrates that for many women, this push is an emotionally charged political project that evokes affective responses such as anger and compassion among racialized women, their allies, and their oppressors.

This literal and metaphorical pushing back against dominant cultural images, the structural violence that gave rise to them, as well as the corresponding emotional responses to this push are prominent themes in Sapphire's *Push*, and Beatrice Mosionier's *In Search of April Raintree*. Within Mosionier's text, Métis sisters Cheryl and April Raintree come of age against the social backdrop of foster care, racism, alcoholism, and abuse. Despite their shared ancestry, April and Cheryl adopt differing strategies to subvert the negative cultural images of Aboriginal women: Cheryl takes pride in her Métis heritage, re-writes the distorted histories of First Nations people depicted in her school textbooks, and is a vocal proponent for Aboriginal people. In contrast, April comes to believe these dominant stereotypes and longs to pass as white in order to escape them, only to be repeatedly and violently reminded of her Métis heritage through neglect, harassment, and horrific sexual violence. Through the use of the Raintree sisters as foils, Mosionier illustrates both the devastating impact of these stereotypes, as well as the anger the Raintree sisters feel as they are continually confronted with these assumptions. Similarly, Sapphire's novel *Push* chronicles Claireece Precious Jones's journey to literacy amidst the extreme sexual, physical, and verbal abuse she suffers at home. As Precious works to gain control over her life and emancipation from her family, she is repeatedly confronted with stereotypes of welfare queen, Jezebel, and urban teen mother. Within the safety of her alternative school, Precious writes her own story and speaks candidly about the incongruity between these dominant social tropes and her lived reality, while chronicling her affective responses in her autobiography. Over the course of these two novels, April, Cheryl, and Precious aggressively push back against racist cultural images, and express anger, sadness, and hopelessness at the injustice they confront on a daily basis. In both texts, Mosionier and Sapphire use similar rhetorical strategies to subvert dominant

representations of Aboriginal and Black women. Both authors juxtapose dominant stereotypes with the lived realities of their young female protagonists, both texts are characterized by graphic and horrific descriptions of gendered and racially motivated violence. Ultimately, both texts illustrate that Precious, April, and Cheryl cannot be blamed for their suffering, subverting dominant neo-liberal ideologies of hard work and equal opportunity that inform these negative tropes. Further, following these graphic representations of violence, Cheryl, April, and Precious express intense anger, disrupting the notion that women's anger is the product of mental instability, framing it as a legitimate response to oppression. While showing that women's anger is a legitimate response to oppression and a useful political strategy, this approach also reaffirms the binary frame of phallogentric western thought, and ultimately preserves the distinctions between legitimate and illegitimate emotional responses. As one of the aims of this dissertation is to study anger beside this bifurcated way of thinking, it is important to ask, what are other ways anger functions in these texts? Given the graphic depictions of violence that characterize both narratives, what kinds of affective responses might Mosionier and Sapphire evoke among their readers and potential allies? How can these responses be better understood by studying them alongside of anger?

These repeated and graphic depictions of violence can also be read as leading the reader to feel compassion for the female protagonists who suffer throughout both narratives. According to Martha Nussbaum, compassion is an emotional response that an individual feels when they see another person suffering, and decide that this suffering is due to circumstances that are outside of that person's control (33). For Nussbaum, compassion forms an imagined connection, or an emotional bridge, between individuals who might not

otherwise share a connection (28), by allowing one person to share in the suffering of another person, guided by the knowledge that one day they may suffer in a similar way (35). Although Nussbaum argues that compassion can play a key role in moral behavior and inform social change, affect theorists have been more critical of this emotional response. For example, Lauren Berlant argues that compassion denotes a certain level of privilege on behalf of the emoter, as the suffering is not shared, but rather distant and separate from the person who feels compassion (*Compassion* 4). Because compassion is felt at a distance, it does not signal an obligation to take action, and can give way to complacency (Vogler 31). Consequently, compassion is not necessarily the impetus to moral behavior as Nussbaum suggests, but rather, can give the impression of morality without catalyzing action. Mediated through compassion, moral behavior could simply function as recognition of suffering, rather than working to improve the living conditions of others. Although philosophers and affect theorists differ in their understandings of this emotional response, this debate suggests that compassion is more complex than simply a positive/useful or negative/ineffective response. For the purposes of this chapter, and following Nussbaum, Vogler, and Berlant, I understand compassion as a shared feeling of suffering among individuals who would otherwise have no connection. Through compassion, a person imagines what the suffering of another person might feel like. I also understand compassion as a socially valued emotional response- it is not only socially acceptable to feel compassion, but socially desirable, and when a person feels compassion they are also understood as kind, caring, and just. While compassion plays an important role in social justice projects, I am interested in exploring critiques of compassion, particularly those that centre around passive compassion (that is, compassion

that does not lead to action), or compassion that obscures the realities of the Other who suffers.

In relation to *Push* and *In Search of April Raintree*, the protagonists' circumstances, the graphic depictions of violence, as well as the first person narration of both texts makes it clear that April, Cheryl, and Precious are not to blame for their suffering, which could lead the reader to feel compassion. Although this compassion may be well intended, this affective response also allows the reader to prop themselves up as a moral subject because they can recognize suffering, and emote a socially desirable affective response. While the recognition of injustice is a crucial aspect of social justice projects, it is also possible that people will refuse to act once they see inequality and feel compassion, even though they might have the ability or the resources to relieve the suffering of another person. Once established as a moral subject by virtue of this compassion, readers might also be absolved (or absolve themselves) from any other social action. Given the angry tone of these narratives, as well as the graphic depictions of gendered and racially motivated abuse, it is important to consider what roles anger and compassion might play in these texts. This is an important project as literary critics have yet to discuss the role of affect in these texts, and its connection to their political underpinnings of each text. To date, considerable effort has been dedicated to exploring the intertextual connections between *Push*, *The Color Purple*, and the *Bluest Eye*, as well as other prominent African-American authors such as Langston Hughes (Rountree 2004; Dalsgard 1998; Donaldson 2005; Liddell 2002). Literary critics have also read *Push* through a Freirean lens (Stapleton 2004) and discussed Precious's road to self-actualization (Michlin 2006) within the context of American welfare reform. The bulk of the literary criticism about *In Search of April Raintree* is compiled in the 1999 critical edition of the text, where critics

have explored April's search for identity (Acoose; Creal; Fee), April's human rights (Grant), and the topic of sisterhood (Zwicker). Finally, critics have explored the autobiographical elements of both texts (Hoy), and outside of this anthology, Sharon Smulders (2006) has explored the question of Métis identity in Mosionier's text. In light of the affective gaps in this scholarly work, I will focus my analysis on an alternative readings of both texts, and contend that the protagonists' anger problematizes passive compassionate reader responses in order to foreground the invisible privilege that compassion might obscure.

In this chapter, I will draw from Martha Nussbaum's discussion of compassion, as well as critiques of this emotional response, to argue that while compassion builds Nussbaum's metaphorical emotional bridge between the reader, Cheryl, and/or Precious, compassion also erases the specificity of their suffering. Departing from Nussbaum, and following affect theorists Lauren Berlant and Candace Vogler, I contend that while compassion can function as a stepping stone for moral action, it can also allow a person to prop themselves up as a moral actor under the premise that they have identified oppression, and are now displaying the correct social response. While I am not arguing that compassion necessarily leads to complacency, I develop this critique to underline the limits of compassion, as my aim is to weigh in on debates within affect theory and moral philosophy surrounding the drawbacks to this emotional response, as well as to establish a framework to inform my reading of anger and compassion in Sapphire and Mosionier's narratives. In both texts, and central to my discussion, are the graphic depictions of violence and scenes where Mosionier and Sapphire use anger to interrogate the images of the squaw, welfare queen, urban teen mother, and Jezebel discussed above. I contend that while these violent passages can be read as calling for compassion because they clearly illustrate that the female

characters are not to blame for their suffering, they are often complicated by April and Precious's anger. When they are confronted with negative images and abuse, April and Precious often feel intense anger, then imagine themselves as white and/or affluent, social locations they think will protect them from abuse. I will argue that this anger and longing interrupts potentially compassionate reader responses. However, this anger goes beyond interrupting racist stereotypes, as it also interrupts the potential moral propping of the reader that is made possible through compassion. I will ultimately argue that anger can help us account for these critiques of compassion, as April and Precious's anger foregrounds the racial and class based hierarchies, the social privilege, and public policies that simultaneously cause and erase the suffering of racialized women.

### **Compassion and the Intimate Public Sphere**

Before outlining ongoing discussions of compassion and critiques thereof, it is important to outline how the current social climate enables readers to feel compassion from the outset. *Push* and *In Search of April Raintree* are both located within the parameters of what Lauren Berlant calls the intimate public sphere, a social milieu that is characterized, in part, by notions of shared suffering. According to Berlant, the belief that all citizens share a similar history of suffering and pain is a hallmark of the intimate public sphere. This ideal of communal suffering centers around the nationalist narrative that by working together, citizens can dissolve, transcend, and overcome the obstacles that shape their suffering from the outset (*The Female Complaint* 8). Berlant explains that neoliberal claims to self-improvement and overcoming adversity figure prominently in the intimate public sphere, which ultimately give rise to discourses that call for citizens to work hard to overcome obstacles in order to remedy their suffering (8). These discourses also blame individuals for

failing to vanquish obstacles or to ease their suffering, under the premise that subjugated groups who continue to suffer simply do not work hard enough. Further, this discursive trend also erases the social stratification that allows some people to suffer more than others. These factors ultimately give rise to an idealized notion of American citizenship that is built upon suffering and overcoming that obscures the fundamental interplay between identities, hierarchies, and violence (Berlant 2). According to Candace Vogler, representations of pain play a special role in forming social relations within an intimate public sphere, and public outcry in response to these depictions produces concern for what the public sees as a shared injury (as in this sphere of shared suffering, all injuries are similar). However, this notion of shared injury ultimately prevents politicized, movement-building energy that could dismantle structural violence (29). For Berlant, this logic is characteristic of conservative cultural politics, which universalize the struggles of marginalized groups such as gays and lesbians, people of color, and women, pitting them against dominant groups who feel the slow erosion of their ability to function as unmarked, and who are beginning to experience the untenability of the American dream (2). While Mosionier and Sapphire's texts problematize these narratives of overcoming and shared pain, they figure within an intimate public sphere as both narratives follow female protagonists who suffer through graphic depictions of sexual abuse. In an epoch where millions of women are sexually assaulted annually, and representations of heterosexual sexual assault are widespread, rape figures as a universal female danger (Bergoffen 119). In this case, by inhabiting a body that is vulnerable to sexual assault (131), readers may see Precious's and April's suffering as universal, a viewpoint that ultimately conceals the racist assumptions that motivate the violence they endure.

Within the intimate public sphere, private lives are at the forefront of political debates. Berlant explains that this emphasis on domestic lives “recognizes a public good only in a particularly constricted nation of simultaneously lived private worlds” (Berlant qtd in Vogler 29). Political dialogues that centre on allegedly private matters such as the family and reproductive rights gives rise to America’s national identity, as well as corresponding social codes that dictate how Americans should act. Significantly, many of these notions and debates hinge on protecting children from harm. This is an important discursive feature of the intimate public sphere, whereby the child figures as a being that is untouched by history, secularization, sexuality, mass consumption, or war. As a result, children and the construct of childhood function as important sites for hope and prosperity. Berlant is deeply critical of this way of thinking, and argues that the idealized figure of the child within the intimate public sphere is

still tacitly white, and it still contains the blueprint for the reproductive form that assures the family and the nation its future history. This national icon is still innocent of knowledge, agency, and accountability and thus as ethical claims of the adult political agents who write laws, make culture, administer resources, control things. (*The Queen of America* 6)

Much like the narrative that citizens in an intimate public sphere all suffer in similar ways, this call to protect children obscures the plight of minoritarian youth, as the child who merits protection is most often a white, middle class child. This reliance upon children as the hope for the future is both present and complicated by Sapphire and Mosionier’s texts, as both narratives follow a child protagonist as they come of age amidst poverty and violence. By discussing the experiences of racialized children, these authors foreground the suffering of

minoritarian groups that is erased within an intimate public sphere. However, although Sapphire complicates the centrality of white children within the intimate public sphere, her text also makes claims to universality that appeals to an audience that is shaped by this sphere. For example, Sapphire dedicates her text “To Children Everywhere” not only relying on the trope of the American child as the site of hope, this dedication also implies that there is a sort of universal suffering (or the potential for that suffering) among all children. While children of all races, classes, and sexes are vulnerable to abuse, the universalizing “all children” can be read as the tacitly white child within the intimate public sphere, particularly if a white audience is reading *Push*. Similarly, Sapphire’s previous claim that women must push back against violence can be read as a call for women to rally against gender based oppression. However, mediated within the intimate public sphere, this assertion casts women as a homogenous group that suffers in the same way, and who deploy the same methods of resistance. Understood within the intimate public sphere, these assertions risk erasing the specificity of the suffering Sapphire chronicles in *Push*.

Finally, Berlant explains that the assumption of universal suffering also creates the circumstances where readers interpret narratives that depict suffering as autobiographical recounts of this shared experience (*The Queen of America* vii). Both *Push* and *In Search of April Raintree* lend themselves to these interpretative methods, as they are both loosely autobiographical texts. This is reaffirmed by the ongoing trend where interviews with both writers tend to focus on each author’s personal life and the similarities between their novel and lived experience. For example, Sapphire is a survivor of incest who also uses poetry to come to terms with abuse and tell her story, and Precious is a composite of the students Sapphire taught within the parameters of literacy workshops in Harlem (Michlin 170; Cohen

1). Beatrice Mosionier's youth follows a similar trajectory to April Raintree's: both of her sisters committed suicide, she herself attended boarding school, and like Cheryl Raintree, she shared a desire as a teenager to find solutions for all of the world's problems ("The Special Time" 247-248). Sharon Smulders explains that Mosionier wrote this novel as a means to come to terms with her past as a ward of the Children's Aid Society of Winnipeg, her parents' addiction to alcohol, and her sense of shame for being Aboriginal (76). Located within an intimate public sphere, the suffering of the female protagonists can be read as entirely autobiographical, as reflective of a universal female suffering, and beyond the control of the author-victim. However, Mosionier feels a sense of unease with the characterization of her text as an autobiography, and explains "unless I could really explain what I meant by autobiographical, some would unfairly judge the people I admire and cherish" (246). Despite Mosionier's reservations, mediated through the intimate public sphere, the intersections of race, class, and sexuality that give rise to this suffering are largely erased and are replaced by the narrative that all of our lives are equally impacted by violence and sorrow. As Katherine Woodward explains, "key to the liberal narrative of compassion is a scene of personal suffering and pain" (63). Following Woodward, these trends at play within the intimate public sphere make compassion a likely reader response, as readers can read Precious and April's pain as related, to their own and then connect it to the suffering of those who surround them.

Within the intimate public sphere, compassion is also a likely reader response as it links one person to another in a community of shared suffering. In her analysis of Greek tragedies, Martha Nussbaum explores the social, political, and philosophical utility of compassion and pity, and notes that the significance of both affective responses is

continuously in flux. Nussbaum departs her analysis from Aristotle's discussion of pity and compassion, and explains that according to Aristotle, a person feels pity when they witness someone else suffering, and they imagine that they might eventually have the same fate. Nussbaum goes on to map the trajectory of philosophical discussions of compassion and pity, and explains that in the tradition of Western philosophy, pity works as a metaphorical bridge between the individual and their community. More specifically, pity was one of the ways humans could create links between their own interests and those of others. Nussbaum argues that where compassion currently denotes a concern for the well being of others (28), the meaning of pity has transformed over time to take on a more negative meaning. In the wake of the Victorian era, to feel pity for someone implies that the person who emotes pity assumes a position of moral superiority over the person who suffers (Woodward 67; Nussbaum 29). It is thus important to note that Nussbaum uses the term pity in the Aristotelian sense, and like her philosophical predecessors, uses pity and compassion interchangeably. While I draw from Nussbaum's analysis of pity, and quote her discussion of pity at length, in my own analysis, I use the term compassion exclusively in order to account for the current social underpinnings of this emotional response.

Compassion is also informed by the notion that a person has rights that have been violated, or has entitlements that are not being met (Nussbaum 37). As a result, when a person feels compassion, they have recognized injustice (Woodward 69), and feeling compassion prompts the observer to consider the gravity of this injustice (37). Following Nussbaum and Woodward, compassion is thus an evaluative response. A person will not feel compassion if they do not think that the suffering of another is legitimate, or do not believe that their rights have been violated. Through this judgment, a person either gives or

withholds their compassion. Nussbaum goes on to explain that giving the gift of compassion is also mediated by a person's background and subject position; the circumstances that allow one person to feel compassion may not evoke the same emotional response from others. Nussbaum argues that while we might attempt to understand the suffering of another and feel compassion for them, we can never escape our own subject position, and thus can never actually know what the pain of another feels like. Consequently, the perspective of the person who expresses compassion often elides that of the person who is suffering. Nussbaum explains:

pity takes up the onlooker's point of view, informed by the best judgment the onlooker can make about what is really happening to the person being observed- taking the person's own wishes into account, but not always taking as the last word the judgment that the person herself is able to form. (32)

As a result, the perspectives and emotional responses of the observer and the person who suffers might not necessarily align, and a person may feel compassion for a person who does not feel that they are suffering at all, or withhold it when a person suffers greatly. Finally, this tendency for a person to universalize their conception of suffering and thriving aligns neatly with the notion of universal suffering at work within this sphere, making compassion a likely reader response.

Nussbaum argues that central to compassion is a sense of human flourishing, an understanding of the resources that must be present for a person to succeed, and goes on to explain

putting seriousness and fault together, we see that pity requires the belief that there are serious bad things that may happen to people through no fault of

their own, or beyond their fault. In pitying another, the pitier accepts a certain picture of the world, according to which the valuable things are not always safely under a person's own control, but that can be damaged by fortune. (33)

Following Nussbaum, compassion departs from an understanding of which resources and relationships are integral to a person's well being, and should a person lack these resources through no fault of their own, they might be the recipients of compassion. This transferring of affect from one person to another builds Nussbaum's metaphorical bridge, linking one person to the next in an imagined community of shared suffering. Within an intimate public sphere that is characterized by stories of universal pain, compassion plays a key role in linking one person to another through this communal suffering, by either allowing one person to feel compassion because they fear that one day they too will suffer, or by allowing individuals to evaluate the claims to suffering made by their peers, and enter into affective relationships with them.

### **Responding with Compassion**

After outlining the ways in which the intimate public sphere fosters compassion, it is clear that both *In Search of April Raintree* and *Push* have the potential to elicit this reader response. Not only do both texts outline the tremendous suffering of the female protagonists (suffering that often goes ignored in the context of both narratives), they also feature compassionate characters that can function as emotional mentors who model appropriate affective responses to the reader. In the opening pages of *Push*, Precious addresses the constellation of abuse that characterizes her life, and immediately calls for the reader's compassion as she explains:

I was left back when I was twelve because I has a baby for my fahver...I was out of school for a year. This gonna be my second baby. My daughter got Down Sinder. She's retarded. I had got left back in the second grade too, when I was seven 'cause I couldn't read (and I still peed on myself).

(Sapphire 3)

From the outset, Precious locates her subject position as a young woman who suffers tremendous abuse at the hands of her father, and who has been ignored by her teachers and school administrators. Following this reflection, Precious points towards the devastating impact this has had on her life and explains: "I got suspended from school 'cause I'm pregnant which I don't think is fair. I ain' did nothin'!" (3). This statement not only implies that Precious feels as though those who surround her continuously blame her for causing her suffering (and following Nussbaum, deem her unworthy of compassion), this reflection also sets the stage for her literal and metaphorical push against the ongoing erasure of her experiences.

The first portion of the novel moves back and forth between Precious's first and second pregnancies, which are four years apart and both the product of incest by her father. In one flashback, Precious remembers standing at the sink while her mother shouts obscenities at her, knocks her to the ground, and kicks her in the head as Precious goes into labor (9). As she chronicles her first experience giving birth, Precious contrasts her mother's cruel actions with a vivid recollection of a nurse who showed her kindness. Sitting in her hospital bed, this nurse wraps her arms around twelve-year-old Precious, who cries because no one has ever held her in kindness. Precious is so traumatized by "Mama's shoe coming at the side of my head like a bullet, Carl's dick dangle dangle in my face and now the flat-face

baby with eyes like Koreans” (18) that the nurse’s touch catalyses a cascade of horrific flashbacks. Precious then recalls in graphic detail the violence she suffers at the hands of her father and her mother, who have been sexually abusing her from the age of three (18). These flashbacks make it clear that Precious’s family is to blame for her suffering, and that Precious herself has not caused her own misfortunes, as those who surround her might believe. Following Nussbaum, because her suffering is no fault of her own, Precious seems worthy of compassion. Through this juxtaposition between the nurse and Precious’s family, the reader can condemn Mary and Carl, and feel compassion alongside of the nurse who cares for Precious.

Compassion is also an easy moral bridge to build when reading *Push*, as Sapphire goes on to juxtapose the behavior of Precious’s family with the responses of her classmates, her teacher, and her peers, who treat her with compassion and care. According to Wendy Roundtree, Precious experiences compassion within the parameters of her support groups, whose members have kindness, character, and conscience, traits that her mother and father lack (140). For example, at Each One Teach One, Miss. Rain not only teaches Precious to read and write, she validates her experiences and helps her unlearn the hate that she has absorbed from her parents. Rather than react in anger towards Precious’s own homophobic and racist attitudes (for example, Precious does not want to leave Harlem for fear of other racial minorities, and she is weary of the Queer student in her class), Ms. Rain shows Precious that such hatred is taught, and that it is not racial or sexual minorities who have abused and neglected her. Where Precious has previously disavowed others in an attempt to locate herself as a moral subject worthy of compassion and care, under Ms. Rain’s guidance, she begins to reconsider her own prejudices, reflecting that her lesbian teacher “put the chalk

in my hand, make me queen of the ABCs” (Sapphire 81). When Ms. Rain, along with the students in Precious’s alternative school, learn that Precious is homeless following the birth of her second child, they immediately come to her aid. Precious fondly remembers, “all of Each One Teach One is on the phone! They calling everybody from Mama to the mayor’s office to TV stations! Before this day is up, Ms. Rain say, you gonna be living somewhere, as god is my witness. As GOD is my witness!” (79). Similarly, Precious enjoys the compassion of her classmates from Each One Teach One, as they offer her the small kindnesses of a bag of chips from the corner store (48), bring her to support groups (131), and their collective actions allow Precious to feel like a person who is seen, heard, and valued. Because compassionate responses to Precious’ suffering are modeled for the reader by many of the characters in the text, readers can thus create an ethical bridge between themselves and Precious, while condemning Precious’s parents and teachers who do not see Precious’s suffering as the reader does. As they erect this bridge, the reader can also leave Precious’s family on the other side of a metaphorical chiasm, because as expressed by Roundtree, these characters lack compassion.

Like *Push*, *In Search of April Raintree* is also characterized by the juxtaposition of compassionate characters with their unsympathetic counterparts, and graphic descriptions of abuse that show the reader that April and Cheryl are not responsible for their suffering. As a child, April describes watching her family take “medicine”, worries her mother is “fat”, and maintains hope that she and Cheryl will eventually return to live with their parents rather than live in foster homes. These are the longings and confusions of a young child, and it is clear from April’s descriptions of changes her parents undergo when they ingest the “medicine” that they are abusing alcohol, and that her mother’s weight gain is actually a

pregnancy that went without medical supervision or community support. Although April is not cognizant of this reality, her parents' addiction will make it very unlikely that she and Cheryl can return home (Masionier 11-36). As previously discussed, compassion is possible when we do not think the person who suffers is responsible for their turmoil. As a result, compassion is a likely reader response as April's obvious confusion about her parents' behavior illustrates that she lives in circumstances that are beyond her control, and as a young, obedient, child, she cannot possibly contribute to her misfortune. Because children figure in the intimate public sphere as beings who are unsullied by hatred and commercial interests, compassion is also a likely response as April is the very image of this naïve, innocent child. April also evokes the readers' compassion because she responds to her parents' alcoholism by caring for her younger sister Cheryl, bathing, feeding, and playing with her, as well as protecting her from her parents' visitors (12). Not only does April seem worthy of compassion through her actions (which is itself a problematic value judgement), she stands in stark opposition to the other children who pass through her home, whom she describes as sullen, aggressive, and dirty bullies (12), while she, on the other hand, goes beyond what could reasonably be expected from a child. Further, the descriptions of Cheryl and April's early childhood foreground the gravity of their lack- they do not have adequate parental support, housing, or protection from the adults who come in and out of their parents' lives. As the reader recognizes the significant impact of this lack, they may respond with compassion.

The reader can also follow the emotional lead of Mrs. Dion, April's first foster mother, who is the model of compassionate behavior. April is initially confused by the Dions' Catholic faith and its inexplicable rules. The incongruence between Catholicism and

her own upbringing is clear as she reflects “my parents had done a lot of mortal sins because they had never gone to Mass on Sundays. That meant they were going to hell”. When April realizes that she will not be reunited with them in Heaven, April reflects: “I didn’t think that I’d want to go to heaven so much, after all” (Masionier 25). Mrs. Dion reacts to April’s confusion and sadness with compassion, comforting her by calling her “you poor angel”, provides her with love and support, urges her to continue loving her parents, and understands April’s longing to go home (30). April then reflects on the help and support the Dions offered her as a child:

when I was in Grade Two, my classroom was overcrowded. I was among six students who were placed in the Grade Three class. With Nicole’s help and patience, I was able to adapt very quickly to the higher grade. When I passed Grade Three with a good average, all the Dions were very proud of me and they made a little celebration. For an eight year old, I had a very large head for a while. (34)

Led by Mrs. Dion, April grows into a confident child. Compassion here not only builds a bridge between April and the reader, it also creates a link of shared affect between the reader and the Dions, who model the potential for compassionate behavior to create positive change in the lives of others. Moreover, April’s time with the Dions resonates within the intimate public sphere as April has, for the most part, overcome her suffering and is now the model of a well-adapted child.

Much like Ms. Rain in *Push*, the Dions stand in sharp contrast to other characters who do not show compassion. This juxtaposition allows readers to align themselves with compassionate characters, and erect a moral bridge between themselves and April while

distancing themselves from the other, less compassionate, characters. For example, Mrs. Semple, the sisters' social worker, lacks any compassion for April, and blames her for her suffering. In one instance, Mrs. Semple urges the compassionate Mrs. Dion not to coddle April, lest she express sadness following her infrequent visits with her family (Masionier 30). In this case, the benefit April derives from her compassionate foster family stands in sharp contrast with Mrs. Semple, a synecdoche for child services more broadly, who views April's suffering as the unavoidable product of her Métis heritage. After Mrs. Dion falls terminally ill, April moves to the DeRosier farm, and her new foster mother Mrs. DeRosier and her children Maggie and Rick treat April like their personal servant. This malicious trio expects her to do the bulk of the household chores while they sit and watch (40). Mrs. DeRosier also forces her to live in a drafty cold room (38), makes April wear out of style, shabby clothing, and refuses to let her use the sewing machine to alter them. Mrs. DeRosier also impedes April's communication with her sister by throwing her letters away rather than mailing them (66). She repeatedly taunts April with racist slurs, calling her lazy half-breed (37), and evokes colonial tropes by cutting her and Cheryl's hair when they run away (55). In contrast to Mrs. Dion, Mrs. DeRosier demeans April's parents, remarking to her children "they were fortunate in having a parent like her as my [April's] parents were too busy boozing it up to even come to visit me" (44). April deeply resents Mrs. DeRosier's posturing as a compassionate person, and remembering one incident after mass, where she "was by her side and she explained my presence, adding that I was a lovely little child, and we all got along very well. She wallowed in their compliments on what a generous, good-hearted woman she was to take poor, unfortunate children like myself into her home" (41). These experiences have a devastating psychic impact on April. While she had previously felt the

sting of racism from a young age, envying the white children in her northern community for their light skin and financial status (16), April comes to fully believe the negative stereotypes about Aboriginal people while living with the DeRosier family, thinking

being a half-breed meant being poor and dirty. It meant being weak and having to drink. It meant being ugly and stupid. It meant living off white people. And giving your children to white people to look after. It meant having to take all the crap white people gave. (47)

At this moment, April decides that when she is no longer a ward of child services, she would live like a “real white person” (47). April now sees Métis people as accountable for their own suffering, disavowing them and refusing to feel compassion for her family. Further, by vowing to live like a “real” white person, April ascribes an authenticity to whiteness that denies the structural oppression that gives rise to white privilege. This sequence of events shows the reader that racism is taught through individual attitudes and within broader social structures, and also illustrates the devastating impact of withholding compassion and adhering to racist tropes. Because Mosionier juxtaposes the benefits of Mrs. Dion’s compassion with the devastating impact of Mrs. DeRosier’s actions, the reader is able to align themselves with the Dion family, and mentally distance themselves from Mrs. Semple and the DeRosiers, who seem to be devoid of any consideration for April and Cheryl.

Finally, compassion is also possible through April’s brutal rape and her trial. Near the end of the narrative, April returns to Cheryl’s apartment to retrieve her possessions. A group of men mistake April for her sister (who had been making a living as a sex-worker), abduct her, and rape her. As they beat and assault April, her assailants call her “squaw” (129) and “savage” (130), indicating that this assault is racially motivated. One of her attackers then

urinates in April's mouth before finally throwing her from their car (132). Over the course of these events, April feels that she has been "mistaken" for an Aboriginal woman, an identity she has long been trying to hide by passing as white and concealing her Métis heritage. Because this horrific sequence of abuse is informed by mistaken identity, read within the intimate public sphere, this passage can imply to female readers that they too could be victims of such a "mistake" and assaulted. Further, because male readers might also be impacted by sexual assault, and they may see their own experiences (or the experiences of loved ones) reflected in April's trauma, catalyzing compassion. Compassion is also a possible reader response as the first person narration makes it clear that April is not a participant in her own assault. Rather, her internal dialogue before, during, and following the rape indicates that she has resisted her assailants to the best of her ability. She has not invited this abuse through her actions or clothing, as the stereotypes within rape culture would have us believe. Rather, April was kidnapped on a winter night and fought against her assailants until it was clear that she could not escape (127-132). In this case, the narrative encourages compassion, as readers know that once again, April is a victim of circumstances beyond her control. These events also clearly traumatize April, as, following the rape, she feels that she is now unable to participate in intimate relationships with men or form a family (172). In this case, compassion is once again possible as the reader recognizes these as consequential losses given April's previous desire to marry and bear children. Compassion becomes even more likely because the intimate public sphere positions families as the center of political debates, and children as the site of future promise. By feeling as though creating a nuclear family is now an impossibility, April is also denied the promise of happiness and fulfillment that accompanies family formation in this sphere.

## **Critique of Compassion**

While compassion connects people in an imagined affective community, there are also important drawbacks to this emotional response. It is important to note that compassionate reader responses are important in the context of both narratives, as this compassion indicates that readers identify injustice. This recognition is central to social justice projects, as we must be cognizant of oppression before we can work to remedy it. Although this is certainly one of the benefits of compassion, I am more interested in both the drawbacks to this emotional response, and in the ways anger can help us make sense of these critiques. As such, it is important to outline ongoing criticisms of compassion, and to explore the significant impact they can have on compassionate readership. Once I have outlined these critiques, I will illustrate how anger can function alongside of compassion to resolve some of these tensions.

In “Compassion and Withholding”, Lauren Berlant explains that compassion is not necessarily good in itself, but rather, denotes a social relationship where one person suffers considerably more than another (9). Although this compassion is well intentioned, it is also likely that the individual who feels compassion for another has access to resources that would alleviate that person’s suffering (4). Further, because of the distance between the person who suffers and the individual who feels compassion, it is possible that this emotional response will not catalyze action, but rather, will function as a gift that can be given or withheld without rectifying the unequal distribution of resources that gives rise to suffering from the outset. Berlant is critical of this simultaneous giving and withholding, explaining “compassion can feel like the apex of affective agency among strangers [...] to feel compassion for people who struggle or fail is at best to take the first step toward forging a

personal relationship to a politics of the practice of equality” (9). Compassion is thus an ambivalent response that can justify complacency or political betrayal when it does not function as a catalyst for social action (11). Candace Vogler echoes Berlant’s critique of compassion, and explains

of the many species of tenderness directed toward others’ troubles, compassion falls squarely in the range of affective orientations with a built-in cleans-hands clause [...] the compassionate person sympathizes with misfortunes she did not cause and would not otherwise touch her life. Accordingly, any intervention that she undertakes from compassion, beyond expressing condolence, will involve generosity or kindness, which likewise takes good people beyond the strict limits of [...] *responsibility*. While it’s good to help strangers now and then, you do not *owe* comfort to particular strangers. (30)

Following Vogler and Berlant, we can understand compassion as a socially acceptable response to suffering that does not make any tangible demands on the emoter. In this sense, recognizing loss or lack, and feeling compassion, constitutes moral action. Any response that exceeds giving the gift of compassion (such as giving the gift of time or resources) goes above and beyond the responsibilities of compassion. Although Nussbaum explains that compassion denotes a recognition of the suffering of others, Berlant and Vogler show that compassion can function as the height of affective agency in itself, but does not carry with it an obligation to act. As a result, compassion can function as a means for people to prop themselves up as moral subjects because they have successfully recognized suffering and injustice, and have expressed an affective response that is aligned with morality. In this

instance, compassion might function as a means for a person to establish an identity for himself or herself as caring or just, while simultaneously absolving them of any material actions.

Affect theorists are also critical of the presumed universality of suffering that characterizes compassion. Katherine Vogler explains that being emotionally receptive to other people's affects and misfortunes makes an implicit claim to universal humanity by presuming that we all suffer in the same way (34). Similarly, Lee Edelman argues that when we imagine what the suffering of another person might feel like, we project our own feelings onto them, confusing their emotions with our own. Compassion thus obscures the social factors that lead some groups to suffer more than others, and locates dominant groups as benevolent affective donors who are not obliged to ease the suffering of their subjugated peers. Through the presumed universality of suffering within the intimate public sphere, this process also elides the emotional responses of subjugated groups and foregrounds those of their dominant peers. Further, giving or withholding compassion also obscures the social mechanisms that produce some groups as sub-human or unworthy of compassion, excluding them from universalizing notions of human suffering, or blaming them for causing their own pain (159). In concert with the neo-liberal ideologies of self-help and overcoming adversity that characterize the intimate public sphere, it is clear that compassion might simply reaffirm ongoing distinctions between which groups merit social support (and thus compassion) and those who are framed as responsible not only for their own suffering (and thus denied the gift of compassion). In relation to *Push* and *In Search of April Raintree*, compassionate reader responses might actually naturalize the social stratification that informs April and Precious's suffering. Although readers might have similar experiences to those of April and

Precious, or they can imagine what it might be like to face the trials that Mosionier and Sapphire describe, this does little to disrupt the dominant cultural images that translate into social policies that also allow us to deny compassion, or feel as though we are not implicated in the suffering of others.

### **Racial Images and Denying Compassion**

Negative public images feature prominently within Sapphire and Mosionier's texts, and interact with compassion in complex ways. Through the circulation of tropes such as the squaw, the welfare queen, and the urban teen mother, citizens can blame racialized women for failing to alleviate their suffering, and excluding them from the shared community of pain that characterizes the intimate public sphere. By deploying and reaffirming these images, citizens and policy makers enable us to withhold the gift of their compassion under the premise that racialized women are entirely responsible for their own suffering. Before exploring how anger complicates compassionate reader responses, it is important to outline what these images are, how they function in both narratives, and explore how they allow us to withhold compassion, and finally to map how anger can complicate these tropes.

The public identities of squaw, welfare queen, Jezebel, and urban teen mother are created through an interplay of class, race, and gendered stereotypes. These public identities are ascribed to groups and inform legislative policies, and remain intact despite ongoing contestation (Hancock 15). *Push* and *In Search of April Raintree* clearly illustrate the inaccuracy of these public identities, and can be read as moving racialized women from objects of disdain to subjects worthy of compassion. While this reading usefully foregrounds the incongruence between these images and the lived realities of many racialized women, ongoing critiques of compassion illustrate that there are important drawbacks to simply

reframing a group as worthy of compassion when they were previously denied this gift. Not only does this logic preserve the dichotomy between groups that are either deserving or undeserving of compassion, it also fails to interrogate the processes through which dominant groups give or withhold compassion and blame minorities for their subjugated status. Given the aforementioned critiques of compassion, reading *In Search of April Raintree* and *Push* as contesting the legitimacy of the public images of the squaw, Jezebel, the urban teen mother and the welfare queen, and thus as texts that set the stage for compassionate readership, may merely allow readers to see themselves as moral subjects, who suffer alongside the April and Precious within the intimate public sphere. Some readers might relate to the plights of these female protagonists, and draw from these texts to inform their own political projects.

However, this compassion may also allow readers to prop themselves up as moral subjects, who can recognize racist images as false constructs, and follow social scripts dictating that compassion is an appropriate emotional response. Despite giving this gift, following Berlant, the suffering of racialized women will continue to be “over there” in northern communities or social housing projects, and within an intimate public sphere, and might ultimately be erased by the notion that we all are suffering together.

A focus on anger can complicate these readings of compassion, and analyzing compassion alongside of anger can point towards alternative functions of compassion. In this sense, anger interrupts the type of compassionate reader response that leads to moral propping but nothing else. Specifically, many of the scenes where Sapphire and Mosionier disrupt the aforementioned cultural images are combined with scenes where the female protagonists express intense anger, which are immediately followed by instances where they long for white skin under the premise that it will protect them from harm. In the following

sections of this chapter, I will argue that this anger and longing interrupts compassionate reader responses, and foregrounds the ways in which gender, class, and race impact suffering that are erased within compassionate readership alone. This anger foregrounds the invisible privilege that is distributed along the lines of race, class, and gender (hooks 2000), reminding the reader that as they offer their compassion, they might be doing little else to alleviate the suffering of others or to disrupt the aforementioned negative public images. In the following sections, I will briefly touch on dominant representations of Aboriginal and Black women in Canada and the United States, and outline how these continue to inform social policies and ways of thinking that casts them as undeserving of compassion. While Sapphire and Mosionier illustrate that these images are incongruent with Precious's and April's lived realities, I will ultimately argue that when these images are mediated through anger and longing, they disrupt compassion and bring white privilege into sharp relief.

According to Julia Jordan-Zachary, dominant cultural representations of Black women play out along binaries such as good/bad woman, male/female, and normal/other (28). Dominant images of the welfare queen, the urban teen mom, and Jezebel are all underpinned by the trope of Sapphire, the quintessential Black woman who is brash, loud, angry, and emasculates Black men. Melissa Harris-Perry explains that the trope of Sapphire has not been the subject of significant scholarly analysis because irrational or uncontrolled anger is a hallmark of other representations of Black women (88-89). It is important to note that many of the traits that signify difference in these images of Black women are worn on their bodies, which is illustrative of the belief that emotional states such as anger are imprinted upon bodily surfaces. As racialized women are thought to wear both their emotions and their difference upon their bodies, these function as clear markers of their

difference from, and subordination to, rational white men who are aligned with the mind. This logic ultimately rearticulates the longstanding distinctions between mind and body, rational and irrational explored in the introduction of this dissertation. For example, the dominant image of Sapphire holds that Black women are inherently angry, and that this anger is irrational and has no basis in lived events. Many Black women have re-appropriated this image and work to disrupt this logic, re-framing their anger as responses to oppression, and as a sign of strength and resistance. For example, Sapphire, the author of *Push* discussed in this chapter, is the pen name Romona Lofton. Lofton uses this dominant image as a pen name feeling that it evokes the “name of a strong Black woman” (Cohen 1). In this case, the novelist Sapphire is both implicitly angry through her choice of pen name, and explicitly so as she names and critiques the social mechanisms that disempower Black women in *Push*.

Other dominant images of Black women are often couched in the longstanding construct of Black women as sexually available with insatiable sexual appetites. The image of Jezebel stands as a representation of the sexually aggressive Black woman, whose actions are directed by her libido (Jordan-Zachary 39). Before emancipation, this public image allowed white slave owners sexual access to their female slaves, absolving them of any responsibility for this ongoing abuse. Jezebel stood in opposition to the white wives of slave owners, whose social identity was that of a chaste and mothering presence in the home. Jordan-Zachary explains that following the 19<sup>th</sup> century, when sexuality signaled an inherently debased nature, the image of Jezebel was used to construct Black women as “non-women” and deny them protection (40). In the racial politics following emancipation, the image of Jezebel continued to articulate the imagined distinctions between salacious Black women and their chaste white counterparts (41). As a counter-image to Mammy, who works

in servitude to white families, the Jezebel poses a threat to the family unit through her sexual appetite and duplicitous ways. As Melissa Harris-Perry explains:

the myth of the Black woman as lascivious, seductive, and insatiable was a way of reconciling the forced public exposure and commoditization of Black women's bodies with the Victorian ideals of women's modesty and fragility. The idea that Black women were hypersexual beings created space for white moral superiority by justifying the brutality of Southern white men. (55)

Although Jezebel emerged within the context of slavery, newer articulations of these stereotypes merged in the forms of the welfare queen and the urban teen mother have now come to light. Popularized in the 1980s, the welfare queen embodies Jezebel's voracious sexual appetite and Sapphire's anger. However, the welfare queen also functions as an irresponsible mother who sets a poor example for her children by relying on the welfare system. The welfare queen lives outside of the formal workforce, and is therefore a threat to political and economic stability because she refuses to find employment. Like her predecessors, the welfare queen also wears her difference on her body, and is figured as overweight and grotesque (Jordan-Zachary 46). Ange-Marie Hancock explores how these public images circulate in relationship to welfare and social assistance in the United States, and explains "conflation of all welfare recipients with single, poor, Black mothers largely reflects the supercession of inegalitarian traditions of race, gender, and class over the facts concerning the demographic characteristics of welfare recipients" (24). Although Hancock explains that the image of the welfare queen has informed American social support policies since the Aid to Dependent Children act of 1935 (34), *Push* is set against the backdrop of welfare reform in the 1990s. As a result, in this section, I will focus on contemporary

deployments of this public identity, particularly in relationship to current welfare reform programs in the United States.

Hancock explains that the public identity of the welfare queen played a prominent role in 1996 Congressional debates surrounding welfare reform, which relied on this trope to justify reforms such as work for welfare (25). Jordan-Zachary explains that from its inception, welfare was not initially available to African-Americans. However, as racial minorities began to access social services, the rhetoric surrounding the program drastically changed. According to Jordan-Zachary, “as discussions became more and more infused with images of irresponsible, lazy, excessively fertile, Black mothers, the policy suggestions became more punitive”, and the backlash against opening welfare to African-Americans culminated in the discourse to “end of welfare as we know it” (84). These changes to welfare include policies that are couched in the public image of the welfare queen, and articulated imagined links between work and the rehabilitation of poor Black women, transforming them into productive members of the workforce (93). Work for welfare proved to be poorly planned, as Jordan-Zachary explains, women who left welfare for work often found themselves in the clutches of poverty because they did not have the education or the skills to live without social support (107-108). Discourses that call for the welfare queen to enter into the workforce as a means to end a cycle of dependency, combined with the notion that Black women have uncontrolled fertility, have also given rise to the public image of the urban teen mother (96). This trope, which emerged in the 1990s, paints the imagined daughters of the welfare queen as sexually available, childlike, simpleminded, and willing to exploit social services (46). These images and policies are also informed by the specific affective responses they seek to evoke and deny, as Hancock goes on to explain that within

the aforementioned social reforms, “care or compassion for mothers lacking child support or other forms of income was nearly non-existent” (115). In this case, the public identity of welfare queen and urban teen mother, informed by the images of Jezebel and Sapphire, create the conditions for members of Congress to withhold their compassion from poor Black women, setting the stage for members of the broader public to follow suit. Further, these images blame Black women for their poverty, allowing citizens to deny them compassion and hold them accountable for their suffering and ignore the reality that structural oppression plays a central role in racial inequality in The United States.

Welfare reform and work for welfare programs are at the heart of Sapphire’s *Push*. As Monica Michlin argues that this narrative

is Sapphire’s angry rephrasing of the stigmatization of single Black mothers in the drive towards ‘welfare reform’ at the time the book was written—indeed, the 1996 Personal Responsibility and Work Reconciliation Opportunity Act put a 5-year *lifetime* limit on welfare, forcing poor women from welfare into work, and making escape from poverty practically impossible. (179)

Sapphire’s text is an emotionally charged critique of these policies and images, as she lambastes both work for welfare, and the discourses of gainful employment that inform this policy. Sapphire also foregrounds the ways these public images obscure the lived experiences of racialized women who depend on social support. Sapphire interrogates these images from the outset, and in the opening pages of *Push*, Precious considers the distinctions between fact and fiction. Precious explains that she will try to tell the truth, “else what’s the fucking use? Ain’ enough lies and shit out there already?” (Sapphire 4). This initial

reflection foreshadows the narrative trajectory of this epistolary novel, where Precious's experiences will stand in stark opposition to oft-recycled public images that stigmatize Black women, and to the discourses of merit and overcoming that inform her suffering. Precious has long been denied the status of innocent child that figures prominently within the intimate public sphere, mirroring Berlant's assertion that the figure of the idealized child is in fact, a white child. Because of her obese body and dark skin, Precious does not function as a child untouched by capitalism or greed, but rather is a welfare queen in the making who poses a threat to capitalism itself. As the urban teen mother, Precious is only visible as a grotesque spectacle, but otherwise her experiences are obscured by the "lies and shit" (4), such as negative public images. Precious reflects that she has been invisible for as long as she can remember, which is both the cause and the product of the sexual abuse she has suffered at the hands of her family.

The people who abuse Precious continually impose these images upon her, and as an obese, illiterate teenager with two young children, Precious seems to embody all of the negative public images that plague Black women. As mentioned above, as Carl abuses his daughter Precious, he calls her "Butter Ball Big Mama Two Ton of Fun" (35), obscuring his role in the abuse by casting his young daughter as a woman through the name of "Big Mama" and as a consenting party in the rape by calling her "Two Ton of Fun", implying that she enjoys the abuse. Precious's mother Mary Jones also molests Precious, and imposes these public images upon her. In one instance, she forces Precious to eat more than she can bear in order to literally shape her daughter into the obese image of the urban teen mother or welfare queen. Precious's mother Mary also sees her daughter as the sexually voracious Jezebel, and punishes her for her perceived sexual transgressions. For example, when

Precious goes into labor before the birth of her first child at the age of twelve, Mary kicks Precious in the face as punishment for “stealing” her husband (9). Mary’s actions imply not only that Precious consented to sex with her father, it also suggests that like Jezebel, her sexual appetite is so voracious that she will not discern between sexual partners and willingly sleep with her own father. Mary also overtly aligns her daughter with these racist images shouting at her to “Git your Jezebel ass up and fix some dinner ‘fore I give you something to cry about” (19). Mary herself adheres to these public images as she imposes them upon her daughter. She has so fully absorbed the image of the welfare queen that she does not believe in any alternatives to social support. She chastises Precious for working towards independence from welfare, yelling “*school?* Go down to welfare, school can’t help you *now*” (22). Throughout this abuse, Precious continuously reflects that she hates her mother and her father, that they never loved her, and that they are responsible for her suffering, who make her feel stupid, ugly, and worthless (34) traits embodied by the urban teen mother, Jezebel, and the welfare queen. Told in the first person, these scenes are contrasted with Precious’ quest for literacy, her self-perception as a good mother, and her trauma in the wake of this abuse, foregrounding dissonance between racist public images and Precious’s lived reality. Through this juxtaposition, readers may feel compassion for Precious, as she is clearly not to blame for her suffering as these public images might suggest.

It is important to note that these scenes, and this compassion, are complicated as they are often the basis upon which Precious imagines herself as white, and expresses tremendous anger. This combination of anger and longing interrupts potentially compassionate reader responses, reminding us of the critical distinctions and social hierarchies informed by an

interplay of race, class, and body size that inform this affective response. As a twelve-year-old, Precious is already keenly aware of the privilege that accompanies white skin. As she watches a lighter skinned Black nurse move around her hospital room, she contemplates the distinctions between this woman's skin and her own body, reflecting "it's something about being a nigger ain't color. This nurse same as me. A lot of Black people with nurse cap or big car or light skin same as me but don't know it" (Sapphire 11). Despite the nurse's pale skin and higher social status, Precious knows that they share racial markers that cannot be transcended through work. Mediated by this recognition of white privilege from a young age, Precious falls into the pattern of feeling deep anger towards both her parents and in relation to her suffering, and then immediately imagines what her life might be like if she was white. For example as she sits in her room daydreaming after she has angrily vowed that her unborn child will learn to read, Precious contemplates her mother's failures. Precious admits that she wants to murder her mother (59), and as her anger subsides, she imagines that if she had white skin, her mother would have burst into the room as her father was raping her, exclaiming

Carl Kenwood Jones- that's wrong! Git off Precious like that! Can't you see Precious is a beautiful chile like white chile in magazine or on toilet paper wrappers. Precious is a blue-eye skinny chile whose hair is long braids, long long braids. Git off Precious, fool! It time for Precious to go to the gym like Janet Jackson. It time for Precious hair to be braided. Get off my chile nigger!

(64)

In this case, Precious's anger is transferred into longing for whiteness and markers of class that she imagines accompany light skin, allowing Precious to see herself as the antithesis to

public images of Black women that are continuously forced upon her. Precious thus feels anger not only for her suffering, but also for being denied the visibility and protections granted to the white child within the intimate public sphere. Precious's anger also foregrounds the allocation of resources along the lines of race, class, and sex that make her vulnerable from the outset- a distribution of resources that might greatly benefit the reader, whose gift of compassion does little to relieve her suffering.

This cycle of anger and longing is repeated throughout the text, and through this repetition, Sapphire foregrounds the inequalities that allow readers to give the gift of compassion but nothing more. As Precious learns that she might have contracted the AIDS virus from her father, she wonders "Why I not born a light-skin dream?" (Sapphire 87). Precious goes on to write in her journal "I think I AM MAD ANGERREEY angerry very my life not good" (100). Precious's anger foregrounds the racism and poverty that deny her access to this "white skinned dream", a dream that might be congruent with the reader's lived reality. As Precious comes to terms with her status as HIV positive, she again imagines what her life might be like if she were "someone not fat, dark skin, short hair, someone not fucked" but rather, "a pink virgin girl" (112). The extent to which Precious suffers because of racism is illustrated as Ms. Rain tells the class to write down how they would be if their lives were perfect. Without a moment's thought, Precious thinks that in her personal utopia, "I would be light skinned, thereby treated right and loved by boyz. Light skin even more important than being skinny" (113). Where the urban teen mother, Jezebel, and welfare queen are large, Black, emasculating and promiscuous, Precious imagines herself as the antithesis to these identities, a thin white virgin whom boys love, and who is treated with dignity and respect. Where compassionate reader responses erase the specificity of

Precious's suffering under the premise that we all face the same obstacles, this anger, combined with a longing for white skin, foreground the reasons why Precious is angry. By longing for white skin, sexual autonomy, and respect, Precious illustrates the unique ways her race, sex, and social location leave her vulnerable to abuse that is erased by compassion.

Precious repeats this cycle of anger and longing when school officials and social workers impose negative public identities upon her as they measure her body and test her abilities. As a child, the boys in Precious's second grade class would taunt her every time she stood up. This, combined with the ongoing incest she experienced at home, led Precious to refuse to leave her desk, even to go to the washroom. As Precious wet her pants in her seat, the school principal simply dismisses Precious as a child who cannot learn, and urges the teacher to focus on the students who can (Sapphire 37). As a product of her trauma, Precious is unable to acquire basic literacy skills in school, but she still gets good grades and moves through the school system because of social promotion rather than demonstrated academic ability (Roundtree 137). This identification as a child who cannot learn aligns Precious with the simple minded urban teen mother from an early age, suggesting that as a second-grader, Precious' educational future is already a lost cause. Her progression through the school system despite her illiteracy teaches Precious that as an urban teen mother, she must occupy as little public space as possible (Sapphire 6), and any rewards depend on her invisibility. As Precious is pregnant again at the age of sixteen, she feels as though her parents have denied her a childhood, and that her size leads others to think that she is much older than she actually is. These reflections illustrate that Precious's body, in the form of the urban teen mother and the welfare queen, continues to stand in for her entire identity. As she matures, school officials continue to force the public images of the obese welfare queen and urban

teen mother onto Precious by needlessly weighing her in school. Precious admits that the number that signifies her weight is of little meaning to her, and she begins to object to the ongoing surveillance of her body, explaining “I ju’ know I’m over two hundred ‘cause the needle on the scale in the bathroom stop there it don’t go no further. Last time they want to weigh me at school I say no. Why for, I know I’m fat. So what. next topic for the day” (Sapphire 11). Where the scale erases the abuse that underpins Precious’ weight gain and confirms her status as the urban teen mother, the tests she must take in school and in order to transition into the Each One Teach One alternative school, and the principal’s assertion that she is not capable of learning, rearticulate this identity.

After Precious fails her GED test before entering her new school, she sees the inadequacy of the tests to accurately reflect her reality and explains:

For me this nuffin’ new. There has always been something wrong wif the tesses. These tesses paint a picture of me wif no brain. The tesses paint a picture of me an’ my muver- my whole family, we kore than dumb, we invisible... I don’t exist. Don’t nobody want me. Don’t nobody need me. I know who I am. I am who they say I am- vampire sucking the system’s blood. Ugly Black grease to wipe away, punish, kilt, changed, finded a job for.

(Sapphire 31)

These tests repeatedly reduce Precious’s experiences to manifestations of negative public identities, leading her to wonder whether social workers and teachers “see *me* or the tess. But I don’t care now what anybody see. I see something, somebody. I got baby. So what. I feel proud ‘cept it’s baby by my fahver and that make me not in the picture again” (Sapphire 33). In this case, the ongoing incest Precious suffers leaves her unable to adhere to hegemonic

scripts of flourishing, family formation, and happiness. While she has a child and fits into overarching conceptions of womanhood that rely on motherhood, the circumstances of her child's conception and birth push her outside of this normative frame. Precious thus develops a deep suspicion of teachers and social workers who police the norm and force these images upon her, which is manifested in particular, through her mistrust of the file school officials keep, as "every time they wants to fuck wif me or decide something in my life, where they come wif the mutherfucking file" (Sapphire 28). Precious has been reduced to the contents of her file and to the number on a scale. As the official records of social services, these articulate Precious's experiences in light of the negative public images that governments deploy and reaffirm. Precious's personal journal soon comes to stand in opposition to what is written about her, and when she is confronted with the possibility that she will have to leave school under new work for welfare policies, she thinks "I cannot just talk to white social worker. She look at me like I am ugly freak did something to make my own life like it is. And she is trying to make me go to work wiping old white people's ass. When I have a baby at twelve" (125). Compassion might be a likely reader response to these juxtapositions, as Precious's desire for literacy and independence stands in stark contrast with her interactions with social services and mainstream educators who see her as incapable of learning and flourishing. The incongruity between Precious's file and her journal also shows readers that despite the dominant narrative attesting to the contrary, Precious is not to blame for her suffering. However, this compassion is rapidly interrupted as Precious recognizes that the very tests that erase her foreground individuals who "are pritty people, girls with little titties like buttons and legs like long white straws" (31). Like her imagining that as a white child she would be valued and have bodily autonomy (signified through Precious's desire for

virginity), her anger following the reality that these tests make white women visible at the expense of their Black counterparts interrupts compassion that is contingent on universalizing conceptions of suffering.

It is important to note that when Carl molests his daughter, Precious often loses herself in fantasies where she is a famous hip-hop star (Sapphire 24). These scenes have the same effect as those where Precious longs for white skin, as they allow her to imagine what her life might be like if she inhabited a class position that would grant her more bodily autonomy than she can currently exercise. This longing is significant within the social climate in which *Push* was written, as Melissa Harris-Perry explains, “Within the context of 1990s hip-hop culture, women opened new sexual terrain. Although hip-hop stars like Queen Latifa and Salt-n-Pepa are not bias-free or ideal images of Black womanhood, they do function as examples of Black women speaking about the complexities of their lives and vocalizing their sexual desires” (65). For Harris-Perry, “one important space for young Black women to express new sexual ethics was part of the burgeoning urban culture of hip-hop” (64). In this case, Precious’s imagining herself as a rap star can be read, in part, as an effort to reclaim her sexual responses from the realm of shame to a source of her empowerment through the model of Black rap stars. Further, much like she imagines that her parents would face consequences for this incest if she was white, imagining herself as a rap star (and thus correspondingly benefiting from the status and financial ease) allows Precious to enter into a material world where she is not a teen urban mom on the cusp of becoming a welfare queen, but rather is an affluent and powerful woman, whose violation has real consequences. This imaging makes clear that bodily autonomy manifests itself along the lines of race and class,

reminding readers that their compassion does little to remedy the unequal distribution of wealth and informs Precious's suffering.

### **Public Images and *In Search of April Raintree***

Mosionier also interrogates the limits of compassion in her novel *In Search of April Raintree*. Like *Push*, we can read Mosionier's exploration of the negative public images that plague Aboriginal women as a point of departure for an analysis of the ways anger can complicate compassion. However, unlike the stereotypes that blame Black women for their suffering, there are relatively few intensive investigations as to how the negative public images confronted by Aboriginal women are concretely deployed and reaffirmed by policy makers and governments. This can be attributed, in part, to the myth that Canada is a place that is somehow "free" from racism, or that Canada has overcome its colonial roots.

According to Debra Thompson,

multiculturalism and a national myth that there is 'no place for race' have allowed Canadians to negate racism as a historical and contemporary fact of Canadian society by using a logic that denies by compassion to the more overt racism of the United States. This denial is made easily in Canada, for explicit race production or racism named and acknowledged as such is difficult to find. (355)

This logic not only obscures the gravity of ongoing colonial projects, but this erasure also resonates and reinforces dominant discourses within the intimate public sphere surrounding shared or universal suffering. Despite this erasure, negative public images of Aboriginal women continue to circulate in Canada. Within the discursive parameters of these stereotypes, the Indian queen and her daughter the princess figure as full-bodied women,

who are aligned with the earth and idealized notions of spirituality. These women are conceptualized as powerful and nurturing, but are also highly dangerous because they embody the imagined traits of the new world. Barbara Godard explains that where the Indian queen is the archetype of Aboriginal women untouched by European contact, the Indian princess is depicted as lighter complexioned version of her mother, representing an imagined hybrid of the new world and freedoms associated with America, and the classical virtue of England. The squaw functions as a counter image to both the queen and princess, and Godard explains the squaw is the “witch healer medicine woman, the seductive whore, the drunken stupid, thieving Natives living in shacks on the edge of town, not in a woodland paradise” (189). As the despised object of conquest, the squaw has become the dominant cultural image of Aboriginal women, and would eventually “determine the value of all subsequent cultural productions by Native women which would be measured against it” (189). It is also important to note that these images of Aboriginal women have been defined in relation to white men, and these dominant representations show Aboriginal women rescuing, healing, marrying, bewitching, or double-crossing the men who colonize them (Valaskakis 282). This dichotomous conception of Aboriginal women as either virtuous or duplicitous is also informed by a broader trend of Anglo-American representations of Aboriginal people as either savage or stoic- that is, peace loving and spiritual or brutal and violent (Carpenter 3). Like dominant representations of Black women, these depictions are also informed by the notion that Aboriginal women are inherently or irrationally angry. As a result, Cari Carpenter argues, “Indigenous writers have the difficult task of mounting a respectable protest that was not reduced to such racist stereotypes” (3). These tropes, the affective responses to which they give rise, as well as the difficulty of producing a critique of

Canadian racism without reproducing Aboriginal people as inherently angry figure prominently in Mosionier's text. Although the Indian queen and princess are important public images that necessitate careful consideration, *In Search of April Raintree* specifically interrogates the image of the squaw. As a result, this image is central to my analysis. Similar to *Push*, *In Search of April Raintree* can be read as an attempt to disrupt this negative public image by juxtaposing it with the lived realities of the female protagonists in the text. Where the reader could rely on the image of the squaw to withhold their compassion, they are able to give compassion following Mosionier's deconstruction of this trope. However, this reading does little to disrupt the reader's position as affective benefactor from the outset, and like my analysis of *Push*, I contend that a focus on anger and longing can complicate this logic.

Before exploring the ways anger complicates compassionate reader responses to representations of the squaw, it is important to contextualize this image within the history of colonialism in Canada, and to underscore the ways the Métis women in Canada are particularly vulnerable to racist policies. The public image of the squaw has both given rise to, as well as obscured, the interplay between racism and sexism that has disempowered Aboriginal people since European contact. In their 2003 "Report on Stolen Sisters", Amnesty International explains that "Indigenous women in Canada face discrimination because of their gender and because of their Indigenous identity [...] this compounded by further discriminatory treatment that women face due to poverty, ill-health, or involvement in sex-trade" (10). The disenfranchisement of Aboriginal people, particularly women, through government policies in Canada can be traced back to 1857. At this time, laws stipulated that a woman's Aboriginal status was dictated by her husband, that is, she could

not willingly renounce her status whereas men had this freedom (12). In 1869, new laws jeopardized women's status, as these dictated that an Aboriginal woman could not retain her status if she moved off reserve, or if she married a non-Aboriginal man. In both of these cases, her children would not be granted status, whereas men could retain status if they lived off reserve or married a non-Aboriginal woman (13). In this case, the racial markers that formed that basis for inclusion into government treaties were carried by men, which implicitly assign biological roots to social distinctions between Aboriginal and white groups. Further, the emphasis these laws place on the status of women indicates that this group is specifically vulnerable to, and targeted by, colonial projects and racist tropes. While the Canadian government repealed the laws targeting women in 1985, the Métis people were excluded from the provisions of the *Indian Act* from the outset due to the practice of granting scrip, which allowed the government to start granting land to the Métis in 1873 (Smulders 78; Boisvert & Turnbull 125). As a result of these land rights, the Canadian government did not recognize the Métis in the Constitution Act as one of Canada's Aboriginal peoples (Smulders 77). By the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, however, the Métis had largely lost their land but were still denied status. Although the Constitution Act of 1982 finally recognized the Métis as one of Canada's Aboriginal groups, "it remains to be seen whether this will suffice as the basis of recognition of Aboriginal rights of the Métis" (Boisvert & Turnbull 107). Disempowered by their sex, their race, and because of the long denial of official status, Métis women occupy a tenuous place in Canadian society. In 1981, when Mosionier wrote *In Search of April Raintree*, Métis women were simultaneously denied the benefits offered to other Aboriginal groups under the various iterations of the *Indian Act*. However, exclusion from the act does not mean that Métis women were not impacted by the sexist assumptions

therein, as these are hallmarks of colonial projects from the outset. As a result, like their sisters with Aboriginal status, Métis women continued to be confronted with racism, sexism, and colonial projects in Canada despite their exclusion from the *Indian Act*.

The matrix of oppression confronted by the Métis forms the narrative backdrop for Mosionier's text. As Métis, April feels that she is neither Aboriginal nor white, but rather has the worst of both worlds (Mosionier 142-143). The double-identity of Métis people, coupled with the public image of the squaw, also figures prominently in Mosionier's text. Much like *Push*, these themes and images can be read as evoking the reader's compassion as Mosionier juxtaposes this inaccurate public image with April and Cheryl's lived realities to illustrate the falsity of these tropes. However, where Precious sees these images as incongruous with her reality, April firmly believes these tropes and works to pass as white in order to avoid their social impact. Cheryl, on the other hand, stands in opposition to her sister and continuously points towards their inaccuracy. In fact, in her interactions with others at the Aboriginal Friendship Center, Cheryl models the appropriate compassionate response to the reader, and April comes to see her sister as a "stalk that could bend to the gentle breezes of compassion" (Mosionier 111). In opposition to Cheryl, April is void of compassion, and sees her racial heritage as a shortcoming rather than discursively produced within a matrix of power relations that continually disempower her. As a result, April longs for white skin, affluence, and social mobility, which she imagines would shield her from the racial violence and structural oppression she continually faces. Ultimately, this oppression works in concert with April's desiring of white skin, giving rise to a continued cycle of anger and longing that interrupts potentially compassionate reader responses.

Like Precious, April must also contend with the negative public images that others force upon her and that complicate the giving or withholding of the readers's compassion. For example, Mrs. Semple forces the stereotype of the squaw upon April and Cheryl when she predicts what will become of them if they continue to rebel against Mrs. DeRosier. Mrs. Semple has coined their rebellion "native girl syndrome", explaining that

it starts with the fighting, the running away, the lies. Next come the accusations that everyone in the world is against you. There are the sullen, uncooperative silences, the feeling sorry for yourselves. And when you go on your own, you get pregnant right away, or you can't find or keep jobs. So you'll start with alcohol and drugs. From there you get into shoplifting and prostitution, and in and out of jails. You'll live with men who abuse you.

You'll end up like your parents, living off society. (Mosiener 64)

Mrs. Semple concludes her diatribe with the warning "If you don't smarten up, you'll end up in the same place they do. Skid row!" (64). Mrs. Semple's notion of skid row is similar to April's conception of the gutter, as both are characterized by addiction and poverty. Further, as Mrs. Semple uses the medical language of disease and symptoms, she suggests that this syndrome is both innate within Aboriginal girls, and that these symptoms are contagious (or, at least exacerbated when April and Cheryl spend time together). Further, Mrs. Semple places the burden of avoiding this syndrome onto the sisters themselves, and ignores the external factors that contribute to the hardships that plague Aboriginal women. "Native girl syndrome" soon becomes synonymous with being Métis and the gutter that April longs to avoid, and informs her ongoing desire to pass as white. Despite her efforts to avoid showing the symptoms of this "syndrome", the stereotypes that form the public image of the squaw

have tremendous social significance, and April continues to confront these tropes. In one instance, Mrs. DeRosier's children spread rumors that April is having sexual relationships with her two foster brothers Raymond and Gilbert. The identity of the salacious squaw is so socially coherent that despite April's disdain for the opposite sex, even her teachers believe the rumors, and the school guidance councilor eventually cautions her to be careful and avoid pregnancy (75). April is conscious of how her sex complicates her status as a Métis, and thinks "had Raymond and Gilbert gotten that same kind of speech? Probably not. Only girls got pregnant" (74). Like Precious's learned distrust of social workers and police because of their forcing negative public images upon her, April soon learns that her teachers and social workers subscribe to these negative stereotypes, giving rise to and maintaining sharp distinctions between Aboriginal youth and their white counterparts. While one teacher soon apologizes to April for believing these rumors, this sequence of events not only confirms to April that white skin is the source of social privilege, it also confirms her deep suspicion towards those who are entrusted with her care. Once again, this sequence of events sets the stage for the reader to feel compassion for April, as this juxtaposition shows that April does not reproduce any of the racist stereotypes that are forced upon her. In fact, she is the studious, virginal, clean, and productive opposite to this trope. Compassion is thus a possible response as, unlike the stereotypical squaw, April is thus not responsible for her suffering, and it is clear that her rights are being violated.

Following April's harrowing rape (which, as previously discussed is racially motivated), April feels intense anger, and again, longs for white skin, which interrupts the reader's potential moral posturing. After her rapists have abandoned her on the outskirts of town, April knocks on a stranger's door looking for help. When a man answers, the feeling

of racism and the image of squaw elides her experience, as April reflects “from the way he looked at me, I’m sure he at first thought I was some drunken squaw who had gotten into a fight and had been thrown out of a car. Begrudgingly, he asked me in, only after I told him I had just been raped and could he please call the police” (133). Following the rape, April also begins taking what she calls “ritual baths” (146) to remove the psychic residue of her attackers from her skin. As she fills the tub with hot water, she wants to “scream aloud, that long silent scream I kept in my head that night. I wanted them to feel my anguish. I wanted to gouge their eyes out. I wanted to whip the life out of them. Mutilate them. Kill them” (146). Following this murderous daydream, April contemplates opening a clothing shop in Winnipeg, thinking that she has learnt a lot from her broken marriage to a wealthy man. She reconsiders, however, thinking that Cheryl will draw Aboriginal women to the store, thwarting her attempt to conceal her race and cater to upper class customers (147). In this case, not only does the daydream signal ascending class markers, it also illustrates that April’s longing for white skin is directly linked to the abuse she suffers and the ongoing imposition of the public image of the squaw. In this case, where readers might feel compassion for April’s traumatic assault, through her intense anger, they are quickly reminded of the ways public images construct racial minorities as complicit in their suffering, and the centrality of these stereotypes to their own potential social privilege.

This cycle is also manifested as April learns to feel ashamed of her background and ancestors. While attending primary school, Cheryl gives April a book about Louis Riel, and April responds by crinkling her nose in disgust, thinking that Riel was

a crazy-half breed [...] I learned about his folly in history, also, I had read about the Indian and the various tortures they had put the missionaries

through. No wonder they were known as savages. So, anything to do with Indians, I despised [...] I remember how relieved I was that no one in my class knew my heritage when we were going through that period in Canadian history. (43)

This reflection indicates that April has come to believe the accounts of the Métis people in her history texts, and she goes on to think that “there were a few Indian or part-Indian kids in my class who couldn’t hide what they were like I did. They knew their places” (43). In this case, not only has April learned that Aboriginal people are second-class citizens by virtue of their ‘savagery’ rather than through colonialism and structural racism, she has also come to expect Aboriginal people to defer to white people. Further, her relief at being able to continue to pass as white reflects both a strategy to avoid abuse at school, but is also indicative of a deep longing that is manifested more overtly as she ages.

April is also confronted with racist messages at her foster home. When her parents fail to show up for a visit, the DeRosiers make fun of them calling her family drunkards. This is the moment where April learns that her parents are alcoholics, and experiences intense anger towards her mother and father, thinking “I hate you both for lying to us. I hope I never see you again” (46). These circumstances can lead the reader to feel compassion, as April is trapped between two worlds, and the circumstances that have given rise to her suffering are beyond her control. Further, she and Cheryl miss their parents immensely, and they have no idea why they visit them so irregularly. However, right after her angry outburst, April reflects that Métis were weak people who cause their own suffering, and feels relief that she can pass for a “pure white person” (46). Here, the compassion that the reader might feel for April is problematized, not only because she foregrounds the ways Aboriginal youth

are taught to be self-loathing, it also signals the reality that as a Métis child, she is vulnerable in ways that are often erased within the intimate public sphere.

As she grows older, April continues to develop a conception of Métis people as “gutter-creatures”, who are characterized by dependence on alcohol and drugs, who are poor, and who live on the fringes of town in substandard housing (108). As an adult, April outlines what she perceives to be the fundamental difference between the Métis people and their white counterparts: “It seems to me that the majority of native people are gutter-creatures, and only a minority of white people are” (105). Where the reader might feel compassion for April because of her suffering, she now assumes the ideological stance of the colonizer by explicitly withholding her compassion from Métis people on the premise that “they allow it to happen to them” (110). In this case, April articulates the logic that allows many white people to withhold their compassion from Aboriginal people while simultaneously illustrating the ways this logic erases structural oppression from the outset.

Although April felt jealous of white children in her youth, associating their skin with cleanliness and affluence (Mosionier 14-16), she does not respond in anger until she begins to feel the devastating impact that her race has on her autonomy. According to Agnes Grant, April “had been raised knowing that if she had rights, she did not know what they were. People had power over her, and when they wished to exercise this power to fulfill their own warped needs, she was the hapless victim” (244). This is illustrated when Mrs. Dion falls terminally ill, and tells April that the family wants to retain custody over her, but that she must move to a new foster home. Mrs. Dion can only explain to April “the final decisions was theirs” (37). In this case, Mosionier’s use of the ambiguous pronoun “theirs” points towards unnamed officials within Child and Family Services who, while unseen to April,

dictate what she can do, even though it might be against her wishes and best interests. As April is relocated to the DeRosier farm, her longing for white skin is soon coupled with anger as the DeRosier family dictates the course of her life, and continuously threatens to separate her permanently from Cheryl. In one instance, when the girls live together briefly at the DeRosier farm, Cheryl refuses to apologize for overtly questioning the historical account of European settlement she is learning in class. When the principal calls her foster mother into the school, Mrs. DeRosier tells the sisters “You’re going to do exactly as they wish or else I’ll call your worker, have you moved, and then I’ll make sure you never see April again” (54). In a manifestation of colonial power, Mrs. DeRosier brings Cheryl home and cuts off all of her hair with blunt scissors. April responds to the threat of separation, and to the humiliation of her sister’s haircut, in anger. April feels as though her “fury outweighed my normal fear of Mrs. DeRosier. I stormed into the kitchen, and Mrs. DeRosier there, and demanded ‘why did you scalp my sister? [...] you had no right to do that!’” (55). This sequence of events is immediately followed by April sitting with her sister reading in their room. April changes the subject when Cheryl wants to make herself feel better by discussing her hero Louis Riel (56). By avoiding the topic, April illustrates that she continues to be ill at ease with her Métis heritage and her sister’s idolization of a man who she has learnt is a “crazy half-breed”(42), preferring to daydream about what life might hold when she is free from child services and living as a white person. Through this sequence of events, April re-works ongoing constructions of Aboriginal people as savage to foreground Mrs. DeRosier’s extreme and racially motivated cruelty. This anger, particularly April’s use of the term scalping to confront her foster mother, destabilizes the longstanding tropes of Aboriginal people as savage by painting her white foster mother as violent and malicious. However,

April's subsequent daydreams the freedoms she will one day enjoy as a "real white person" make it clear that white children (particularly the idealized white child of the intimate public sphere) may not be subject to these same racially motivated abuses. While the reader might feel compassion for April's suffering, they are soon reminded that her suffering has important particularities that are foregrounded through the interplay between anger and compassion.

Because school officials and social workers fail to intervene in the abuse she suffers at the DeRosier farm, April soon learns that "talking to my social worker was futile because she's already proven to me that she was on Mrs. DeRosier's side. And the same thing went for the teachers at school" (75). Like Precious, April's race forms a chasm between herself and the people who control her future, and she has learnt to distrust them. In this case, the reader might feel sympathy for the Raintree sisters and condemn Mrs. DeRosier, the teachers, and the social workers who control her future. However, building Nussbaum's metaphorical bridge between themselves and April proves to be a difficult project, as April's anger at her circumstances, followed by her daydreams of how much her life would improve if she could successfully pass as white, foreground the racism and sexism that give rise to her suffering. Where the reader could once feel compassion and thus see themselves as moral actors, they are soon reminded of the colonial projects from which they might benefit; the very projects that continue to haunt the Raintree sisters.

## **Conclusion**

As both texts come to a close, Precious and April have learned how to resist the aforementioned negative public images. While they continue to express anger, they have also learnt to direct their energy towards the social processes that inform their suffering, rather than long for lighter skin. In Sapphire's novel, Ms. Rain urges Precious to "look and see how

much welfare has helped your mother” (73), to fully illustrate to her that social systems are weighted in favor of white, middle class Americans. Similarly, as Mosionier’s text comes to a close, April’s anger subsides and she begins to reconcile herself with her Métis heritage, vowing to raise her sister’s son, and identifying the Métis people as *her* people (207). In both cases, Precious and April’s anger complicates compassionate reader responses that risk erasing the specificity of their suffering and foregrounds the particular ways their respective subject positions inform their oppression. In both texts, while compassion signals a recognition of suffering, anger accompanies and interrupts this compassion, and foregrounds the intersections of oppression that are obscured within the intimate public sphere.

It is important to note that the negative public images of the squaw, the welfare queen, the urban teen mother, and Jezebel all point towards the simultaneous hypervisibility and invisibility of racial minorities in Canada and the United States. According to Melissa Harris-Perry, images of the welfare queen, the urban teen mother, and the notion that Black women are inherently angry obscure and invalidate meaningful images of Black women. Through this relative absence of accurate and affirming recognition in public, the experiences of Black women are often erased. Harris-Perry goes on to explain that despite this invisibility, Black women are also hypervisible; as a marginalized group, they do not have the hiding place of private property, and are continuously subject to government surveillance through social policies (39). While Harris-Perry does not discuss racialized women in a Canadian context, the same is true for Aboriginal women in Canada, who are either hypervisible through negative public images, government policy, and social surveillance, or invisible as through the image of the squaw who perpetuates her own misfortunes. Without a place to hide (either literally due to poverty, or metaphorically

through the privilege of white skin), racialized women in Canada, like their American peers, will continue to face this in/visibility. Texts like Sapphire's and Mosionier's are thus critical to the project of creating accurate representations of racialized women within the intimate public sphere. Both texts deal with the complex interplay of race, class, body size, and government policy, and both texts complicate the notion that anger is an essential and irrational component of racial identity. While racialized women might be angry, both texts illustrate that this anger is not a biological fact, but often arises from incredible injustice. Within both of these novels, studying anger along side of compassion complicates the problematic and erroneous logic that some groups are deserving of compassion while others are not, by interrogating the social factors that give rise to this logic from the outset. Although I have argued that the anger of subjugated groups can force us to confront the ways in which privileged groups can give and withhold compassion through negative public images, my intention is not to communicate that compassion is an affective response that must remain unfelt, nor do I intend to argue that compassion necessarily leads to an erasure of the specificity of suffering. My aim is rather to illustrate how anger can help us make sense of some of the drawbacks to compassion, particularly passive compassion that does little to remedy the suffering of others. In these examples, where compassion risks erasing the specificity of suffering, anger brings the distinct ways many racialized women suffer into sharp relief. This anger reminds readers of the stories and experiences that are obscured within the intimate public sphere, where compassion often figures as an adequate gift in itself.

## **Chapter 4: Writing the Past and Memory Keeping: Linking Anger and Nostalgia to the Home**

In the third chapter of this dissertation, I explored the ways reading about violence might give rise to compassion, and the ways anger can interrupt these responses. A discussion of the centrality of normative identity categories, and the ways these give rise to abuse or protect us from harm, has been integral to my dissertation thus far. In the chapter that follows, I will expand upon this analysis, and will turn my attention to the ways the home is often the locus for much of the abuse that liminal, subjugated, or marginalized subjects endure. In the following chapter, I will explore feminist discussions of the home, ways of recalling the domestic realm, and I will ultimately map how anger and nostalgia allow women to link this abuse to the home. Before undertaking my analysis in this chapter, it is also important to note that the section that follows explores the distinctions between looking to the past and revisiting the past through nostalgia. While there are certainly competing definitions of nostalgia, I draw specifically from feminist debates surround this way of revisiting the past in order to begin to recuperate nostalgia for feminist usage.

“Women,” explains Gayle Greene, “need to remember because forgetting is a major obstacle to change” (298). In this telling statement, Greene argues that when women do not recall trauma and political struggle, they risk taking feminist gains for granted, and might erase the struggles of their predecessors. Remembering is also a means through which women can resist the erasure of both their lives and their experiences of violence and oppression, both of which commonly occur within patriarchal discourse (McDermott 394). Despite the political utility of remembering, this is also a complex project, as memory is imperfect, fragmented, and can offer, at best, an incomplete picture of the past. As a result,

revisiting the past and recalling abuse can only offer an incomplete account of how events unfold. Despite this complexity, feminists like Greene and McDermott continue to pursue the project of taking stock of the past. These acts of remembering work towards a political objective, give rise to debates surrounding how women should look back, and often culminate in the privileging of memory itself over other forms of recollection. More specifically, whereas feminists like Greene champion for memory, they are also deeply suspicious of other methods of revisiting the past such as nostalgia. Feminist critics often argue that nostalgia is a deeply problematic way to sift through the past because it centers on memories of home. Greene discusses the distinctions between memory and nostalgia at length, and argues that entrenched in a nostalgic longing for home “is also a longing to return to the state of things in which woman keeps the home and in which she awaits, like Penelope, the return of her wandering Odysseus” (296). According to Svetlana Boym, the idealized conception of the home that characterizes dominant notions of nostalgia is a location that either no longer exists, or did not exist from the outset (xiii). Feminists are rightly critical of a method of remembering that obscures domestic violence, as the U.S. Surgeon General notes “the home is actually a more dangerous place for American women than the city streets” (Coontz 3). It is important to note that feminist critiques of nostalgia span far beyond its focus on the home. Janelle Wilson explains that nostalgic conceptions of the past lead to an acceptance of the status quo, which includes and perpetuates unmarked privilege associated with whiteness, heterosexuality, masculinity, and bourgeois backgrounds. For Wilson, nostalgia reinforces and is reinforced by hegemonic leadership, and produces meaning in the interests of ruling groups (45). In this case, nostalgia erases or normalizes violence that is often already hidden away in the domestic realm, rearticulates the

hegemony of the heterosexual family, and conceals the exploitation that is often inherent in capitalism.

John J. Su explains that nearly twenty years after feminist critics mounted their scathing critiques of nostalgia, this form of remembering now see to operate as a derogatory term, whereby “a diagnosis of nostalgia typically earns a writer or scholar condemnation; to be nostalgic is to be ‘out of touch’, reactionary, even xenophobic” (2). This trend is manifested across academic disciplines, as Ron Eyerman muses that when sociologists discuss memory, they often refer to it disparagingly as nostalgia (161). Su and Eyerman’s comments suggest that many cultural critics remain deeply suspicious of nostalgia, and are invested in projects that will expose its underlying hegemonic or commercial functions. While the aforementioned scholars certainly point towards some important drawbacks to nostalgia, as discussed in the theories and methodologies section of this dissertation, this project is guided by a reparative approach rather than by the impetus to unmask the problematic and hegemonic functions of affective responses or modes of remembering. A reparative perspective is an important intervention into this debate, as it is entirely possible that nostalgia or nostalgic longing is an involuntary response. As a result, to name nostalgia as unproductive or un-feminist sets limitations on the ways people can recall the past, and ultimately forecloses the possibility of a rich scholarly analysis of remembering. In light of these problems, it is important to ask, what other functions might nostalgia have, particularly within the parameters of feminist projects?

Nostalgia does not operate independently, but rather, it is also related to other affects: memories can evoke joy, sadness, and anger, or other emotional responses. Nostalgia is also connected to responses such as melancholia, as Boym reminds us that many philosophers

thought of nostalgia as longing for its own sake. For example, Immanuel Kant saw nostalgia, melancholia, and self-awareness connected to form a unique aesthetic that made a person more sensitive to moral dilemmas. For Kant, philosophy is nostalgia for a better world (Boym 13). Boym's analysis of nostalgia is similar to Kant's as she sees nostalgia as deeply tied to a vast range of emotions. For Boym, remembering the past unearths both pleasant memories that evoke happiness, as well as "humiliating footnotes and cultural untranslatables" (52). Similarly, Janelle Wilson explains that there is no neat correlation between nostalgia, positive experiences, and happy emotional responses. Rather, "one may recall negative events from the past and experience nostalgia. This is to say, a negative stimulus could actually trigger nostalgic feeling" (27). Following Boym and Wilson, nostalgia does not line up neatly with distinctions between "good" and "bad", or "positive" and "negative" emotional responses. Nostalgia thus has enormous potential to facilitate the type of remembering Greene urges women to partake in, as it allows them to recall darker aspects of their personal histories, and to make sense of traumatic events. Because this dissertation explores the function of anger, I am particularly interested in exploring the links between nostalgia and anger. Engaging with this question is an important project within the parameters of affect theory, as nostalgia has the potential to assist in affect theory's commitment to complicating distinctions between "good" and "bad" emotional responses.

In this chapter, I will explore how nostalgia, the process of remembering, the act of writing history, and longing for home function in Joyce Carol Oates's novels *Foxfire* and *We Were the Mulvaney's*. In *Foxfire*, Madeline "Maddy" Wirtz pens what she terms FOXFIRE<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Oates capitalizes FOXFIRE when she refers to the girl gang throughout her novel. I will do the same in this chapter: when referring to the gang I use FOXFIRE and when referring to the novel I use *Foxfire*. Similarly, Oates uses italics, caps, and bold letters to emphasize

chronology, that is, the events that comprise the gang's formation, their exploits, and their demise. In *We Were the Mulvaney*s, Judd, the youngest son in the prominent Mulvaney family, chronicles the events surrounding his sister's rape, and the devastating impact this has on his family. Both texts are characterized by a narrative style that adheres to many of the hallmarks of nostalgia, and both foreground anger in relation to abuse that is often concealed within dominant historical narratives. Through nostalgia, Judd and Maddy continually distinguish between dominant accounts of these events (either within newspaper articles, common perceptions in their communities, or dominant narratives about violence against women) and these events as they saw and experienced them. In both cases, committing these alternative perspectives to paper allows Judd and Maddy to write themselves into a history from which they had previously been excluded, as both occupy marginal social positions in their groups or within their broader communities. I will argue that rather than function as a yearning for a time or place that is long past (or did not exist from the outset), nostalgia enables an emotionally complex form of remembering. By using nostalgia to look at and chronicle the past, and to interrogate dominant accounts of these events, Maddy and Judd create complex narrations of the past, name their anger, relate it to trauma and oppression, and complicate the dominant understandings of anger outlined in the introduction to this dissertation. Rather than rearticulate the ideal of the home, I will ultimately illustrate that nostalgia allows subjugated groups to use their anger as the means to connect violence to the home, and interrogate the construct of the idyllic home altogether.

### **Nostalgic Debates**

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important pieces of dialogue or reflections in both texts. When I cite Oates, I use italics, caps, and bold letters as she does, unless indicated otherwise.

Before exploring how anger and nostalgia function in these two texts, it is important to map the trajectory of critical debates about nostalgia, and feminist critiques thereof, to outline recent reparative readings of nostalgia, and to explore the relationship between nostalgia and affect. I outline the trajectory of these debates in order to locate my own reading of Oates's two texts in relation to them, and to explore how anger can both complicate and complement nostalgia. The Swiss physician Johannes Hofner coined the term nostalgia in the 17<sup>th</sup> century as a diagnosis for Swiss soldiers with low spirits who longed to return home (McDermott 390). Over the course of the next two centuries, this conception of nostalgia shifted but did not stray entirely from its link to longing for the past, giving rise to our current understanding of nostalgia as a "homesickness for a lost past" (Pickering & Keightley 922). Svetlana Boym explains that in the wake of digital technologies, the rise of communities linked together through technology, and new modes of communication, nostalgia often functions as a longing for a past where communities and collectives are less reliant on technology (xiv). Nostalgia can thus signal a longing for simpler times (that is, where communication was not mediated by, or reliant on, electronic devices), or can point towards feelings of loss or displacement more broadly, particularly in relation to a person, place, thing, or set of circumstances (Boym xiii). Pickering and Keightley go on to explain that nostalgia is often symptomatic of dissatisfaction with a person's current state, and they also explain that rather than "living in the past", nostalgia can function as a dialogue between the past and the present (923). For Boym, this dialogue also blurs the lines between the real and the imagined (xvi). Despite the utility of this dialectic between past, present, real, and imagined, many theorists continue to be critical of nostalgia, and align it with sentimentality, or illustrate how corporations deploy nostalgia to sell goods and services (Pickering &

Keightley 922). In sum, these scholarly debates suggest that nostalgia is a complex, and sometimes contradictory, means of revisiting the past, a longing for home, originates within medical discourses of “sickness”.

As previously discussed, feminist thinkers have mounted some of the most scathing critiques of nostalgia. Theorists like Greene are deeply suspicious of the ties between nostalgia, the home, capitalism, and idealized recreations of the past. While the social construction of Canadian and American households continues to shift and change, hegemonic notions of “family values” remain firmly located in the heterosexual home, and nostalgia often signals a re-articulation of the very norms feminists work to disrupt. Jan Willem Duyvendak explains

In the US, the stronghold of ‘home’ remains the dwelling of the nuclear family, long seen as a haven in a turbulent world. And it is precisely the embattled family household that is central in the American crisis of ‘home’. Home at the micro level is in crisis because the custodians of the traditional home- women- have left its bounds to enter the paid workforce [...] the American fixation on ‘family’ values- far from hiding the crisis of the nuclear family- is a testament to it and reinforces feelings of nostalgia: while many idealize home in the past as a safe haven, today it is an unstable and overburdened place for parents working long hours, often combining several jobs and starved for time to spend with their children. American society is deeply nostalgic for better times at home. (3)

Similarly, Janice Doane and Devon Hodges argue that within the context of American culture and politics, nostalgia signals a desired past that “authenticates women’s traditional

place” where “men were men, women were women, and reality was real” (qtd. in Greene 296). In this sense, nostalgia constructs the home as a domestic utopia, presided over by a female caretaker, and financed by a male breadwinner. In this vein, nostalgia for the home and the people who reside therein conflates the real home with an imagined, untenable, construct (Boym xvi). As such, political messages and social texts that evoke family values and nostalgic versions of home often articulate this domestic fantasy and obscure the exclusions, hegemonic norms, and economic exploitation, upon which these notions of the home depend.

In order to contend with these difficulties, but also to promote remembering as a feminist project, many feminists distinguish between memory and nostalgia. According to Gayle Greene, memory is a means “to discover play rather than place [...] a view of the past not as fixed and finished but as so vitally connected to the present that it takes on new meaning in response to present questions and needs” (305). Greene notes that “memory is our means of connecting past and present and constructing a self and versions of experience we can live with” (293). However, Greene also cautions her reader against uncritically accepting representations of the past, as memory shifts and changes (294). In this case, Greene positions nostalgia as uncritical acceptance of the past, whereas memory is a process of revisiting fragmented and fluctuating histories. For Greene, nostalgia and memory are simultaneously connected, but also stand in opposition to one another: nostalgia is “forgetting, merely regressive”, whereas memory “looks back in order to move forward and transform disabling fictions to enabling fictions, altering our relation to the present and future” (298). In this logic, memory unearths and foregrounds personal experiences that counter dominant histories, whereas nostalgia signals inauthentic experiences created by

capitalist or nationalist interests (Su 2). John S. Su explains that many theorists have followed Greene's lead, and distinguish between memory and nostalgia (2), privileging the former over the latter. For example, Sinead McDermott extols the virtues of memory, arguing that it functions as an archeological excavation of the past. Through memory, we can see events as continuously changing, and open to re-evaluation. McDermott then contrasts memory and nostalgia, and argues that nostalgia is a vision of the past that is static and unchanging (390). Similarly, bell hooks champions the revolutionary potential of memory and critiques nostalgia. According to hooks, memory is a political practice that expresses the need to create spaces where people can redeem and reclaim the past. Further, memory gives voice to forgotten legacies of both pain and triumph, and can transform present reality. This is distinct from nostalgia, which hooks sees as "longing for something to be as once it was" that is ultimately "a kind of useless act" (147). While these thinkers underline some important drawbacks to nostalgic forms of remembering, distinguishing between memory and nostalgia might be an impossible and limiting project. Not only does Greene explain that the two are necessarily connected, urging women to use memory, rather than nostalgia sets limits on the ways people can remember, and presumes that a person can necessarily control their affective responses to the past. By foreclosing nostalgia as an avenue for feminist knowledge, these critics limit recollections of, and relationships to, the past that could be tremendously valuable for feminist epistemologies.

Svetlana Boym is one of a handful of cultural critics who has begun to dismantle the false binary between nostalgia and memory. In her reparative approach, Boym identifies two loose trends in nostalgia: reflective and restorative. Restorative nostalgia constructs a trans-historical and unchanging reconstruction of a lost home, and does not think of itself as

nostalgia, but rather as truth and tradition. Within the frame of restorative nostalgia, the home is rebuilt as an idyllic place of origin (50), and idealized notions of national identity are couched in the home and women's place within it. This type of nostalgia restores dominant narratives and hegemonies, and is at the core of nationalist, capitalist, and religious revivals (xviii). For Boym, restorative nostalgia ultimately erases alternative narratives, as well as the suffering of subjugated groups, by creating a linear trajectory of how the past unfolded. Conversely, reflective nostalgia is characterized by longing for, but also by a delay in homecoming itself. Although the home figures prominently in reflective nostalgia, Boym explains that this "home is in ruins, or, on the contrary, has just been renovated and gentrified beyond recognition" (50). Similarly, John J. Su explains that many nostalgic discussions of home are more nuanced than critics initially believed, as these analyses often explore the shortcomings of the home, or re-signify it as a place that did not exist from the outset. As such, when a person longs for home, nostalgia can function as a necessary and productive way to confront displacement and disappointment (12). Su's discussion of home follows Boym's hallmarks of reflective nostalgia, as Su goes on to explain "homecoming does not signify a recovery of identity; it does not end the journey in the virtual space of imagination. A modern nostalgic can be homesick and sick of home, at once" (50). Following Boym and Su, not only does reflective nostalgia de-center hegemonic constructions of the home, it also dwells on the ambivalences of human longing and relationships, embracing the contradictions within memories rather than creating a linear history of progress. Reflective nostalgia also explores many ways of inhabiting places, and seeks out details rather than idolized symbols. For Boym, this type of nostalgia can be fruitful, as she argues

reflective nostalgia can present an ethical and creative challenge, not merely a pretext for midnight melancholias. The typology of nostalgia allows us to distinguish between national memory that is based on a single plot of national identity, and social memory, which consists of collective frameworks that mark but do not define the individual memory. (xviii)

Boym goes on to explain that “restorative nostalgia manifests itself in total reconstructions of monuments of the past, while reflective nostalgia lingers on ruins, the patina of time and history, in the dreams of another place and another time” (41). Boym sums up the key distinctions between the two by explaining that where restorative nostalgia sees itself as truth, reflective nostalgia calls this truth into doubt (xviii). However, Boym also cautions her readers that restorative and reflective nostalgia are not mutually exclusive, as both use memory as the trigger to construct different versions of the past (41). Rather, these are two loose trends within a complex social process of remembering. Although Boym does not speak directly to the distinctions between memory and nostalgia, her discussion complicates Greene’s analysis, and foregrounds the reality that distinctions between memory and nostalgia are not as evident as the aforementioned feminist thinkers suggest.

Many critics are also weary of the alleged binary between memory and nostalgia, suggesting that they are interconnected rather than mutually exclusive (Su 2). For example, despite her critique of nostalgia, Sinead McDermott asks if it is even possible “to mine the past the past or look to it as a source of change, without at some point engaging in nostalgic longings?” (391). In light of the aforementioned feminist critiques of nostalgia, it is also clear that these theorists have focused on what Boym would term restorative nostalgia, and have largely ignored its reflective counterpart. In fact, Boym’s discussion of reflective

nostalgia is similar to Greene's analysis of memory, as both emphasize a form of remembering that sees the past as complex, in flux, and grounded in a home that is far from the hegemonic domestic ideal. In light of Boym's influential text, we can understand Greene's groundbreaking critique of nostalgia not as a refusal of nostalgia per se, but rather as a critique of reparative nostalgia. By acknowledging that it may be impossible to distinguish between nostalgia and memory, we can begin to see the immense potential of nostalgia within feminist projects. For example, nostalgia can allow subjugated groups to recall stories that are excluded from dominant historical accounts (Wright qtd. in Pickering & Keightley 931), and function as a means through which they can name their desires, goals, and disappointments as they move forward.

Rather than function as a longing for a simpler time where social interaction was less reliant on technology, nostalgia can also help us make sense of, and respond to, the unease that accompanies modernity. For example, Su explains that nostalgia can function as a rebellion against the linear notion of time and progress, and can represent a rejection of the modern logic of unyielding progress and improvement (4). Similarly, Pickering and Keightley argue that nostalgia creates the conditions where we can address dissatisfactions with "the temporal emphasis in modernity [...] on relentless supercession and movement beyond existing conditions and circumstances" (920). Because nostalgia can designate dissatisfaction with the present, Duyvendak argues that nostalgia actually says more about contemporary society than it does about the past (107). Rather than dismiss nostalgia, critics like Su, Boym, Pickering, and Keightley urge us to rethink nostalgia as a process that enables people to draw from their memories to create renewal and satisfaction in the future (Pickering & Keightley 921). Nostalgia can give rise to a dialectic between past, present, and

future (927), allowing individuals and groups to reflect upon their unrealized dreams, or contemplate visions of the past that have been erased or rendered obsolete.

Feminist scholars have also revisited nostalgia since Greene wrote her influential text. For example, Janelle Wilson argues nostalgia serves a feminist function as it is tied to agency, that is, individuals decide in the present how to remember the past, and determine how to deploy their memories as they look towards the future (7). Through reflective nostalgia, both dominant historical narratives and counter narratives are continuously destabilized, creating space for divergent recollections of the past. Nostalgia can thus disrupt the neat binary between narrative and counter narrative, or between past and present, creating space for multiple and contradictory recollections of a single event. In this light, nostalgia is a central component of feminist acts of remembering; not only does it allow subjugated groups like women to excavate the past for more nuanced or complex memories, it also allows them to write and re-write themselves into a past from which they have previously been omitted.

Like their feminist counterparts, affect theorists have also revisited nostalgia, and now see it as an emotional reaction to the past, rather than an act of looking to the past from an allegedly objective standpoint (Ridout 136). In this case, nostalgia is a means of unearthing forgotten memories, as well as an affective response to this excavation, which might in turn evoke a host of other emotions including anger. In light of these debates and reparative readings, and for the purposes of this chapter, I understand nostalgia as both an affective response to the past that is connected to other emotions, as well as the act of looking to the past itself. Like other emotional reactions, nostalgia can function as a state (for example, when one is nostalgic), as an evaluation of a set of circumstances (for example,

remembering can make a person feel fleeting nostalgia), or can denote the act of looking to the past itself, that can operate in tandem with other affects like anger. In this chapter, nostalgia signals a way of revisiting the past that is centered on a loosely defined notion of home, that can be, but is not limited to, a community, a single person, a physical location, or a feeling of belonging. Following Boym and Su, I understand nostalgia as the process of excavating the past that allows subjugated groups to write themselves and their emotions into dominant historical narratives from which they have been excluded. Within this chapter, nostalgia underlines the impossibility of creating a perfect or non-fragmented account of the past. As such, nostalgia embraces the contradicting perceptions and emotions that accompany remembering, and continually creates space for alternative historical accounts. Because this dissertation focuses specifically on anger, I also understand nostalgia as a means for subjugated groups to recall their angry responses to past events, which are often distorted or erased within dominant constructions of history. Nostalgia also subverts the logic that women's anger is either symptomatic of their mental instability, a manifestation of their bitter nature, or as a legitimate response to oppression, by allowing women to link anger to their memories, particularly those that are connected to the home. By reading nostalgia as interacting with anger in unpredictable ways, it is clear that both anger and nostalgia are far more complex than many of these debates suggest. Finally, like my analysis in the previous chapter, I underscore how nostalgia interacts with anger to outline an alternative function for the latter outside of the binary logic described in the introduction to this dissertation.

### **Revisiting the Past and Naming Anger**

Joyce Carol Oates's *Foxfire* and *We Were the Mulvaney*s are both characterized by an interplay between anger and nostalgia. *Foxfire* follows a group of adolescent girls as they band together to protect one another from harm, enact vigilante justice against the men who abuse them, and is characterized by an angry narrative tone. Critics have responded to *Foxfire*'s narrative style and violent content by disparaging Oates as shrill, by denouncing her as complaining, and by accusing her of hating men (Cologne-Brookes 184). These critiques follow the pattern identified by Felski and Silver discussed in the introduction to this dissertation, and as a result of these criticisms, other important features of *Foxfire* remain undiscussed. Oates herself is bemused by these readings of her work, and reflects that critics tended to be "very literal" in their interpretation of *Foxfire*, noting that "people assume it's full of anger/rage" (Cologne-Brookes 183). Feminist literary critics have since revisited *Foxfire*, and now offer alternative readings of this text, arguing that the fragmented narrative style disrupts the linear "masculine" narrative form, and that *Foxfire* is either a critique of the romantic outlaw, or a feminist revision of this trope (Daily 222; Cologne-Brookes 189). While these are useful interventions, critics have yet to explore the ways the angry tone of this text both relates to, and complicates the fragmented narrative style. Further, the graphic violence that characterizes Oates's novel remains unaddressed. Similarly, literary critics have explored how Oates's narrative style in *We Were the Mulvaney*s complicates notions of truth and authority (Cologne-Brookes 196), but have yet to explore the angry tone of this text, and the way this anger complicates this narration. It is thus important to ask, how do the anger and violence that characterize both texts complicate the nostalgic underpinnings of both novels? What impact does the fragmented narration of

both texts have on the anger therein? How is anger obscured by concepts such as truth, history, and memory, and how does nostalgia bring anger back into focus?

Before exploring these questions, it is important to underline the nostalgic elements in *Foxfire* and *We Were the Mulvaneys*, and to underscore how this method of sifting through the past allows both Judd and Maddy to interrogate claims to truth, authority, and the process of writing history that often excludes young women and men, and erases their anger. Nostalgia rebels against the modern notion of a linear time and progress as it oscillates between the past and the present (Su 4; Pickering & Keightley 920), in order to seek out forgotten details rather than construct a grand narrative of the past (Boym xviii). *Foxfire*'s narrative style follows this motif, as Maddy moves fluidly between past and present as she narrates the rise, activities, and demise of the FOXFIRE girl-gang. For example, *Foxfire* opens when Maddy, now an adult, sifts through old journals, notes, and memories in order to commit her FOXFIRE CHRONOLOGY to paper. As she writes, Maddy repeatedly contrasts her perspective as an adolescent with her viewpoint as an adult, creating a dialectic that functions as her "double-voiced narration," which allows her "to present events through the eyes of the adolescent girls and her own younger self, and only then to pull back and present her mature perspective" (Cologne-Brookes 184). This dialectic between past and present is a hallmark of nostalgia, and allows her to put the past in conversation with the present (Daily 15). Rather than organize her recollections into a linear narrative of fond memories, through nostalgia, Maddy's dialectic brings unpleasant details to the forefront. In this instance, as Maddy looks to the past, she vividly recalls many of the gang-members' racist beliefs that come to light when they refuse to let a Black girl join the gang, as well as the shame Maddy felt following this exclusion (Oates 223). Looking to the past also forces Maddy to recall

“the things you don’t want to think about if you’re female” (101) such as the continuous threat of gender based violence, and traumatic manifestations thereof. A gruesome example of this violence appears in the vignette entitled “the strange episode of the DWARF-WOMAN” (Oates 195). Here, Maddy admits that she tries to erase this sequence of events from her memory, she cannot help but recall Legs’s most violent misadventures. One afternoon, Legs comes across a ramshackle house outside of the city where a group of men held a mentally and physically disabled woman captive. The woman wears a dog collar around her neck, which is attached to a wire stretching the length of the property so that she can move about but cannot leave. She introduces herself to Legs as Yetta, they chat briefly, and Legs wonders how the woman came to live under such horrific conditions (198). Later that week, Legs and Goldie return to the house, peer through the window, and witness

a sight they wish they’d never seen[...] a four-poster bed, and the dwarf-woman is lying on it naked, spread-eagle[...] her wrists and ankles tied to the bed’s four posters so her deformed body is completely exposed and completely [...] and one by one men come into the room. And shut the door behind them. (200)

Legs and Goldie watch as three different men rape Yetta one by one. Legs then flies into a rage, and knocks on the front door of the house to demand that the men let Yetta go, only for the men to reply that she is happy living where she does (201). Legs sneaks back to the home the next night, finds cans of kerosene in the shed, douses the house in the flammable liquid, and sets the house ablaze with the men asleep inside (202-3). While it is not clear whether Yetta or her abusers are able to escape the flames that engulf the house, it is clear that Legs’s desire to enact justice for Yetta leads her to commit shocking violence that traumatizes

Maddy even though she did not witness it first hand. Through nostalgia, Maddy commits these traumatic events to paper, and the graphic details she gives of Yetta's rape disrupt the notion that the home is an idyllic place for women, even though her captors believe that they are providing a happy domestic space for Yetta. These acts of writing and remembering are important processes, as Susan Watkins explains "to make a traumatic event into a narrative is to turn the unspeakable spoken. This, in turn, helps the victim go beyond the dis-ease of individual suffering and become part of history" (105). Through this dialectic between past and present that is made possible by nostalgia, Maddy is able to chronicle events that no one else would recall, particularly because they involve violence enacted upon a relatively invisible group, that is, women with disabilities. This vignette is also one example of an ongoing narrative trend where Maddy combs through the past to unearth trauma and to evaluate her actions from the vantage point of adulthood. Through this dialectic, Maddy does not construct a linear grand narrative of FOXFIRE as a just refuge from violence, but rather foregrounds the complexities of group identity, justice, and the devastating impacts of gender based violence.

*We Were the Mulvaney's* is characterized by a similar narrative style, and the story follows Judd as he chronicles his prominent family's demise when they are unable to come to terms with his sister Marianne's assault. Like Maddy, Judd opens his narrative as an adult who looks to the past, telling his reader "I am an adult telling you these things: Judd Mulvaney, Thirty years old. Editor in chief of the *Chautauqua Falls Journal*" (Oates 5). Judd not only narrates the story, he also speaks for his parents and siblings, writing what he imagines they are thinking and feeling into his narrative. As such, like *Foxfire*, *We Were the Mulvaney's* is dialogical because it moves through time, as well as from one perspective to

the next. For example, on the day after Zachary Lundt rapes Marianne following the school dance, their older brother Patrick picks her up from her friend's house where she had spent the night. Judd writes that Patrick did not know at that point that Marianne had been raped, and describes his careless actions on the drive home. Judd then immediately contrasts this with how he imagines Patrick would have liked to react had he known of his sister's suffering, thinking that Patrick would ask his sister, "*Why didn't you tell me? Why, as soon as you got into the car? As soon as we were alone together?* [...]" Afterward he would think these things but not at the time" (35).

Through nostalgia, Judd moves between past and present, as well as between the perspective of one character to the next to foreground his family's inability to cope with the assault, and the ways in which his parents' grief following Marianne's rape completely erases Marianne's own sorrow. The chapter "Damaged Girl" opens with matriarch Corinne Mulvaney's brief stream of consciousness: "*I hadn't known. God help me. I hadn't guessed. Yet I think it must have been partly my fault. I'm her mother, it must have been partly my fault. I'm waiting, O God I'm hoping to understand*" (114). Following this glimpse into Corinne's consciousness, Judd describes the mundane afternoon before Marianne's assault, only to move back in time to describe how his parents met, fell in love, got married, and mailed cards to their acquaintances following Judd's birth that declared "praise God the Mulvaney caboose has arrived" (113) before returning to Marianne's rape in subsequent chapters. Judd's motion through time and perspectives is not only a hallmark of nostalgia, it also foregrounds the ways in which Marianne's suffering is continuously erased through the dominant narrative of the successful Mulvaney family. The metaphor of the Mulvaney family as a train illustrates the family's self-fashioning as a cohesive group following a

dominant leader, rather than as individual family members who suffer unique traumas.

Although Corinne's worry about her own maternal shortcomings denotes concern for her daughter, it also makes clear that as a lead car in the Mulvaney train, both Corinne's and her husband Michel's worries take precedence over their daughter's emotions.

This is clearly reaffirmed throughout the text, as Corinne and Michel repeatedly erase Marianne's responses to her trauma by focusing on their own reactions to the assault. The night before they send Marianne away, Michel explains to Corinne that Zachary Lundt is "getting away with it, with the hurt he inflicted on us" (184), transforming Marianne's personal trauma into an affront to his patriarchal rule. Michel sobs to his wife "I'm not strong enough, I'm a coward. How can I live knowing that! God help me Corinne, I can't bear the sight of the girl any longer" (185), and the next day, it appears to Judd as though Marianne has simply vanished from the home. Judd then moves from Michel's perspective to Marianne's point of view to illustrate the devastating impact this decision has had on her. In the chapter entitled "Tears", Judd juxtaposes Michel's public sadness with Marianne's private grief: "it's true she was hurt. In secret. Never admitting to Mom, or certainly to Patrick over the phone. She did cry occasionally, even after so many months (how many? Better not to count)- more than was healthy" (307). This expulsion from the home teaches Marianne that her own suffering is less significant than her parents' grief. In fact, Marianne has come to believe that she is responsible for her mother's shame and maternal insecurities (322), and she ultimately suffers in silence. Through this process of moving between time and perspectives, Judd shows the ways Marianne's trauma and sadness following the rape are erased by her family, and brings her suffering into focus by including Marianne's perspective, by exploring the grief she does not vocalize, and by foregrounding her longing

to return home. Further, because *Foxfire* and *We Were the Mulvaneys* do not follow the linear progression of time and move from one perspective to the next, nostalgia also allows Maddy and Judd to subvert the binary logic of narrative and counter-narrative, illustrating that any historical account is fraught with imperfect and competing recollections of the past.

Oates's novels are also characterized by nostalgia as they interrogate notions such as truth, authority, and history. As the communal narrator in *Foxfire*, Maddy's reflections on the process of writing history point towards the instability of the self, of truth, and of authority (Daily 220). Like Precious, Maddy opens her chronology by asserting that her goal is to subvert dominant misconceptions about FOXFIRE, and describes her journal as a "secret document [...] in which Truth would reside forever" (Oates 3). Knowing that written documents make a claim to truth other forms do not, Maddy feels that the act of writing history will provide her with a venue where "*distortions and misunderstandings and outright lies could be refuted*" (3). However, Maddy's contradictory entries soon show that the binary between truth and lies is not as clear as she initially states, and she repeatedly undermines her own claims to truth, as she explains to that the memories she records are untrustworthy:

what is memory but the repository of things doomed to be forgotten, so you must have History. You must labor to invent History. Being faithful to all that happens to you of significance, recording days, dates, events, names, sights not relying merely upon memory which fades like a Polaroid print where you see the memory fading before your eyes like itself retreating. (44)

Although Maddy expresses a desire to record "events not as I remember them, but as they occurred" (195), she undermines herself again by asking her reader "can language be trusted?" (196), signaling again that her memories, like her method of communication, are

unreliable. Maddy also notes that a complete or comprehensive history is impossible, as “for every fact transcribed in these CONFESSIONS there are a dozen facts. A hundred facts, my God maybe a thousand left out [...] can you tell the truth if it isn’t the *entire* truth- and what *is* truth?” (99). Following Boym, the ongoing negotiation of truth is characteristic of nostalgia, and Maddy names this process of naming truth only to disrupt it “the *paradox of chronology*” or, “being made to know that no thing can have happened without another thing preceding it and another preceding *that* to the very beginning of Time!” (196). Maddy’s recollections are necessarily informed by her experiences, and she interprets each new experience or event in light of those that came before. As she continues to grow and change, her recollections will follow suit. Like Boym’s concept of reflective nostalgia which is grounded in an ever-changing truth, Maddy’s *paradox of chronology* does not seek to establish a single true plot, but rather explores and juxtaposes different perspectives, illustrating that writing a full and comprehensive truth is an impossible project.

Similarly, Judd grapples with questions of truth, and with the reliability of his memories. As the youngest child of a well-known family, Judd reflects:

They say the youngest kid in a family doesn’t remember himself very clearly because he has learned to rely on the memories of others, who are older and possess authority. Where his memory conflicts with theirs, it’s discarded as of little worth. What he believes to be his memory is more accurately described as a rag-bin of others’ memories, their overlapping testimonies of things that happened before he was born, mixed in with things that happened after his birth, including him. (Oates 378)

As such, Judd is cognizant that his claim to not know his own memories is not a fabrication: his memories are erased, cast off like metaphorical old rags, re-written by his older siblings, and obscured when they conflict with the dominant narrative of the powerful and cohesive Mulvaney family. In this case, traumatic events are continually obfuscated by the familiar refrain: “*You Mulvaneys! How lucky are you!*” (112). Like Maddy’s commitment to write the truth about FOXFIRE, Judd aims to write a “family album. The kind my mother never kept, absolute truth-telling” (6). However, Judd is continuously confronted with the un-tenability of truth itself, as Cologne-Brookes explains:

The concept of truth Judd comes up with, however, is not simply the one relative, dialogic truth- the certainty that there is no certainty- traditionally associated with the novel form, but something more definable. Truth turns out to be ever shifting, but not unfathomable. It depends on each individual’s attitude toward events. The family members’ reaction to a given truth (centrally, Marianne’s date rape and the fact that she is forced to live away from the family) in turn produces further truths that must themselves be dealt with in a never-ending sequence. There is no truth that does not itself have an overlay of human perception that creates a further truth. (196)

Like Maddy’s paradox of chronology, each of Judd’s truths relies on those that came before them, and as his family life falls apart, his recollections shift and change. Judd is cognizant of this reality, and thus seeks out contradicting stories and perspectives, and mines through his memories for details of his past that are now visible because his perspective has changed. For example, Judd evaluates his father from his perspective as an adult, and contrasts that with his view as an adolescent. As an adult, Judd admits “I don’t want to misrepresent my

father. There were days when he didn't drink much or in any case didn't show the effects of drinking" (Oates 368). From the vantage point of adulthood, Judd knows that his father is battling an addiction to alcohol, is unable to find work, and is struggling since his separation from Corinne. From this perspective, Judd understands that his father's condition is the product on a long sequence of events that date back to Marianne's rape. Judd contrasts this with his perception of his father as a teenager, where he saw his father as "*a fool. He's stupid. He doesn't give a shit about you or mom [...] look at what he did to Marianne. Erased her like she never existed. What makes you think he won't do the same fucking thing to you*" (368). As an adolescent, the truth that Judd sees is the expulsion of his sister from the family home, and the possibility that he too, will be banished. Through nostalgia, Judd is able to put the present in dialogue with the past, and paint a more complex picture of his father than the grand narrative of the successful Mulvaney family, or his own adolescent view that his father is a villain, would suggest.

Once they have disrupted notions such as truth, nostalgia allows Judd and Maddy to foreground the social mechanisms that erase or subsume their experiences while allowing others considerably more visibility. As previously discussed, Judd's perspective is continuously erased through his status as the caboose on the Mulvaney train (and thus must follow in line and not deviate from his family's chosen path). In the case of *Foxfire*, Maddy's narrative style is not only dialectical because she puts the past and the present in conversation with one another, but also because she brings dominant beliefs about gender-based violence into conversation with FOXFIRE's opposing and collective viewpoint. FOXFIRE designates men and adults as its primary enemies, as these groups are largely responsible for the misconceptions that circulate about the girl gang. Although it appears that

the distinctions between friend and foe are informed by age and sex, other social distinctions, such as class, are the grounds upon which these lines are drawn. For example, when the girls are arrested for stealing a car, Maddy reflects “Lowertown girls, especially living around Fairfax Avenue, down by the river, you can bet we were arrested” (166). In this case, as poor young women, they are subject to police surveillance, and are punished for their crimes, whereas their more affluent peers might have more freedom.

In the wake of this theft, animosity towards FOXFIRE becomes widespread in Hammond, and the dominant discourse surrounding FOXFIRE is that they are a threatening group of delinquent young women. Maddy has grown so accustomed to this way of thinking that she groups her readers with FOXFIRE’s enemies, and addresses her readers: “you safe and snug and self-righteous thinking *juvenile delinquents- gang girls- bitches-* right? Yeah, I don’t blame you. That’s how most people in Hammond were thinking” (129). This public perception stands in stark contrast with the girls’ self-perception, as they feel that FOXFIRE is a necessity that protects them from gender-based violence (8). However, as young women living in an economically deprived area, the girls lack the social capital to self-define as anything other than a public menace. This is made clear on the day Legs is sentenced for stealing the car. During her hearing, Legs’s father Abe was a witness against her. Despite his general absence from Legs’s life, Abe tells the judge that he can no longer control his daughter, and attributes her actions to her mother’s absence. When the judge asks if Legs is promiscuous, he only “stared at his shoes like he couldn’t bring himself to answer” (133). Maddy angrily writes that Abe has a “reputation everywhere in Lowertown for his bad temper, his crazy-quick temper, propensity for fighting, drinking, drinking, drinking and problems with women and employers” (132). Despite his reputation the judge interprets his

silence as an admission of his daughter's promiscuity, and Maddy recalls the absurdity of Legs, who abhors all men, being cast as promiscuous (133). In this case, the circumstances that have led to Legs's alienation from her father such as his addiction, violent temper, and ongoing abuse are obscured by the familiar discourse of unruly young women deployed by Abe within the court (132). Maddy also recalls that *The Hammond Chronicle* echoes this perception and reported the arrest and trial through a special report on the growing problem of outlaw gangs in public schools (130). Maddy returns to this memory later in her chronology to recall her disgust with one editorial describing FOXFIRE "like we were part of some older guys' gang, actual criminals, car thieves or something" (166). In this case, not only does this erase the violence that leads the girls to join FOXFIRE from the outset, the notion that FOXFIRE is an autonomous gang is also incompatible with dominant scripts of gangs being male centered. This reporting, as well as the trial and the legal framework of incorrigible young women, reduces FOXFIRE to the sexual auxiliaries of male gangs.

Both Boym and John J. Su remind us that recollections of the past are necessarily fragmented, and rife with omissions and contradictions. According to Su, rather than deny their presence, we can read contradictions and omissions as acts of agency, as nostalgia allows a person to decide how to remember, what to omit, and how to deploy their memories (4). Similarly, Pickering & Keightly argue that nostalgia is empowering, as it allows subjugated groups to write themselves into histories from which they are largely excluded (931). Because nostalgia allows subjugated groups to designate specific events as politically important and as worth remembering (Wilson 47), Maddy is able to use nostalgia to recall the trial, and news reports covering these legal procedures, and contrast these with Legs's lived reality that was not addressed in court, which in turn allow the girls to distinguish

between allies and enemies for the purpose of self-preservation. Maddy's memories denote a refusal to acknowledge the reality that theft is, in fact, illegal as she and Legs justify the theft as "just riding" in the car (131). However, Maddy's recollections can be read as acts of agency, as she is choosing how to deploy her memories, and using them to foreground the circumstances, including sex and class, that allow FOXFIRE to be coded as criminal while allowing those she designates as enemies such as Legs's father, considerably more freedom. Where the restorative trend of viewing FOXFIRE as a social menace erases the girls' plight, Maddy's reflective excavation of the past and her motion between time and perspective foregrounds their experiences. Although Maddy appears to continually undermine her claims that FOXFIRE is not a gang made of criminals (particularly as car theft and kidnapping are serious crimes), reflective nostalgia allows her to contrast the prevailing narratives about FOXFIRE with the gang's counter narrative, illustrating that neither is entirely accurate.

### **Dialogical Memories and Foregrounding Anger**

Once they have disrupted notions such as truth and authority that erase their experiences, Maddy and Judd are able to link past events to their anger, or to the anger of the people who surround them. For example, in *Foxfire*, the boys and men in Rita's neighborhood have continually sexually harassed her since she was a child. Maddy writes of one particularly horrific incident, where Rita's two youngest brothers lure her to a club house belonging to an adolescent gang and, "captive there, Rita O'Hagan, twelve years old, was the object of certain acts performed upon her, or to her, or with her, for most of a long August afternoon" (25). This abuse is continuously normalized or ignored through the logic that by virtue of her beauty, her age, and her naïveté, Rita brings this violence upon herself. This abuse is symptomatic of a broader pattern in Hammond, where gender based violence is both

widespread and undiscussed, as Maddy recalls “to girls and women in the area, it was a time of violence against girls and women but we didn’t have the language to talk about it then” (100). This violence is so pervasive, and is normalized to the extent that Maddy adheres to the dominant logic that women are complicit in sexual violence, and she views Rita with “disdain and contempt and even loathing [...] these things don’t just happen to you, you let them happen” (26). As the feminist mouthpiece for the gang, Legs disrupts this logic, and angrily chastises her friends for believing Rita participates in this abuse, telling her friends: “When that sonuvabitch picks on Rita you better tell yourself he’s picking on you ‘cause the fucker sure *would* if he *could*” and goes on to “blame her gang-mates for letting the abuse happen because they knew about the assaults but did nothing to stop them” (47). Legs’s telling of an alternative truth allows Maddy to connect Legs’s anger to the unrelenting threat of violence women in Hammond face, and she soon reflects “right away I could see the logic of that, so clear and so final it about took my breath away” (46). In this case, once hegemonic truths are disrupted as Maddy revisits the past, she is able to connect Legs’s anger to this continued threat of violence, rather than see it as simply Legs’s natural inclination or the product of her role as the leader of a girl gang as dominant accounts of FOXFIRE would have us believe.

The notion that women do not invite abuse is harshly reaffirmed to Maddy when her uncle attempts to molest her as she tries to purchase a typewriter from him. Maddy is surprised that she would be vulnerable to sexual assault, reflecting “but- I am not Rita”, to which Legs replies, “Oh Maddy-Monkey, shit- *we’re all Rita*” (71). In this case, as she mines through the past, Maddy connects her own assault to the abuse Rita suffers, and to Legs’s corresponding anger. In this case, nostalgia reaffirms to Maddy that Legs’s rage is the

product of the constant threat of male violence they face. Now cognizant that all women are vulnerable to violence, Maddy understands the root of Legs's anger, and is able to look to the past to make broader and more coherent connections between Legs's emotional responses and the ongoing violence in Hammond. For example, Maddy recalls that in the early days of FOXFIRE, Legs would get "worked up" about events that did not directly impact anyone she knew, such as a man who raped and strangled a young nursing student, a man who stabbed his pregnant woman, killing her and her unborn child, a masked man who killed eight girls and women over the course of fifteen months in upstate New York, and a man who slashed the face, body, and genitalia of a six year old girl to ribbons (100). While Maddy still does not have the language to name this abuse, the notion that "we are all Rita" allows her to connect Legs's being "worked up" or angry to the threat of violence they all face by virtue of being female.

Nostalgia also allows Maddy to foreground the ways women participate in the erasure of their own oppression, as she recalls that she omitted these events from her original journal entries because none of the girls wanted to discuss them (101). Maddy defends these omissions with the same logic she used to view Rita as complicit in her own abuse, as she thinks "there are things you don't want to think about if you're female, say you're a young girl or a woman you're *female* and that isn't going to change, right?" (Oates 101). Maddy sees this violence as inevitable and natural, and it thus remains undiscussed. Further, Maddy excludes this certainty of violence from the history she initially wrote, only to include it once she has revisited the past and found fragments that she had forgotten. Megan Watkins discusses this trend, and explains that "memory is an important way of accessing the inner life of those who have been excluded from official history, a way of challenging what has

been termed ‘willful forgetting’” (104). Through her journal, Maddy reflects on this process of forgetting and thinks “much of what we knew we didn’t like knowing and worked to forget so if you haven’t been keeping a diary as such (and nobody does, these days) you’ll succeed in forgetting what’s mysterious, upsetting” (Oates 180). Through reflective nostalgia, Maddy unearths events that are forgotten, and also recalls FOXFIRE’s emotional responses to these traumas. As a result, where FOXFIRE was once simply angry, nostalgia allows Maddy to understand what the gang is angry about. While this violence might continue to go ignored by the broader public, and following Ahmed, although the discourse of irrationally angry young women “sticks” to FOXFIRE in a way that limits their mobility and visibility (or informs their hypervisibility), Maddy’s memories ensure that she will not forget the roots of their collective rage.

Like Maddy, Judd also draws together multiple perspectives to deal with trauma, and to recall his sister’s expulsion from the family home. Further, by looking to the past, Judd is able to connect his brother Patrick’s anger to Marianne’s exile, as well as foreground unexpected and hidden reasons for this anger. Like his brother Judd, much of Patrick’s anger is aimed at his father, whom Ellen Friedman describes as “a self-made man” who “has made the family rich and is a pillar of the community”. Friedman goes on to explain that Michel sees himself as having created a new Garden of Eden, whose inhabitants bear his name (698). As the creator and keeper of the Mulvaney family and the idyllic High Point Farm on which they reside, his desires and sorrows come to obscure those of his family. Further, like a God who creates a kingdom, he feels as though he can eject people at will from his paradise. Michel Mulvaney soon becomes obsessed with his daughter’s assault (Oates 172), and is unable to look at or speak to her. Although Marianne longs to stay home, he eases his

own suffering by sending her away to live with a distant relative (186). Now separated from her family, Judd recalls the trajectory of his sister's calls home: "once his sister had spoken to each family member she would draw a deep breath and ask after Dad, as if she hadn't already asked Mom and Patrick" (193). She would ask Judd when she could come home, and inquire as to whether or not her father ever asked about her, or mentioned her name. Corinne, hovering nearby, "would take the receiver gently from me and say into the mouth piece in a playful mom-voice, 'Sor-ry! This is your long-distance operator and *your time has run out!*'" (193). Following Watkins, Judd's memories foreground the deliberate erasure or forgetting of Marianne's absence, as Corinne works to relieve her husband's suffering (or, to extend Friedman's metaphor, to appease an angry God), at Marianne's expense. Corinne also attempts to maintain the outward appearance of the cohesive patriarchal family even though, following her rape, Marianne is "made useless as exchange value to ensure the paternal legacy" (Friedman 698). It is important to note here that while her father and brother feel anger following her rape, Marianne is never actually angry. Rather, she feels shame, isolation, and loneliness following the assault and her expulsion from the home. In light of Gayle Rubin's analysis of the sex/gender system (which she defines as "the set of arrangements by which society transforms biological sexuality into products of human activity, and in which these transformed sexual needs are satisfied (13)), Marianne's lack of anger is unsurprising. According to Rubin, kinship is a significant location where we can observe sex/gender systems at work (18). Through the exchange of women through marriage and other social processes, families establish their ties to one another, and a woman's motion from one family to another can elevate or debase that family's social currency (19-20). Consequently, women are the conduits of relationships between men rather than partners

therein. Before her assault, the Mulvaney family collective enjoyed her popularity, and used it to forge social links between themselves and other families in their hometown. Marianne's presence in the domestic realm and mastery of domestic chores such as sewing and gardening, also set the stage for an eventual marriage contract between the Mulvaney and another prominent family. Following her assault, Marianne can no longer function as currency in this method of exchange, as this transaction is contingent on her virginal status. Moreover, because her status is one of object or conduit, her feelings do not resonate within the family unit. Simply put, "objects" do not have feelings. While it is easy to condemn Corinne and Michel for sending Marianne away, reading Corinne's actions in light of Rubin's analysis, it is clear that Corinne's responsibility is to protect her network of kin from a decline in social status, as this is the system upon which her own worth depends. As a result, where Michel Sr. and Patrick lust for revenge against the parties they feel have wronged them and their family (catalyzing their decline in social status), Marianne simply longs to return home to the network of people who assign her social value.

Soon after Marianne is gone, Patrick leaves home for university, and Judd draws parallels between Marianne's exile, Patrick's refusal to visit home, and Patrick's intense anger. For example, Judd reflects that Patrick "hadn't seen his parents and brother Judd for almost eight months: when he'd discovered, to his disgust, that, another time, Marianne hadn't been invited home for Christmas" (Oates 208). When Marianne comes to visit him in Ithaca where he attends university, he flies into a rage when Marianne speaks fondly of their father, and shouts "he's a blind, selfish man. He's cruel. He's crazy. The way he treated you-crazy!" (233). Through his deliberate choice to maintain the physical and emotional distance between himself and his family, Patrick uses his own absence to show his disgust following

his parents' choice to exile Marianne. Although Judd connects Patrick's anger to his sister's departure, whose absence his parents work tirelessly to forget, Judd also uses his multivocal narrative to foreground another, less obvious, reason why Patrick is so angry with his parents. As Patrick sits in his apartment while Marianne sleeps on the couch, he reflects

our lives are not our own but in the possession of others, our parents. Our lives are defined by the whims, caprices, cruelties of others. That genetic web, the ties of blood. It was the oldest curse, older than God. *Am I loved? Am I wanted? Who will want me, if my parents don't?* (233)

As Judd combs through the past he is able to uncover a previously hidden detail, that is, Patrick could just as easily have been expelled from the family's Garden of Eden (by the angry father-God) as his sister. Although Marianne is no longer virginal through no fault of her own, she has lost her value within the family system described above. After witnessing Marianne's plight, Patrick fears that through no fault of his own, he too will unexpectedly cease being an item that ensures Michel's paternal legacy. Through this glimpse into Patrick's intimate fears, Judd foregrounds the possibility that Patrick's absence might be more complex than simply to contest Marianne's exile. Rather, it could signal Patrick's anger when he is confronted with the reality that he is still at the mercy of his parents' cruel whims, which, through the ongoing discourse of the Mulvaneys as an idyllic nuclear family, have largely gone ignored or are re-framed as the acts of a benevolent patriarch.

As he moves from one person's perspective to the next, Judd continues to link his family members' anger to lived events, and simultaneously unearths hidden causes for their rage. For example, in the wake of her rape, Marianne's friends turn their backs on her. Judd recalls "few of Marianne's friends had called to ask after her. Through she'd been absent

from school for days. No boy called. Trisha who was her closest friend, since fifth grade, hadn't called" (145). Following the assault, Corinne Mulvaney notices a similar decline in their own popularity: "there were few calls, these days, for Corinne Mulvaney, as for her daughter. What happened, so swiftly, to their popularity? She could count her friends on the thumbs of both hands, Mom joked. Though Mom didn't joke much, these days" (148). Judd parallels this decline in popularity with the disturbing trend of Michel's increasingly erratic behavior. Michel soon plummets into alcoholism, and he depletes his fortune by hiring lawyers, which causes irreparable damage to his status as a community pillar. Michel also feels betrayed by his friends, who he feels have chosen to lend their support to Mort Lundt, Zachary's father and a wealthy member of the community, over himself (174). Michel ultimately seeks justice by attempting to lay charges against Zachary even though Marianne refuses to testify. When he learns that the case will not stand in court without his daughter's testimony, Michel exclaims in anger "I want the fucker punished! I want justice! I see this kind around town, my daughter has to see him in school, and my son- *he's getting away with it, with the hurt he inflicted on us*"(184). Here, Michel's anger conceals Marianne's trauma, and he appropriates her suffering as hurt that is inflicted upon the family. While it seems that Michel is deeply angry about his daughter's rape, Judd's multivocal narrative foregrounds the reality that Michel is actually angry about his community's reaction to the assault, and what he perceives to be their failure to stand by him during his crisis and alienate Mort Lundt from their social circle.

### **Linking Anger to the Home**

As previously discussed, both texts explore the theme of the dissolution of the family home, and in both texts, anger functions as a means through which the narrators can link

violence to the domestic or private sphere. As a result, rather than deploy nostalgia to articulate an idealized conception of the home, Maddy and Judd move between the past and the present to interrogate this construction. Nostalgia is an ideal means to contest hegemonic conceptions of home, given that the term nostalgia itself is inextricably connected to the home, as nostalgia literally means homesickness (Wilson 21). Su explains that nostalgia signals the constructed nature of places, and “even the most personal and intimate of places, the home, can function as a site for such explorations” (22). Similarly, Bidy Martin and Chandra Mohanty argue that home is often an illusion of coherence and safety that is grounded in the exclusion of specific histories of oppression and struggle (196). In this sense, the ongoing construction of the idyllic home relies on the repeated exclusion of stories that deviate from the domestic ideal. Capitalism plays an important role in this process, as Duyvendak argues “capitalism in the late 1970s was blamed for trapping women in the home- and profiting from their unpaid ‘reproductive’ housework- capitalism today is blamed for trapping women (and men) at work and not providing enough time to be at home” (45). Although he rightly shows how the social production of the home is a capitalist project, Duyvendak ultimately ignores the wealth of feminist theory that foregrounds the interplay of race and class that are integral to the myth of domesticity. The idyllic middle class home of the 1970s excludes racialized women and other minorities, and the current conception of the home as a consumer project relies on the labor of marginalized groups around the world. Although the home continues to figure prominently in restorative narratives of place and identity, Su and Boym’s analysis indicates that we can participate in acts of constructing the home without re-articulating this myth. Specifically, while nostalgia means homesickness,

the home that resides at the centre of this longing or remembering does not necessarily have to adhere to these idealizations.

For the members of FOXFIRE, the home is not in shambles because of the absence of a maternal figure. Rather, the maternal figure is sometimes responsible for abuse that is concealed within the home, or the home is a locus of violence from which children try to escape. Maddy describes her childhood home as a dilapidated house where her mother sporadically appears from a drug-induced trance, displaying the horrific markers of a string of abusive relationships such as a black eye or a broken nose (Oates 58). Maddy eventually witnesses her mother “carried out of their house on a stretcher with the neighbors on the sidewalk staring [...] sobbing whimpering soiling herself like an infant” (101). In the absence of a parental figure, Maddy lives with her aunt Rose Packer, who launches into regular diatribes against “the pack of notorious bitches sluts juvenile delinquents” (209) that comprise FOXFIRE. Maddy recalls that she paid her aunt every cent she earned as a hotel maid for room and board, which Rose charged her every month because her “mother is such a tramp” (208). In this case, Maddy’s memories do not adhere to the narrative of a mother presiding over the domestic space, but rather, home is a temporary dwelling governed by absent, abused, or abusive women. Many of the others girls have similarly troubled domestic lives. For example, Maddy recalls that when a gang of adolescent boys assaulted Rita when she was twelve years old, her mother

screamed at her and slapped her and did not then, or subsequently, inquire of her what had happened that afternoon-whether anything had happened at all. Mrs. O’Hagan’s primary concern was that her husband know nothing since Mr. O’Hagan, a machine-shop worker, was inclined to melancholic binges of

drinking and sporadic acts of violence, most of them domestic, when things troubled him. (Oates 26)

Not only does Rita's mother fail to protect her from harm (or even attempt to offer such protection), she perpetuates the notion that Rita brings this abuse upon herself, and thus punishes her for doing so. For Rita, the home is not a refuge from the outside world, but the place where she is punished for being assaulted. Legs's household also deviates from the idyllic domestic norm, as she shares her home with an abusive alcoholic father rather than a maternal figure. As Maddy collects memories about their respective homes, Legs's place of residence is hardly the idyllic domestic realm that feminists argue is the product of nostalgia, but rather, a

blurred passage of soiled wall paper, doorways, dim-lit rooms, rug remnants laid upon unpainted floorboards and gauzy curtain panels from Woolworth's or Grant's affixed at the windows with thumbtacks, there was an odor of cooking grease, there was an odor of cigarette smoke, there was an odor of mice that sweet-rancid odor saturating the walls that was home. (37)

Through nostalgia, Maddy moves between time and perspectives to foreground the reality that "there wasn't one of us who was not, and had not been for some time, at odds with her family: or what passed for 'family' in our lives" (208). While Maddy recalls these people and places with relative emotional detachment, as she remembers the purchase of FOXFIRE HOMESTEAD, she uses anger as a means through which to connect this violence to the home.

The girls long to live together "like true blood-sisters [...] free and clear of all Others" (204) and thus buy a rundown house on the outskirts of Hammond and call it

FOXFIRE HOMESTEAD. Legs and Muriel Ovis, her father's pregnant ex-girlfriend, orchestrate the purchase of the house, and as they negotiate the deed, Legs's anger surrounding the abuse they are enduring at home becomes clear. Muriel is skeptical that moving into a filthy, ramshackle house is a sound financial decision, and accuses Legs of being "hot headed" "impulsive" and "extreme" (209-210) when Legs refuses to reconsider the purchase. Legs angrily responds that she has been weighing the decision for a long time, and when Muriel demands to know how long, she retorts "all my fucking life, if you want to know" (211). In her narrative, Maddy moves directly between documenting the turmoil of living in Rose Packer's home with this exchange between Legs and Muriel, illustrating that Legs's anger is connected to all of their domestic troubles. It is also important to note that FOXFIRE's motive for buying a house to live away from their parents is obscured through the dominant narrative that FOXFIRE HOMESTEAD is a criminal commune (247). However, by moving between perspectives and through time, Legs's anger makes it clear that their homes are the locus of alienation and abuse rather than a place of belonging, and that their "criminal commune" is a safe haven for the young women. Jan Duyvendak explores the emotions at work in conceptions of the home and explains "whether experienced as a haven or heaven, feeling at home is a highly selective emotion: we don't feel at home everywhere, or with everybody. Feeling at home seems to entail including some and excluding many" (36). By purchasing the house, FOXFIRE renegotiate home as a chosen place of belonging, and re-frame family as a group of "blood-sisters" rather than adhere to a heterosexual nuclear model.

Rather than articulate the myth of the idyllic middle-class home, nostalgia also allows Maddy to explore the untenability of this construct. Further, through nostalgia, Maddy is also

able to connect Legs's anger to her realization that the FOXFIRE cannot reproduce this middle-class domestic ideal when they live at FOXFIRE HOMESTEAD. Once FOXFIRE takes possession of their house, the girls attempt to replicate what they think is a middle class American dwelling. They proceed with purchasing curtains, fabric, furniture, and appliances (Oates 212), and Maddy remembers that their beds were "outfitted [...] with nice sheets, real woolen blankets. Even bedspreads" (247). Although the girls have long believed that "the propertied bourgeoisie" are "class enemies" (93; 263), they attempt to reproduce this model of middle class life. This contradiction is unsurprising, as Stephanie Coontz explains that the white middle class family figures prominently in the creation and articulation of the myth of the idyllic American home. Not only are these families the primary myth-makers in U.S. culture, the media transforms fragments of the white-middle class experience as truths, and as natural ways of organizing kin (6). Given their experiences in abusive homes, and their idealizing living free from Others, it is clear that FOXFIRE does not have an alternative to the binary of either idyllic or abusive homes, nor are they immune to the attractive image of the middle-class American dwelling. While they problematize the idyllic middle-class home by living as sisters rather than as a nuclear family, they police the boundaries of their group in the same manner that Duyvendak explains is characteristic of many families, preventing outsiders from crossing the threshold into their domestic space.

Despite their efforts to live independently, FOXFIRE is unable to maintain their home on the paltry wages the girls can earn legally, and they must resort to stealing to make ends meet. Their collective inability to pay for their expenses foregrounds the reality that they cannot reproduce a middle class home, and Legs feels intense anger as the result of this knowledge. For example, upon befriending Marianne Kellogg in a plot to kidnap her father,

Legs visits Marianne and wanders through her enormous home. The contrasts between the Kellogg's home and FOXFIRE HOMESTEAD, leaves Legs "disoriented for an instant, and overcome with an inexplicable rage. *How the fine handiwork of the poor, the exhaustion and depletion of their souls, slave-labor, wage-slave-labor, ends up ineluctably in the possession of the rich*" (268). Here, Legs makes the connection between the unpaid labor of the poor and the idyllic American home, and not only does her temper flare because FOXFIRE is unable to replicate this model, she is deeply angry that this model is contingent of the exploitation of others. Maddy reaffirms the connection between Legs's anger and the home as she moves between time and perspectives to contrasts Leg's reaction to the Kellogg's opulent home with Muriel's financial difficulties after she gave birth to a daughter who needs extensive medical care (224). Maddy explains that as FOXFIRE organizes their finances, Legs feels "a renewed almost white-hot fury at her father Abe: abandoning Muriel and his own baby daughter, the fucker. Already Muriel owes more than two thousand dollars in medical expenses and the end [...] isn't in sight" (225). Through the dialectic between past and present, Maddy is not only able to link Legs's anger to the unequal distribution of resources by contrasting the Kellogg's wealth with their own desperate poverty, she is also able to illustrate that rather than examining the home through nostalgia, as well as longing for it, can foreground the experiences of marginalized groups from whom the middle-class American home is an impossibility.

Although the Mulvaney's do not face the same financial hardships as FOXFIRE, the Mulvaney home is also the site of insecurity and exploitation. According to Megan Watkins, "home is not always a place of safety and familiarity but necessarily includes within it differences, resistances and dependencies that must be acknowledged and that cannot be

excluded and positioned as exterior” (101). As patriarch of the Mulvaney family, Michel is dependant upon his family to maintain his rule, and he works tirelessly to maintain the outward appearance that his family is a cohesive, uniform group. However, as patriarch, Michel’s response to Marianne’s rape not only excludes his daughter’s experience, it also conceals the violence Judd and Corinne suffer at his hands. As Judd moves between time and perspectives, his growing anger brings this abuse back into focus, and foregrounds the reality that Watkins speaks to. For example, Patrick becomes consumed with a desire to avenge his sister’s rape, and builds a plan that he thinks will bring justice. As Patrick explains his plot to Judd, he stops to inquire about their mother, and asks how Michel is treating her. Judd feels a pang of resentment that Patrick is not as concerned for his well being, and recalls an episode from a few days before, where “he’d asked his father to please not shout at his mother and his father had come close to striking him in the face” (Oates 289). Patrick’s actions are illustrative of a broader pattern where no one takes the time to ask Judd how he is coping at home, and thus he is unable to voice the abuse he suffers. Judd goes on to angrily ask his brother “what about me? I live there” (Oates 290), and bemoans the fact that their home is now in ruins. In this case, Judd moves between the past and the present and uses his own anger following Patrick’s disregard for his experience to reaffirm that his home has transitioned from a domestic ideal to an abusive nightmare. Through this angry asking “what about me?” Judd shows that as Mulvaney’s “caboose” his suffering has been positioned as exterior to the family life, setting the stage for downfall of the patriarchal father figure and the family’s reunion at the end of the text.

Michel eventually accumulates thousands of dollars in debt and must sell High Point Farm. Judd feels deep anger following the sale of their home, and also when he recalls their

new house miles from where he grew up. Judd's sentiments mirror Duyvendak's analysis of the home as a created and affective space where people do not necessarily feel at ease when he recalls "the split-level ranch with the glary-white aluminum siding was not *home* and would never be *home*" (Oates 366). Judd goes on to recall many of the events that eroded his feelings of belonging, and includes snapshots of domestic struggle in his metaphorical family album. While he admits that he has not documented each of his father's violent outbursts, he tells his reader:

In fact, just for the record [...] there'd been plenty of 'incidents' for a long time I'd tolerated in silence. I mean months, years, of my father ordering me around, half the time in a sarcastic voice, as he'd never ordered Mike or Patrick. I felt that hurt as keenly as the hurt of being treated by my father like a dog. (374)

This statement contextualizes the events that led to his leaving home, and he goes on to recall that on the night before he left, he overhears his father "cursing my Mom because *he's* a loser, *he's* a failure and a bankrupt and all the world's waiting to know" (375). Michel then beats Corinne, and then is violent towards Judd when he attempts to defend his mother (376). Judd escapes their new home, and his mother promises to seek refuge at his apartment if Michel becomes violent again (377-378). In this case, Judd feels deep anger towards his father for this violence, as well as towards his brother Patrick for failing to express concern for his well being, and like Marianne's desire to return home, Judd's experience is largely overlooked. Through nostalgia however, Judd is able to use this anger to link violence to the home, and to foreground the hidden domestic abuse that characterizes Michel's downward

spiral as he tries desperately to uphold the construction of the Mulvaney's as an idyllic family.

## **Conclusion**

Studied along side one another, both texts show that anger is more than simply a reaction to physical abuse, it is also a response to inequalities that are embedded in our social systems. Throughout *Foxfire*, Maddy links Legs's anger to gender based violence, but also creates connections between this anger and the social mechanisms that erase oppression. Specifically, Maddy shows her reader that Legs is angry about the unequal distribution of wealth, as well as the social power granted to men to write history and construct truths. In this case, oppression and violence are the products of this social stratification, and although Legs's vigilante justice sometimes perpetuates violence as she tries to fight it, is also calls attention to these inequalities. Within *We Were the Mulvaney's*, Oates illustrates the ways in which social stratification creates the conditions where men's emotional reactions to gender-based oppression often obscure women's responses to their own suffering. Further, by juxtaposing Michel's, Patrick's, and Marianne's responses to her rape, *We Were the Mulvaney's* foregrounds ways women's voices are often lost within debates that directly concern them. Like ongoing debates surrounding reproductive choice and sexual assault, Marianne's voice, like the voices of the women who must contend with the ongoing erosion of their bodily autonomy, is ignored. Marianne's silence also foregrounds the reality that affects like anger do not follow the neat pattern of cause and effect, but rather, anger is often an involuntary response. Marianne's perspective shows us that a person does not necessarily feel angry when they suffer abuse (although Legs's example shows us they certainly might), just as a person is sometimes angry when they would prefer not to be. While anger does not

necessarily follow the pattern of cause and effect, both texts use nostalgia to explore the social factors that make it difficult for women to express anger while giving men considerably more freedom. Ultimately, through nostalgia, *Foxfire* illustrates that gender based violence evokes anger among many young women, and *We Were the Mulvaneys* uses nostalgia to foreground the violence that is concealed within the idyllic domestic realm.

## **Conclusion: A Note on Reason**

This project has explored some alternative functions of women's anger outside of the binary logic where anger is either a legitimate response to oppression, or an irrational emotional reaction. This dissertation also maps how this understanding of anger is informed by, and reaffirms, the logic where men's anger is socially coherent (and thus a legitimate response to oppression), whereas a woman's anger is more likely to be misunderstood (and is easily framed as an irrational emotional response). As previously discussed, my aim is not to critique theorists who attempt to disrupt this way of thinking by drawing links between women's anger and oppression. Framing women's anger as a legitimate response to oppression is an important project, as it foregrounds social stratification that is often ignored or erased, and my doctoral research departs from this scholarly work. Rather, my goal was to explore other functions for anger, as these are often obscured or ignored by the terms of this ongoing debate. The objectives of this project were initially twofold. First, I wanted to contribute to the feminist scholarship about anger, and to participate in scholarly debates about women's emotional responses, particularly those that are not couched in binary thought. Second, I wanted to contribute to the research on my primary sources themselves. Despite their popularity, there is relatively little scholarship pertaining to many of these texts, particularly when we compare them to the considerable attention scholars pay to literary works written by men.

Like many doctoral students, I soon learnt that attaining these two goals was not as straightforward as I had initially hoped. As I began this project, I had to confront the incongruities between my theoretical framework and my methodologies. As a result, I soon had to develop a third objective, that is, to find a way to reconcile the tensions between affect

theory, which is my theoretical framework, and discourse analysis, the methodology that guides this project. As previously discussed, where discourse analysis departs from an understanding of experiences as constituted through language (Philips & Hardy 6), affect theory works to bring emotional responses back into the fold that is deconstructed within poststructural thought (Terrada 3). While many literary scholars, social scientists, and feminist thinkers use affect theory and discourse analysis together without discussing the tensions between the two, I felt that it was important to explore this apparent impasse, and to outline a resolution to this tension. As such, one of the primary, yet unexpected, contributions of my research has been to develop a methodology grounded in discourse analysis that does not view emotional responses as mere discursive constructs. Feminist debates surrounding whether experience alone can function as a form of knowledge are similar to the tensions between affect theory and discourse analysis, as both take somewhat opposing stances on poststructural assumptions about language. The way this feminist debate has unfolded can alleviate the tension between my theoretical framework and my methodology. Departing from Linda Martin Alcoff's analysis of the tensions between women's experiences and poststructural assumptions about language, I developed a methodology of "imperfect alignment", where I understand emotions as informed by discourses, but not as solely the product thereof.

As the name of this methodology suggests, experiences and emotions are informed by discourse, but there are also sites of disjuncture and tensions between the two. As such, this methodology departs from the perspective that emotions are an important part of experience, but also acknowledges that emotions are informed by discourse. This methodology allowed me to make sense of the ways that some groups are produced as

inherently and irrationally angry (such as Black and Aboriginal women, as discussed in chapter 3, or transgendered people in chapter 2), whereas those who enjoy “normal” subjectivity have considerably more leeway to express a vast range of emotions. This approach has also allowed me to account for the emotional responses that occur within the confines of discursive categories such as “women” while simultaneously interrogating these categories themselves. It is important to note, however, that this is not an exhaustive study (if such a thing is even possible). As subject positions change, as social contexts shift, and as government policies emerge, feminist anger will follow suit. As a result, each chapter of this thesis offers insight into some of the functions of anger without making a claim to have identified all of the ways anger can function. Taken together, the chapters that comprise this research project underscore the ways race, gender, ability, and socio-economic status both impact and complicates anger, and also investigates the ways anger interacts with other affective responses.

Guided by this methodology, the second chapter of my thesis explores the ways social conceptions of “normalcy”, particularly hegemonic understandings of normal bodies or identities, are grounded in binary thought. In this chapter, I drew from feminist thinker Judith Butler to argue that hegemonic norms continuously erase the anger of marginal groups. According to Butler, social and bodily norms necessarily shift and change. Using the metaphor of the frame, Butler suggests that whoever falls outside of this ever-changing normative frame becomes socially invisible, and thus symbolically ceases to exist. Departing from this metaphor, Butler goes on to explain that this frame is in a continual process of breaking from itself in order to be reformed, and this process maintains the hegemony of the normative frame itself. In this chapter, I explored how this process functions in Leslie

Feinberg's *Stone Butch Blues* and in Mary McGarry Morris's *A Dangerous Woman*. Both Feinberg's protagonist Jess Goldberg, and McGarry Morris's protagonist Martha Horgan exist as liminal subjects. Jess is located between normative gender identities, and Martha is both mentally ill and well, simultaneously beautiful and repugnant, and independent from and dependant upon her aunt Francis. The violence they suffer as a product of these identities leads them to feel incredible anger. As Jess and Martha attempt to gain social visibility and the corresponding social privilege that accompanies being seen, Butler's normative frame shifts and changes, and continues to exclude them and erase their suffering. As a result, despite their ongoing efforts to adhere to social scripts of normalcy (and thus to move themselves into this frame), it is tremendously difficult for Jess and Martha to replicate these norms, and they are continually erased. Drawing from Butler, I contend that the moment that this frame breaks and re-articulates is the moment where liminal subjects like Jess and Martha become visible. Specifically, while they are concealed because they exist outside of this frame, the moment the frame breaks from itself is the moment when they briefly become intelligible. This instance of breaking and re-articulation leads Jess and Martha to express considerable anger, which not only calls attention to their plight, but also calls attention to the ways dominant conceptions of normalcy continue to render some groups invisible, while granting privilege and safety to others. Ultimately, in this chapter, I argue not only that anger can foreground liminal subjects who are often ignored, but also that anger points towards the very moment when Butler's frame breaks and re-forms.

This analysis of shifting social norms and the idealized normal body sets the stage for the third chapter of my dissertation, where I map the centrality of hegemonic notions of normalcy to Canadian and American government policies, and explore the impact these have

on racialized women. In this chapter, I contextualize my discussion of anger within the Clinton administration's Work for Welfare program, which feminist scholars argue is grounded in a caricature of Black women as lazy, sexually available, and willing to exploit social programs. As a result, not only do these policies marginalize individuals of lower socio-economic status, but they also reaffirm negative stereotypes about Black women across the United States. In a Canadian context, colonial legacies have left Métis women in a liminal space where it is difficult to access government reparations intended for First Nations people, but where they are still subject to the violence of Canada's colonial history. Like their American sisters, Aboriginal women in Canada are confronted with multiple stereotypes that ultimately construct them as sexually salacious, lazy, duplicitous, and inherently or irrationally angry. Feminist thinkers have devoted considerable energy to disrupting these stereotypes, and often pursue this project by exposing the ongoing manifestations of colonialism and racism north and south of the border that continue to circulate. At times, these projects culminate in the construction of Black and Aboriginal women as individuals worthy of compassion, rather than as objects of disdain. While this is a valuable project, this logic preserves the distinctions between rational and irrational anger, or worthy and unworthy of compassion, and merely shifts racialized women from one side of a binary to the other.

Because my doctoral research works against binary thinking, and is grounded in reparative reading that resists the impetus to "unmask" the hegemonic underpinnings of social policies and ways of thinking, the primary contribution of this chapter is to disrupt the logic that some groups are "rational" and others are not through an analysis of anger and compassion. Rather than suggest that *Push* and *In Search of April Raintree* compel readers to

feel compassion for the female protagonists, I draw from ongoing critiques of compassion to extend this reading. I contend that because both texts deal frankly with gender based violence and racism, readers are likely to feel compassion for the female protagonists. In this case, compassion can allow the reader to view themselves as moral subjects, as they have identified pressing social problems, and feel a socially acceptable and virtuous emotional response. While this process usefully foregrounds social stratification, it does little to alleviate the suffering of others, as it maintains the conditions where some people can give or withhold their compassion, and others are reliant upon this gift. I contend that the narrative patterns in both texts can problematize this logic. Both texts contain graphic depictions of violence, which are directly followed by the female protagonists' intense anger. This anger is then immediately followed by scenes where April and Precious long for white skin, affluence, beauty, and social status, which they imagine will shield them from harm. I ultimately argue that this anger and longing can complicate the moral complacency that is possible through compassion, as it can remind the reader that they likely benefit from a subject position or from wealth that April and Precious imagine would prevent their suffering.

April, Precious, Jess, and Martha often face violence that occurs within the domestic realm, and is thus hidden from view. In Precious's case, the school principal characterizes her as a child who cannot learn, when, unbeknownst to him, she is suffering from acute trauma following multiple sexual assaults. Similarly, April and her sister Cheryl move from one abusive foster home to the next, and suffer from sexual violence, addiction, and eventually suicide which is obscured because much of this abuse occurs in the home, out of public view. Moreover, much of this violence is further concealed and normalized because of

dominant assumptions and stereotypes that plague Black and Aboriginal women. The hidden violence of the domestic realm is also a theme in *Stone Butch Blues*, as Jess's gender identity leads her family to ignore and institutionalize her, and her teachers fail to act when she is raped at school. Because of her liminal status, Jess is vulnerable to unemployment, and she continues to face extreme police brutality. In these three cases, the home does not function as a safe haven from abuse, but rather, is the starting point for increasing gender-based, homophobic, and racialized violence.

It is important to note here that Martha Horgan's life follows a different trajectory. As the niece of a wealthy woman, she is not subject to the same social precarity as Jess, Precious, and April who have significantly less financial stability. However, through her ambiguous mental illness, members of her family continuously taunt her and deny her autonomy. In fact, some of the most egregious insults occur in the home of her aunt Frances, who chastises Martha for her inability to adhere to social norms and firmly believes that Martha could "act normal" if she so desired. As such, Martha seems to have more in common with April, Jess, and Precious, than her wealthy aunt, as Martha suffers sexual, physical, and emotional abuse that is either normalized or ignored by those who surround her. Despite their differences and divergent experiences, none of these characters enjoy the social status conferred upon normative subjects, and for each protagonist, the home functions as the site of abuse, neglect, torment, and isolation rather than an idyllic space filled with love and support.

The final chapter of my research project explores this ongoing theme, and revisits feminist discussions of nostalgia to map how these might be complicated through anger. In this chapter, I argue that because nostalgia is centered on the home, it is an ideal means for

women to foreground the violence that is often hidden therein. In the final chapter of this dissertation, I read Joyce Carol Oates's novels *Foxfire* and *We Were the Mulvaney*s as examples of the ways people can explore the past through nostalgia, and use it as a means to connect their anger to events that had previously been erased or elided by dominant accounts of the past. In this case, nostalgia does not re-create an idealized domestic realm, but rather, allows the narrators of each novel to disrupt the logic through which their anger is erased, and to link this anger to violence that occurs within, and is hidden by, the home. The contributions of this chapter are twofold. First, I elaborate upon feminist discussions of nostalgia and map how these might be complicated if we study nostalgia alongside of anger. Second, although Oates is an important American novelist, these texts are relatively undiscussed by literary critics, and I hope that this chapter will begin to fill some of this void. Although they were published nearly twenty years ago, these two narratives merit scholarly attention as they continue to have a social impact. For example, there are two film adaptations of *Foxfire*, the most recent of which premiered at the Toronto International Film Festival in the fall of 2012. *We Were the Mulvaney*s appears on Oprah's book club, illustrating its potential for widespread popularity.

Although this project centered on alternative functions for women's anger, the theories and methodologies that guide this project can be usefully extended to explore the anger of other marginalized groups. One avenue that merits further study is the way men (that is, individuals who self-identify as male) use the novel as a means to contest violence, and underline their own gendered experiences that are ignored through binary thinking. This is an important project, as Descartes's claim "that it is weak and servile souls who let themselves get carried away most" by anger (*The Passions of the Soul* 128-129) can be read

as an articulation of emerging colonial tropes that characterize racialized and lower class men, as well as women, as prone to irrational fits of anger. Emotional responses are inextricably linked to race and sex, as Allison Jagger observes, “a woman may cry in the face of disaster, and a man of color may gesticulate, but a man merely sets his jaw” (696).

Although men might be able to express anger in public spaces more easily than women, there is also tremendous pressure for them to mute their emotional reactions, or to translate their affective responses into violent acts. Further, ways of conceiving of emotions that are informed by binary thought and social norms can have a devastating impact on men whose sexual orientation, gender identity, ability, race, and geographic location stray from the social norms I have outlined in the introduction and in the second chapter of this thesis.

While I do not discuss literature written by men in this research project, novels written by men can also function as a means through which marginalized groups can dismantle the logic where anger is either legitimate or irrational. In the end, I hope that this project has underscored the potential for rich analysis when we explore emotions outside of binary structures

### **Concluding Notes on Reason**

The themes that tie these dissertation chapters together, that is, anger, normalcy, and the hidden violence of the domestic realm, are all underpinned by an overarching social trend: the distinction between reason over emotion, and the privileging of the former over the latter. While I spoke briefly about this phenomenon in the introduction of this project, I feel that it is important to return to the notion of binary thinking, and to locate the aims and findings of this dissertation within the context of feminist critiques of reason. Descartes saw reason as a universal trait that must be cultivated, and he continues to be an extremely

influential figure in discussions about reason. Within the Enlightenment, many women in Parisian society interpreted the alleged universality of reason to mean that reason is gender-neutral. As such, many affluent women aligned themselves with the Cartesian movement that continued to grow following Descartes's death. Female followers of Descartes drew from his treatises on reason to argue for the education of women, and also held that women should be enabled to cultivate the capacity to think critically, and permitted to remain unmarried (Nye 36). While this political stance hinges on the notion that access to knowledge is integral to the redistribution of power (Le Doeuff 39), some postmodern feminist thinkers have grown increasingly critical of Descartes's emphasis on reason.

These contemporary feminist thinkers work to interrogate universalizing constructions of "reason" and "truth", and as a result of this conceptual shift, Descartes's theories are increasingly being criticized. Although gender neutrality might point towards a space outside of gender binaries or a trait that is universal, many feminist thinkers argue that male can function as the universal, that gender neutrality erases women, devaluing their experiences (Cantrell 8). According to Susan Bordo, claims to truth that are grounded in notions such as neutrality, reason, or universality are actually deeply biased ways of viewing the world, as the assertion that there can be unbiased knowledge "may itself be a construction of the male possibilities of knowledge" (137). Further, because Descartes wrote within a historical period where man was the absolute and woman is the particular (de Beauvoir xvi), it is also possible to read Descartes's conception of universal reason as a male property. Andrea Nye is skeptical of the universality of Descartes's philosophical claims, and hesitates to embrace his framework as a means to advance women's rights. For Nye, "Descartes drove a wedge between feeling and knowing, creating a masculinist illusion of

absolute truth. Cartesian ideals of objectivity, rationality, mechanism, and control are hallmarks of philosophy's masculinist identity" (36). For Michele Le Doeuff, the neutrality of subject, reason, and language in philosophy is illusory, and is expressive of masculine values that reject difference or plurality (David 367). Ultimately, Lorraine Code extends these critiques of Descartes, and illustrates that the theme of women as prone to emotional excess, and thus deficient in reason, is a common theme in important works of philosophy regardless of their claims to universality (220).

The distinction between reason and emotion is not only gendered, it is also informed by problematic constructions of race and class, and has given rise to the notion that racialized groups are inherently angry and exhibit uncontrolled rage. According to Thomas West, "disenfranchised groups often feel angry and display strong emotion not because they are essentially emotional hence unreasonable, as racist arguments go, but because in part their participation in politics is, at best, systemically discouraged" (48). This devaluing of anger on the basis that an emoter is not reasonable not only impacts women and racialized groups, but my research also illustrates the ways this logic impacts liminal subjects, people with mental illnesses, individuals who do not fit neatly within the gender binary, and people from impoverished areas. Within the logic that privileges reason over emotion, these groups are at risk of being dismissed as emotional and irrational, and thus excluded from the realm of reason. Lorraine Code summarizes feminist and postcolonial critiques of the ideal of pure reason and explains that the ideal of reason is not as widely attainable as it leads us to believe:

the putatively universal claims of Enlightenment rational autonomy extended only to a small group of people, comprised primarily of educated, propertied,

able-bodied, European, usually Christian, white, adult (but not old) men.

Ideals of reason that govern the history of philosophy so as to underwrite received conceptions of knowledge, objectivity, formal validity, and moral authority are modeled upon, and generate models for, the best socially sanctioned realizations of white male achievement in the professional and propertied classes of affluent societies. (213)

The similarities between Code's description of a "reasonable" subject and David or Linton's analysis of a "normal body" explored in the second chapter of this dissertation are striking. Through these descriptions, and critiques thereof, it is clear that the normal body is the property of the reasonable subject, or the means through which a person can attain the status of "reasonable individual". Code goes on to explain "the domain of reason remains contested territory for oppressed and disadvantaged people, whose underclass status is not simply erased once they are allowed entry. They have to conform to the dictates of the privileged and powerful original occupants, and to settle for inclusion on those occupants' terms" (217). In this case, Code's discussion of reason is similar to West's in the introduction to this thesis, as a call to reason often erases the anger of marginalized groups and forces them to participate in dialogue that reaffirms the unequal distribution of resources and unequal relations of power that lead to their suffering.

Like Code and West, Alison Jagger is also critical of reason, as she explains that because reason and emotion occupy opposite sides of a false binary, ongoing conceptions of reason function as an implicit evaluation of emotion. In this framework, philosophers can view emotions as non-rational or irrational responses that sweep the body the way a storm sweeps over land (688). Emotions, like Jagger's metaphorical storm, must be endured and

can cause significant damage, which reason must then rebuild. To build on Jagger's metaphor, reason functions as a reliable shelter from this emotional storm. As a result, for some feminist thinkers, a call for reason is actually a manifestation of violence. For example, feminist philosopher Geraldine Finn argues "reason itself is constitutionally and not accidentally violent [...] Reason is most fundamentally an instrument of specifically *male* power and violence, constructed in the image of men and rooted in a particularly male experience of power" (10). For Finn, reason itself has no fixed referent, and is constituted by what it is not. As such, "anything can be opposed to Reason depending on what is politically expedient for the ruling-class spokesmen of Reason" (11). Through the ambiguous and powerful claim to reason, dominant groups negate and repress emotion, as well as other forms of knowledge, without actually naming what counts as reasonable from the outset. Reason thus serves the ideological and political function of discrediting as irrational the knowledge available to subjugated groups, depriving members of these groups of social power (12). Where Finn rejects reason altogether, other feminist thinkers are weary of this tactic, as to position oneself as not reasoned or as against reason can reify the existence of reason itself, and perpetuate the binary logic that informs distinctions between reason and emotion (Le Doeuff 8). Whereas Finn rejects reason, Jagger sees reason and emotions as mutually constitutive, each of which impacts the other (692). As a result, both are important means through which we can judge a situation (693). Jagger argues that emotion and reason, like the mind and the body, are inseparable, and explains, "rather than repressing emotion in epistemology it is necessary to rethink the relation between knowledge and emotion as a conceptual model that demonstrates the mutually constitutive rather than oppositional relation between reason and emotion" (695). As discussed in the theories and methodologies

chapter, this historical context and debate is central to my choice to use the terms affect and emotion interchangeably. Reading through affect theory, I came to see that each theorist had specific and well-founded justifications for their decision to use either reason or emotion in their analysis of emotional states and affective responses. Guided by Sedgwick's notion of "reparative reading" my aim was not to unmask the shortcomings of the use of each term, as I feel that there are times when the exclusive use of one term over the other can lead to rich and fruitful analysis. Rather, following Bordo and Nye, my decision to use emotion and affect interchangeably reflects my desire to disrupt what I feel are distinctions between mind and body that sometimes underpin the differences between these terms.

### **Notes on the Canadian and American Women's Movement**

I also feel that it is important to conclude my doctoral research by acknowledging the influence that feminist thinkers have had on discussions about emotion and affect, and also to underline the impact these have had on my doctoral research. Feminist theorists, philosophers, and activists have been deploying their anger and exploring the ways their emotional responses form and inform their surroundings long before affect theory became an important theoretical perspective. Not only have prominent feminist thinkers like Frye and Lorde explored the function of women's anger, activist groups such as Vancouver Women's Caucus and the members of the abortion caravan self-identified as "angry, furious women" in a letter to Prime Minister Trudeau when they demanded access to safe and legal abortions (Sethna 473). For these thinkers and activists, anger is not only a legitimate response to oppression, it is also a political call to action, a force that is complicated by race and class, and contested territory within academia. While Descartes and Aristotle are significant thinkers who shape the discursive landscape surrounding the devaluing of women's anger,

early thinkers like Florence Nightingale, as well as sociologists, psychologists, and literary scholars have been writing back to these trends for decades.

The tendency for theorists to engage with the fathers of Western thought while often brushing over longstanding feminist critiques of these texts is part of an ongoing trend that extends beyond affect theory. For example, Sara Ahmed explains that claims that feminist thought fails to account for the body (that are waged by feminist thinkers), ignore the history of feminist science studies and other disciplines that use the body as the primary axes of analysis. For Ahmed, “what is evident here is an uneven distribution of the work of critique, which is after all, a labor of love. To be blunt, male writers (who are usually dead and white) are engaged with closely, while feminist writers are not” (30). Here, Ahmed is not critiquing important contributions to conceptions of embodiment, but rather, illustrates that we can look to other fields of study to find intellectual contributions that we might have otherwise missed. As I have explained in the introduction and within the parameters of the theories/methodologies chapter of this dissertation, my project is informed by affect theorists like Ahmed and Cvetkovich, but is also grounded in the work of thinkers who do not align their work with the affective turn. This approach ultimately allows me to explore the function of anger in women’s writing, and use each of the sources in my archive as a “case study” of anger rather than locate my project exclusively within literary criticism or affect theory.

This dissertation has explored alternative functions for women’s anger outside of the logic that anger is either a legitimate response to oppression or an irrational affective response. Although I feel that this is a useful exercise, it is important to note that unless there is a broader shift in dominant social attitudes surrounding women’s anger, critics will

continue to frame angry women as irrational, bitter, or mentally unstable. This is perhaps (and sadly) unsurprising, as Sylvia Burrow explains that anger is “a key tool for leveraging women into their rightful place in society through subverting dominant ideologies” (28). While I do not claim that there is an ongoing conspiracy to silence women’s anger and reaffirm their subordinate status, many dominant groups ignore or critique their more marginal counterparts, particularly when their anger threatens their dominant social status. Burrow goes on to explain, that “if [...] a woman’s angry objections are not to be dismissed as childish petulance or the workings of a deranged mind, she needs to have interpreters willing to take seriously her point of view” (36). In this case, it is clear that we must explore alternative functions for anger, but in order to work for tangible social change, we must also listen to voices from the margins, particularly when these voices are full of rage. Men and women in positions of power must work with those who do not benefit from the same elevated social status, and collaborate in the process of reinterpreting their points of view as Scheman describes above. Another important step in the process of making women’s anger more socially coherent is to recognize our own anger. Scheman explains that this is an important political move:

if we take ourselves to be angry, whether justifiably or not, our anger changes. We begin to see things differently, as it were *through* the anger; it colors our world, both inner and outer. We find, because we are looking for them, more reason for our anger and more feelings we can take as anger, which we may before have labeled differently or not have noticed. Our feelings, judgments, and behavior become organized around the fact of our anger. (179)

Following Scheman, if women take themselves to be angry, and use this anger to motivate behaviors and beliefs that will enable other women to recognize and validate their emotional responses, they work together to explore alternative functions and outlets for this emotion. Perhaps, in the case of women's anger, the first step towards disrupting the hegemonic beliefs that silence us is to begin to explore how our own perceptions and reactions are informed by anger, and to take steps to view this as a complex and politically significant emotional response.

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