

ABSTRACT

Title of Document: FROM “QUARE” TO “KWEER”:
TOWARDS A QUEER ASIAN AMERICAN
CRITIQUE

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It is insufficient to think of multiple dimensions of difference in merely some additive fashion—what is needed is a fundamentally different approach. E. Patrick Johnson and Roderick A. Ferguson, respectively, offer such approaches as well as inspiration for this dissertation. More specifically, they posit interventions into queer theorizing and queer studies that attempt to disrupt the (over-)emphasis on whiteness and instead turn the focus to racialized subjectivities. The centrality of African American racial formations in their queer of color critique, however, must be taken into account. Given the vastly different histories between African American and Asian American racial formations, including, but not limited to the ways in which these racial groups have historically been pitted against one another (for the betterment of privileged whites), it is especially important that we consider how the specificities of Asian American subjects and subjectivities might account for distinct queer of color critiques.

At the heart of my dissertation is the movement towards a queer Asian American critique, or “kweer studies,” that directs attention to nationality and national belonging as a way of expanding beyond the black/white binary which currently predominates. In particular, the key components of nationality and national belonging for queer Asian American subjects and subjectivities that my study foregrounds are cultural, political, and legal citizenship. To this end my dissertation asks, what is needed to imagine and entrench understandings of queer Asian American subjects and subjectivities that are not rendered as alien, always already foreign, or simply invisible within discourses of cultural, political, and legal citizenship? Specifically, through participant observation, critical legal theory, and textual analysis I investigate kweering culture and discourses of U.S. immigration, revealing limits of existing formations that, respectively, have naturalized blackness as the sole focus of queer of color critique, and have narrowly sought queer immigration through seeking asylum and recognition of same-sex partnerships for family reunification, in order to posit a queer of color critique that helps imagine and create more expansive formations and better accounts for the material existence of a fuller range of queer bodies of various colors.

FROM “QUARE” TO “KWEER”:
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By

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Foreword

Like many queers do when first coming out, I sought out anything and everything that had to do with queers; I was looking for myself between the pages of books and among the masses on the World Wide Web. I was desperate to know that I was not alone, and that despite how different I felt from those around me there were others who shared my feelings. Having been mired in my secrets and silences, my sense of isolation had grown and I needed to feel that I belonged, I needed to be part of a community. It wasn't until several years later that I began to more fully understand that it wasn't simply a matter of finding *the one* queer community to which I belonged, but rather a process of negotiating my place in various gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, and queer communities. I also began to more fully comprehend that my sexuality was but one aspect of myself, and that I needed to attend to other dimensions of my identity—my gender, race, ethnicity, religion, class, age, nationality, etc. What follows is an attempt to consider specifically the dynamic of nationality and national belonging at play within a U.S. context of queer identifications.

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Chapter 1: Introduction: Movements Towards Kweer

The dynamic of nationality and national belonging at play within a U.S. context of queer identifications is the subject of this dissertation. At the heart of my study is the movement towards a queer Asian American critique that unpacks and builds upon the genealogies of queer of color critique and Asian American critique. Constantly struggling against being perceived as always already foreign within U.S. legal and cultural borders, Asian Americans face particular challenges about their nationality and national belonging. These challenges are present in a U.S. context of queer identifications, similarly rendering queer Asian Americans as outsider and alien within already marginalized sexual communities. I move towards a queer Asian American critique in order to better account for the material existence of a fuller range of queer bodies of various colors. To this end my dissertation asks, what is needed to imagine and entrench understandings of queer Asian American subjects and subjectivities that are not rendered as alien or always already foreign within discourses of cultural, political, and legal citizenship?

Beyond Sex and Sexuality: Setting the Context of Intersectional Analyses in Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Studies and Queer Theory

Crucial to the discipline of women's studies is a deployment of intersectional analyses which are grounded in the material realities of people often affected by multiple systems of oppression, and understand identities as multiple and simultaneous (both/and) rather than merely as an either/or proposition (Crenshaw

357).¹ Similarly, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender (LGBT) studies has been and continues to be transformed by intersectional analyses. As would be expected, there have been many developments in LGBT studies and queer theory since the publishing of *The Lesbian and Gay Studies Reader*, a text widely acknowledged as a seminal text to contemporary LGBT studies and queer thought.² In the “Introduction” to *The Lesbian and Gay Studies Reader*, the editors posit the centrality of “sex and sexuality” as fundamental categories of analysis and understanding within lesbian/gay studies. More specifically they write, “Lesbian/gay studies does for *sex* and *sexuality* approximately what women’s studies does for gender” (xv). However, just as attention to gender alone is not sufficient within feminist discussions,³ neither is attention only to sex and sexuality sufficient within discussions of lesbian/gay

¹ Even before it was termed “intersectional analyses,” radical women of color feminists were making this argument, in particular to demonstrate the differences between them and white women, as well as between them and men and women of their own culture. See for example Cherie Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa’s (eds.) *This Bridge Called My Back*.

² Despite their disclaimers to its lack of comprehensiveness (because no one text can do it all), the editors make a claim to its significance when in the “Introduction” they write, “*The Lesbian and Gay Studies Reader* is the largest and most nearly comprehensive collection yet undertaken in the field. It is designed in part to meet the curricular needs created by the proliferation of undergraduate and graduate courses in lesbian/gay studies. Until now there has been no single, inclusive, cross-disciplinary anthology of scholarly and critical essay in lesbian/gay studies—no ‘Reader’—that students and teachers might use as a resource or as a textbook” (xvi). Another indication that *The Lesbian and Gay Studies Reader* is considered a seminal text in the field is the frequency with which subsequent LGBT anthologies refer to it, explicitly setting themselves in relationship to it (see for example: Brett Beemyn and Mickey Eliason’s (eds.) “Introduction” *Queer Studies*; David L. Eng and Alice Y. Hom’s (eds.) “Introduction” *Q&A: Queer in Asian America*; Annamarie Jagose “Introduction” *Queer Theory: An Introduction*; Kath Weston’s “The Bubble, The Burn, and the Simmer, Introduction: Locating Sexuality in Social Science” *Long Slow Burn: Sexuality and Social Science*; and Jeffrey Weeks’ “The Challenge of Lesbian and Gay Studies” *Lesbian and Gay Studies: An Introductory, Interdisciplinary Approach*).

³ See for example Audre Lorde’s essay “The Master’s Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master’s House” where she writes, “the absence of these considerations [difference of race, sexuality, class, and age] weakens any feminist discussion” (110).

studies.⁴ Furthermore, to envision LGBT studies as analogous to Women's Studies overemphasizes the parallels between the two fields at the potential cost of understating the ways in which they not only intersect, but are intertwined and embedded inside each other. Although it has certainly been the case that, as Robert J. Corber and Stephen Valocchi write in the "Introduction" of their anthology, *Queer Studies*, there have been crucial disagreements and divergences between Queer Studies and Women's Studies in the last several decades, it is also the case that sustained dialogue and convergences of the two have yielded productive and progressive scholarship.

As LGBT Studies/Queer Studies continues to age and mature, some argue that there has been a clear generational shift. In particular, Joseph A. Boone suggests in *Queer Frontiers* that the 1990s heralded the first wave of queer studies texts, which has given way to "second-generation queers" who "have grown up with the concept of 'queer' as a theoretical and political tool already in play" ("Preface" vii). That second-generation queers have benefited from previous scholars' work in questioning and deconstructing naturalized categories of sex, gender, and sexuality, is evident in the ways in which queer scholarship has already successfully challenged claims of binary bodies, genders, and sexualities, and continues to extend the range of our thinking and knowledge of such processes as transsexualism, transgenderism, and sexual identity development, and of such people as transsexuals, transpeople, and genderqueers, all of varying hetero-, homo-, bi-, and pansexualities. Feminist

⁴ I specifically use "lesbian/gay studies" here in keeping with its usage by the editors of *The Lesbian and Gay Studies Reader*. In most other circumstances I use "Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender (LGBT) Studies" in order to reflect my commitment to often overlooked and historically marginalized bisexual and transgender people and issues.

scholars and others working from within Women's Studies locations have been particularly important in examining gendered dynamics of sex and sexuality. Still, while sex and sexuality remain fundamental categories of analysis within LGBT studies, there is an ever growing demand for intersectional analyses which account also for gender, race, ethnicity, and nationality.⁵

In particular, queer scholars of color writing from their experiences have been in the forefront of critiquing the limitations of existing scholarship and calling for attention to dimensions of difference beyond sex and sexuality in LGBT studies and queer theory.⁶ José Muñoz, for example, makes a poetic critique of the overwhelming whiteness of queer theory in the introduction to his book, *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics*. He writes, “the field of queer theory...is—and I write from experience—a place where a scholar of color can easily be lost in an immersion of vanilla while her or his critical faculties can be frozen by an avalanche of snow” (Muñoz 11). Muñoz's use of “immersion of vanilla” and “avalanche of snow” metaphorically conveys the large degree to which whiteness circumscribes and permeates throughout queer thought, while his use of “lost” and “frozen” point to the danger of isolation and erasure for queer scholars of

⁵ For more work on intersectional analyses see Kimberlè Williams Crenshaw's “Beyond Racism and Misogyny: Black Feminism and 2 Live Crew” *Words that Wound* and Lynn Weber's *Understanding Race, Class, Gender, and Sexuality*. Specifically, Crenshaw explores the race and gender dimensions of violence against women of color through intersectional analyses in order to rectify the ways in which feminist and antiracist practices have reduced such explorations to the single axis of either gender or race. She argues that the problem with identity politics is when it “conflates or ignores intragroup differences” (357) instead of “consider[ing] intersectional identities” (358). It is the focus on intragroup differences that presents the opportunity to focus on those often marginalized within already marginalized groups which makes intersectional analyses vital.

⁶ It is especially queer women of color feminists (namely Audre Lorde, Barbara Smith, Gloria Anzaldúa, and Cherrie Moraga) who are often cited as foremothers of such critiques and innovations of scholarship. In fact, Muñoz, Eng, and Hom explicitly cite their indebtedness to these authors. See for example Lorde's *Sister Outsider*, Smith's *Home Girls*, and Moraga and Anzaldúa's *This Bridge Called My Back*.

color due to the lack of engagement with race as it pertains to non-whites. In addition, Muñoz makes clear his indebtedness to feminist women of color's writings, particularly Cherrie Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa's *This Bridge Called My Back*, for the model they provide in "integrating multiple sites of difference in their analytic approaches," suggesting that race as well as gender need to be attended to in sexuality studies (22). Similarly invested in paying attention to multiple dimensions of social differences, David L. Eng and Alice Y. Hom, in their introduction to *Q&A: Queer in Asian America*, make explicit their fear of "the unproblematic positing of the universal (white) subject" in LGBT studies (11). While Eng and Hom do not name their universal white subject as also male, they do make explicit that analyses of race, especially for Asian Americans, are always entangled with gender implications (1). Collectively, what Muñoz, Eng, and Hom establish here is that despite the evidence of lived realities of male and female queer subjects of color, the imagined queer subject is a white male.⁷

In the same way that Muñoz, Eng, and Hom foreground the predominance of the imagined white male queer subject, Dwight A. McBride also acknowledges the tyranny of the imagined white male queer subject at the expense of ignoring the existence of queers of color. However, whereas Muñoz, Eng, and Hom's critiques are largely contained to lesbian/gay studies, queer studies, and other historically, predominantly white academic disciplines, McBride's focus is outside of academia. In particular, he focuses on the way in which queerness is imagined as "a white thing"

⁷ Not only have queers of color insisted on the recognition of their subjectivity within academic theorizing, they have also fought for their place and recognition within activist movements. Urvashi Vaid, for example, in her book *Virtual Equality*, discusses her tenure as executive director of the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force and her continued efforts to point out "the unchallenged racism (as well as sexism and chauvinism) within the gay and lesbian movement" (279).

in black communities, whereby some (heterosexual) black community members disregard the existence of other (gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, queer) black community members. In a commentary article in the *Chicago Tribune*, entitled “Who Draws the Line?: Racism Among Homosexuals and Homophobia Among Blacks,” McBride calls for the recognition of gays and lesbians within black communities. He writes, “[w]e need to keep it real in the black community. Black gays and lesbians have always been a part of us” (par. 17). Another area McBride focuses on is the gay marketplace of desire. More specifically, he explores the ways in which experiences with race and racism seep into and shape sexual desires, both those desires we ourselves hold, as well as the desires of others by which we are judged and valued. In discussing these racial dynamics in his essay, “‘It’s a White Man’s World,’” McBride writes:

All of this points, however, to the centrality of whiteness and of white-on-white gay male relationships as a sense-making norm that fuels the logic by which we ascribe value in the gay marketplace of desire. This is the extent to which gay white men know, and all of us who would have commerce in the marketplace know, that of all variables that circulate, none are more central and salient than “the gift” of racial whiteness. (125)

McBride’s work reminds us it is not only queers of color within scholarly pursuits that we must recognize, but also queers of color in our communities and neighborhoods.

Recognition of the material realities of people in our communities and neighborhoods affected by multiple systems of oppression are particularly important

in shaping social justice movements. In working to combat such multiple oppressions, there are those, such as Dean Spade, who insist that social justice movements must be shaped and led by and for the people affected most.⁸ In his work as a trans attorney and activist, and founder of the Sylvia Rivera Law Project, Spade paid particular attention to low-income trans, intersex, and gender-variant people of color as he works to “enable all people to determine their own sex, sexual practices, and gender identity and expression” (“Transecting the Academy” 240). He argues that it is only by addressing these multiply-marginalized subjects’ specific intersectional struggles and needs that we will eventually obtain social justice for all.

Quare Studies/Queer of Color Critique

Muñoz, Eng, Hom, and McBride are clear that it is insufficient to think of multiple dimensions of difference in merely some additive fashion—what is needed is a fundamentally different approach. E. Patrick Johnson and Roderick A. Ferguson, respectively, offer such approaches as well as inspiration towards a queer Asian American critique. In his essay, “‘Quare’ Studies, or (Almost) Everything I Know About Queer Studies I Learned from My Grandmother,” Johnson tells a story of how “queer” was used in his family. In particular, he talks about his grandmother and how she, in a “thick, black, southern dialect” would say, “‘That sho’ll is a quare chile” (2). He latches onto “quare,” understanding it as a nuanced discursive tool grounded in African American cultural rituals and lived experience, and proposes “quare studies” as a “recapitulation and recuperation” of queer studies’ tendencies to erase racial and

⁸ Spade makes this claim repeatedly throughout his various lectures and publications. One source includes his lecture entitled “Trans-Formations” on transgender issues, cultural theory, and public policy at the University of Maryland, College Park.

other differences that is more directly useful for gays and lesbians of color (3). More specifically, Johnson writes, “quare studies would reinstate the subject and the identity around which the subject circulates that queer theory so easily dismisses. By refocusing our attention on the racialized bodies, experiences, and knowledges of transgendered people, lesbians, gays, and bisexuals of color, quare studies grounds the discursive process of mediated identification and subjectivity in a political praxis that speaks to the material existence of ‘colored’ bodies” (10). In so far as Johnson posits quare studies as an intervention into queer theory that attempts to disrupt its (over-)emphasis on whiteness and instead turn its focus to racialized subjectivities, I understand quaring as a racial project of intersectionality situated within queer feminist theory. Michael Omi and Howard Winant define a racial project as “simultaneously an interpretation, representation, or explanation of racial dynamics, and an effort to reorganize and redistribute resources along particular racial lines” (56). Many have argued that such reorganization and redistribution begins with the ability to more fully tell stories of being located at the intersections. As a racial project of intersectionality, quaring focuses on the experiences of racialized queer people and in so doing offers us the means to interrogate the hegemonic whiteness of LGBT studies and queer theory.

Engaged in a similar racial project intervening into queer theory, in his book *Aberrations in Black: Toward a Queer of Color Critique*, Ferguson meticulously crafts and employs “queer of color analysis.” According to Ferguson, a queer of color analysis “interrogates social formations as the intersections of race, gender, sexuality, and class, with particular interest in how those formations correspond with

and diverge from nationalist ideals and practices” (note #1, 149). Throughout *Aberrations in Black* Ferguson uses queer of color analysis to explore African American nonheteronormative subjects in contrast and resistance to canonical sociological formations. It is exactly such a refocusing on the material existence of “othered” bodies within the specificity of the U.S. nation-state that forms the foundation of a queer Asian American critique.

Expanding Queer of Color Critique: From ”Quare” to “Kweer” Studies

We need a study of racial formations that will not oblige heteropatriarchy, an analysis of sexuality not severed from race and material relations, an interrogation of African American culture that keeps company with other racial formations, and an American studies not beguiled by the United States. (Ferguson 29)

It’s not that I disagree with the argument Ferguson makes in the quotation above, but rather that I am not satisfied by how his earlier postulations of queer of *color* analysis boil down here only to an African American cultural context. In no way do I mean to elide the importance and value of Ferguson’s work. Without a doubt, Johnson and Ferguson’s texts each compellingly undertakes an intersectional approach that successfully engages an integrated analyses of sexuality in conjunction with race and racial formation. The centrality of African American racial formations in these texts, however, must be taken into account. Given the vastly different histories between African American and Asian American racial formations, including, but not limited to the ways in which these racial groups have historically been pitted against one another (for the betterment of privileged whites), it is

especially important that we consider how the specificities of African American subjects and subjectivities and of Asian American subjects and subjectivities might account for distinct queer of color critiques within a U.S. context.⁹

Rather, in moving toward a queer Asian American critique I mean to build from the base Ferguson provides and consider, as the subtitle of Frank H. Wu's book *Yellow* states, *Race in America Beyond Black and White*. In *Yellow*, Wu writes, "If the color line runs between whites and people of color, Asian Americans are on one side; if the color line runs between blacks and everyone else, Asian Americans are on the other side" (18). What Wu points out here is that Asian Americans find themselves positioned on either one side of the color line or the other according to how specific contexts and situations are classified. In her book *Feminism Without Borders* Chandra Talpade Mohanty similarly asserts, "the color line differs depending on one's geographical location in the United States" (134). More specifically, Mohanty distinguishes between her experiences living on the East Coast versus San Diego, California. She writes:

Having lived on the East Coast for many years, my designation as "brown," "Asian," "South Asian," "Third World," and "immigrant" has everything to do with definitions of "blackness" (understood specifically as African

⁹ Ferguson's *Aberrations in Black* focuses on U.S. subjects and contexts, and is located specifically within African American Studies and American Studies. Similarly, most of *Black Queer Studies* is focused on blackness in the U.S. Though Rinaldo Walcott's essay "Outside in Black Studies: Reading From a Queer Place in the Diaspora," offers us a glimpse of blackness that is not specific to the U.S., for the most part these texts posit queer of color critique and black queer studies as tied to particular U.S. formations of blackness. Besides de-naturalizing a focus on blackness as I do here by turned attention to queer Asian American subjects and subjectivities, another effective way to build upon and expand queer of color critique and black queer studies would be to de-naturalize "blackness" itself through investigating different formations of blackness, for example in transnational and diasporic contexts. Such a project could actually be closely related to my own in so far as a diasporic approach disrupts nationalist discourses, and allows for the re-evaluation of nationality and national belonging.

American). However, San Diego, with its histories of immigration and racial struggle, its shared border with Mexico, its predominantly brown (Chicano and Asian-American) color line, and its virulent anti-immigrant culture unsettled my East Coast definitions of race and racialization. I could pass as Latin until I spoke my “Indian” English, and then being South Asian became a question of (in)visibility and foreignness. Being South Asian here was synonymous with being alien, non-American. (134)

Whereas Wu’s formulation is in relationship to a black/white color line, Mohanty’s experiences speak to the more nuanced relationships among communities of color, positing a brown/Asian color line. Still, however, it’s clear from both these examples that inhabiting such a variable racial position uniquely situates queer Asian American subjects and subjectivities within discourses of queer of color critique, and demands yet another fundamentally different approach.

Taking queer of color critique—a tool for taking into account racialized sexualities—to a level that directs attentions to nationality and national belonging, my critical project moves beyond the black/white binary which currently predominates in the field. In addition to addressing the limitations of discussing race in the U.S. in terms of a black/white binary, moving towards a queer Asian American critique also helps to disrupt notions of homosexuality as a specifically white *American* phenomenon, as well as notions of Asians in America as perpetual foreigners. These two misconceptions have worked in tandem to reify the unintelligibility and impossibility of queer Asian American subjects and subjectivities by positing Asian-ness and queerness, as well as Asian heritages and American identities as mutually

exclusive. The work by Asian American Studies scholars to point out “the ways in which Asians in America, immigrant and native-born, have been made into a race of aliens” (R. Lee xi), or how “in the last century and a half, the American *citizen* has been defined over against the Asian *immigrant*, legally, economically, and culturally” (L. Lowe 4), along with the work by LGBT Studies scholars to demonstrate the racial and ethnic diversity of LGBT people, has made definite progress in challenging these misconceptions, respectively. It is through a queer Asian American critique that I integrate these analyses so as to consider the dynamics of nationality and national belonging at play within a U.S. context of queer identifications.

I advocate kweer studies as a practice (re-)dedicated to speaking about the material existence of a fuller range of bodies of various colors, and aimed at understanding the complexity of racial differences as they intersect with sexual identities. By no means are Asian Americans the only ones to find themselves disregarded by the black/white binary of race predominant in the U.S.; the experiences of American Indians, Latin Americans, as well as the growing population of mixed race people in the U.S. are also elided by the black/white binary. Writing specifically about mixed race people and the black/white binary, Gigi Otalvaro-Hormillosa argues that, “colonial violence maintains itself by the creation of black/white paradigms of race that render other cultures invisible or prone to locating themselves on either side of this paradigm” (337). Otalvaro-Hormillosa’s argument goes even further than Wu’s, pointing not only to the limits of black/white paradigms of race, but also revealing how taking up the discourse of a black/white binary maintains colonial violence. Otalvaro-Hormillosa’s focus on colonial violence is

particularly useful in expanding queer of color critique to account for a wider range of racialized experiences.

Kweer

My first memory of stumbling upon “kweer” is connected to seeing it in an on-line edition of the now defunct, alternative Seattle newspaper, *Tablet*.¹⁰

Specifically, it appeared in the article, “Better Living Through Drag: A Discussion With Bamboo Clan About Race, Gender, and Being Kweer,” by writer, editor in chief, and *Tablet* co-owner, De Kwok. In the specific context of his essay’s title, “kweer” signified to me a distinct racially Asian way of being queer.¹¹

While “kweer” is not utilized in the body of the article itself, Kwok’s use of it in the (sub)title struck me as familiar (to both “queer” and “quare”), yet distinct (from both “queer” and “quare”), and still now, many years later, continues to captivate my imagination. Johnson cites “quare” as part of his grandmother’s “thick, black, southern dialect,” (2) and the quare studies he asserts follows a similar racial lineage, focusing specifically on African American culture. His rhetorical strategy of proposing a new term that is racially marked effectively challenges queer studies’

¹⁰ For more information about *Tablet* see [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tablet_\(newspaper\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tablet_(newspaper))

¹¹ Since that first sighting, I have found “kweer” in a handful of other contexts, ranging from a book by Palmer Cox published in 1888 titled, *Queer People with Wings and Stings and Their Kweer Kapers* that features a cast of talking animals to on-line references from UrbanDictionary.com and Kweer.com, that simply use “kweer” as synonymous for “queer.” Another on-line source is from a personal blog post where the author self-identifies as a “proud kweer gringo kaffir,” and uses “kweer” as “a whimsical spelling for ‘queer’...and perhaps a way of distancing myself from ‘Queer Studies’ and other Frankensteinian pastimes” (*Ex Cathedra*). Two sources, however, that seemed to similarly posit “kweer” as a specifically racialized term are: 1) on-line biographies of Julie Dulani, who introduce her as “a desi gender-kweer poet, filmmaker and activist, passionate about speaking the truth fiercely and unapologetically” (*SALAAM*); and 2) Vicki Crowley’s essay “Drag Kings ‘Down Under’: An Archive and Introspective of a Few Aussie Blokes” which notes that “kweer is the preferred spelling of many Australian Indigenous peoples” (306) and further cites Rea and Brook Andrew, *Blak Bebe(z) & Kweer Kat(z)*.

tendency towards white hegemony. At the same time, however, steeped in southern blackness, “quare” has limiting tendencies of its own.

I invest in “kweer” as another way, different although not wholly unlike Johnson’s conception of “quare,” to challenge queer studies’ tendency towards white hegemony. One way in which to think about the relationship between “kweer” and “quare” is that similar to “quare,” “kweer” visibly differs from “queer,” signaling to readers its (racial) distinctiveness.¹² Aside from their visual elements, “kweer” and “quare” can also be compared to “queer” according to their pronunciation. In fact, Johnson’s discussion of “quare” is specifically tied to his grandmother’s utterance, suggesting the significance of its oral transmission.¹³ In contrast, “kweer” and “queer” are homonyms, aurally undistinguishable from one another.¹⁴ In fact, it has often been the case that when telling people the title of this dissertation, they have mistakenly thought me to be saying “from quare to queer” instead of “from quare to kweer,” and questioned why the turn away from “quare’s” focus on race to “queer’s” hegemonic whiteness. I take the risk of “kweer” being mistaken for “queer” in order to highlight “kweer’s” difference from “quare.” Although both “quare” and “kweer” aim to challenge how whiteness has become naturalized within queer studies, “kweer” also challenges the naturalization of blackness as the sole focus of queer of

¹² To some degree, the visual characteristic that marks both “quare” and “kweer” as something else than “queer” could be seen as mirroring the assumed visual differences often attributed to people of color. While it is not my intention to promote this reading of either “kweer” or “quare,” I do mean to highlight how their difference from “queer,” as well as from one another is signified visually.

¹³ And perhaps even suggesting the importance of oral traditions between generations in African American history and culture.

¹⁴ In light of the stereotypical assumption of Asian Americans as foreign-language speakers whose English speech is riddled by an Asian accent, I take pleasure that it could be seen as disrupting this stereotype that “kweer” and “queer” are homonyms.

color critique; hence my decision to deploy a similar rhetorical strategy as Johnson in order to propose “kweer” as a visually and aurally marked racial term distinct from “quare” that can explore nuances of racialized cultural rituals and lived experiences within a fuller range of various cultures—particularly, but not limited only to, Asian Americans.

Kweer Disruptions

The importance of intersectional analysis lays not only in acknowledging the fuller range of people’s material realities, but also in the larger project of queer studies to challenge the stability of supposedly naturalized categories of identity, especially sexuality. As Geoffrey Bowker and Susan Leigh Star write in their book, *Sorting Things Out*, “the more at home you are in a community of practice, the more you forget the strange and contingent nature of its categories seen from the outside” (293-295). This being “at home” and forgetting of strangeness are what define being naturalized. Naturalization is an on going, and ever evolving process. For example, “queer” has been deployed to disrupt assimilationist uses of “gay” and “lesbian,” and “quare” has been deployed to disrupt and denaturalize (mis-)conceptions of the hegemonic whiteness of “queer.” Kweer is another strategy aimed at examining our assumptions and taken-for-granted beliefs of who queers of color are and what queer of color critique entails in order to retain a certain level of strangeness that ultimately allows for a more nuanced, and complex understanding of nationality and national belonging at play within a U.S. context of queer identifications.

The main reason I turn to a kweer strategy is to purposefully denaturalize not only the assumption of the hegemonic whiteness of “queer,” but also to disrupt the

ways in which blackness is being naturalized as the sole focus of queer of color studies. Certainly, black queer studies is a crucial project, necessary, as E. Patrick Johnson and Mae G. Henderson argue, for “nam[ing] the specificity of the historical and cultural differences that shape the experiences and expressions of ‘queerness’” (7). In their “Introduction: Queering Black Studies/’Quaring’ Queer Studies,” Johnson and Henderson make clear the importance and significance of considering the specificity attached to the marker “black” (7). Indeed, despite all the work that has been done on questions of black lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender identities, that Johnson and Henderson’s edited anthology, *Black Queer Studies*, published in 2005 can be said to be the first of its kind reveals the extent to which attention to specificities of blackness have largely been marginalized. Still, given the differing histories and contexts of particular groups’ racial formations in the U.S., it is important to consider the specificity attached to racial, historical, and cultural markers aside from “black.” For example, as Angelo Ancheta, Jacinta Ma, and Don Nakanishi argue in their introduction to *AAPI Nexus’ Special Issue on Civil Rights*, “Asian Americans are frequently absent from the largely black-white civil rights discourse, and if they are considered, they are often relegated to secondary or tertiary roles. Major components of the Asian American civil rights agenda are ignored altogether” (v). In this instance, kweer studies helps to disrupt the black/white binary and bring Asian Americans and Asian American issues into sharper and more central focus. Furthermore, Ancheta, Ma, and Nakanishi point to the various populations included under the umbrella term “Asian American” to make clear that not only do we have to consider the relationships between Asian Americans and other

communities of color, but among different populations within Asian American communities themselves.¹⁵ This latter project of looking to specificities aside from “black,” which I term kweer studies, is not in competition with black queer studies, but rather another avenue alongside black queer studies, in the service of the larger realm of queer of color studies.

Thus, despite black queer studies’ relatively recent emergence as a visible and developing field of study, and its very attention to black racial differences, we must continue to push towards recognizing other racial differences. My point here is that my concern is not for the specificity on black queers that texts such as *Black Queer Studies* and *Aberrations in Black* make central, but rather that these texts’ specificity on blackness be highlighted and distinguished from wider investigations of queer people of color, including, but not limited to black people. In this way, “queer people of color” does not come to stand only for black queers, and we maintain the potential to focus on a fuller range of queer racial formations. As AnaLouise Keating writes in her essay “Forging El Mundo Zurdo,” “it’s not differences that divide us but rather our refusal to openly discuss the differences among us” (520). We must not only discuss our differences, but also recognize the complexity of our differences. In her essay “Age, Race, Class, and Sex: Women Redefining Difference,” Audre Lorde makes clear that such complex recognition of our differences is the key to successfully challenging systematized oppression and creating a better society for us

¹⁵ In fact, when considering the differences among Asian Americans in regards to scholarly disciplines of study, Helen C. Toribio argues that “there are elements in Filipino American studies that make it distinct from both Chinese American and Japanese American studies and more similar to other areas of ethnic studies, such as Native American studies and La Raza studies,” (167) pointing not only to the potential of a kweer studies to discuss differences among Asian Americans, but also to discuss ties between some Asian Americans and other non-black communities of color (167).

all. I take Keating's and Lorde's messages to heart as I attempt to move towards a kweer studies which is indebted to, but distinct from much prior work in queer of color critique that focuses on race in terms of African Americans and blackness, and so calls for even greater attention to differences.

Furthermore, a queer Asian American critique makes a significant contribution to Women's Studies' focus on intersectionality. Feminist scholarship is not free from a problematic history of centering on white, middle-class, Eurocentric and heterosexual women, although it is the case that women of color, working-class women and lesbians' critique of that kind of feminist scholarship has led to foregrounding the study of the intersectionality of race, class, gender, and sexuality that is now at the heart of Women's Studies. In her book, *Understanding Race, Class, Gender, and Sexuality*, Lynn Weber writes at length about the benefits of intersectional analysis, citing such things as recognizing limiting views of others, achieving good mental health, and realistically assessing our environment (11-14). Beyond contributing to the field of Women's Studies by mere virtue of being an intersectional analysis, this dissertation also seeks to make a contribution by challenging Women's Studies' approach to intersectionality.

More specifically, my research illustrates that some kinds of intersectionality have been prioritized at the cost of others. This critique is by no means unique. For example, in their book *Scattered Hegemonies*, Inderpal Grewal and Caren Kaplan point out that "race, class, and gender are fast becoming the holy trinity that every feminist feels compelled to address even as this trinity delimits the range of discussion around women's lives. What is often left out of these U.S.-focused

debates are other categories of identity and affiliation that apply to non-U.S. cultures and situations” (19). The intervention Grewal and Kaplan attempt to make here is one specifically on behalf of transnational feminism, arguing for the need to pay attention to women in a global context. Since the publishing of *Scattered Hegemonies* in 1994, there has certainly been a significant increase in work transnational feminism, and Women’s Studies in global contexts.

My own challenge to the field of Women’s Studies is both similar to and different from Grewal and Kaplan’s. Like Grewal and Kaplan, I find problematic the way in which the “holy trinity” of race, class, and gender elides other dimensions—especially sexuality, but also such things as disability, nationality, and religion. However, whereas Grewal and Kaplan push for a non-U.S. focus, my project seeks to turn the focus back on the U.S., specifically to Asian Americans. Centering Asian Americans in my project contributes to maintaining an intersectional analysis that not only looks to multiple dimensions of difference—race, gender, sexuality, nationality—but also understands that each of those dimensions is itself complex, rather than simply a matter of simplistic binaries (e.g., white/black, heterosexual/homosexual, U.S. citizen/non-U.S. citizen, male/female, masculine/feminine). Thus, in addition to broadening queer of color scholarship’s focus on African American sexualities, another contribution a U.S. focus makes is to more closely address the changing racial climate in the U.S. While Grewal and Kaplan are certainly justified in their push to focus on the ways in which transnational feminism and women in a global context must be understood in their own light, and not merely by U.S. standards, investigation of racial formations within the U.S.,

specifically in regards for Asian Americans remains important, too. In fact, in light of how both Women's Studies and LGBT Studies are becoming increasingly focused on issues of international globalization, and more and more attention is bestowed on Asians in Asian countries, the importance of unpacking the complexities of racialized sexualities within the U.S. takes on especial significance. Despite the opposing foci between my approach and that of Grewal and Kaplan's, the contribution both make is the commitment to developing and practicing a complex intersectional analysis.

Kweer Expansions

In particular, my interest in questions of nationality and national belonging within a U.S. context of queer identifications have led me to explore kweer studies with a particular eye towards Asian Americans. Given the historical exclusions—legally through exclusion acts, culturally through their lack of representation in the media, and socially through the stigma of always being “alien” and outsider—of Asian Americans, visibility and the insistence of being recognized as subjects of the nation-state play an important role in making a kweer intervention into LGBT Studies and queer theory. The predominant stereotype of Asian Americans as always already foreign foregrounds aspects of citizenship—both formal, legal citizenship and informal, cultural citizenship—that bear heavily on nationality and national belonging. This attention to citizenship is one point of distinction in the racial formation of Asian Americans that adds to the existing complexity of queer of color critique. In addition, the focus on racialized citizenship also expands on the discourse of sexual/queer citizenship that has been emerging in recent years.

Since the Immigration and Nationality Act amendments of 1965 removed national-origin quotas limiting the number of immigrants from each country, the population in the U.S. has noticeably changed, becoming more multicultural and multiethnic. In fact, much post-1970 U.S. population growth can be attributed to immigration. Asian American racial formations, in particular, have been affected by such relatively recent and dramatic changes because of the sharp increase of immigrants from Asian countries. Especially since the World Trade Towers and Pentagon were attacked by terrorists on September 11, 2001, there has been a noticeable rise in: racial profiling of those who appear to be Arab, South Asian, or Muslim (Narasaki and Han 4); anti-immigration policies that erode due process protection of immigrants and make them more vulnerable to deportation (Narasaki and Han 5); employment discrimination disproportionately affecting Asian Americans, South Asians, and Sikh Americans, including those who are legal permanent residents (Narasaki and Han 8); and scrutiny of Asian American citizens as they exercise their voting rights (Narasaki and Han 10). In addition, growing concerns about the national security of U.S. borders has led to an increase in border control through more stringent transportation regulations, a larger force of border patrol personnel, hundreds of miles of added border fences between the U.S. and Mexico, and immigration reforms that impose greater restrictions on immigrants already in the U.S., as well as people applying for immigration. Concerned specifically with immigration and sexuality, the anthology *Queer Migrations: Sexuality, U.S. Citizenship, and Border Crossings* edited by Eithne Luibhéid and Lionel Cantú, Jr. critiques immigration controls and their effects on queer

immigrants. These practices of detention, employment discrimination, racial profiling, deportation and voting discrimination in the name of anti-terrorism call for a renewed, more specific, investigation of racial formations within the U.S., in regards to Latino Americans because of how they have long been regarded as intruders to the U.S. illegally crossing the border between Mexico and the U.S., and also specifically in regards to Asian Americans because of how they have long been stereotyped and understood as perpetual foreigners. A kweer studies approach furthers this renewed investigation of race and situates it intersectionally with other discussions of identity, including sexuality.

Asian Americans are among the fastest growing minority groups in the nation, yet studies of Asian American LGBT communities are still very limited and few, often resulting in the needs and concerns of queer Asian Americans being overlooked.¹⁶ Thus, as a population that remains largely understudied, work on queer on queer Asian Americans is highly valuable, not just for the visibility it offers, but also for its potential to lead us to new conceptualizations and theoretical paradigms of racialized sexualities. In addition, most of the studies that have been conducted concern HIV/AIDS and focus only on men. These are certainly important studies, yet just as the field of Women's Studies has centrally maintained, it is crucial to broaden our focus, in terms of who we study and how we study them. In keeping with this, my focus on developing a queer Asian American critique that reveals the dynamic of nationality and national belonging at play within a U.S. context of queer

¹⁶ In fact, one example of how studies about Asian Americans in general have only relatively recently begun to be made possible is that it was only in 1980, after lobbying efforts and Congressional debate, that the U.S. census included the category "Asian and Pacific Islanders." Thus, it is not uncommon for studies about Asian Americans prior to 1980 yield the result "data not available" since such data was not consistently systematically collected.

identifications contributes to the core tenet of Women's Studies to consider all peoples within the complexity they live their lives.

Another way in which kweer studies adds to queer of color analysis is through its interdisciplinarity. Johnson and Henderson posit *Black Queer Studies* as the “interanimation” of black studies and queer studies (6). The particular formulation of kweer studies concentrated on Asian Americans I develop here is grounded in women's studies, and reaches across LGBT studies, queer studies, Asian American studies, and immigrant studies. Whereas much prior scholarship in queer Asian American studies is based in literary analysis, my deployment of kweer studies uses ethnography within a performance studies framework and critical race theory to maintain and encourage the interdisciplinarity at the core of women's studies. Aside from exploring the connections among these various (inter)disciplinary boundaries, a kweer studies focused on Asian Americans is also invested in expanding each (inter)discipline's boundaries. For example, kweer studies follows in the footsteps of radical women of color feminists' efforts to broaden who is considered the proper subject of feminist theory, in order to similarly broaden who is counted amongst subjects of queer theory. Or, also, kweer studies follows developments in Asian American studies to consider pan-ethnicity, in order to better account for the distinct racial formations and material experiences of particular ethnic groups.

Perhaps most importantly, however, a kweer studies approach is significant for its contribution to a reconsideration of identity politics. Many critiques have been made about the emphasis on identity in women's studies, Asian American studies, LGBT studies, and queer theory, respectively. Norma Alarcon, for example, in her

essay, “The Theoretical Subject(s) of *This Bridge Called My Back* and Anglo-American Feminism” writes about the “need to question the subject of feminist theory and its single attention to gender” (359). While texts such as *This Bridge Called My Back* displace the Anglo-American woman as the subject in favor of women of color, some later texts eschew any woman (of any color) as the subject of feminist theory. Such a move has certainly opened up the field in particular ways, allowing a broadening of those imagined as implicated by and within feminist theory. In her essay, “The Impossibility of Women’s Studies,” Wendy Brown goes even further and argues that because of the multiplicitous subject, gender is no longer appropriate as a fixed category or an object of study, and that Women’s Studies, then, is no longer feasible as a discipline. Asian American Studies has similarly questioned the “proper subject” of its scholarship. Citing the broad range of those who could fall under the label “Asian/Asian American,” alongside the predominance of East Asia in much early Asian American Studies scholarship, scholars such as Kandice Chuh propose a move away from any one proper subject of Asian American Studies. At the heart of this argument is Chuh’s desire to “appreciate fully intra-Asian American difference” (18). In very practical ways this strategic move successfully diverts the focus of Asian American Studies away from those select few populations (i.e., Chinese, Japanese) which have been heretofore over-represented, highlighting the importance of studying more fully the pan-ethnic range of “Asian American.” Queer of color critique, too, has its own analogous project, challenging the white hegemony of queer theory with particularly increased attention to blackness and African American history.

These criticisms of identity politics take issue with the singularity often associated with identity, and critique the tendency towards a politics of unity at the price of hegemony they perceive identity politics to entail. For example, Crenshaw formulates her intersectional theory as a critique of, and in direct opposition to identity politics, the former “consider[ing] intersectional identities,” (358) the latter “conflat[ing] or ignor[ing] differences” (357). Clearly, a major tenet in each of these above projects has been to be more attentive to differences among people, and to allow for a wider range of these diverse voices to emerge. Interestingly, however, this move towards greater incorporation has often led to challenges of any “proper subject” of study, instead of a reconsideration of how to account for a diversity of subjects and subjectivities. In contrast to Crenshaw, my own use of identity politics intimately considers intersectional identities by exploring racial and sexual dimensions of queer subjectivity. Perhaps what needs to be done here is to distinguish between “subject” and “subjectivity.” For, if we understand “subjectivity” as signifying people’s humanity and their rightful inherent claim to be recognized as such by everyone, everywhere, this it becomes less objectionable as a point of focus. As Alarcon goes on to write, “to be oppressed means to be disabled not only from grasping an ‘identity,’ but also from reclaiming it” (364). In essence, Alarcon defines being oppressed as being denied your subjectivity. Thus, while it might be desirable to abandon a “proper subject” of study, it is also crucial to get at people’s subjectivity—to acknowledge the importance of, and allow and facilitate people’s access to, identity. Queer studies is engaged with this very project of

challenging the singularity of identity, while simultaneously maintaining its importance.

Identity Politics Reconsidered

Indeed, there are those who have not abandoned identity politics. In the introductory essay to their edited anthology, *Identity Politics Reconsidered*, Linda Martín Alcoff and Satya P. Mohanty argue that “critiques of identity politics are largely mistaken, too often based on anecdotes about incidents where specific groups used poor political judgment rather than empirical studies of identity-based movements from which a larger analysis of their effects can emerge” (3). While the kweer studies approach I argue for is far from an empirical study of identity-based movements, like Alcoff and Mohanty, it does investigate aspects of identity politics which reflect our shared desire to “reopen discussion about the viability of identity politics” (3). More specifically, kweer studies makes a key contribution to identity politics because of the population I study.

One distinction between “lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender Studies” and “queer studies” is a supposed focus on identity; more specifically, the latter being staked in identity politics while the former staked in postmodern non-normativity. In fact, the threat of being called “essentialist” is quite a stifling one, and one that many position as synonymous with identity politics. It’s true, there are some identity politics that do espouse essentialism, but this is certainly not true for all identity politics. As a 2005 issue of *Social Text* asked, “What’s Queer About Queer Studies now?”, it becomes clear that there is a growing anxiety about “settling” back too much into identity. For, it’s the case that to maintain a postmodern non-normative

positionality, you must constantly not be the very thing that is constantly being normalized/naturalized. That is, the worry is that the extent to which gay and lesbian identities are being mainstreamed is threatening the transformation potential of queer studies. In particular, the editors of this special issue of *Social Text* are invested in renewing queer studies “ever vigilant to the fact that sexuality is intersectional, not extraneous to other modes of difference, and calibrated to a firm understanding of queer as a political metaphor without a fixed referent” (Eng et al. 1). In this way, they reassert a queer studies that is distinct from an identity politics implicitly characterized as singularly focused on a fixed referent.

I, for one, am not ready to give up on identity politics, and rather than be frightened away by others’ threats of “essentialism” and being out of fashion and out of date, I would argue that identity and identity politics demands to be thought of in different ways. My point here is that identity is something that serves a purpose in real people’s everyday lives. It is not something people experience in only one dimension at a time, and, many times it is exactly the thing that brings individuals into a community. As Pauline Park writes, “such identify formations can be used to construct communities and to organize such communities politically” (“Activism and the Consciousness of Difference” 98). This is not to say that these people do not face struggles because of their identities, in fact in her essay, “Activism and the Consciousness of Difference,” Park notes that “many identities form in response to oppression” (98). Thus, identity is interconnected to both oppression and empowerment, and identity politics can be used to unite or divide. We must not, however, throw out the whole of identity or identity politics in order to address

concerns of essentialism and exclusion, for doing so eliminates an avenue for organizing communities and political activism useful to many. In fact, it is often marginalized and excluded populations who find their way to one another through identity, even if this meeting is just a beginning fraught with hazards of presumed homogeneity. The challenge is to adopt a wider understanding of identity that doesn't preclude differences or change.

There are others who are similarly dedicated to the significance of identity and identity politics. In particular, as part of their work with The Future of Minority Studies Research Project, Linda Martín Alcoff and Satya P. Mohanty push for a reconsideration of identity that brings to bear its continued significance in the face of postmodernist deconstructions of identity. In particular, they point to a realist theory of identity as being key.¹⁷ At its core, the realist theory of identity they espouse highlights the connections between social location, positionality, and identity, and stresses that identities are always implicated by individuals' interpretations and so can have various political connotations. Specifically, they write, "identities are not our mysterious inner essences but rather social embodied facts about ourselves in our world; moreover, they are not mere descriptions of who we are but, rather, casual explanations of our social locations in a world that is shaped by such locations, by the way they are distributed and hierarchically organized" (6). It is this feature of being able to understand, navigate, and negotiate our social world—through attention to identities—that a realist theory of identity offers. In short, it allows us to acknowledge how differences in race, class, gender, and sexuality are played out in

¹⁷ For another example of the use of a realist theory of identity, see Paula M.L. Moya's "Postmodernism, 'Realism,' and the Politics of Identity: Cherríe Moraga and Chicana Feminism."

people's lives without reducing individuals to those identity markers. However, whereas Park's essay focused on the differences that emerge between people and the potential of identities to create communities working towards change, Alcoff and Mohanty seem to more reservedly focus on the potential value of identities and identity politics because they "are the locus and nodal point by which political structures are played out, mobilized, reinforced, and sometimes challenged" (7). Still they make it clear that taking into account the complexities of identity and identity politics is important, especially for exposing unequal access to power.

In addition to Alcoff and Mohanty's strategy of employing a realist theory of identity, there are other strategies that are useful in establishing that identity is not necessarily an essentialized, stable, and fixed thing. In her essay "Sexual Identity and Bisexual Identities: The Struggle for Self-Description in a Changing Sexual Landscape," Paula C. Rust shows us that identity does and can change, and not in linear ways, but on a more open landscape. In her book, *Methodology of the Oppressed*, Chela Sandoval writes of differential consciousness, and our strategic deployment of various elements and aspects of our identity at various times, depending on the need of the situation. José Muñoz writes of disidentifications, a positionality that's neither identification (claiming sameness/likeness) nor counter-identification (claiming difference/opposition), but rather a subject's making of himself in more complex ways. In her essay, "Gender Pluralisms Under the Transgender Umbrella," Paisley Currah focuses on examining strategic deployment of identity politics in legal cases, highlighting the productivity and success of identity based claims for transgender plaintiffs. Taken collectively, these various

understandings of identity and identification help to shift the terms on which identity politics rests. In keeping with these scholars, what I propose here through kweer studies is a revised and nuanced identity politics strategy, particularly useful for marginalized racial, gendered, and sexual citizens. That is, I employ a type of identity politics in order to differentiate queer Asian/Pacific Islander subjects and subjectivities from those queers that have been naturalized in previous scholarship, in order to investigate the ways in which their differences are materialized institutionally and come to bear on those populations in distinct ways that need to be more fully attended to.

Kweerly Forward

Imagination, a function of the soul, has the capacity to extend us beyond the confines of our skin, situation, and condition so we can choose our responses. It enables us to reimagine our lives, rewrite the self, and create guiding myths for our times. (Anzaldúa “Preface: (Un)Natural Bridge, (Un)Safe Spaces” 5)

In working towards the kind of imagination that Gloria Anzaldúa describes in the quotation above, I investigate the areas of kwing culture and U.S. immigration. That there have been failures in imagining queer Asian American subjects and subjectivities is seen more clearly when we foreground the interplay of racialized sexualities with national belonging within areas of kwing culture and U.S. immigration. Although these failures exist, working with and through interdisciplinary methodologies in these sites provides insight into how such imaginings can be, and have been realized in the practices of actual queer Asian American subjects.

Whether in kinging culture or discourses of U.S. immigration, my dissertation emphasizes a similar dynamic of asserting a presence and challenging convention as strategies employed to claim nationality and national belonging in these contexts that have failed to imagine and include queer Asian American subjects and subjectivities. I juxtapose these two sites because doing so allows me to put cultural production, political activism, and legislation into intimate conversation with one another. My combination of investigation kinging culture and U.S. immigration issues encourages imaginative processes that foreground national belonging and highlights work that seeks to realize these imaginings, at both the micro level of an individual king's performance, as well as the macro level of federal immigration legislation. In highlighting these overlaps, my project seeks to make kinging culture more accountable to racialized sexualities in national contexts, while also simultaneously making immigration legislation more accountable to individuals' queer sexualities.

In addition, in opening up the conversations of “queer of color critique” to a broader range of racializations, focused on, but not limited to Asian Americans, I hope to contribute to a better understanding of how we might pursue and achieve a politics of solidarity (in opposition to a politics of unity). A kweer approach allows me to be attentive to queer Asian Americans' lives as they live them—to understand their lives within the very organizations, institutions, and structures they are circumscribed by, while at the same time understanding that they cull out spaces where hopes and dreams persist by creating new nations and worlds around them.

While it is important to foreground the intersectionality of our various dimensions of identity, it is perhaps of greater importance that we stress our

interconnectedness. In this way, we can band together, strong in numbers and driven in shared purposes. More and more it becomes clear that it is only through such a politics of solidarity that large social change will occur, and social justice will be obtained.

Bringing Race into Focus

In endeavoring to detail the ways in which U.S. immigration helps to focus on race, specifically in relationship to Asian Americans, I take an approach using critical legal analysis. More specifically I do this through the lens of Critical Race Theory (CRT). As a research paradigm, Women's Studies centrally utilizes critical theory, especially in its subfield Bodies, Genders, and Sexualities. As part of this subfield, LGBT studies has also relied heavily on critical theory. In *Lesbian and Gay Studies: An Introductory, Interdisciplinary Approach*, Judith Schuyf and Theo Sandfort discuss paradigms of lesbian and gay studies, and write about critical theory that, “[it] assumes that all thought is mediated by power relations, that facts can never be isolated from the domain of values, and that language is central to the formation of subjectivity” (218). Moreover, they assert that “inherently, critical theory seeks to produce transformations of the social order” (Schuyf and Sandfort 218). Critical Race Theory, having roots in Critical Legal Studies, focuses specifically on power relations within legal systems. In her edited anthology, *Global Critical Race Feminism*, Adrien Katherine Wing begins by describing CRT. She writes, “In illuminating the racist nature of the American legal system, CRT adherents are particularly interested in legal manifestations of white supremacy and the perpetuation of the subordination of people of color. ... We [adherents] thus reject

the notion that the legal system has even been color-blind, and specifically embrace color consciousness and identity politics as the way to rectify today’s racist legal legacies” (4-5). Whereas Wing discusses CRT as part of her larger, main focus on what she has termed Global Critical Race Feminism—which pushes the work of Critical Legal Studies, Critical Race Theory, and feminism in international contexts—I turn to CRT to illuminate the heterosexist and racist underpinnings of U.S. legal systems in order to better investigate queer Asian American subjectivity and move towards a queer Asian American critique. CRT’s “embrace [of] color consciousness and identity politics” is especially helpful for the kweer studies I propose not only because in attempting to challenge the naturalization of “queer’s” whiteness, and “quare’s” blackness, color consciousness beyond those naturalized racial formations is necessary, but also because of the shared value of identity politics between CRT and kweer studies (Wing 4-5).

More specifically, I use Critical Race Theory as the lens through which I analyze 19th century and early 20th century immigration exclusion laws that barred Asians from legal U.S. immigration and hence an opportunity for legal U.S. citizenship, as well as other historical laws that explicitly determined access to citizenship for Asians (through the denial and allowance of citizenship rights to Asians). Using such a lens allows me to point to the struggles over immigration (and hence citizenship) experienced under these laws that have affected and continue to affect the particular racialization of Asian Americans in regards to nationality and national belonging, not only in terms of how these laws worked to maintain white supremacy and white privilege, but also how they succeeded in dividing Asian

Americans from African Americans in service of maintaining white supremacy and white privilege. For example, looking first to the establishment of immigration exclusion acts and then their subsequent repeals through a Critical Race Theory lens begs us to consider the changing historical contexts of these moments, and how these moments became manifested in laws that then affected the ways in which Asian Americans were racialized. There are many instances of the changing racialization of Asian Americans evidenced by immigration laws. One such example is prior to 1882, when Chinese labor was integral in harvesting Hawaiian sugar plantations, and building the first trans-continental railroad, the Chinese were seen as a useful and valued labor force (Yung 423-424). However, as the U.S. experienced a period of labor unrest, during which white laborers were striking for improved working conditions and better pay, an anti-Chinese movement arose and led to the 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act. Even in the case of Asian Americans who are born in the U.S., and are thus U.S. citizens by birth, because of the stereotype of Asian Americans as foreigners/aliens their racialization is still affected by such (anti-) immigration laws.

While it is very much my contention that kinging culture demonstrates particular scripts of racialization, for Asian Americans as well as other people of color, race has not always been brought to the foreground. In the last several years, kinging has helped to push boundaries around how gender is imagined, as well as how gender is performed and practiced, in temporary circumstances as well as in everyday life. Despite its progress on the gender front, however, racialized nuances of kinging have yet to be fully investigated; largely, focus has remained on the

performance of gender instead of enacting an intersectional approach and looking at kinging as racialized gender performances. To this end, I turn to kinging culture as a site of investigation not because of its noticeable focus on race, but rather because of its glaring lack of focus on race and racialization.

Methods: Manifesting Racialized Sexualities Through Simultaneous Readings of Fields and Texts

When it comes to detailing the racialized sexualities manifested in kinging culture, I take an ethnographic approach. As Margaret LeCompte and Jean Schensul assert in their essay, “What is Ethnography?” ethnography is unique in that culture is absolutely central to it, and furthermore, it is both the process and product of studying cultural groups from their own perspective. In addition, LeCompte and Schensul emphasize the way in which colonized peoples and subordinated minorities have previously been portrayed in research studies and thus advocate the need to develop cultural theories that include a wider range of voices which may then be able to better address possible solutions to existing problems. It is in keeping with the desire to investigate kinging culture while making queer people central that I use ethnography to work towards a queer Asian American critique.

Ethnography’s various characteristics, as presented by Joyceen Boyle in her essay “Styles of Ethnography,” also draw me to utilize it as an approach to studying kinging culture. Boyle looks at four different characteristics of ethnography, but it is the first three that are of particular interest to me. The first characteristic is the holistic and contextual nature of ethnography, which deals with going out into the field (the natural setting of the study population) and learning about them from their

own perspective. Especially because of the dynamic element of kinging performances, it was crucial that I conduct field research in the bars, clubs, and theaters where performances were happening. The second characteristic deals with the reflexive character of ethnography, “which implies that the researcher is a part of the world that she or he studies and is affected by it” (Boyle 165). The use of both emic (from the insider’s/informant’s perspective) and etic (from the outsider’s/researcher’s perspective) data is the third characteristic. Given my personal ties to queer life and culture, especially the queer women’s community in which king performances were heavily concentrated, the use of ethnography fosters the interactions of these ties while still supporting a critical examination of them.

In taking an ethnographic approach, I employed several of the various data collection methods.¹⁸ Specifically, I utilized participant observation, in-depth interviews, and textual and content analysis in order to analyze king performances, kinging communities, and accompanying king cultural products. Generally, my work follows in the tradition of ethnographic research conducted in investigations of the related field of drag queens and female impersonation. For example, Esther Newton (*Mother Camp*), and Leila J. Rupp and Verta Taylor (*Drag Queens at the 801 Cabaret*), have similarly employed participant observation, in-depth interviews, and textual and content analysis to gather and analyze data.

One ethnographic approach I take is to conduct participant observation of kinging communities and kinging performances. I attended over forty events centrally featuring kinging performances between May 2000 and October 2006. At

¹⁸ For more information about the various ways to collect ethnographic data, see Margaret LeCompte and Jean Schensul’s “Collecting Ethnographic Data.”

thirty-two of these events I collected written field notes about my direct observations and recorded various types of data, such as: number of total performances, number of solo performances, number of group performances, number of members per group performance, costuming and song choice of each performance, performers' stage name, types of choreography and/or props used in performances, audience response through tipping, informal conversations between audience members, emcees' verbal descriptions of and reactions to performances, overall stage setting/decorations, and general interaction patterns between and among performers, non-performing kings in the audience, and audience members.

Included among my observations are three distinct types of performances: 1) monthly performances at one specific dinner/dance club in D.C. featuring local performers; 2) annual performances held in D.C. featuring a nationwide and international range of performers; and 3) annual performances held in various cities in conjunction with an international drag king conference, featuring an even more extensive network of nationwide and international performers. Each type of performance was situated within its own unique field setting, and from setting to setting kinging decorum varied.¹⁹ Each field setting consisted of a different kind of venue, attracted its own type of audience, and had its own resonances in kinging culture at large.

¹⁹ In his essay, "Karaoke and the Construction of Identity," Casey Man Kong Lum introduces the term "karaoke decorum." He writes, "Karaoke decorum involves a set of conventions for maintaining and judging what is to be considered socially appropriate behavior in a karaoke scene. Of course, any such decorum also implies what is inappropriate or socially unacceptable. However, specific karaoke decorum varies from one karaoke setting to another" (126). In addition, Lum argues that "each dramaturgical web of karaoke necessarily reflects the organizational, material, and symbolic orientation of the people who build and use it" (127). I adapt Lum's formulations here and apply it to my specific focus on kinging.

The large majority of my observations came from the monthly performances in one specific club in D.C. featuring local performers who were part of a single troupe. The frequency of these monthly shows, their low admission price, as well as their close proximity facilitated recurrent observations. These shows took place on the first Wednesday of the month, were scheduled to begin at 10:00 p.m. and last about one hour, and typically included between eight and ten performances. Usually, the bigger the crowd, the closer to 10:00 p.m. the show would start, whereas smaller audiences would often cause the start time to be delayed ten to twenty minutes until the crowd had grown. In general, shows would end no later than 11:30 p.m. so that the dance floor would be open to patrons. The kings performed on a stage, approximately 7 feet long by 7 feet wide, and 6 inches tall, that was removed after the last act to clear the dance floor. The drag king show was simply the first part of the evening for club goers and kings alike who could then dance until 2:00 a.m. when the bar closed.

Four sets of field notes come from annual performances held in D.C. The same people who produced the local D.C. king shows were responsible for these larger productions. The first of these annual performances was held in May 2001 and was called “The Great Big Drag King Show” (Great Big). After that initial show, Great Big got even bigger. In order to better reflect the international scope of the performers involved, the official name was expanded to “The Great Big International Drag King Show” in subsequent years. Also, from the second annual show in May 2002 until the seventh annual show in May 2007, which was the last show to date, Great Big coincided with The Gender Public Advocacy Coalition’s (GenderPAC)

National Conference on Gender and Gender Lobby Day and was included in their schedule as part of their featured entertainment.

This sponsorship by GenderPAC was certainly a key factor that allowed Great Big to continue to increase in size and scale for so many years. In its first year in 2001 a *Washington Blade* advertisement for “The Great Big Drag King Show” boasted “20 Kings from 6 Cities.” In its second year in 2002, Great Big had grown to 28 acts involving 70 performers, from 12 North American cities. In its fourth year in 2004 it was advertised as including 19 different acts, with 120 kings, from 13 different cities, and continued to expand even more in following years. Commonly, a number of acts featured local D.C. kings. On the whole, kings visiting from other cities would perform in group numbers with others from their troupe. The shows occurred on Saturday nights and began at 10:00 p.m. and lasted up to three hours some years. There were three venue changes in seven years, each change to a venue with a larger capacity. Several of the later Great Big shows that were held at a prominent D.C. venue that typically hosts music concerts had over 1000 people in attendance.

Another four sets of field notes come from annual performances held in various cities in conjunction with an international drag king conference. Beginning on Friday and ending on Sunday, the Fall weekend gathering was dubbed the International Drag King Extravaganza (IDKE), and took place in Columbus, Ohio in October 1999 on and around the campus of The Ohio State University. The series of events included an academic conference, an open mic drag night on Friday, the main showcase event of drag king performances Saturday night, and a Sunday brunch with

additional performances. IDKE was founded by Julie Applegate (Jake), Shani Scott (Maxwell), S'ile Singleton (Luster/Lustivious de la Virgion) and Donna Troka (dj love), in conjunction with H.I.S. Kings, Fast Friday Productions, and the Kings Court.²⁰ For four years IDKE was held in Columbus, Ohio, and then for the next five years it was hosted by various cities in the U.S. and Canada. For the ten year anniversary in 2008, IDKE was once again held in Columbus, Ohio.

Similar to Great Big, IDKE helped to assemble a large number of kings as well as others who were part of the kinging community, from a wide range of places. Also, because of the number of kings involved, the number of different cities represented, and the show's total length, IDKE's Saturday night showcases were in many ways like Great Big. One distinct difference is perhaps that IDKE has tended to favor group numbers (and often very large group numbers) over solo performances, as a way to maximize the number of people who could perform. By and large the quality of performances in showcases is very high. Another unique element of showcases at IDKE is that their audiences were generally much more diverse, consisting not only of local community members, but also pulling from the international array of conference participants.

Of course, in contrast to other king events, IDKE is also distinguished by its other non-showcase events. The academic conference gave people a chance to critically discuss various aspects of kinging. Moreover, in the course of these conferences, I have taken part in direct observations, collective discussions, informal interviews, and gathered documents produced by conference organizers, presenters,

²⁰ For more on the origins of IDKE, see Donna Jean Troka's "The History of the First International Drag King Extravaganza."

as well as fellow attendees. The Friday open mic drag night was designed to give less experienced kings an opportunity to perform, and the Sunday brunch included kings as well as other kinds of performance art. Eventually, IDKE would expand to also include a film fest, an art exhibit, and a meet-and-greet event prior to the start of the conference.

It is through the data yielded by my collective observations from these different king performances that I have secured various examples of both kings of color performances' and cross-racial²¹ king performances which have been useful in identifying patterns for how racialized sexualities are manifested in kinging culture.

Given my interest in understanding the influences of performers' own identities, particularly their racial identities, on the decisions they make in creating and acting out their drag king personas, I had initially sought out to conduct in-depth interviews as another ethnographic approach to collecting data. In my initial research design I wanted to enlist participation from people with varying racial identities, including, but not limited to Asian American kings. By conducting in-depth interviews, I wanted to foreground kings' own understanding of their performances, including such things as: how they develop their acts, how their performances are a reflection of their personal racial identity, how audience reaction plays into their construction of themselves as a king, how varying venues affect their choice of music and/or style of performance, and how they have attempted to particularly focus on race in their acts.

²¹ By cross-racial I mean performances which use music by artists who do not appear to share the same racial identity as the kings who are performing to the music. For example, an African-American king performing a song by Eminem, or a white king performing a song by Michael Jackson.

In total, however, I conducted only two face-to-face in-depth interviews with drag kings who were active at the time of the interview. Both of these kings identify as white and performed as part of the D.C. Drag Kings, and both had been the only ones to respond to my request for interviews that was distributed on the D.C. Kings yahoo listserv. While my interview with each of these two kings interestingly touched on other parts of their respective experiences within kinging culture, neither had very much to say about the influence race had on their experiences, but rather focused on gendered aspects of kinging.

Before having decided I would attempt to study elements of kinging culture, I had attended a good handful of king shows in D.C., and considered myself part of the queer community they performed for and in, and was recognized by some kings and others in the kinging community as a regular at the shows. While there have been researchers who went undercover by dissembling reasons for their presence in the field, I did not want to do so, even though my position within the community could have easily allowed me to gather data with relatively little disruption. When I decided that kinging culture would be one of my sites of investigation, I wanted to be honest with the community members about my interests and intentions.

In the beginning of my interview phase, however, I encountered difficulty with associations in the field. In their chapter, "Entering the Field," Stephen Schensul, Jean Schensul, and Margaret LeCompte discuss how establishing good rapport with gatekeepers, who are generally well informed, facilitates entry. Given the importance of gatekeepers, I sought out the person who most kings looked to as the leader of the D.C. Drag Kings. When we met, he revealed to me that he often

passes as white, but does not identify as white (but rather Brazilian) and then told me quite plainly that my interests in the politics of race and kinging would be better focused elsewhere. Rather than following what Schensul et al. say is the common trajectory for gatekeepers to be at first apprehensive about researches, but then eventually ask probing questions, get familiar with the researcher's work, and then begin to open up, my early discussions with this gatekeeper never seemed to move past the stage of apprehension.

I don't believe, however, that it was my stated interests in the manifestations of racialized sexualities in kinging culture alone that elicited apprehension from informants. In addition, the combination of my identity as a person of color and my ineffectual attempt to assure people that although I am a person of color studying race neither judgment nor criticism were my aim, were also factors. As one informant said in reference to talking about race and kinging, "it is dangerous ground" (Sir Real personal communication). I was never able to underplay my identity enough to overcome some people's apprehension.

Rather than simply abandon the research site, I altered my approach slightly. In her essay "Researcher Roles," Margaret LeCompte discusses the importance of being neutral in the community field. In other words, the importance of being careful not to be aligned with one faction within a community versus another, but rather foster ties to as many different factions as possible to minimize perceptions by research participants of favoritism/bias of certain segments of their community over others. According to LeCompte, the goal of such (non-)alignment is to "avoid negative roles and maintain open communication" with all those at the field site. At

the risk of not being neutral in the field, I sought out key informants who would be interested in speaking with me specifically because I am a person of color interested in talking about race and kinging. Using this tactic of playing upon my identities and using them as an asset instead of perceiving them as liabilities let me explore the racial diversity within the kinging community. I made my research interests public through the local D.C. drag kings listserv as well as through an international listserv focused on drag kings. I encouraged threads of conversations on race and kinging on these listservs, and then from these discussions, contacted people and was contacted by people off-list for further dialogue.

In essence, strategically deploying an identity politics approach allowed me to access personal networks of informants that I was not able to through relationships with gatekeepers. Ultimately, I found informants through the use of listservs, through regular and sustained participant observation of local D.C. kinging performances, and through repeated attendance at IDKE gatherings. Many of the kings I spoke with sought me out specifically because of my interests in the politics of race and kinging. Although these informants all considered themselves members of the kinging community, they were also very cognizant of the hegemonic whiteness that permeated kinging culture and readily reflected upon this as part of their experiences. Still, I ultimately decided not to further pursue formal in-depth interviews, but rather worked to cultivate my relationships with these informants and gather data through informal interviews. Informal interviews were more in keeping with the tone and demeanor with which these kings approached me and seemed to feel most

comfortable with, and proved to be more conducive to talking about such “dangerous” issues as race.

The third, and last, data collection tool I used to investigate the manifestations of racialized sexualities in kinging culture is textual and content analysis.

Specifically I use content analysis in order to reveal the themes and contents of various king cultural materials, such as zines, websites, publicity ads/press releases, and newspaper/magazine articles. In conducting a content analysis, I did such things as: count the extent to which kings mention race as part of their on-line bibliographies; note performers’ whose king names evoke racial connotations (for example, Malcolm Pecs’ play on “Malcom X,” or Charleston Chu’s allusion to his Asian heritage via a homonym word play with a type of candy); and record the degree to which interviewers for magazine/zine/newspaper articles touch on and ask questions about performers’ racial identities on- and off-stage. Because of the emphasis on culture within ethnography, it is particularly useful to consider these textual cultural materials, as they are an indication of how the broader kinging community (that is, beyond performers) have reinforced existing racializations, as well as how they have challenged and helped bring about new and more complex understandings of racialized sexualities.

When it comes to detailing the manifestations of racialized sexualities through an investigation of U.S. immigration, I turned once again to Critical Race Theory. One specific historical phenomenon that is important to take into account are the ways in which immigration restrictions in the late 19th century led to the perpetuation of Chinese bachelor societies. Not only is it fruitful to consider bachelor societies

and the later emergence of stereotypes of Asian men as effeminate, asexual, and subservient houseboys, but it is also prudent to consider racialized sexualities in these forced homosocial spaces.²²

In addition, I use Critical Race Theory as the lens through which I analyze contemporary U.S. immigration laws, as well as laws and acts passed in the name of anti-terrorism efforts and Homeland Security in our post-9/11 U.S. cultural and political climate that aren't explicitly named immigration laws and acts, but which do directly effect immigration laws and policies, particularly for South Asian Americans and Muslims of all races, across all sexualities. One such recently passed act I look at is the REAL ID Act of 2005. In applying CRT to the REAL ID Act, I explore the ways in which its purportedly anti-terrorist measures disproportionately affect immigrants, especially Asian and South Asian immigrants who have long been stereotyped as "illegal aliens." Furthermore, using CRT allows me insight into the subsequent effects of this post-9/11 racialization on the capacity to build community and engage in activist pursuits for LGBTQ Asians and South Asians in the U.S., from those undocumented, to legal immigrants, to those U.S.-born. For instance, aside from looking at the language of the REAL ID Act itself, using organizations' websites, newsletters, and other publications, I also examine the strategies employed by LGBT advocate groups in combating it to better understand their responses, and evaluate their sensitivity to dynamics of racialized sexualities, especially in regards to queer Asian Americans. Given the most recent census data that "over 60 percent of

²² See for example Nayan Shah's essay, "Perversity, Contamination, and the Dangers of Queer Domesticity," in which she examines the ways in which "Chinese bachelor sexuality is represented as deviant because the presumed sexual relations of these men living in San Francisco were considered nonreproductive and nonconjugal" (121).

Asian Americans are foreign-born ... [and that] approximately 40 percent of Asian Americans are not yet citizens” (Narasaki and Han 5), it becomes especially important to consider the tensions Critical Race Theory exposes between anti-terrorist efforts and fostering Asian American communities.

Chapter Conclusion

In this chapter I contend that despite the advances that quare studies and queer of color critique have made in LGBT Studies and Queer Theory, there is a need to work beyond the analysis of blackness in an African American context that they have made central. I begin by situating my project at the nexus of Women’s Studies, LGBT Studies, Queer Theory, and Asian American Studies. Each of these minoritarian disciplines share similar trajectories and histories of their academic institutionalization, and place high value on interdisciplinarity. My research cultivates theories of intersectional analysis developed by feminist women of color that serve to connect them. I do this in one way by tracing the emergence of quare studies and queer of color critique. These beginnings establish the importance of pushing LGBT Studies and Queer Theory to consider race in conjunction with sexuality. Quare studies and queer of color critique have already made substantial contributions in displacing the imagined white male queer subject as *the* subject of study. Recognizing the richness of complexity that arises through queer of color critique, my dissertation is invested in furthering this work. Closely re-examining key texts of queer of color critique by E. Patrick Johnson and Roderick Ferguson suggests that within queer of color critique there is a bias towards analyzing blackness in an African American context. Undoubtedly, black queer studies remains

a necessary venture in LGBT Studies, Queer Theory, Women's Studies, African American Studies, and beyond. Still, in working to resist the seeming trend of exclusively focusing on blackness as the sign of race, and to thwart any potential of blackness being naturalized as the core of queer of color critique I stress the importance of recognizing the distinct processes of racialization among different communities of color.

In particular, to move beyond the predominant black/white binary, I take queer of color critique to a level that directs attention to nationality and national belonging and shift attention to queer Asian American subjects and subjectivities. In making nationality and national belonging a central concern more nuances in processes of racialization are highlighted. Especially given Asian Americans' complex relationships to immigration and representation, looking into representations within kinging culture and U.S. immigration pushes us to examine the politics behind processes of racialization that emerge in different historical moments. Ultimately, in considering nationality and national belonging in a U.S. context of queer identification I hope my work helps to develop a kweer critique that better reflects the experiences of a wider range of queer people of all colors. More specifically, in order to move towards a kweer critique, I use critical race theory and ethnography to investigate kinging culture and U.S. immigration discourses because making a focus on queer Asian Americans central in these two sites results in productively developing intersectional analyses that are more dynamic and responsive to a wider array of differences. In particular, within kinging culture I push for more attention to racialized sexual masculinities and within U.S. immigration discourses I urge for

more attention to queer issues beyond seeking asylum and recognizing same-sex partnerships. In the chapters that follow, I detail my examinations of kinging culture and U.S. immigration discourses and foreground the burgeoning kweer critique that flourishes in their midst.

Chapter 2: Politics of Representation: Establishing and Asserting Citizenship Through Kinging

Representations are sometimes how people come to know things initially, for many people encounter representations before they encounter actual people, events, etc. This means that representations have a potential to reach a wide audience over time and great distances (the extent to which is expanding even further through the use of the internet). In some ways this potential could be seen as a good thing, helping positive messages (e.g., the importance of safer sex for STD/HIV/AIDS prevention) spread out further. However, when representations become stereotypes, generalization about entire groups, they can then be quite damaging, helping to maintain, disseminate, and give life to false and oppressive images (e.g., only gay men get HIV/AIDS, so others don't have to worry about practicing safer sex).

In and of themselves, representations are never simply good or bad, positive or negative. This is not to say that representations are neutral. Rather, their significance lies in the ways in which they are used, ranging from: how they are constructed, by whom, about whom, and for what purposes and goals; how they are deployed in service of particular desires, for example to communicate certain values and judgments of those represented, as well as of those who control the representations; and even, how they are received by specific audiences, who are not only shaped by, but also help to shape representations. It is these uses and effects of representations, and the relationships of power they reveal—the politics of representation—that draw me to study representations.

The power, implicit and explicit, of representations can be immense. Representations which are perpetuated and condoned within our culture not only reflect, but also help to shape, societal values and norms; their repetition and ubiquity creating and reinforcing dominant narratives which overshadow other narratives, relegating them to the margins of discourse, often dismissed as insignificant and unintelligible²³. As such, dominant representations can certainly be oppressive, yet at the same time they also help foster alternative discourses aimed directly at challenging the status quo and shifting the balance of power towards those who are marginalized. In this way, the politics of representation become contested terrain because of the power they entail. As fields of study, both Women's Studies and LGBT Studies have an oppositional design informed exactly by the dynamic to resist oppression and to work towards greater gender and sexual liberation and freedom for all (Abelove et al.).

At the heart of the contestations around representations are people's struggles to be recognized and acknowledged, on both basic and more nuanced levels. For example, one main line of feminist studies is exactly this move away from being objectified, to becoming subjects. Thus, instead of women merely being objects to be viewed by others, the female viewer, the female author, artist, etc., becomes a powerful figure—in control of her own self. For queer people, it has been just as crucial to become the experts of our own lives and “to create for ourselves knowledge that was from us; for us” (Weeks 7).

²³ For example, in her essay, “Beyond Racism and Misogyny,” Kimberlè Williams Crenshaw argues that the media representations of women of color work to “reinforce race and gender stereotypes” to the point that “create[s] a dominant narrative that forces actual women of color to the margins of the discourse and renders our own accounts of such [racial and gendered] victimization less credible” (113).

In what follows I examine the politics of representation in conjunction with citizenship and issues of nationality and national belonging by considering how citizenship can be understood in terms of belonging, and how representation signifies belonging, and hence reflects a generalized notion of citizenship. More specifically, in this chapter I focus on representations within kinging culture. Kinging culture is a particularly valuable site of investigating representations because of its emphasis on performance, but even more so because of the extent to which it is a site that fosters intersectional analyses of gender, sexuality, race, and nationality.

Kinging Culture as a Realm of Investigation

This is going to be big. Pay attention now. Get to know and love these artists now. This is quality stuff. (Morris)

Writing a review of the (Washington) D.C. Drag Kings' three-year anniversary performance at Club Chaos²⁴, Bonnie J. Morris, in the quotation above, offers an assessment of D.C.'s drag kings and kinging culture with which I couldn't agree more. However, it is not only D.C.'s drag king culture that is growing and gaining its community's attentions; kinging cultures are quickly capturing the imaginations and desires of queer women's communities, and queer communities in

²⁴ Club Chaos (heretofore Chaos) was a bar/club/restaurant located within Dupont Circle at the corner of 17th and Q Streets, NW Washington, D.C., on a street frequented by Capital Pride Parade routes and by D.C.'s annual High Heel Race. It had the distinction of hosting the longest consecutively running monthly drag king show nationwide (just shy of 8 years) before it was forced to cease offering entertainment early in 2008 due to the lack of a nightclub license, which soon after resulted in their going out of business. Besides monthly drag king events, Chaos had also hosted a number of weekly drag (queen) events including: "Drag Bingo" on Tuesdays, "Marilyn Suley's Drag Show" on Fridays, "Drag Cabaret" on Saturdays, and "Hollywood Brunch" which features "special [drag queen] entertainment" on Sundays (*Club Chaos*).

general, throughout the United States.²⁵ One indication of the development of kinging cultures is the ever growing number of individual drag kings and drag kings troupes.²⁶ Besides developing in sheer size, kinging cultures and communities are also widening the variety and means of kinging performances. This is to say that the growing diversity within kinging cultures and communities has served to challenge and expand the boundaries of “king” and “kinging.” On one level, these changes are the products of kings and other kinging community members asserting themselves as subjects within their communities, and creating spaces where their subjectivity is no longer obscured, overlooked, and marginal, but rather acknowledged and integral to the prosperity of the community. On another level, these changes indicate the power and scope of kinging culture’s connections with and interventions into wider mainstream culture and society through the politics of representation and performance.

Who/What Are Drag Kings?

Mass media representations have tended to popularize the overly simplistic definition of drag kings as women who dress and perform as men. Moreover, mainstream heterosexual media often reflects a particular pre-occupation with revealing drag kings’ “true” gender as women, in order to clearly make the point that the masculinities kings embody are inauthentic. For example, an episode of *The Maury Povich Show* entitled “Hunky Guys or Gorgeous Gals?” featured drag kings

²⁵ By no means is the appeal of drag kings and kinging cultures limited solely to queer women’s communities, nor to the United States.

²⁶ For a partial list of individual drag kings and drag king troupes see Toone’s “Drag King LINKS!” <<http://www.madkats.com/Drag/King/showLinks.php>>.

alongside biological males, and asked the audience to discern between the “real” men and those disguised as men.²⁷ As each person came out on stage and walked up and down the catwalk, the audience would scrutinize them and come to a conclusion, yelling out either “that’s a man!” or “that’s a woman!” to reflect their judgments, while Povich moved among members of the audience, microphone in hand asking “what do you think that is?”, “are you sure?”, “how can you tell?” Specifically framed as a show about deception, “Hunky Guys or Gorgeous Gals?” eventually climaxes in the show’s closing segments focused on revealing the “truth,” where Povich gives cash rewards (\$40-\$60) to audience members who correctly identify the guests’ gender. Even though throughout the show Povich makes clear that it is difficult to distinguish the guests who are men from those who are women, seemingly highlighting the malleability and performance of gender, the revealing segment ultimately serves to reinforce the emphasis on who the guests “really” are based on the gender they were assigned at birth, and the significance of maintaining traditional gender roles. In fact, the way in which Povich pits an audience member who thinks a guest is a woman against another audience member who thinks the same guest is a man serves not only as a means to reward whoever is right, but also to embarrass whoever is wrong, further positively reinforcing people’s recognition of drag kings as women.

It is not solely mainstream heterosexual media that has perpetuated the definition of drag kings as women who dress and perform as men; alternative lesbian media has similarly promoted this over-simplified definition. For example, the

²⁷ Not all women who dress in men’s clothing are drag kings, but most of the women featured in this episode of *The Maury Povich Show* self-identified as drag kings.

lesbian magazine *Curve* featured interviews with drag kings in a section entitled “Kingdom Come,” prefacing the interviews with the claim “In our world, girls become boys and boys become kings” (28). Here, too, the focus is on revealing and returning to drag kings’ histories as girls/women to describe who they are, and ultimately to circumscribe their masculinity.²⁸ However, in contrast to *The Maury Povich Show* emphasizing kings’ masculinity as deceptive and inauthentic to buttress traditional gender roles, *Curve* draws attention to kings being women to emphasize breaking with traditional feminine gender roles. In fact, *Curve*’s coverage of drag kings seems especially invested in the simplified definition of kings as women because doing so allows for kings to be recouped as lesbians, and for a celebration of resisting traditional femininity (including, but not limited to compulsory heterosexuality). Given *Curve*’s subtitle of “The Best-Selling Lesbian Magazine,” it comes as no surprise that the ability to identify kings as women, and as lesbians, is stressed. Though useful to *Curve*’s purposes, the definition employed of drag kings as women remains an over-simplified one.

Despite the emphasis suggested by some media representations that might suggest otherwise, there is no one, stable, concrete definition of “drag king” that is universally held. While some elements—for example, the performance of masculinity—are present in a variety of definitions, most people within kinging cultures and communities seem content not to limit the boundaries of how “drag king” is defined, nor to focus solely on the dynamic of disguise and revelation, and

²⁸ From the very first sentence, all three articles found in this section make explicit that each drag king profiled is a woman.

rather tend to leave the power of definition to individuals themselves. Some examples of definitions of what a drag king is are as follows:

- “a woman who dresses as a man (often as an iconic man like a cowboy or a trucker)” (Bergquist 28)
- “lesbian cross-dressers” (Feinberg “Allow Me” 23)
- “lesbian women who perform as men” (Radsken)
- “any person—whether male, female, trans, transgendered, lesbian, gay, straight, bi, whatever—who is interested in the fine art of male mimicry” (Mo B. Dick “DK Interview with Mo B. Dick” 19)
- “someone who has made the conscious decision to critique and/or embody certain traits that are traditionally marked as masculine through the use of props, prosthetics, and personal flair” (Pat Riarch “DK Interview with Pat Riarch” 27)
- “a female (usually) who dresses up in recognizably male costume and performs theatrically in that costume” (Halberstam “Drag Kings” 232)
- “a performer who makes masculinity into his or her act” (Halberstam in Volcano and Halberstam’s *The Drag King Book* 36)
- “a person who expresses gender fluidity, through their clothes, attitude, and body language” (Ken Las Vegas “DK Interview with Ken Las Vegas” 69)
- “anyone who feels that they are and feels passionate about it” (Christopher Noel “DK Interview with Christopher Noel” 73)

As we can see from the examples above, there are many different variations among definitions of what a drag king is. Some, such as magazine essayist Kate Bergquist offer the not uncommon formulation of drag as doing the “opposite gender,” defining drag kings as women dressing as men. Others, such as authors Leslie Feinberg and Jill Radsken go beyond simply positing drag kings as *women* dressing as men, and further assert that these women who dress and perform as men are *lesbians*. Then there are those self-identified drag king performers like Mo B. Dick and Pat Riarch, who in their definitions of what a drag king is turn their focus away from the *identity* of a drag king, and instead turn their focus towards the *actions* of a drag king, such as enacting male mimicry and embodying masculinity, respectively. Still others change their definition over time, such as scholar J. Jack Halberstam, who once noted drag kings as “female[s]” who perform masculinity, but then later simply asserted drag kings as “performer[s]” of masculinity. Ken Las Vegas’ above definition is notable because it does not name masculinity in particular, but instead focuses on “gender fluidity.” Christopher Noel’s definition that a drag king is “anyone who feels that they are and feels passionate about it” epitomizes the define-it-for-yourself-because-only-you-know-best attitude of empowered self-definition.

Over the last several years, as Halberstam’s definitions exemplify, the general change in re-defining what a drag king is has been to make it more widely encompassing. Thus, instead of limiting who can be a drag king to a specific sex (females), gender (women), or sexuality (lesbians) definitions have become increasingly indistinct, as shown above through the examples of Mo B. Dick’s “any person” (19), Pat Riarch’s “someone” (27), Halberstam’s “a performer” (36), Ken Las

Vegas' "a person" (69), and Christopher Noel's "anyone" (73). In particular, these expanded re-definitions are coming from within drag king communities (i.e. from drag kings themselves such as Mo B. Dick, Pat Riarch, Ken Las Vegas, and Christopher Noel) and from drag king scholars such as J. Jack Halberstam.²⁹ Furthermore, even those definitions focused on the actions of drag kings have become increasingly varied, with such things as donning facial hair, binding chests, and performing male vocals increasingly understood to be merely a small fraction of what constitutes kinging³⁰. Ultimately, this has created spaces not only for more, but also for more diversified, king representations.

Significances of Kinging Cultures

Precisely because of the growing diversity within kinging cultures and communities, there has been a concomitant expansion of gender performances and representations. This has perhaps been the most discussed aspect of kinging culture, in both popular culture and scholarly works. A broader, more complex, and more nuanced understanding of gender performances and representations, however, is just one of the aspects of kinging culture that makes it an interesting and rich site of

²⁹ While the examples of Bergquist, Feinberg, and Radsken above do not speak for all those outside of drag king communities, nor do Mo B. Dick, Pat Riarch, Ken Las Vegas, Christopher Noel, and J. Jack Halberstam speak for all those inside drag king communities, my research suggests that in general those within drag king communities have been in the forefront of emphasizing more expanded definitions, and of relating those more inclusive definitions to those outside drag king communities, for example during the course of interviews with the media (see for example Suzanne and Shawna's "Interview With a Drag King").

³⁰ "Kinging" is a term coined by J. Jack Halberstam that designates the "drag humor associated with masculinity" ("Drag Kings" 238). More specifically, Halberstam uses "kinging" to "identify the specificity of drag-king acts and distinguish them from drag-queen acts," the former focusing on masculinity, while the latter on femininity ("Oh Behave!" 427). For the most part, my use of "kinging" is meant to simply signify someone performing as a drag king. That is, I use "drag king," along with the more succinct, synonymous term "king," and "drag king act/show" as the nouns designating the performer and the performance, and "kinging" as the verb describing the action the drag king performs.

investigation. When considering its value to a project on nationality and national belonging at play within a U.S. context of queer identifications, other significant features of kinging also come into play.

In addition to its attention to representations, kinging culture also offers valuable insights about group dynamics through a study of the individuals who participate and the communities that are formed. Writing specifically about group dynamics, in an on-line post to the D.C. Drag Kings listserv, Ken Las Vegas writes:

In the celebration of diversity in our expression of gender, politics, life, love and the pursuit of happiness it is important to support those differences as we bring it to the stage. As we grow and become a larger group the variances of expression are also going to grow, so we need to support this surgence [sic.] of diversity NOW and get a handle of what it means to be a performed, entertainer, artists and king and see the validation in all forms of this art. There is not one way to do this [king]. There are no defined ways, and as a group we should continue to challenge ourselves to incorporate all voices from our queer community.

As Ken's message demonstrates, kinging is very much about the people in the community. Two particular elements extending from this focus on people and group dynamics that reflect how citizenship is established and asserted through kinging are: 1) kinging's emergence within queer women's cultural contexts and its part in nurturing community building among queer women, as well as between previously sex-segregated queer communities; and 2) the opportunity that kinging provides as a

political outlet for empowered queer visibility, art activism, and critical social commentary.

Kinging's Emergence Within Queer Women's Cultural Contexts

The very first drag king show I ever saw live was a contest to crown the Pride King for Capital Pride³¹ 2000 in Washington, D.C. (*Pride King/Women's Dance*). It was an entirely different experience from watching drag kings on *The Maury Povich Show* episode, "Hunky Guys or Gorgeous Gals?" Perhaps most significant was the experience of seeing drag kings perform to a primarily queer audience. While *Maury* positioned drag kings as "other" to both "real" men and to women who follow traditional feminine gender roles, the Pride King Contest made drag kings central, celebrating their various performances of gender. Rather than critique kings' gender performances and reinforce narrow gender roles based on assigned birth sex like *Maury*, the Pride King Contest emphasized gender variability, and encouraged such gender fluidity in kings as well as audience members.

I will always have fond memories of Pride King 2000 as my very first drag king show, but as an annual event, the year between shows felt long. However, earlier in March 2000, Club Chaos (hereafter Chaos) had begun to host monthly drag king shows featuring the D.C. Drag Kings (hereafter D.C. Kings). With the help of

³¹ Lesbian and Gay Pride Celebrations are held annually nationwide to commemorate the Stonewall Riots of June 1969 in Greenwich, New York, at which it is said by some that the gay liberation movement began. For the most part "Pride" is a time when gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender people celebrate community. While the form Pride takes in a particular city differs from one city to the next, as well as from year-to-year, there are generally Pride events leading up to a culminating Pride Parade. Washington, D.C.'s Pride celebration, also known as Capital Pride, usually begins the first weekend of June with daily Pride events, and then ends with the Capital Pride Parade and Capital Pride Street Festival during the second weekend of June. For more information on Capital Pride, go to their web site <<http://www.capitalpride.org>>. For a brief overview of the 1969 Stonewall Riots see chapter 5 "Gay Liberation and Lesbian Feminism" in Barry D. Adam's *The Rise of a Gay and Lesbian Movement*.

these monthly shows, more and more drag kings began to perform, and the local Washington, D.C. drag king scene steadily began to grow and develop.³² After having moved to Washington, D.C. in May 2000, I sought out a queer women's community and found it at Pride King 2000, as well as at Chaos' monthly drag king shows.

At the time the D.C. Kings began to perform regularly, I was intrigued that instead of being hosted at one of the three metro area's women's bars/clubs that existed at that time, they were being hosted by Chaos—which predominantly catered to a gay male clientele, except for Wednesdays which were “Ladies' Nights,” the first Wednesday of each month being when drag king shows were held.³³ As the D.C. Kings and their fan base grew, there were marked changes in the cultural landscape of D.C.'s queer women's community. In particular, the rise and success of the D.C. Kings helped to establish a consistent presence of queer women in Dupont Circle's nightlife, which is often touted as the gay neighborhood of D.C., but is more accurately described as the gay male area of D.C. In fact, D.C.'s LGBT News Magazine, *MetroWeekly*, currently lists fourteen different Dupont area venues in their

³² Just one sign of the growing popularity of the D.C. Drag Kings at Chaos is that initially the monthly drag king shows cost \$3 for an admission ticket (which could go to your first drink), but then later there was a cover charge imposed simply for entry into the club, ranging from \$3 to \$10 depending on the particular month/event.

³³ According to the “Where to Go” guide of bars and clubs in an issue of *MW (Metro Weekly)* from 2001, the only three metro area bars/clubs which are designated “mostly women” were: Hung Jury, 1819 H Street, NW; Phase One, 525 8th Street, SE; and She Bar, 2253 Huntington Avenue, Alexandria, VA. Not only is it significant to note that “mostly women” bars/clubs were few in number, but it is also important to note that none of these three were located in the same section of D.C. as one another, let alone are any of them located in the often cited gay neighborhood of Dupont Circle.

on-line “Gay Club/Bar Directory: Guide for LGBT Nightlife.”³⁴ In comparison, the next highest concentration of venues listed by *MetroWeekly* is the five in the Logan Circle area, and four each in the Capitol Hill, Downtown, and U Street areas, clearly distinguishing the Dupont area as the largest hub of gay nightlife. Of the fourteen Dupont area venues, only one, B.O.I. Productions, is designated “favorite for mostly women,” while nine are designated “favorite for mostly men,” two, Jack’s and Larry’s Lounge, “favorite for both men and women” (as well as the only two designated “restaurants”), with the last two venues simply designated “favorite for dancing.” What these designations reflect is the predominance of a gay male context and culture in the Dupont area.³⁵ It is precisely within this context of an overwhelming prevalence of gay male culture and actual physical gay male spaces that the D.C. Kings emerged, providing a much needed queer women’s space that nurtured community building.

Building Queer Women’s Communities in Lesbian Bars

Flipping through Alison Bechdel’s *Dykes to Watch Out For* comics suggests that lesbians travel through a number of locations as they live their lives. Bechdel’s cast of lesbians are represented in everyday locations doing everyday things—going to school, going to work, shopping for groceries, meeting in bookstores, eating at restaurants, choosing movies at their local video store, and spending time socializing in each other’s homes. While it is refreshing to see lesbians in these daily life

³⁴ There have been several changes over the years, with some businesses closing and other opening, but the trends that I point out here based on *MetroWeekly*’s current nightlife guide are ones that have remained persistent over the years.

³⁵ Furthermore, according to this August 2008 *MetroWeekly*’s guide, there is currently only one other Washington, D.C. venue, *Phase I*, that is a “favorite for mostly women.”

situations, I find Bechdel's comics surprising because of how infrequently they are set in the social spaces of bars and clubs.

In contrast to Bechdel's representations, lesbian bars and dance clubs have been prominent in several late-twentieth century U.S. queer women's cultural productions including fiction novels, personal essays, full-length feature films, documentaries, and scholarly histories.³⁶ For example, in her personal essay entitled "The Bathroom Line," Joan Nestle focuses on her experiences at the Sea Colony, a working-class lesbian bar in New York City, from the late 1950s to the mid-1960s. Nestle writes:

We needed the Lesbian air of the Sea Colony to breath the life we could not anywhere else, those of us who wanted to see women dance, make love, wear shirts and pants. Here, and in other bars like this one, we found each other and the space to be a sexually powerful butch-femme community. ("The Bathroom Line" 37)

By equating the Sea Colony with the utmost requirement of life—air to breathe—Nestle makes clear the significance of this lesbian bar to her and other queer women's lives. In the course of conducting oral histories of working-class lesbians in Buffalo, New York from the mid-1930s to the early 1960s Elizabeth Lapovsky Kennedy and Madeline D. Davis similarly point out the importance of lesbian bars. Specifically, Kennedy and Davis assert that when seeking to uncover lesbian cultures of survival and resistance it was exactly the bars that proved to be the sites that sheltered many

³⁶ Just a few of these works include: Leslie Feinberg *Stone Butch Blues*; Joan Nestle "Butch-Femme Relationships" and "Voices From Lesbian Herstory" all in *A Restricted Country*; Marita Giovannia dir. *Bar Girls*; Paris Poirier dir. *Last Call at Maud's*; and, Lillian Faderman *Odd Girls and Twilight Lovers*.

queer women's communities, and fostered their political activism. Nestle echoes this theme of the connection between lesbian bars and lesbian cultural survival and resistance in the 1997 anthology *Queers in Space* when she writes, "what forced the creation of these spaces in the first place [was] our need to confront a personal destiny, to see our reflections in each other's faces and to break societal ostracism with our bodies" ("Restriction and Reclamation" 61).³⁷

I do not mean to suggest here that lesbian bars have been or are now the only spaces of lesbian cultural survival and resistance; I am well aware that bars neither have been nor are the only spaces in which lesbians find one another and create community. However, echoing Sarah Elwood's assertion that lesbian spaces are always already politicized and in constant struggle with dominant culture³⁸, I do posit that lesbian bars have been and continue to be a very unique site of lesbian resistance centered on public challenges of normative gender display and identity.³⁹

Most scholarship analyzing the cultural significance of lesbian bars are histories covering the 1930s to the mid-1960s. These works discuss lesbian bars specifically as sites of community, freedom, and empowerment for butches and femmes during that time period. Butches, because of their masculine appearance—attributable to their dress as well as their behaviors and mannerisms—found lesbian

³⁷ Here Nestle describes lesbian bars along the lines of what John B. Jackson terms, "political landscape," and defines as, "the landscape which evolved partly out of experience, partly from design, to meet some of the needs of men and women in their political guise" (12).

³⁸ Elwood writes specifically about lesbian living/"home" spaces, but I think that her argument here can be reasonably extended to other lesbian spaces, such as lesbian bars.

³⁹ By no means is this the only reading of lesbian bars in the mid-20th century, nor are these the only texts to investigate the significance of lesbian bars. See for example Katie King's "Audre Lorde's Lacquered Layerings." King's essay works through Lorde's depiction, from her book *Zami*, of the lesbian bar of the 1950s to reveal complex dynamics of power beyond gender that reach to race and sex. In contrast, Nestle, Kennedy and Davis, and Faderman's texts focus primarily on gender.

bars to be markedly liberating spaces, especially prior to World War I when women wearing pants was not generally acceptable (Kennedy and Davis 155). Although women in pants did become more normalized during WWI (Kennedy and Davis 155), this is not to say that the same was true for lesbians in pants, let alone in shirts, ties, and jackets.⁴⁰ Indeed, as she emphasized in “The Bathroom Line,” Nestle valued the Sea Colony particularly because it was a space where it was possible “to see women...wear shirts and pants...[and] to be a sexually powerful butch-femme community” (37). In addition, it is butch-femme⁴¹ roles, which play out in part within lesbian bars, that Kennedy and Davis make central throughout their history.⁴² Moreover, it is specifically in her chapter “Butches, Femmes, and Kikis⁴³” that lesbian historian Lillian Faderman writes of lesbian bars. The re-occurring overlap of bars, butches, and challenging gender norms is not merely coincidence. These three histories insistently assert and provide evidence that it was in the bars that butches found an accepting space to pursue their butch lesbian gender identities.

⁴⁰ I make the distinction here between *women* in pants and *lesbians* in pants in order to reflect the potentially differing ways that heterosexual women and lesbians might be perceived while in similar dress. Heterosexual women during WWI could have been perceived as innocently following changing fashions, or as simply exerting their independence through their choice of masculine clothing. Lesbians in the same situation, however, might not be afforded the same benefit of innocence and simplicity. Largely due to sexologists’ mid-nineteenth century theory of inversion, according to which homosexuality is synonymous with inappropriate gender behavior, or more specifically with the “inversion of personality traits so that a female looks and behaves like a male,” (Faderman 41) lesbians sometimes face particular harassment when they take on a masculine appearance because of the notion that they indeed want to be men. This misconception that lesbians are women who desire to be men, in a patriarchal system, has been seen as threatening to men and to their position on top of the hierarchy.

⁴¹ Kennedy and Davis actually use the spelling “butch-fem,” but for the sake of consistency, I have chosen to use the more common spelling “butch-femme.”

⁴² The title imagery of “boots of leather” that distinguish butches from femmes in their “slippers of gold” indicates just one example of how central butch-femme roles are in Kennedy and Davis’ text.

⁴³ Faderman, working from several interviews she conducted, defines “kikis” primarily as women who chose neither a butch nor a femme role (168).

While lesbian historians have shown that bars were spaces that fostered community, freedom, and empowerment which led to both lesbian cultures of survival and resistance from the 1930s to the mid-1960s, there has been a lack of focus on the function and meaning of lesbian bars and dance clubs in contemporary queer women's lives. In part, my focus on D.C.'s kinging culture begins to revisit the question of the significance of lesbian bars to queer women's lives, focusing especially on community building.⁴⁴ While qualitatively different from them, analogous to the butches in the mid-1900s who needed and found the bars to be an accepting space to pursue their butch lesbian gender identities, drag kings in the new millennium similarly help to construct a cognitive landscape where gender is fluid and resisting heteronormativity is a given. According to Peirce Lewis, cognitive landscapes/landscapes of the mind are "the mental structures that lie beneath tangible patterns in the landscape" (qtd. in Korr 8). The power of a cognitive landscape detailing kinging culture is in the possibilities that such a landscape leaves imaginable. Thus, the significance of kinging cultures lies not only in building community in physical landscapes such as lesbian bars, but also in the potential to build a more expansive community, less tied to strict gender roles and divisions, that kinging culture's cognitive landscape fosters.

⁴⁴ It is beyond the scope of my dissertation to more fully explore lesbian bars, but I do think it important to note here that too often lesbian bars remain subjects of historical study, and so their contributions to contemporary queer women's lives and communities go unnoticed. According to Gail Lee Dubrow's four categories of properties significant in gay and lesbian history, lesbian bars could fall under the second category of property type, "places associated with the emergence of homosexual community and identity" (35). Still, attention to the significance of lesbian bars remains stifled by assumptions that lesbians either do not have the desire or the money to go out to bars and dance clubs. These assumptions overlook the sexist female gender stereotypes that lesbians must confront as they move through their daily lives which work to limit all women's social and public mobility, especially at night.

Kinging as Building Queer Community

Kinging culture enabled queer community building in D.C. in several different ways. First, the drag king shows at Chaos facilitated the presence of queer women in the Dupont area by providing an event to assemble around. Wednesday nights at Chaos were already designated as “Ladies Nights” prior to hosting the D.C. Kings’ show, technically providing queer women a physical space to meet and gather. Crowds of women at Chaos, however, were noticeably larger on nights of shows compared to non-show Wednesday nights. Though the space existed to meet and gather, king shows more effectively brought large numbers of women together. Second, the monthly aspect of drag king shows made such queer women’s gatherings more consistent and reliable. As the months passed by and the kinging scene grew, more and more women became regulars at the shows (some sitting in the same seats by the stage month after month), faithfully coming out to Chaos on the first Wednesdays of every month to watch the show, catch up with friends, meet new people, etc. In this way, kings and fans alike demonstrated a commitment to keeping the kinging scene vibrant, which in turn attracted more kings, fans, and others new to the area and/or who hadn’t come out to events recently. The excitement around king shows helped not only the kinging community grow, but also more specifically increased the cohesion among queer women in D.C. who were coalescing around kinging, building a larger and stronger queer women’s community.

As significant an achievement as that was, however, it was not only a queer women’s community that kinging culture helped to build. Given the predominance of

gay male culture in the Dupont area⁴⁵, just as important as strengthening queer women's community was how D.C.'s kinging culture enabled queer community building across gender lines. That is, instead of kinging leading to continued gender-based segregation between gay men and lesbians, there was a simultaneous boom in the presence of queer women in Dupont's gay nightlife culture, as well as increased intermingling between queer men and women through kinging culture. In regards to Chaos as a specific location, these interactions included a shared presence as audience members during shows, as well as partygoers on the dance floor afterwards. Later, the connections would expand to both queer cisgender⁴⁶ men and queer transgender men taking the stage to perform with/as drag kings. Although it would be an overstatement to say that kinging culture is solely responsible for an increase in interactions between queer men and women in D.C., there is evidence that kinging helped enliven queer women's communities in D.C., and in so doing implicitly and explicitly challenged its prevalent sexist gay male-centeredness in ways that opened space for even more queer women's communities to be acknowledged and flourish.

The ways in which kinging culture helped to build queer community in D.C. reflects just one way in which it is valuable to this project on nationality and national

⁴⁵ As well as in "gay culture" in general some would say.

⁴⁶ "Cisgender" is a term largely used by people in transcommunities to denote those whose gender identity coincides with their assigned birth sex, for example woman-identified, female-bodied people and man-identified, male-bodied people. The significance for many in using "cisgender" as an adjective to modify "man" or "woman" is to disrupt the power of "man" or "woman" to necessarily signify non-transgender people. Whereas the pairing "men and transgender men" emphasizes transmen's location as outside of and other than "men," the pairing "cisgender men and transgender men" more evenly presents the two as distinct groups of men without necessarily establishing one as more central than the other.

Kings who were cisgender men were formerly known as "bio-kings" (as a reflection of their biological maleness), but this terminology has since fell out of favor and use because of the contestations over what consisted of biological maleness, especially for transmen who had undergone medical, biological transition through testosterone treatments and surgery.

belonging at play within a U.S. context of queer identifications. As Lesle Kanes Weisman writes in the prologue of *Gender Space Architecture*, “the appropriation and use of space are political acts. The kinds of spaces we have, don’t have, or are denied access to can empower us or render us powerless” (4). Furthermore, in his book, *Disidentifications*, José Esteban Muñoz writes, “queer performance...is about transformation, about the powerful and charged transformation of the world, about the world that is born through performance” (xiv). As a queer performance, kinging is a site for creating and transforming queer communities. In particular, kinging culture appropriates queer spaces and empowers those historically made invisible and marginalized within already marginalized communities (e.g., lesbians, transpeople, queer people of color, etc.) to make themselves visible and assert their belonging. The feeling of belonging to a community is a key base component of nationalism, for without people coming together in community, there would be no nation. More specifically, examining kinging’s emergence as nurturing community building among queer women within a predominant sexist gay male culture lends itself to a productive discussion about how diversity within a community can both support and thwart its strength as a nation. For example, divisiveness along lines of gender within queer communities leads to a weakening of those communities on the whole, whereas cooperation among different queer populations ultimately expands their reach and bolsters their strength. As history has shown us, civil strife can destroy nations, thus pointing to the importance of interaction and cooperation among all communities. Through investigating kinging’s effects on the gendered cultural landscape of a particular queer community, I provide an example of how altering queer landscapes

affects communities, and in particular people's movements within, and relationship to those communities, and in turn to their own queer identifications.

Kinging as a Political Outlet

Just as the definitions of who/what drag kings are have changed and shifted depending on time and who had the power of definition, there have been many varied positions discussing if, at its center, kinging is political. At the fourth annual International Drag King Extravaganza (IDKE.4) in October 2002, the rhetoric around discussions of kinging as political was largely divided between keeping kinging “fun” and “entertaining” versus making kinging “serious” and “political.” While some folks at IDKE.4 argued that political kinging and fun/entertaining kinging are not mutually exclusive, these voices were overshadowed by those who felt that the heart of kinging is to have fun, echoing Sarah Daniels' sentiment in the foreword to *The Routledge Reader in Politics and Performance*, “politics, in relation to theatre, seems now to be thought of as a dirty word” (xxv).⁴⁷

I don't doubt that for many kings, having fun is a crucial element of their kinging. It makes sense that those who have taken on kinging in addition to working their “day jobs”⁴⁸ would prioritize having fun at its center. It is only logical that

⁴⁷ One example of such resistance to politics in performance I encountered was during a presentation I gave at a queer graduate student conference in which I advocated for more political (and explicitly so) kinging performances. I was challenged by an audience member who, as a self-identified artist felt that an imposition of explicit politics was inherently un-theatrical, an affront to the art of performance, as well as to performers, and ultimately undesirable. She did not deny that performances could be political, but instead stressed that the priority should be artistry; if that resulted in political performances, then so be it. In this way, she placed higher value on high quality performances that were apolitical over political performances that were of lesser quality, ultimately failing to imagine the possibility of high quality political performances.

⁴⁸ In fact, with very few exceptions which only lasted short, limited amounts of time, it has been the case that kings do not make enough money to live solely on what they earn through performing as kings.

taking on kinging as an extra commitment would soon lose its appeal if it ceased to be fun. Moreover, as my interview with D.C. drag king Spencer reveals, that kinging is “a lot of fun” is precisely some kings’ main motivation for performing in the first place. In addition to kinging being about having fun, Morris argues that the monthly drag king show at Chaos serves as a place of respite (from mainstream society’s homophobia, George W. Bush’s terrorism, and other oppressions) for queer women, both those who perform on stage as well as those in the audience.

While I have both witnessed first-hand and intimately felt the fun and respite entailed by being part of D.C.’s drag king culture and community, these have not been the sum total of my experiences. The significance of kinging cultures does not lie solely on their being political, but in considering kinging’s value to a project on nationality and national belonging at play within a U.S. context of queer identification, its potential as a political outlet is important to investigate. Thus, even in light of the lack of unanimous agreement within kinging communities that kinging is indeed political, and despite the continuing debates about related concerns, including: how is it political? to whom is it political? to what degree and for what ends is it political?, in what follows I explore kinging as a political outlet.

Kinging has always been, and continues to be political for me because beyond creating and transforming queer communities, as a queer performance practice it challenges more general established mainstream, limited ways of seeing, thinking, and talking about gender, sexuality, sex, race, and class. As a queer performance kinging disrupts hegemonic, dichotomous ways of understanding gender, sex, and sexuality, as well as highlights assumptions around representations of race and class,

both outside and within kinging communities and cultures. My intention is not to insist that all kings everywhere always make their kinging acts consciously political, but rather to explore the ways in which kinging as a form of performance can be seen as historically having political roots, as well as to highlight the empowered queer visibility, art activism, and critical social commentary that is present throughout kinging culture. It is crucial to examine kinging as political in order to more actively access its transformative potential. It is these political aspects of kinging through which citizenship is established and asserted.

Historical Roots of Kinging as Political

With contemporary drag king culture having emerged in the U.S. during the 1980s and then booming in the 1990s, it is still a relatively young cultural phenomenon.⁴⁹ In fact, when I first began telling people of my research interests in drag kings, they would most often reply with the question, “drag what?” After countless people puzzledly asked me “drag what?” I developed the rote answer, “you know, like drag queens but the opposite”; an horribly crude answer, yet *invariably* effective. The effectiveness of this analogy demonstrated the extent to which drag queens, unlike drag kings (as of yet),⁵⁰ have penetrated into mainstream popular culture and imagination. It is not only in pop culture, however, that drag queens have attained a certain level of notoriety, but drag queens, more specifically camp

⁴⁹ See Toone’s “Drag King TimeLine.”

⁵⁰ As more and more drag kings are appearing on national television shows such things as *The Maury Povich Show* and *The Rikki Lake Show*, as well as on cable television shows such as *MTV*, *Sex in the City*, and *Queer as Folk* they are slowly asserting drag king presence into popular culture.

discourses of drag queens, have also secured a foothold within various academic areas and disciplines.⁵¹

I point out the prominence of drag queens and camp here because of the way in which it affects research on drag kings. As J. Jack Halberstam writes, “the histories of both male impersonation and the drag king act are quite difficult to map out, if only because they tend to be subsumed under the larger categories of female drag and impersonation and tend to disappear in all analyses of camp” (“Mackdaddy” 112). Halberstam’s point here is crucial, just as feminists have demonstrated how *History’s* sexism has overlooked and ignored women to the detriment of *Herstory*, drag kings have been made similarly invisible in discourses of drag, impersonation, and camp. While I agree wholeheartedly with Halberstam on this point, rather than focusing on the things that differentiate drag kings from drag queens, and kinging from camp (as Halberstam does in his essay “Mackdaddy, Superfly, Rapper”), I instead accept and make central the predominance of drag queens and camp. This is not to say that I condone the sexism and male privilege that has resulted in drag kings’ invisibility, but rather that my approach to investigating kinging cultures takes camp discourses into central consideration. First, faced with preliminary research findings that most drag texts focus on drag queens, and that most texts on drag queens mention camp, it is not only sensible to engage with these discourses, but also to prudently mine them for the contributions they have to offer, especially given their

⁵¹ It is important to note here, as David Bergman does in his “Introduction” to *Camp Grounds*, that camp has not always been a valued academic topic. However, as Bergman acknowledges, while in 1979 he could not get a publisher for *Camp Grounds* by 1989 he found “almost immediately, sympathetic editors” (“Introduction” 3). This is just one indication of camp’s foothold within some parts of academia. The publishing of other camp anthologies—such as Fabio Cleto’s (ed.) *Camp: Queer Aesthetics and the Performing Subject: A Reader* and Moe Meyer’s (ed.) *The Politics and Poetics of Camp* that showcase camp texts from as early as 1954 up until 1997—further demonstrates this point.

greater notoriety in popular culture and academic realms, alike. Second, I make central camp discourses with the hope that such a strategy and approach will make drag kings visible in the same way that they become visible and intelligible when I explain what a drag king is using a drag queen analogy. Third, I hope that by using camp to analyze kinging, the boundaries of camp discourses will be transformed and the fluidity and connections among camp and kinging, particularly the political roots they share, will be recognized. Collectively, highlighting these elements of camp in relationship to kinging serves to more firmly ground kinging's position within a historical and political queer context, exposing its significance to issues of nationality and national belonging.

Camp and Kinging: Political Visibility, Activism, and Social Commentary

Far from there being just one camp discourse, there are multiple camp discourses, some of which closely resemble others, and others which seem nothing like one another. Looking specifically at the variety of ways each of these discourses constructs "camp" reveals its usefulness in illuminating kinging as a political outlet, as well as in more deeply examining representations within kinging culture.

One understanding of camp, described by David Bergman in *Camp Grounds* and Esther Newton in *Mother Camp*, is that camp and its drag queen practitioners exist in opposition to mainstream culture. In the introduction to *Camp Grounds: Style and Homosexuality*, an anthology he edited, Bergman discusses the various definitions and understandings of "camp," but later points out four areas where there is general agreement about what camp is. It is the second and third areas that address the issue of camp's relationship to mainstream culture. Bergman writes, "second,

camp exists in tension with popular culture, commercial culture, or consumerist culture. Third, the person who can recognize camp, who sees things as campy, or who can camp is a person outside of the cultural mainstream” (5). Similar to the second point Bergman discusses, which suggests camp as merely “in tension” with mainstream culture, Newton writes in the second preface to *Mother Camp*, her ethnography of female impersonators, that “drag queens are between traditional values and an acquired but profound cynicism” (xii). Neither Bergman’s second point or Newton’s preface is as explicit about camp existing in opposition to mainstream culture as Bergman’s third point is, yet all three collectively make a strong argument establishing camp’s opposition to mainstream culture.⁵² Most directly camp is a cultural opposition to mainstream culture, but one that has always had political implications.

The outsider status of camp practitioners is both a denial of national belonging—being exiled and cast-out from the mainstream by gatekeepers aimed at maintaining existing heterosexist power structures, as well as an assertion of national belonging—calling upon their power as national subjects to critique and challenge the oppressive structure of their society. In working towards a kweer critique, it is especially the latter, examining camp as an embodiment of national belonging and strategy of nation building, that is significant for the examples it provides, and the

⁵² A later point Newton makes in *Mother Camp* demonstrates camp’s opposition to mainstream culture further. She writes, “informants said that many ideas had been taken over by straights through the mass media, but that the moment this happened the idea would no longer be campy” (footnote 13, 106). The pitting of heterosexual mass media and culture against camp in this quotation again suggests camp’s opposition to mainstream culture.

ways in which these examples offer models for further successful challenges against oppression.

Considering drag kings as similar to drag queens, and kinging as a camp practice in light of this definition of camp as being in opposition to mainstream culture establishes drag kings and kinging as also existing in opposition to mainstream culture. This shared position of drag queens and drag kings against mainstream culture is significant because it encourages the building of a drag community along lines of sexuality (queers in drag versus straights in mainstream culture), and across sex/gender differences between queer women and men.⁵³ Such community building is not merely social, but deeply political, too. One example of a queer drag community that crossed sex/gender boundaries was Chaos, longtime host club to the D.C. Drag Kings. Chaos' specialization in being a drag venue fostered the formation of a subculture community connecting drag queens and drag kings, and camp and kinging. Looking at cities in which there are established drag queen shows but not drag kings shows provides another example of alliances forming between groups based on an understanding of their shared opposition to mainstream culture. More specifically, drag kings from the dragkings listserv⁵⁴ assert that as one of the first drag kings in their area, they were able to get their start through drag queen shows that invited them to perform alongside the drag queens. In most cases, however, this collaboration between kings and queens lasted only until drag kings

⁵³ Yet another camp discourse that is relevant here is Newton's assertion that "in the mid-sixties 'camp' was an in-group word which denoted specifically homosexual humor" ("Note to Reader"). Her focus on camp as "an in-group word" reflects the similar dynamic of community along lines of sexuality that I point out in regards to queers in drag versus straights in mainstream culture.

⁵⁴ The dragkings listserv is now defunct, but was formerly hosted by queernet.org

became more established, and had gathered a critical mass of performers to put on their own drag king show. Still, the connections that were fostered reflect a successful coalitional politics aimed against oppression by mainstream culture.

Camp and kinging are specifically engaged in the task of fighting against oppressive mainstream ideology and domination. In the chapter “Queer Life, Queer Theater” of her book *Gender Outlaw*, Kate Bornstein provides a general understanding of this aspect of camp. She writes, “I like humor and comedy. A lot. Even slapstick humor so long as it pokes fun at those in power. But a good deal of today’s slapstick is still aimed at unempowered minorities. Camp is an alternative to this kind of slapstick—camp is zen-like in its irreverence for the established order, its non-violence, and its often dizzying use of paradox” (163). While I think that Bornstein’s definition of camp in this instance is a bit (too) idealistic, she nevertheless makes it clear that camp is not only about humor and comedy, but a type of fun that takes it upon itself to use those in power as the target of its humor. Looking more closely at particular targets of camp, I point out camp discourses that challenge heterosexism and beauty ideals, respectively; the former involves Esther Newton and Moe Meyer’s contention that camp is specifically a queer discourse, the latter rests on Newton’s claim that camp is “an alternative for those who are not pretty” (footnote 6, 105). Each of these areas of camp discourse ultimately points to specific ways in which to deploy an outsider status through the medium of representations as an assertion of national belonging, and in the service of nation building. Thus, camp serves as a strategy for taking action against oppression, and is also a product of such action.

First I turn to understanding camp specifically as a queer discourse.⁵⁵ One of the main things that Newton accomplishes in *Mother Camp* is to create a taxonomy of female impersonators. In fact, much of *Mother Camp* revolves around categorizing one thing from another [e.g., street impersonators versus stage impersonators versus street fairies (6-8); covert homosexuals versus overt homosexuals (34); glamour drag versus comic drag (49-52); etc.]. In regards to defining camp, Newton makes it explicitly clear to the readers in the opening pages that “camp humor was an assertion of gay existence” (xii), and furthermore that “camp humor ultimately grows out of the incongruities and absurdities of the patriarchal nuclear family” (“Note to the Reader”). In addition, beyond just being about mere “gay existence,” Newton further posits that the camp accepts his homosexuality and flaunts it, since “only by fully embracing the stigma itself can one neutralize the sting and make it laughable” (111). Not only do these passages from Newton make explicit her view that camp is a specifically queer discourse, but in attributing the origins of camp humor to a critique of the nuclear family and noting the power of camp to defuse the stigma placed on homosexuality by mainstream society and culture, they make clear that camp is about empowering queer subjects to fight dominant heterosexist ideology.

In addition to Newton, another proponent of camp as a specifically queer discourse is Moe Meyer. Meyer defines camp as “the total body of performative

⁵⁵ Whether or not camp is strictly a homosexual phenomenon (specific to gay men) is one of the most contested camp discourses. With the publishing of Susan Sontag’s “Notes on ‘Camp’” began a precedent for the argument that while camp could include homosexual taste, ultimately “camp taste is much more than homosexual taste” (64). It has been this very line of argument, in fact, that has largely allowed feminists to apply camp analyses to female subjects of all sexualities (see Robertson’s “The Kinda Comedy That Imitates Me”), to begin to insert themselves more widely in camp discourses (see Davy), and to foreground feminist camp (see Robertson’s *Guilty Pleasures*). I think these strives are crucial accomplishments, yet at the same time I think Newton’s formation of camp as specifically queer is also significant.

practices and strategies used to enact a queer identity, with enactment defined as the production of social visibility” (“Introduction” 5). Just as with Newton’s definition of camp, Meyer’s foregrounds queer existence and visibility. However, as he continues he defines camp even more narrowly by asserting that “queer identity is inseparable and indistinguishable from its processual enactment, or Camp” (Meyer, “Introduction” 5). This last quotation conflates queer identity and camp, from which vantage point Meyer argues that “there are not different kinds of Camp. There is only one. And it is queer;” all un-queer appropriations are not Camp, but rather “camp trace, or residual camp” (“Introduction” 5). Although Meyer’s distinction of Camp from camp trace might initially seem an extreme division, insofar as it focuses on queer identity as self-conscious performativity, it also is a powerful division that helps to establish a queer subject as separate from the heterosexual mainstream. As I pointed out above with Newton, in explicitly delineating camp and queers from heterosexuals, and in the refusal to accept the stigma of homosexuality and the refusal to accept camp trace, a clear space in opposition to dominant heterosexist ideology is made for queer subjects and representations alike.

While I have heretofore discussed the ways in which an understanding of camp as a specifically queer discourse entails its challenge to dominant heterosexist ideology, I want to quickly offer an alternative camp discourse that offers a similar result. In fact, if anything, this other camp discourse does more than just challenge heterosexism—it specifically critiques the domination of heterosexual men, challenging heterosexist patriarchy. I am referring here to Pamela Robertson’s work on Mae West and feminist camp, “‘The Kinda Comedy That Imitates Me.’” She

begins by stating her goal of “underlin[ing] camp’s potential for asserting the overlapping interests of gay men and women, lesbian and straight” (“Imitates Me” 156). Later, using a specific example from her analysis of Mae West, Robertson writes, “West modeled herself on a camp gay style because she believed that gay men were like women . . . because she believed that gay men and women were similarly oppressed by straight men,” making it clear that it is straight men that are in positions of power and that camp is the strategy to unite those oppressed by heterosexist patriarchy (Robertson “Imitates Me” 161).

The above camp discourses foreground camp’s political implications. It is exactly these explicit and overt politics that help illuminate the possibility of kinging to be a calculated political strategy and not just fun, humor, and entertainment. While not one among Newton, Meyer, or Robertson discusses drag kings or kinging specifically, I understand their various camp discourses as having to do with drag kings and kinging.

One example that illustrates Robertson’s point that camp is a strategy of art activism to form alliances among groups that are similarly oppressed by heterosexist patriarchal culture that has to do with drag kings is from a performance at “The Great Big International Drag King Show II” by drag king Zack from Toronto, Ontario, Canada. One aspect that makes Zack’s performance notable is because before introducing him, the host made it a point for the first time that night (Zack’s was the 19th act of the evening) to explicitly say “what we do is not just entertainment, it’s also political.” In terms of his act illustrating kinging as a strategy to form alliances, as well as his act being a representation of that alliance, I was most impressed by a

video Zack had playing in the background as he lip synced to the song “Guerilla Radio” by the band Rage Against the Machine. The video showed prisons and Gap (the clothing manufacturers) sweatshops, clearly conveying through images the alarming rate at which prisons are being built, and how people—especially disempowered men of color—are being disproportionately imprisoned, as well as the poor working conditions that third-world female textile workers endure for extremely low wages for huge corporations such as the Gap. Coupled with the lyrics from “Guerilla Radio,” “it [change] has to start somewhere, it has to start sometime, what better place than here?” Zack’s message was clear. He was pleading that as we fight to be able to express our genders freely, we also remember the need to struggle for the rights of people who have been unjustly imprisoned, as well as for better working conditions, including a raise of the minimum wage and an end to sweatshop labor. Linking these three struggles in this way, Zack’s performance reflects an attempt to form alliances across differences based on shared oppression at the hands of a heterosexist patriarchal culture, while also being an example of what such an effort might look like. Furthermore, the representation of coalition politics that Zack’s performance provides us with speaks to a politics of representation within kinging culture that opens up discourses of citizenship based on working with and through subjects’ differences.

Another category of camp discourse that I would like to discuss in terms of fighting mainstream ideologies, in particular beauty ideals, is Newton’s discussion of camp as “an alternative for those who are not pretty” (footnote 6, 105). Once again, in sorting her experiences, Newton makes a distinction between the “most beautiful”

versus the “campiest,” suggesting that beauty is antithetical to camp (56). More specifically, in comparing the two she says about the “campiest” that he is less sexually attractive, older, has fewer physical charms, but his acts are the most dramatic and verbally entertaining, and his most successful joke is one himself (56). This last quotation makes clear the need for more drama and verbal entertainment by performers as they get older, since it is getting older that makes others consider them less sexually attractive. Along with the picture that Newton’s paints of camp as for “those who are not pretty” I would also add Susan Sontag’s assertion that “in naïve, or pure, Camp, the essential element is seriousness, a seriousness that fails” (59). Just as Newton stressed that a camp’s biggest joke is on himself, Sontag points to a failure on the Camp’s part.

While challenging beauty ideals is surely quite different from challenging heterosexism, I think that the two are equally important. Moreover, the two are very closely related by their position in fighting mainstream ideologies, albeit on different issues. In regards to how incorporating this discourse of camp into analyses of drag kings and kinging makes possible, I demonstrate that it keeps open a variety of ways of kinging, and allows drag kings and kinging to maintain a certain level of complexity. That is, it helps to prevent a normative drag king ideal from taking hold. On one hand, Halberstam discusses camp as being about femininity and kinging as about masculinity. Furthermore, he asserts that “whereas the drag queen expands and becomes flamboyant, the drag king constrains and becomes quietly macho” (“Drag Kings” 259). Indeed, both these points are crucial to his project of culling out a space for female masculinity, for in distinguishing so clearly between what is feminine and

what is masculine, it becomes easier for female masculinity to emerge. I argue, however, that insisting on camp and kining as mutually exclusive can be limiting for analyses of comic drag king performances and the art activism and social commentary they provide.

To illustrate my point let me give an example—Hunter, one of the early D.C. Drag Kings. Contrary to Halberstam’s observation that “comedic [drag king] acts outnumber sexy acts ten to one...[the implied reason being] spectators’ desire for a deconstruction of maleness rather than a reconstruction of masculinity” in the local D.C. drag king scene, Hunter was one of the few who drag kings whose acts are consistently comedic (“Oh Behave!” 433). Yet comedic doesn’t even begin to describe Hunter’s drag king acts. Where other comedic drag king acts at Chaos have included performances to the B-52’s “Love Shack” and the Village People’s “YMCA” (March 2002), Hunter has performed with Mary the Manly Man as two adolescent teenage boys discovering their sexuality and each other to Tiffany’s song “I Think We’re Alone Now” (Feb. 2002), and as Richard Simons (March 2002). The main difference here is that while all four of these were comedic drag king acts, the first two were in many ways still trying to explicitly sell themselves as sexually desirable kings, but the latter two by Hunter were much more focused on embodying characters (who turn out to be comedic figures, yes, but who do not necessarily see themselves as such initially) over anything else. Incorporating camp in this analysis could help clarify the differences between these two acts further, for in Sontag’s terms, the first two acts could be seen as unsuccessful, “deliberate camp” in their conscious attempt to be funny and sexually desirable (58), whereas Hunter’s acts are

“naïve camp,” performed in an earnest fashion that does not mean to be funny but ultimately is nevertheless (58).

A look at Hunter’s biography, formerly on the D.C. Drag King’s web site, makes the extent of Hunter’s comedy clear.⁵⁶ His biography reads, “the quintessential loser, Hunter is a guy who keeps trying, but never really gets it. (Both figuratively and literally...) Fortunately, Hunter is completely unaware of his pitiful state, and actually believes himself to be a suave, seductive ladies man (when he’s not exploring the other sides of his sexuality...)” (*D.C. Drag Kings*). Comparing Newton and Sontag’s camp discourse with Hunter’s biography leaves no doubt that Hunter is a camp figure. As “the quintessential loser” Hunter fits within the grouping “for those who are not pretty.” In addition, he fits within Sontag’s definitions of camp not only because of his constant failure demonstrated by the fact that he “keeps trying, but never really gets it,” but also because in being “completely unaware of his pitiful state” he fulfills Sontag’s definition for “naïve, or pure, Camp” which she sees as more satisfying than “deliberate camp” (58). While on one level Hunter is indeed consciously attempting to be funny, I posit that at the level of his act, the way in which he earnestly tries to embody his character shifts his camp style from deliberate to naïve.

In the “Great Big International Drag King Show II” Hunter performed to Robert Palmer’s song “Simply Irresistible.” Performing alongside of Hunter were two conventionally beautiful women (skinny, long blonde hair, wearing slim fitting

⁵⁶ The latest update of the D.C. Kings website in January 2009, <<http://www.dckings.com/>>, no longer includes a comprehensive list of individual D.C. kings’ biographies, but merely a partial list of select individual and group performers nationwide. Hunter’s biography that I refer to here was a part of the D.C. Kings website on 2 March 2003. Hunter’s biography can still be accessed through the out-of-date D.C. Kings website at <<http://www.geocities.com/dcdragkings/bios/hunter.html>>.

black dresses—resonating strongly with the women portrayed in the music video to Palmer’s “Simply Irresistible”) and one female performer named Femme Fearless who was the antithesis to the conventionally beautiful women. Femme Fearless was in an obvious, ill-fitting and uncombed long platinum blonde wig, with make up caked on so thick it was clownish, intentionally in a dress that was too small to zip up the back, and so just remained opened. Yet, as Hunter began to sing, it was clear that the woman he found “simply irresistible” was the unconventional beauty. As he tried to get closer to her and dance with her, the other two women would run interference, literally getting in his way and being a physical barrier between him and Femme Fearless. Try as they might, however, they lacked the power to gain Hunter’s attention or affection. Clearly defeated, they abandoned their conventional beauty and joined forces with the third woman, messing their hair up and dancing off beat. But, Hunter’s comedy doesn’t stop here, satisfied with his performance of being a less-than-conventional guy himself (for loving the unconventionally beautiful woman), and sending out the message that there is more than one kind of “irresistible” woman. Hunter pushes the comedy even further. Towards the end of the song, after all three women have joined together, Hunter moves downstage center, and continues to sing. Unbeknownst to him, they sneak off stage together suggesting a sexual tryst among themselves, and leave Hunter on stage alone, belting out his last verse of “simply irresistible.” As he finishes his song, he smiles and turns around expecting to see all three women, and lo and behold he finds nothing. In true Hunter fashion, the last joke is on himself!

If I were to stick with Halberstam's delineation between camp and kinging, Hunter would be no more than a comedic drag king, parodying masculinity to the point of disarming it. However, by considering Hunter a king who camps, not only I am able to come to the same conclusion about his parody of dominant masculinity, I am also able to discuss the ways in which he not only enacts camp, but also parodies camp at the same time. More precisely, Hunter is able to deconstruct maleness in his performance as a king, as well as deconstruct the notion of camp as "an alternative for those who are not pretty" (Newton footnote 6, 105). This "not pretty" discourse of camp is especially interesting to me as a feminist scholar when I consider the way in which women are compelled (by such things as advertisements, television) to strive to achieve a certain conventional beauty.⁵⁷ Thus, when a king camps, the situation becomes more complicated, for which self, the drag king or the female performer, is "not pretty"? If it's the female performer, then beauty ideals are in tact, for the system that those who are seen by the mainstream as less attractive and desirable turn to camp, is maintained. However, if it is the drag king who is performing as unwittingly a figure of constant failure, then there is another level to his campiness. It is this other level that creates the potential that a king's campiness can become more than about not being pretty—it can be about making fun of yourself in a way that challenges why you felt you needed to make fun of yourself to begin with. This parodying of camp calls into question its very construction as "an alternative for those who are not pretty" and hence successfully challenges dominant mainstream beauty ideals for both men and women, and drag queens and drag kings.

⁵⁷ See for example Jean Kilbourne and Susan Bordo.

Chapter Conclusion

In this chapter I assert that elements of cultural and political citizenship that emerge in kinging make kinging a noteworthy avenue to explore the dynamic of nationality and national belonging at play within a U.S. context of queer identifications. I begin by offering sketches of definitions of what a drag king is/what a drag king does. Despite the ways in which drag kings have been narrowly defined as women who dress up and perform (on-stage) as men by some, there is a variety of definitions that arise from people within kinging cultures and communities that offer broader, more complex, and more nuanced understandings of gender performances and ultimately leave the power of definition to individuals themselves. While it has been kinging's interventions into gender performances that have received the most attention in previous scholarship, my dissertation's focus differs in its scrutiny of racialized performances within kinging.

More specifically my work in this chapter focuses on the insights kinging offers about group dynamics and community formations as indicators of cultural citizenship at local levels that relate in larger contexts of queer identifications to issues of nationality and national belonging. For example, the emergence of kinging within queer women's cultural contexts successfully strengthens queer women's communities through increased presence in gay public spaces, as well as through expanded definitions of who is part of the community. Beyond strengthening queer women's communities, kinging also facilitates community building across sex and gender lines, challenging gay male sexism, to strengthen a more collective queer

community. Community cohesion is just one aspect of political citizenship that emerges in kinging.

As a political outlet, kinging offers indicators of political citizenship at individual, local, and community levels that have resonance in larger contexts relevant to nationality and national belonging in systems of U.S. queer identifications. Foregrounding kinging as a queer performance practice and illuminating examples of its transformative potential makes kinging's political resonances clear. Primarily, in this chapter I do this by discussing the points of convergence of drag king and drag queen cultures, focusing particularly on their uses of camp as art activism to engage in the task of fighting against oppressive mainstream ideologies. More specifically, I point out kinging performances that engage camp discourse to challenge heterosexism and patriarchal beauty ideals. Using camp to demonstrate kinging's political roots of empowering queers to challenge mainstream culture's heterosexist patriarchy, and analyze king performances for the social commentary they offer through their art activism, I utilize a politics of representation to borrow from drag queens' precedent in popular culture and academic realms in order to highlight kinging culture's contributions. These contributions represent the ways in which, even as outsiders, kings assert their belonging within society, and as citizens of the nation as a whole, through the representations they create. Through investigating kinging's ties to the more easily historically situated camp discourses, I provide an example of how dominant mainstream culture is successfully challenged by queer representations, and how these representations open up the scope of imagination possible not only for individual's own queer identifications, but for larger social scripts as well.

Chapter 3: De-naturalizing U.S. Discourses of Queer Citizenship, Legal Citizenship, and Asian Immigration

Kinging culture allows us to examine the dynamic of nationality and national belonging at play within a U.S. context of queer identifications through an examination of cultural citizenship, particularly in terms of community building. Another way to investigate nationality and national belonging is through an examination of legal citizenship. For queer Asian American subjects and subjectivities, cultural and legal citizenship are intimately intertwined layers of citizenship both affected by politics of representation. Thus, an examination of legal citizenship is necessary for moving towards a queer Asian American critique. Moreover, because as Peter X. Feng notes, we are “at a time when foreign-born Asian immigrants living in the US outnumber US-born Asian Americans” (40) it is particularly important to a kweer approach to consider the relationships between immigration and legal citizenship.

In many ways, looking at legal citizenship and immigration could be seen as an out-dated project within Asian American studies. As a field Asian American studies has long established the distinctiveness of Asian American-ness by means of investigating national identity formation through the technology of immigration laws. Speaking of the development of Asian American studies, in his essay “Asian American Studies in Its Second Phase” Kent A. Ono writes:

Their [Asian Americanists’] principal focus was on the post-immigration family’s experience of political non-recognition, non-inclusion, and outright hostility toward all things deviating from an ostensible normative embodied

way of being within the nation-state. It was, in fact, lack of privilege, lack of citizenship status, and national disenfranchisement that were the central concerns of 1960s, 1970s, and arguably 1980s Asian American studies. (2)

Ono characterizes these concerns with identity, subjectivity, and nationalism as part of the first phase of Asian American studies, and goes on to posit that the field has entered a second phase that attempts to better articulate nuances of transnationalism, globalization, panethnicity, and methodology that challenge and are in tension with older, foundational assumptions. While reminiscent of first phase concerns of immigration, citizenship, nationality, and national belonging, in so far as a kweer approach re-frames discussions to highlight queer Asian American subjects and subjectivities, it also has ties to Asian American studies' second phase of moving away from focusing on East Asian American studies to focusing on marginalized subfields (Ono 4).

Indeed, it is kweer studies' synthesis of the interconnections among Women's Studies, LGBT studies, and Asian American studies, and the space that a kweer approach opens up that allows for a more in-depth look at how immigration and sexuality are related, or more specifically how U.S. national sexualities are regulated vis-à-vis immigration policies. I begin the task of examining how immigration policies regulate U.S. national sexualities by first exploring politics of representation within discourses of citizenship and immigration to expose the ways in which queer Asian American subjects and subjectivities have been elided by current frameworks of analysis.

Disrupting Conceptualizations of Queer Citizenship

In the wake of legalized same-sex marriages in Massachusetts, the issuing of marriage licenses to lesbian and gay couples in San Francisco, the push for a Federal Marriage Amendment seeking to define marriage as strictly between a man and a woman, and the 2004 U.S. presidential election, queer citizenship was pushed to the foreground in the U.S. in 2004. In particular, the U.S. Supreme Court's ruling in *Lawrence v. Texas* in June 2003 that anti-sodomy laws were unconstitutional seemed to herald a new era of queer citizenship through its decriminalization of laws intended to outlaw gay (male) sex⁵⁸. Dominant within this new era was an increased hopefulness and belief that queer people in the U.S. were finally on the verge of overcoming the second-class citizenship they had been relegated to because of their sexuality. That is, queer people have been and are denied certain rights based specifically on their lack of adherence to the heterosexual norm. Thus, rather than enjoy the range of rights extended to full citizens, the marginalization queer people face within the U.S. polity reflects their status as second-class citizens. In the wake of U.S. anti-sodomy laws being invalidated nationwide, it was anticipated that all other forms of systematic and institutional discrimination against queer people were near an end, too, and that queer people's full citizenship was close at hand.

The anticipation of the end of homophobia and heterosexism was concomitant with a re-vitalization and increased visibility of LGBTQ grassroots activism organized around lesbian and gay civil rights, especially around the right to marry. This focus on marriage has continued in the last five years, and according to the

⁵⁸ Legal definitions of sodomy vary and often encompass sex acts between a man and a woman, as well as between two men; typically, however, sodomy laws were enforced only against men's same-sex sexual behavior.

National Gay and Lesbian Taskforce and the National Conference of State Legislatures has resulted in a handful of gains: same-sex couples have the right to marry in six⁵⁹ states [Massachusetts (2004), Connecticut (2008), Iowa (2009), Vermont (2009), Maine (2009), and New Hampshire (2009)]; civil unions granting state-level spousal rights to same-sex couples are allowed in New Jersey (2006); domestic partnerships that give unmarried couples some state-level spousal rights are available in California (2005), Oregon (2007), Hawaii (1997), Washington (2008), and the District of Columbia (2008); and Rhode Island (2007) and New York (2008) recognize same-sex marriages performed in other states. While securing same-sex marriage rights is by far not the only gay civil right being sought out, it does remain the case that it is often depicted as among the most prevalent struggles, if not the most prevalent one, throughout numerous gay mainstream rights groups and movements.

Fighting against anti-sodomy laws and making a case in favor of same-sex marriage rights are just two examples of discourses of queer citizenship, but like other examples (e.g., gay adoption and serving in the military), revolve around queer people overcoming second-class citizenship. That is, these examples of discourses of queer citizenship are preoccupied with obtaining the rights usually afforded heterosexuals as the means to end the societal and cultural marginalization they face.⁶⁰ In effect, by focusing on second-class citizenship⁶¹, queer concerns about

⁵⁹ California was also among these states, granting same-sex couples the right to marry in May 2008, but the passing of Proposition 8 in November 2008 has since limited marriages in California to one man and one woman.

⁶⁰ Some characterize these endeavors as assimilationist, predicated on conforming to dominant heterosexist ideologies. For example, in his essay, "A Gay World Make-Over? An Asian American Queer Critique," Martin Manalansan goes on to argue that "we need to get away from the seduction of transformation and the allure of the make-over, we need to examine the very premises of these changes, and we need to ask how these cosmetic changes can actually mask, if not reify, the ugly

actual legal citizenship are overshadowed. In so far as discourses of queer citizenship reflect a presumption of legal U.S. citizenship, they situate some queer subjects and subjectivities, including some queer Asian American subjects and subjectivities as well as other queer immigrant populations, as beyond their scope. Writing about the importance of being recognized, in her book *Sexual Strangers* Shane Phelan asserts that “in order to challenge injustice and claim decent treatment, one must be recognized as a member of the polity being challenged” (83). Following Phelan’s position that recognition is indeed necessary to justice, if we are sincere in achieving justice for *all* queer citizens, then it becomes crucial that the U.S. context of queer identifications we conceptualize is extended to include all people residing in the U.S., whether or not they have status as legal U.S. citizens.

Acknowledging Limits of Legal U.S. Citizenship

While legal U.S. citizenship needs to be more firmly established within conceptualizations of queer citizenship, relying on a binary of legal versus non-legal

structures of oppression that they purport to erase” (108). Manalansan makes clear his position that gaining same-sex marriage rights, gay adoption rights, etc. simply helps to push queer people to assimilate to and maintain the heteronormative mainstream, fashioning a parallel homonormativity. The pressure for queer people, immigrants, and queer immigrants of color to assimilate is a legitimate threat that I do think needs to be highlighted and addressed. I agree with Manalansan’s argument that we must challenge the very foundations upon which structures of oppression have been built. However, while Manalansan’s argument seems to portray seeking same-sex marriage rights and gay adoption rights as necessarily assimilationist, viewing them as part of the oppressive structures he wants to challenge, my viewpoint differs in that I argue that the safe and secure access to legal rights of citizenship (including, but not limited to marriage and adoption rights) is a key component of nationality and national belonging. Although certainly not the only component, or even in all circumstances the most important component, I hesitate to dismiss the importance of seeking legal rights in challenging structures of oppression. Moreover, because queer people are pushed to assimilate in ways beyond the realms of marriage and adoption, Manalansan’s critique of fighting for legal rights only partially addresses the pressures to assimilate that queer people face.

⁶¹ My intention here is not to minimize the effects of second-class citizenship status. Indeed, the subordination and marginalization of second-class citizens is real, and their struggles legitimate. Rather, my aim is to draw attention to the fact that second-class citizens do have legal citizenship which does afford them rights and recognition, albeit limited, that people without legal citizenship do not have.

status is problematic. Too narrow a focus on legal status alone can not account for the strategic deployment of citizenship affected by dimensions of difference such as race, ethnicity, class, sex, gender, and sexuality. The shortcomings of such a binary are revealed particularly when the experiences of Asian/Pacific Islander (API) U.S. immigrants and legal citizens are taken into account. Employing an intersectional approach helps us to understand the distinct effects of systems of knowledges, and structures of power and meaning (including, but not limited to public policies, laws, and cultural productions) on different populations. Centering API U.S. immigrants and legal citizens demonstrates how their lived material realities are connected variously to being denied, obtaining, and losing legal status as immigrants and citizens. More specifically, I argue that despite their status as legal U.S. citizens, many Asian Americans are not recognized as such, nor extended the protections of such legal status, and so experience their citizenship as precarious and instable.

Citizenship is a multi-layered and multi-faceted concept that extends through social, cultural, political, and legal realms. In her descriptions of the various notions of citizenship in her essay “‘Obnoxious to Their Very Nature’: Asian Americans and Constitutional Citizenship,” Leti Volpp posits four types of citizenship: 1) citizenship as legal status; 2) citizenship as rights; 3) citizenship as political activity; and 4) citizenship as identity/citizenship as solidarity (57-58). More specifically, Volpp argues that while we might understand these various discourses of citizenship as “temporally ordered” (58), it is also the case that “the guarantees of citizenship as [legal] status, rights and politics are insufficient to produce citizenship as identity” (67). The lack of access to this fourth category of citizenship, Volpp argues, is

particularly damaging because “the general failure to identify Asian Americans as constituting American national identity reappears to haunt the access to Asian Americans to the first three categories of citizenship” (67). In answer to this dilemma Volpp calls for a strategy that does not merely seek membership within the national body, but rather one that fundamentally transforms it. I agree wholeheartedly with Volpp’s argument that the guarantee of one category of citizenship does not secure full access to other categories. Moreover, in arguing for the centralization of API U.S. immigrants and legal citizens through an intersectional identity politics, I, too, recognize the importance of citizenship as identity. However, I differ from Volpp in that my work focuses on what she labels the first category of citizenship, citizenship as legal status.

Though Volpp seems to take legal citizenship status for granted in “‘Obnoxious to Their Very Nature,’” not all do. In his book *Global Divas*, an ethnographic study of Filipino gay male immigrants in New York, Martin F. Manalansan, IV quotes an unnamed informant who says, “I wish there were no need for visas. I wish I were a citizen of the world” (189). As this informant makes clear, despite our wishes to travel freely between borders and to be “citizen[s] of the world,” citizenship operates within more particular contexts, namely legal ones tied to specific localities that circumscribe our wishes and movements. While it is certainly true that API U.S. immigrants are no longer banned from naturalization as U.S. citizens merely because of their race, they still face legal battles and barriers related to naturalization. I turn here to a discussion of API legal U.S. citizenship to facilitate a more complex understanding of what (legal) citizenship means.

Status as a legal U.S. citizen affords a certain amount of recognition by the U.S. government, as well as a number of rights and privileges. Ideally, all legal U.S. citizens would be equal under the law. As Shane Phelan writes, “citizenship is supposed to guarantee both fair treatment at home and protection abroad” (3), yet for API people who are legal citizens, this has not always proved to be the case. Contrary to the understanding that citizenship is a “universal concept,” in which “all citizens of a particular nation state are equal before the law” (Rosaldo 253), injustices perpetrated by the nation-state against API U.S. immigrants and citizens demonstrate how considering citizenship strictly in legal terms is limiting for API people who are legal U.S. citizens, let alone for those who are not legal citizens. This is not to suggest the unimportance of legal U.S. citizenship for API people, but rather to point to the nuances of understanding API citizenship, legal and otherwise, with fuller complexity.

In what follows I attempt to demonstrate the often always-already precarious position API people have vis-à-vis legal citizenship. More specifically, I begin with a partial history of some of the legislative acts that have explicitly disallowed Asian/Pacific Islanders access to U.S. immigration and to legal U.S. citizenship. The immigration and citizenship history of Asian Americans is a considerable field of study. To attempt to present a comprehensive telling of that history is beyond the scope of this chapter.⁶² However, in order to demonstrate API people’s contested access to U.S. immigration and legal U.S. citizenship, I offer a glimpse at selected

⁶² Although I discuss particular legislative acts, my emphasis here focuses primarily on the significance of the adoption and repeal of these acts as indicative of changes in access for APIs to U.S. immigration and legal citizenship. Thus, more specific analyses of these acts’ legal particularities are beyond the scope of this chapter.

portions of Asian American immigration history. In particular, I highlight immigration exclusion acts that barred Asians from legal U.S. immigration and hence an opportunity for legal U.S. citizenship, and other legislative acts that explicitly determined access to citizenship for Asians. Although in the remainder of this chapter I pay particular attention to analyzing immigration controls based largely on race, in the next chapter I look more closely at the interplay of sexuality and immigration. Ultimately, the kweer critique of immigration I develop by teasing out implications of race in this chapter, and of sexuality in the next chapter allows for a more cohesive analysis of queer Asian American immigrant subjects and subjectivities. In the meantime, the specific and partial analysis of Asian American immigration history I offer here is a strategic effort to emphasize the importance of legal citizenship, even if it is only a fraction of what determines nationality and national belonging in the fullest sense.

Asian Exclusion Acts

The legality of U.S. citizenship for Asian Americans is one facet of a larger context in which their citizenship must be considered. The Naturalization Act of 1790 granted all “free white persons” the right to U.S. citizenship, and thus excluded non-“free white persons” from being naturalized as U.S. citizens (R. Lee 107; L. Lowe 20; Okihiro 48; Yung 423). More specifically, until 1870 it was only white men that were granted American citizenship. While in 1870 men of African descent could become naturalized, Asian men were barred from becoming citizens in a series of exclusionary legislative acts beginning in the late 19th century and continuing until the first third of the 20th century. The Page Act of 1875 explicitly prohibited

immigration by women for the purpose of prostitution, but implicitly was effectively used as a way to disproportionately deny Chinese women entry to the U.S. (Chacón 345, Somerville “Sexual Aliens” 78). Following a few years later was the Chinese Exclusion Immigration Act of 1882, explicitly barring Chinese immigration, specifically of Chinese laborers, and naturalization of legal residents (Yung 424; Zia 28). Then, the 1917 Immigration Act established “Asiatic Barred Zones” to prohibit immigration of laborers from virtually all of Asia except for Japan (Lee 108; Yung 426), specifically barring Asian Indians from citizenship and ownership of property (L. Lowe 13). Next, the Cable Act of 1922 targeted both women’s citizenship rights and interracial marriage by stating that an Asian woman who married a man who was an American citizen was not eligible for citizenship, and also that an American woman with U.S. citizenship who married a man not eligible for U.S. citizenship could lose her own citizenship as punishment. At the time, Asians were still barred from becoming citizens, which meant that the scope of the Cable Act, in effect, was limited to deterring white women who were U.S. citizens from engaging in interracial relationships with Asian men by threatening these women with the loss of citizenship. After, the Immigration Act of 1924 excluded all aliens ineligible for citizenship (except Hawaiians and Filipinos) from immigrating (L. Lowe 13; Yung 426; Zia 31). Hence, because at this time citizenship is only extended to white men and men of African descent, this act facilitated (white) European immigration while halting Asian immigration, particularly of the Japanese (Zia 31). Filipinos, however, were exempted from the Immigration Act of 1924 and were the only Asians eligible for immigration because at the time the Philippines was a U.S. territory⁶³, and Filipinos

⁶³ In fact, Spain’s agreement to the Treaty of Paris in 1898 made the Philippines among the first

were considered U.S. nationals and held U.S. passports (Zia 34). Ironically, because the Philippines were annexed by the U.S. in 1898 after the Spanish-American War (Zia 142) and hence not considered its own independent country, Filipinos had more access to U.S. immigration than people from other Asian countries. Eventually, however, the Tydings-McDuffie Act of 1934 promised to convert the Philippines from a U.S. territory to its own commonwealth (in ten years time), which resulted in Filipinos' immediate reclassification as aliens prohibited from citizenship because they were not white or of African descent (Yung 426; Zia 35).

What these exclusionary acts reflect are the ways in which Asian immigrants were strategically denied U.S. immigration and citizenship as they began to be perceived as an increasing threat to white U.S. laborers, U.S. economics, and U.S. national identity. Thus, access to legal immigration and citizenship revolved around the racist and classist maintenance of U.S. white supremacy.⁶⁴ For example, prior to 1882, when Chinese labor was integral in harvesting Hawaiian sugar plantations, and building the first trans-continental railroad, the Chinese were seen as a useful and valued labor force (Yung 423-424). However, as the U.S. experienced a period of labor unrest, during which white U.S. laborers are striking for improved working conditions and better pay, an anti-Chinese movement arose and led to the 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act. A second example of the strategic deployment of exclusionary legislative acts can be seen through the targeting of Japanese in the 1924 Immigration Quota Act. In the early 1890s, the Japanese were seen as a growing

colonies of the U.S. along with Guam and Puerto Rico.

⁶⁴ For other ways in which U.S. white supremacy was/is maintained, see George Lipsitz's *The Possessive Investment in Whiteness*.

threat because of the combination of their increasing immigrant populations and the perception of them as “least assimilable and the most dangerous to this country [the U.S.]...They come here...for the purpose of colonizing and establishing permanently the proud Yamato race. They never cease to be Japanese” (McClatchy qtd. in Zia 31). Based in part on a perception of Japanese people as not assimilating to U.S. cultural norms, a fear of Japanese colonization comes to inform the Immigration Act of 1924, once again highlighting the use of exclusionary acts to maintain a racist U.S. white hegemony.⁶⁵

Exclusion Acts Repealed

Beginning in 1943, Asian men finally became eligible for U.S. citizenship as exclusion acts were repealed by new legislation. First one specific Asian ethnicity was extended eligibility for citizenship, and then another, and another, etc. until 1952 when the last repeal act was passed (L. Lowe 11). More specifically, the Magnuson Act of 1943 repealed the Chinese Exclusion Immigration Act of 1882, allowing Chinese immigration and naturalization of legal residents (L. Lowe 20; Yung 424; Zia 40). Next, in 1946 the United States finally declared the Philippines independent, and granted Filipinos and Asian Indians the right of naturalization (L. Lowe 13; Yung 427; Zia 40). Then, in 1950 the Act of 19 August 1950, which amended the Immigration Act of 1924, allowed non-quota immigration status to the spouses and minor children of members of the American armed forces, largely affecting aliens of Japanese and Korean ancestry (L. Lowe 13; Yung 427-428; Zia 40). Moreover, in

⁶⁵ There were other legislative acts besides ones focused on immigration that targeted communities of color in order to further maintain U.S. white hegemony. See for example the 1907 Expatriation Act passed by Congress, along with U.S. anti-miscegenation laws of the first half of the 20th century that regulated rights to marriage (Volpp “American Mestizo”).

1952 the McCarran-Walter Act, while still imposing quotas on Asian immigrants allowed aliens previously ineligible for citizenship to be naturalized (Lee 152; Okihiro 48; Yung 428). However, a provision in the McCarran-Walter Act also allowed for the exclusion of and right to deport “any alien who has engaged or has had purpose to engage in activities ‘prejudicial to the public interest’ or ‘subversive to national security’” (Preston qtd. in L. Lowe 9). In addition, in 1965, the Immigration and Nationality Act ended immigration quotas that favored Europeans, opening the borders to an unprecedented number of Asian immigrants, and also allowed family members of naturalized U.S. citizens to immigrate to the U.S. (Yung 428; Zia 4, 196).

Although an expanded access to legalized immigration and citizenship is certainly suggestive of progress for API people, it must be recognized that while more and more Asian ethnic groups were made eligible for legal U.S. citizenship from 1943-1965, it was also the case that this wider eligibility was accompanied by increased regulation and greater scrutiny of immigrant bodies. For example, while on its surface it improved the possibility of Asian immigration, in actuality the 1965 Immigration and Nationality Act “initiated not fewer but indeed more specifications and regulations for immigrants of Asian origins” (L. Lowe 9). In particular, the new immigration regulations of the 1965 act favored educated professionals, especially scientific and professional personnel (Lee 188; Zia 62, 205). Furthermore, as the next section will demonstrate, although the overall scope of Asians eligible for legal U.S. citizenship was expanding, there remain several historical instances in which legal U.S. citizenship of Asians has been granted and then revoked, or else simply

denied and ignored, casting into doubt API people's access to "fair treatment" and "protection" (Phelan 3) even when they are legal U.S. citizens.

Precariousness of Legal U.S. Citizenship for Asian Americans

The struggle for legal U.S. citizenship for API people has been at times an arduous one, battling the journey across oceans and seas, immigration exclusion acts, and any number of other regulations and requirements. Yet, even in obtaining legal U.S. citizenship, Asian Americans have not always enjoyed security, fair treatment, and protection usually associated with citizenship. On the contrary, examples of the revoking of Asian Americans' legal U.S. citizenship as well as the willful denial of Asian American legal citizens' rights disturbingly attests to the lack of stability and security of legal U.S. citizenship for Asian Americans. This precariousness of Asian Americans' legal U.S. citizenship furthers my argument that solely considering the legality versus illegality of citizenship is limiting since in certain instances legal citizenship was only fleetingly bestowed, open to challenges and contestations as though it were, at best, a provisional status instead of a stable and enduring one.⁶⁶

The granting and then subsequent revoking of legal citizenship is just one example of the unreliability of legal U.S. citizenship for Asian Americans. In 1920 Bhagat Singh Thind was granted citizenship by an Oregon court, "on the grounds that he [as an Asian Indian] was Caucasian, but the federal government disagreed and appealed in 1923" (Zia 32). The Supreme Court ruled that being Caucasian was not

⁶⁶ Just as Siobhan B. Somerville's work in her book, *Queering the Color Line*, "attempts to show that questions of race—in particular the formation of notions of 'whiteness' and 'blackness'—must be understood as a crucial part of the history and representation of sexual formations, including lesbian and gay identity and compulsory heterosexuality in the United States" (5), I similarly argue here that questions of citizenship—in particular the formation of "American-ness = whiteness"—must be understood as a part of the racial formation of heterosexual white hegemony in the U.S. in response to increased immigration in the twentieth century.

enough to be eligible for citizenship, but that it was also necessary to be “white” (Zia 33). On these grounds Thind’s claim to U.S. citizenship was denied, and his status as a legal U.S. citizen was invalidated and revoked. Moreover, “the decision in the Thind case was applied retroactively, and the citizenship of the naturalized Indian American was revoked” (Yung 426; Zia 33).

In fact, the Thind decision is not the only example of legal U.S. citizenship status initially bestowed to an API group, and then later revoked. Another example of a radical change in citizenship status involves Filipinos. After having been under Spanish rule for 327 years, when the U.S. defeated Spain in the Spanish-American War in 1898 the Philippines then became a U.S. colony (Arcilla 96). After 1898, as citizens of a U.S. colony, Filipinos were considered U.S. nationals and as such held U.S. passports, and were excluded from the Immigration Quota Act of 1924 (Zia 34). However, with the passing of the Tydings-McDuffie Act of 1934, and the impending conversion of the Philippines from a U.S. territory to a commonwealth that it promised, Filipinos were reclassified as aliens prohibited from citizenship (Yung 426; Zia 35).⁶⁷ Similar to the situation Asian Indians faced in light of the Thind decision, once their citizenship was revoked Filipinos were encouraged to leave the U.S. (and return to their homeland) (Yung 426). In contrast to Thind’s 1923 situation, which was the result of a judicial decision handed down by the Supreme Court, however, the Tydings-McDuffie Act of 1934 was a legislative act enacted by Congress.

⁶⁷ The Tydings-McDuffie Act of 1934 provided for the Philippines’ eventual full independence from the U.S., but mandated a transition period from 1934 to 1946 during which the classification of the Philippines went from a U.S. colony to a commonwealth, affecting Filipinos’ immigration and citizenship statuses. Filipinos present a particularly interesting case because of their unique history as “the only Asian country of origin to have been subjected to a sustained and systematic American experiment in extraterritorial colonial rule” (par. 4). For more on the Philippines as a (post)colonial nation, see Oscar V. Campomanes’ “The New Empire’s Forgetful and Forgotten Citizens.”

The possibility of retroactively revoking a group's legal citizenship through judicial decisions and congressional acts, transforming protected citizen-subjects to foreign aliens, is especially alarming since it provides a precedent and foundation of Asian American legal citizenship as provisional. Unlike discussions of immigration exclusion acts and their clear denial of access to legal citizenship for API people, the bestowing and then revoking of legal citizenship serves to demonstrate that even if access to legal citizenship is obtained, it may not be retained indefinitely. Thus, it becomes clear that even when considering the narrow scope of legal citizenship, it is not enough to simply consider whether one is or is not a legal citizen, for the stability and endurance of being a legal citizen is also at issue. The meaningfulness of being a legal citizen is also something that can not be assumed and taken for granted.

In 1942 the U.S. citizenship of Japanese Americans proved meaningless as President Roosevelt issued Executive Order 9066, authorizing "the military to prescribe military zones from which persons may be excluded" (Yung 427) which led to the forced evacuation and internment of Japanese Americans, many of whom were legal U.S. citizens (Yung 427; Zia 42). Japanese Americans were incarcerated without due process of law simply because of their Japanese heritage. Internment meant an economic disenfranchisement of Japanese Americans through the loss of homes and most other material possessions, for many Japanese Americans were shipped to camps with nothing but whatever they could pack and carry in suitcases. Moreover, some Japanese Americans were made to swear loyalty statements forswearing allegiance to the Emperor of Japan, while others were encouraged to join an all-Japanese American combat team in order to prove their loyalty to the U.S. (Zia

42-43). Even those born in the U.S. did not escape these tests of loyalty. While the majority of interned Japanese Americans endured these tests of loyalty, a few thousand renounced their U.S. citizenship in the face of their internment experiences at the hands of the U.S. government. While there were a significant number of Japanese American internees who resisted coercive efforts by the U.S. nation-state, the fact of their resistance did not change that their U.S. citizenship did not serve to protect them from internment in the first place.

Unfortunately, responding to the threat of terrorism by suspending people's due process of law, without regard to their legal status, has continued beyond the culmination of World War II. Since the World Trade Towers and Pentagon were attacked by terrorists on September 11, 2001, attitudes towards immigrants and people of color shifted. Manalansan writes:

post 9/11 has created an atmosphere of fear for immigrants and people of color that is largely different from the general mainstream uneasiness and fear. Thus, while many Americans are afraid of traveling for fear that the plane they are riding in will be hijacked, immigrants and people of color have a more complicated set of issues they have to confront, including their tenuous relationship with police and other governmental authorities like immigration officers. ("A Gay World Make-Over" 105).

More specifically, the additional set of issues immigrants and people of color face that Manalansan point to here manifested themselves in a post 9/11 noticeable rise in: racial profiling of those who appear to be Arab, South Asian, or Muslim (Narasaki and Han 4); anti-immigration policies that erode due process protection of immigrants

and make them more vulnerable to deportation (Narasaki and Han 5); employment discrimination disproportionately affecting Asian Americans, South Asians, and Sikh Americans, including those who are legal permanent residents (Narasaki and Han 8); and scrutiny of APA citizens as they exercise their voting rights (Narasaki and Han 10). In addition, as Narasaki and Han point out in their essay, “Asian American Civil Rights Advocacy and Research Agenda After 9/11”:

The Patriot Act erodes the rights of even immigrants with legal status, including legal permanent residents, by adding numerous triggers for detention and deportation... Instead of applying criminal laws, which offer stronger due process protections, DOJ [the Department of Justice] has aggressively sought to use minor technical violations of civil immigration laws as the basis for conducting sweeping investigations and detaining individuals for indefinite periods of time (5-6).

Just as with Japanese Americans facing internment during World War II, there are many legal U.S. citizens and legal permanent residents today whose legal status has been rendered meaningless by the nation-state because of a suspected threat of terrorism.

To a large degree, practices of detention, employment discrimination, racial profiling, and deportation are understood as acceptable only in so far as those they are perpetrated against are not recognized as part of the nation-state. It is for this exact reason that some, like author Karin Aguilar-San Juan, want to resist playing into the notion that “as Asian Americans we are somehow always foreigners in America, longing for home in another faraway continent” (26); for, to seek “home” outside the

U.S. only serves to reinforce the foreignness which is so often already ascribed to Asian Americans. However, if Shane Phelan is indeed correct in positing that “[i]n order to challenge injustice and claim decent treatment, one must be recognized as a member of the polity being challenged” (83), given the exclusionary laws historically levied against them, as well as historical and contemporary denials of their legal statuses and suspensions of their civil rights, I fear that despite their status as legal U.S. citizens, Asian Americans will not be recognized, nor given their just due, as such.

Collectively, this overview of U.S. legislative acts relating to Asian immigration and legal citizenship demonstrates the strategic and calculating ways in which the U.S. nation-state has denied, bestowed, revoked, and ignored Asian American’s legal citizenship. While facilitating a focus on legal citizenship for Asian American subjects and subjectivities that discourses of queer citizenship tended to overlook, these discourses do very little to facilitate a focus on sexuality. Once again, singularly aimed critical approaches fail to account for the full range of intersectionality of queer Asian American subjects and subjectivities.

Chapter Conclusion

In this chapter I argue that existing discourses of queer citizenship, legal citizenship, and Asian immigration each reflect particular weaknesses that obscure a focus on queer Asian American subjects and subjectivities. Whereas previously I used kinging culture to examine the dynamic of nationality and national belonging at play within a U.S. context of queer identifications through an examination of cultural citizenship, in this chapter I shift my examinations to legal citizenship through a focus

on U.S. immigration discourses. Before discussing immigration, however, I begin by looking at conceptualizations of queer citizenship. More specifically, in light of changing legislation in the past five years that successfully challenged and overturned laws that curtailed the rights of queer people in the U.S., there is an increased hopefulness and belief that the discrimination that maintains queer people's second-class citizenship status is coming to an end. Such a focus on overcoming second-class citizenship overshadows queer concerns about actual legal citizenship, and establishes the importance of legal recognition. Examples of Asian/Pacific Islander people's contested access to U.S. immigration and legal U.S. citizenship make a similar case for the importance of legal recognition for Asian Americans. These glimpses into Asian American immigration history detail the barriers that have prevented API people from gaining legal U.S. citizenship; they also offer examples illustrating that even with legal U.S. citizenship Asian Americans have not always enjoyed the full protection of that status, in many ways connected to the experience of second-class citizenship by queer people. Together, the lack of focus on legal citizenship in discourses of queer citizenship, and the ways in which Asian/Pacific Islander people in the U.S. have been barred from immigration and citizenship and/or have been discriminated against despite their legal citizenship confirms a continued need to draw attention to legal citizenship to better account for queer Asian American subjects and subjectivities. In developing a kweer approach that centers queer Asian American subjects and subjectivities, in the following chapter, I attend, more specifically, to the intersectionality of immigration and sexuality.

Chapter 4: Intersectionality Within Immigration

Ultimately, de-naturalizing U.S. discourses of queer citizenship, legal citizenship, and Asian immigration points to gaps where a kweer critique intervenes in order to understand formations of racialized sexual identities in a national context. Immigration and legal citizenship affect queer Asian American subjects and subjectivities in a variety of ways. While it is much easier to separate out parts of a multi-faceted and multi-layered subjectivity than to deal with it as one whole—to make identity singular and simplified—the intersectionality and interdisciplinarity of a kweer approach allows for the cultivation of an identity politics that retains complexity from which similarly complex analyses can emerge.

In the previous chapter I highlighted a select range of legislative acts that explicitly determined access to U.S. immigration and citizenship for Asians, ranging in date from 1790 to 1965, with most dating from the first half of the 20th century. Though most apparently they were dealing centrally with race and ethnicity, many of these legislative acts have gender and sexuality components, both explicit and implicit. For example, when the U.S. wanted foreign laborers, immigration policies allowed Asian male laborers access into the country. Then, when immigration acts were more restrictive, such as the Page Act of 1875 and the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, they fostered the persistence of existing predominantly male Chinese bachelor societies because Chinese women, including wives, were denied access to immigration. Later immigration acts, however, like the 1950 amendment to the Immigration Act of 1924 and the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965, tended to make immigration more readily accessible for spouses and other family members of

those who are U.S. citizens or legal permanent residents of the U.S. In this way, (heterosexual) marriage and family relationships become key contemporary factors for immigration applicants, so much so that according to a Migration Policy Institute essay by Ramah McKay, “family reunification is the largest of four major avenues through which individuals qualify for admission and ‘lawful permanent residence’ in the U.S.” (par. 2). Beginning in 1990, additional changes to immigration policies have more directly affected gay and lesbian immigration.

Revisiting Immigration Through A Sexualized Frame

Despite implications of gender and sexuality that run through myriad immigration acts, scholarship that brings together immigration scholarship and sexuality scholarship to consider the intersectional and interdisciplinary connections that are enmeshed between the two has only recently emerged. Not coincidentally, connections between sexuality and immigration have come into greater focus since immigration laws have changed in explicit relationship to gay and lesbian immigration. Both the Immigration Act of 1917 and the 1952 Immigration and Nationality Act had provisions excluding immigrants on the basis of “mental defect,” which implicitly allowed for the exclusion of gay and lesbian immigrants since at the time homosexuality appeared on the official lists of mental disorders from both the American Psychiatric Association and the American Psychological Association. In her essay, “Sexual Aliens and the Racialized State: A Queer Reading of the 1952 U.S. Immigration and Nationality Act” Siobhan Somerville focuses on how the “INA’s construction of sexual aliens was embedded in and maintained a thoroughly racialized model of national citizenship” (77). She posits the 1952 Immigration and

Nationality Act as a turning point where explicit exclusions based on race were removed and replaced by other exclusions foregrounding sexual acts and identities, rather than specifically attending to any one particular racial or ethnic group (76). In this way, Somerville extends her earlier work from her book *Queering the Color Line* that focused on African American and black sexualized racial formations by establishing the extent to which discourses of sexuality and race are thoroughly enmeshed with one another within immigration laws, thus opening up a space to talk about a wider range of queer communities of color whose racialization is affected by immigration. A 1965 amendment to the Immigration and Nationality Act, however, made exclusion based on “sexual deviation” explicit, effectively banning gay and lesbian immigrants who disclosed their sexuality. Despite the American Psychiatric Association’s removal of homosexuality from their official list of mental disorders in 1973, followed by the American Psychological Association’s similar removal in 1975, it was not until Congress passed the Immigration Act of 1990 that the phrase “sexual deviation” was removed from the Immigration and Nationality Act and that the explicit ban against gay and lesbian immigrants into the U.S. finally ended. In addition, while claims based on refugee and asylum had been grounds for immigration since Congress adopted the Refugee Act of 1980, it was not until 1994 in the *Matter of Toboso-Alfonso* that the Immigration and Naturalization Services (now known as U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services⁶⁸) first ever granted asylum

⁶⁸ In actuality, Immigration and Naturalization Services was substantially re-organized in 2003, in part in response to terrorist attacks in the U.S. in 2001 and the ensuing actions to prevent future attacks through better control of U.S. borders and greater scrutiny of immigration. No longer a part of the Department of Justice, immigration related services and offices were re-assembled and re-configured within the newly formed Department of Homeland Security. Instead of one entity overseeing immigration issues, three new offices were established: the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) was tasked with handling the administrative aspects of immigration; the U.S. Immigration

based on an applicant's sexuality. Further entrenching sexuality's relationship to asylum appeals, then-Attorney General Janet Reno issued a memorandum in 1994 that designated *Matter of Toboso-Alfonoso* as a legal precedent so that asylum applicants no longer had to prove on a case-by-case basis that being gay or lesbian constitutes a social group (seen as a class instead of just individuals) under the Refugee Act of 1980. Although asylum applicants are still tasked with demonstrating evidence of the persecution they face, Reno's memorandum explicitly removed the burden of demonstrating that being gay or lesbian qualified as being a member of a social group eligible for asylum status. Together, these explicit changes in immigration laws and their particular effects on gay and lesbian immigrants have fostered an increase in intersectional analyses of sexuality and immigration.

One crucial text at the forefront of studying immigration through a sexualized frame is the 2005 anthology *Queer Migrations: Sexuality, U.S. Citizenship, and Border Crossings* edited by Eithne Luibhéid and Lionel Cantú, Jr. *Queer Migrations* is organized into two parts, the first providing "historical, cultural, and structural analyses of norms, institutions, and discourses that affect queer (and other) migrants in the United States" (Luibhéid xxxi), and the second part focusing on "ethnographic and sociological studies of queer migrants' lives and communities" (Luibhéid xxxi). Together, these two parts serve *Queer Migrations'* goals of challenging existing frameworks of immigration and sexuality scholarship, as well as maintaining attentiveness to studying the lived experiences of queer migrants.

and Customs Enforcement (USICE) branch handles all investigative and enforcement tasks; and the Customs and Border Protection (CBP) division is in charge of border functions.

While not only concerned with legal immigration to the U.S.⁶⁹, of the four major avenues through which people can legally immigrate to the U.S.—family reunification, employment-based immigration, refugee and asylum seekers, and diversity-based immigration (also known as the lottery)—it is asylum and family reunification that are most often discussed by essays in *Queer Migrations*. In her introductory essay, Eithne Luibhéid focuses specifically on the refugee/asylum system. In particular, Luibhéid draws a distinction between “regular” immigration control and the refugee/asylum system where the former “frames entry as a privilege that can be granted in a discriminatory manner by a sovereign nation-state” (xvi) and favors nuclear, heteropatriarchal families, while in the latter “admission is supposed to be granted based on the United States commitment to upholding international human rights laws” (xvi) but is “often driven as much by U.S. foreign policy considerations as by the merits of individual claims” (xvii). She also goes on to critique the ways in which “traditionally, studies of immigration have been framed by a view of migrants as individual actors making rational choices based on cost-benefit analysis, the horizon of the nation-state, and models of assimilation” (xxi).

Though Luibhéid’s critiques of immigration policies and immigration studies are not only applicable in queer contexts, they do take on special significance in queer contexts. Perhaps most obvious is how her critique of the way in which “regular” immigration control favors nuclear, heteropatriarchal families points to potential sites of tension for queer people, from both inside family structures, as well as from being

⁶⁹ In fact, in her use of “migrant” editor Eithne Luibhéid “makes no distinction among legal immigrants, refugees, asylum seekers, or undocumented immigrants” (xi) and furthermore argues for a redefinition of citizenship beyond merely considering legal definitions of rights and obligations that can better take into account people who are multiply marginalized.

outside of heteronormative relationships. Annually, the highest percentage of immigrants entering the U.S. do so based on grounds of family reunification, with immediate relatives of U.S. citizens (spouses, unmarried children under the age of 21, and parents of U.S. citizens over the age of 21) being granted visas without regard to numerical quotas. In addition to not being limited by a quota system, the immigration applications of immediate relatives of U.S. citizens are also processed and approved more quickly than applications based on other classes of family reunification⁷⁰. In effect, these specific family formations—married heterosexual spouse of a U.S. citizen, unmarried child under 21 of a U.S. citizen, and parent of a U.S. citizen over 21—have become privileged within immigration law. Since same-sex spouses are not included in spousal provisions for family reunification, queer people have no access to immigration through this avenue which is among the ones most used by immigrants as a whole. In addition, the other privileged categories of immediate relatives are dependent on strong ties within nuclear families that are sometimes disrupted when queer people come out. In so far as the current immigration system continues to favor these specific family formations over others, queer people will continue to be disproportionately disadvantaged.

Just as significant as exposing the discrimination within regular immigration controls for queer immigrant subjects and subjectivities is highlighting how Luibhéid's critique of the refugee/asylum system and of traditional studies of

⁷⁰ Other grounds for family reunification, in order of preference, include: unmarried children over the age of 21 of U.S. citizens, spouses and unmarried children of U.S. permanent resident aliens, married children of U.S. citizens, and siblings of U.S. citizens over the age of 21. In a background paper for a U.S. immigration study conducted by Patricia Hatch for the League of Women Voters of the U.S., Hatch pointed to the high amount of backlog of applications based on these alternate familial ties and estimated that wait times for these immigrants to obtain permission to enter the U.S. ranged from at least five years up to twenty years (n.p.).

immigration relates to queer politics. Early in her essay, Luibhéid defines her understanding of “queer” as pushing for transformation rather than accommodation within existing social structures (x). In pointing to the extent to which asylum claims are highly influenced by U.S. foreign policy concerns, Luibhéid argues that rather than actually upholding international human rights laws, the refugee/asylum system merely plays into maintaining U.S. dominance in international contexts. Thus, her critique of the refugee/asylum system is an attack against globalized U.S. dominance that is based on advancing queer politics. In regards to Luibhéid’s critique of traditional studies of immigration, from her viewpoint, such studies fall too easily into emphasizing the individual actor and accepting a narrative of assimilation that leaves no room for understanding the ties to the home country that continue for many migrants. Moreover, she finds problematic the ways in which queer migration is framed as a “movement from repression to freedom, or a heroic journey undertaken in search of liberation” (xxv) because such framing unquestioningly positions the U.S. as the site of freedom and liberation⁷¹. By pushing our attention beyond the individual to other factors that influence immigration, fighting against pressures to assimilate, and keeping in mind that migration is not simply a movement from repression elsewhere to freedom in the U.S., Luibhéid expands the borders of traditional studies of immigration and advocates a queer strategy for rethinking immigration.

⁷¹ Similarly highlighting the point that we must challenge the fantasy of the U.S. as the ultimate site of freedom and luxury for queer people, Karin Aguilar San-Juan writes about the “colonial impulse” behind “bringing ‘home’ oppressed queers from all over the world” to the U.S. in her essay “Going Home: Enacting Justice in Queer Asian America” (29).

Asylum

Looking more closely at immigration through asylum is Timothy J. Randazzo in his essay, “Social and Legal Barriers: Sexual Orientation and Asylum in the United States.” Although since 1994 the U.S. has accepted hundreds of asylum applications based on sexuality-based persecution, not all of these applications have been granted. In fact, in their “Summary of GLBTHIV Asylum Claims” prepared for the American Immigration Lawyers Association Annual Conference on Immigration Law in June 2007, Holland and Knight LLP highlighted forty-seven asylum applications, fourteen that were granted, four that were denied in part and granted in part, and twenty-nine that were denied (29). In his essay, Randazzo focuses on social and legal barriers that applicants for asylum based on sexuality-based persecution continue to face, in order to raise our awareness that despite advancements in immigration law related to queer people, much more work still needs to be done.

In examining barriers to successfully applying for immigration to the U.S. on the grounds of asylum from sexuality-based persecution, Randazzo effectively demonstrates that, as Luibhéid argues, immigration is not simply a movement from repression to freedom. He illustrates a less triumphant context of immigration based on asylum. Some of the barriers that Randazzo discusses include: departure (barriers that prevent applicants from leaving their home countries and making it to the United States); community isolation (even after arrival in the U.S. gay and lesbian asylum seekers face possible alienation—from immigrant communities from which they hide and/or deny their sexuality, and from the mainstream gay movement which do not meet the needs of recently arrived immigrants, especially immigrants of color); legal

barriers (having the services of an attorney is a decisive factor in successful immigration proceedings); gender disparity in legal elements (human rights abuses are more commonly associated with men than women and hence lead to gender disparities for lesbians seeking asylum); and contestations as to whether asylum seekers are actually gay and/or lesbian (having to prove their sexuality becomes particularly problematic for applicants who are not publicly out, are single, or do not officially belong to any gay or lesbian organizations).⁷² To begin overcoming these barriers Randazzo points to the importance of acknowledging structural and political intersectionality between immigrant rights and LGBT rights as the means through which to implement more effective strategies for change on behalf of gay and lesbian asylum seekers. Furthermore, he highlights a few key organizations [the International Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission, the National Center for Lesbian Rights, the Lambda Legal Defense and Education Fund, and the Lesbian and Gay Immigration Rights Task Force (now known as Immigration Equality)] that offer services and assistance to queer asylum applicants in the hopes that with such assistance they might increase the likelihood of their applications being successful.

Randazzo's focus on the continuing social and legal barriers that gay and lesbian asylum seekers face in the U.S. makes an important critique against the U.S.

⁷² Randazzo goes on to scrutinize the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigration Responsibility Act (IIRIRA) of 1996 and the new restrictions it imposes that work against all asylum applicants, including lesbian, gay, and transgender applicants. According to Randazzo, three aspects of the IIRIRA have had especially harsh effects on applicants: a one-year filing deadline, expedited removal, and mandatory detention. Navigating immigration systems and applications within a one-year time frame can be particularly tricky for people who have had little prior knowledge of, or contact with, the legal processes involved. Also, not everyone knows about the possibility of applying for asylum based on sexuality, and even those who do know about the option don't always know the specifics about how to go about doing it. Secondly, expedited removal provisions in the IIRIRA gives immigration officers the power to deport individuals with little review, and hence makes it difficult for these immigrants to appeal their decisions. Thirdly, mandatory detention treats applicants attempting to flee persecution like criminals.

as being the site of freedom for immigrants, but is not without its own weaknesses. On one hand, he convincingly works against the characterization of immigration to the U.S. as a move from repression to freedom. On the other hand, his approach almost seems to emphasize asylum applicants' victimization, not only in their home countries, but also in the U.S. In addition, while Randazzo justifiably points to the inadequacy of most queer groups and organizations' familiarity with immigration laws and their inability to offer potential applicants information about the asylum process, he says nothing about the effects of homophobia within the legal process. In contrast, in her essay, "The Difficulties of U.S. Asylum Claims Based on Sexual Orientation" Swetha Sridharan notes that:

Although the success rates of sexual-orientation-based asylum claims have improved since the first cases were argued, immigration officers and judges are still known to consider their homophobic or discriminatory beliefs in deciding the eligibility of LGBT applicants. Legal practitioners have observed that the success of their case hangs almost entirely upon the attitude — accepting or resilient — of the adjudicator. (n.p.)

Calls for change must not only be addressed to queer groups and organizations, but to immigration officers, judges, and others involved in the legal proceedings of applying for asylum. Moreover, although seeking refugee and asylum status is one of the four major avenues through which people can legally immigrate to the U.S., on the whole the allotment of refugees and asylees being admitted to the U.S. has been declining in the last two decades, and typically the number of refugees admitted each year

accounts for only a small fraction of the total number of those immigrating⁷³. Thus, focusing centrally on gay and lesbian asylum applicants, as Randazzo does, means focusing on a limited percentage of the total number of queer immigrants.

Furthermore, Randazzo makes no mention that even those who are successful in their asylum application must still obtain status as legal permanent residents⁷⁴.

Family Reunification

Asylum based on sexuality-based persecution, however, is not the only means to consider immigration through a sexualized frame; another strategy relies on using the discourse of family reunification. Despite the huge backlog of applications based in family reunification, it is still the largest avenue through which people immigrate to the U.S. every year, accounting for about two-thirds of all immigrants entering as legal permanent residents (McKay). It is especially immediate relatives of U.S. citizens that have historically accounted for the largest group of legal immigrants. Among the three categories of immediate relatives of U.S. citizens (spouses, unmarried children under the age of 21, and parents of U.S. citizens over the age of 21), it is more specifically spouses that account for the majority of incoming immigrants who are immediate relatives. In fact, between 2000 and 2007, the number of people legally immigrating to the U.S. based on being spouses of U.S. citizens was

⁷³ For example, the Office of Immigration Statistics' *2007 Yearbook of Immigration Statistics* notes that 48,217 people arrived in the U.S. with refugee and asylee status, versus the 689,820 people who obtained legal permanent resident status based on family reunification grounds (26, 40).

⁷⁴ According to Immigration Equality's publication entitled "Sexual Orientation and Immigration: The Basics," "there is currently a backlog of more than 10 years before these applications are granted" (9). Out of the 1,052,415 people who obtained legal permanent resident status in 2007, 136,125 had been refugees and asylees. Among the four major avenues of immigration, only those entering on the basis of diversity had fewer numbers of people obtaining legal permanent resident status at 42,127 (Office of Immigration Statistics 26).

greater than the combined number of those entering who are unmarried children under the age of 21, and parents of U.S. citizens over the age of 21 (Office of Immigration Statistics 18). Recognizing the emphasis on spouses of U.S. citizens as the most preferred and prevalent status among categories of family reunification, another strategy to gain immigration rights for gays and lesbians has been to focus on the immigration of foreign born same-sex partners of U.S. citizens and legal permanent residents of the U.S. In particular, efforts have been made to pass the Uniting American Families Act (UAFA) [formerly known as the Permanent Partners Immigration Act (PPIA)]. Although the UAFA aligns itself with the emphasis on spouses of U.S. citizens within immigration law, the UAFA does not seek to make the status of same-sex partners equal to spouses, but rather to create a new category of relationship, permanent partner, that is recognized by the Immigration and Nationality Act and could be used by U.S. citizens and legal permanent residents to sponsor their foreign born same-sex partners for immigration.⁷⁵

Insofar as the Immigration and Nationality Act (INA) and the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) give preferential treatment to immigrant applicants based on grounds of family reunification, working within discourses of

⁷⁵ In both the U.S. Senate and U.S. House of Representatives, the “Uniting American Families Act 2009” was introduced (S. 424 and H.R. 1024, respectively) on 12 February 2009. According to Immigration Equality’s blog, Senator Patrick Leahy (D-VT) convened a Congressional hearing on UAFA on 3 June 2009, for the first time opening up a discussion about bi-national gay and lesbian couples (Ralls “History!”). In addition to being a forum to increase the visibility of support by members of the Senate Judiciary Committee including Senator Arlen Specter (D-PA) and Senator Chuck Schumer (D-NY), this historical hearing also provided a platform for individuals to voice their stories illustrating the need for UAFA (Tiven). Following this discussion, not only did UAFA gain the official support of Senators Maria Cantwell (D-WA) and Richard Durbin (D-IL) (Ralls “Notes From the Senate”), but California Congressman Mike Honda also introduced into the U.S. House of Representatives the “Reuniting Families Act” (H.R. 2709) in another attempt to work towards immigration reform that includes an end to discrimination against access to immigration for same-sex partners. News media coverage on both UAFA and Honda’s “Reuniting Families Act” has continued since the June 3rd Congressional hearing, raising further public attention.

family reunification seems the most logical strategy to obtain immigrant rights for gays and lesbians.⁷⁶ The Uniting American Families Act works within the discourse of family reunification in several ways that include the implementation of specific language, terms, and concepts in the act, as well as the campaign efforts to educate people about the issues, to gain public support, and ultimately to obtain enough congressional votes to pass the bill into law.

Most obviously, UAFA adopts the very language of family reunification in its name—“Uniting American Families.” Originally titled the “Permanent Partners Immigration Act” this legislation was first introduced in 2001 to the U.S. House of Representatives by Representative Jerrold Nadler in the 107th session of Congress as H.R. 690, and then in 2003 re-introduced in the 108th Congress as H.R. 832, and initially introduced to the U.S. Senate by Senator Patrick Leahy in the 108th Congress as S. 1510. Since its June 2005 reintroduction to both the U.S. Senate and U.S. House of Representatives in the 109th Congress, however, the short titles of the bills were amended to be “Uniting American Families Act.” In both the 110th Congress in 2007, and most recently in 2009 in the 111th Congress, the titles have remained the “Uniting American Families Act.” Throughout the five sessions of Congress that this bill has been introduced in, the text of the bill has remained virtually the same while “Uniting American Families Act” has been added as the primary short title.

The shift that began in 2005 from being known as the “Permanent Partners Immigration Act” to “Uniting American Families Act” is a significant one. The former title makes explicit the bill’s focus on obtaining immigration rights for

⁷⁶ It must be noted here, however, that it is not without irony that appeals to family reunification by gay and lesbian immigrants stand in stark contrast to earlier immigration laws that explicitly obstructed Asian immigrants’ efforts to form families.

permanent partners. Implicitly, however, the title “Permanent Partners Immigration Act” foregrounds the foreign nationals attempting to immigrate to the U.S., and also highlights immigrant applicants’ non-marital status to U.S. citizens and U.S. legal permanent residents. In contrast, the title “Uniting American Families Act” not only makes explicit the bill’s focus on family reunification, but clearly stresses the American-ness of the U.S. citizens and U.S. legal permanent residents who would use this legislation to help their same-sex permanent partners immigrate into the country. In the rhetoric of the latter title, permanent partners who are foreign nationals are implicitly deemed part of “American families.” Although a seemingly simple change in title, the newer name, “Uniting American Families Act,” effectively shifts the frame of reference to family reunification and standing as an American (as a U.S. citizen or legal permanent resident), and compellingly appeals for gay and lesbian immigration on the grounds most popular for immigrants in general.

Another way in which the language of the Uniting American Families Act works within the immigration discourse of family reunification is through its emphasis on family. Most visible is the explicit change in titles from stressing “partners” to “families.” Existing Immigration and Nationality Act (INA) provisions use the term “immediate relative” in reference to children (under the age of 21), spouses, and parents (of U.S. citizens over 21), as well as the term “family” to discuss relationships between U.S. citizens and legal permanent residents and their other relatives, for example adult children (over the age of 21), grandchildren, and brothers and sisters. In addition, some parts of the INA allow for the Attorney General to waive certain provisions “to assure family unity.” “Family” is thus a well-established

and key concept in the INA. In changing the name of the bill from “partners” to “families,” the “Uniting American Families Act” more clearly reflects the INA’s concern for family on its surface. Moreover, whereas “Permanent Partners Immigration Act” seemed instead to reference only an individual partner, the use of “families” in UAFA is more ambiguous, and subtly transforms and entrenches same-sex partners firmly into the discourse of (nuclear) families.

A third way in which the language of the Uniting American Families Act works in relationship to discourses of family within the INA is through trying to institute a new category of familial relationship—permanent partner. Though the title of the bill has changed over the years, the text of the bill has remained virtually the same and continues to seek the insertion of the phrase “permanent partner” (and where appropriate, “permanent partnership”) throughout the Immigration and Nationality Act, often following references to “spouse.” In other words, the UAFA is pushing for changes that would amend the INA to read “spouse or permanent partner” where it currently only says “spouse.” The addition of “permanent partner”/“permanent partnership” makes clear that the UAFA is in no way seeking to replace, or even redefine “spouse” as it is currently used in the INA. In effect, the insertion of the new language of “partner” makes clear that it is distinct from “spouse.” Although on one hand the change in title from explicitly identifying “partners” to “families” can be seen as a way to subtly position same-sex partners within discourse of families, on the other hand, the text of the bill makes clear that the insertion of “permanent partner” is not a contestation or challenge seeking to usurp “spouse,” or even heterosexual marriages or (nuclear) families. This twofold strategy

of using the rhetoric of family, while at the same time distinguishing between “permanent partner” and “spouse” allows the UAFA to more cautiously advocate for gay and lesbian immigration rights.

In addition to how the specific language of the Uniting American Families Act works within immigration discourses of family reunification to advocate for gay and lesbian immigration, it is important to note that campaign efforts in support of UAFA have also similarly appealed to discourses of family reunification. However, whereas the former concentrates on legal discourses, the latter foregrounds cultural discourses. This cultural focus comes as no surprise since campaign efforts advocating for the UAFA are aimed at educating people about the issues and gaining public support in order to foster a social climate in which relationships between U.S. citizens and legal permanent residents of the U.S. and their same-sex partners are not only recognized, but also respected. More specifically, two main cultural strategies emerge: the first is a comparison between U.S. immigration laws and other countries’ immigration laws in regards to family reunification provisions; the second is a comparison between same-sex bi-national couples and opposite-sex bi-national couples in the U.S.

Internationally, laws regarding LGBT people differ from country to country. While those seeking asylum in the U.S. based on sexuality-based persecution attest to some countries’ greater intolerance and oppression of LGBT people compared to the U.S., there are also examples of laws in other countries’ that better acknowledge and protect LGBT people’s rights compared to the U.S.⁷⁷ In reference to advocating for

⁷⁷ For a brief overview of worldwide laws relating to the legal status of LGBT people, see Daniel Ottosson’s “Wrap Up Survey on the Laws Worldwide Affecting Gays, Lesbians, and Transgendered People” compiled in 2006 for the International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association (ILGA).

gay and lesbian immigration to the U.S., one cultural strategy used is to point out other countries' recognition of same-sex partnerships that allow the foreign national in bi-national same-sex couples grounds for legal immigration based on family reunification. For example, in their brochure "Immigration Project," the National Center for Lesbian Rights (NCLR) highlights that:

As of June 2006, nineteen countries have changed their immigration policies or laws to allow LGBT citizens to sponsor their same-sex partners for immigration purposes. These countries include: Australia, Belgium, Brazil, Canada, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Iceland, Israel, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Portugal, South Africa, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom. (5-6)

In this instance, the NCLR presents these countries as more favorable places than the U.S. for LGBT people to immigrate to, since unlike the U.S. they recognize same-sex partnerships to allow foreign nationals in bi-national couples access to immigration. This tactic critiques U.S. laws by painting them as not as up-to-date as other countries' laws, suggests the social and cultural advancement of other countries' attitudes and laws regarding LGBT people, and urges the U.S. to follow suit.

Making the same argument about other countries' advancement in immigration laws in comparison to the U.S. are Lena Ayoub and Shin-Ming Wong in their essay "Separated and Unequal."⁷⁸ One of their essay's sub-sections forthrightly argues that "The United States Should Heed Legislation of Eighteen Countries

⁷⁸ Although they do not reference it directly, it is not surprising that the title of Ayoub and Wong's essay echoes the challenge made by *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* in 1954 to overturn the doctrine of "separate but equal" originally upheld in *Plessy v. Ferguson* in 1896, for in the U.S. African American and LGBT civil rights are often seen in close connection with one another.

World-Wide that Have Granted Immigration Equality” (559). In the body of this sub-section Ayoub and Wong give details about each of the eighteen countries’ specific legislation and under what terms the sponsorship of same-sex partners for immigration is allowed. Then, they conclude this sub-section by advocating the passage of UFAA by Congress as a way of “strengthening the right to family and family unity for gay and lesbian U.S. citizens and lawful permanent residents as well as their children” (581). Though they are writing from within a legal discourse, the arguments they make also extend to cultural discourses. In effect, Ayoub and Wong depict the importance of family reflected by other countries, as well as the U.S., and point to the hypocrisy of homophobic U.S. immigration legislation that denies LGBT people the right to family and family unity. Once again, this tactic of comparing U.S. immigration laws to other countries’ laws heightens the gap between other countries and how the U.S. trails in drawing level with them to produce a kind of U.S. cultural shame.

Another strategy used in campaign efforts in support of the Uniting American Families Act that appeals to cultural discourses of family is a comparison between same-sex bi-national couples and opposite-sex bi-national couples in the U.S. Two LGBT organizations in particular, the Human Rights Campaign (HRC) and Immigration Equality, rely heavily on the stories of same-sex bi-national couples to convey the tragedy and injustice they face by not having access to sponsor their foreign national same-sex partner for immigration. By emphasizing these representations of same-sex bi-national couples, they attempt to not only demonstrate how homophobic U.S. immigration laws play out in people’s lived reality, but also to

personalize the issue for all Americans who desire the right to family. On their website, HRC states that one of their “issues” is “international rights and immigration,” and focuses specifically on the UAFAs. In addition to offering a short introduction to the issue, HRC’s website also offers a handful of stories from couples describing various hardships: having to leave the U.S. and the lives and home they established to be able to live together in a country where both partners could obtain legal access to immigration (Berta); forced separation because one partner must leave the U.S. alone and return to his country of origin after failing to obtain status to remain in the country legally (Iaccarino); and, the high costs associated with various aspects of trying to obtain legal status to remain together, whether in the U.S. or abroad (Berta; Iaccarino). Similarly, in their publication, *Family, Unvalued: Discrimination, Denial, and the Fate of Binational Same-Sex Couples under U.S. Law*, Immigration Equality along with Human Rights Watch offer personal story after personal story about how they are being unfairly and harshly victimized by current U.S. immigration laws. Though each individual’s story is unique, several themes run through them all—that if they were an opposite-sex bi-national couple they would not be facing these struggles; that all they want is to be together and be able to live free from discrimination based on their sexuality and pursue happiness; and that their love and commitment to one another is true and meaningful. These stories are meant to sway our emotions and gain the sympathy crucial to bringing about a cultural shift and legal changes that honor all families, including gay and lesbian bi-national partnerships.

Other Avenues of Legal Immigration

Although there are four major avenues for legal immigration into the U.S., scholarship that brings together immigration and sexuality has tended to focus on only two of those avenues—refugee and asylum seekers, and family reunification. The other two avenues—employment-based immigration and diversity-based immigration—have yet to garner any major attention in such intersectional and interdisciplinary analyses. Though there are certainly gay and lesbian immigrants who were able to obtain legal status to immigrate to the U.S. precisely through employment-based and diversity-based grounds, these two avenues are less explicitly connected to issues of sexuality, and hence more marginalized in examining immigration through a sexualized frame. Certainly, the random, lottery aspect of diversity-based immigration seems unproblematically unconnected to sexuality.⁷⁹ There is, however, much more analysis that could be done in regards to the intersectionality of sexuality and employment-based immigration.

On one hand, the extent to which the intersectionality of immigration and sexuality are overwhelmingly represented through discourses of seeking asylum based on sexuality-based persecution and discourses of family reunification and the struggle to have same-sex partnerships with foreign nationals recognized for immigration purposes overshadows other dimensions. Surveying the websites of two major national LGBT organizations (the Human Rights Campaign and the National

⁷⁹ One element about the diversity lottery that does seem to receive a lot of attention from queer immigration organizations like Immigration Equality, however, is its potential danger for undocumented immigrants who, if selected, may face being returned to their country of origin and then be banned from returning to the U.S. for up to ten years. In addition, now that the Department of State is only accepting electronically filed applications, there is fear about how the information gathered might be used against undocumented immigrants.

Gay and Lesbian Taskforce), and of the four organizations Timothy Randazzo specifically names as helpful for gay and lesbian people seeking asylum based on sexuality-based persecution (the International Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission, the National Center for Lesbian Rights, the Lambda Legal Defense and Education Fund, and Immigration Equality) demonstrates this extent. While Lambda Legal's publication "Sexual Orientation and Immigration: The Basics" includes a brief introduction of each of the four major avenues of immigration, their website focuses specifically on the issue of "Immigration and Asylum," stressing asylum based immigration, which includes some information on immigration policies and procedures for those who are HIV positive. The National Center for Lesbian Rights also predominantly presents immigration information related to asylum, but does also include information about the Uniting American Families Act, the HIV exclusion, and transsexual spouses and immigration ("Immigration Project: The Work We Do"). "Immigration" is not among the International Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission's "Issues," which instead focus on more broadly ranging topics of various human rights struggles related to sexuality, such as: discrimination and equality; torture, violence and abuse; decriminalization; health and human rights, etc. ("Our Issues"). However, they do offer many a list of referrals to other organizations focused on asylum, as well as a link to access asylum related documentation ("Asylum Resources"). Similarly, the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force does not list immigration as one of its "Issues," but searching the website for references to "immigration" results in numerous hits of press releases and other sources that discuss immigration and its connection to LGBT people and issues. The Human

Rights Campaign's focus is on "International Rights and Immigration" and focuses primarily on the Uniting American Families Act. The "Articles" and "Resources" available in HRC's "International Rights and Immigration" are mostly about international marriage rights and relationship recognition laws, but there is also one article on diversity-based immigration, and one article on asylum. Immigration Equality, by far, presents the most information about employment-based immigration among these six sources. In addition to also making available "Sexual Orientation and Immigration: The Basics" which Immigration Equality co-published with Lambda Legal, Immigration Equality also lists "Employment-Based Immigration Options" under "Immigration Basics" along with information about diversity visas. Still, the main foci reflected in their "Issues" and by their "Resource and Publications" are on bi-national couples and asylum ("Immigration Equality").

On the other hand, considering that employment-based immigration accounted for the second largest number of persons legally immigrating and obtaining legal permanent resident status in the U.S. from 1998 to 2007 (United States, "Table 6" 18), only falling below the number of cases based on family reunification grounds, it's a bit surprising that scholarship that brings together immigration and sexuality has not focused on it more. However, when attention to race in conjunction with sexuality and immigration are used to consider employment-based immigration, what emerges is a new, distinctly kweer critique of immigration. This kweer critique arises from challenging discourses of asylum and family reunification built upon narratives of victimization and individual heroism, and helps to uncover the ways in which

employment-based immigration is intimately tied to both sexuality and race in ways that need to be explored more thoroughly.

Exploring Employment-based Immigration's Queer Potential

Despite their predominance throughout scholarship focused on the intersectionality of immigration and sexuality, discourses of asylum and family reunification are built upon narrow narratives of victimization and individual heroism that cannot fully encompass the experiences of all immigrants, specifically queer API immigrants. Taking queer API immigrant subjects and subjectivities into account helps reveal other nuances of intersectionality that incorporate attention to race and ethnicity that sexualized frames of immigration do not necessarily consider. In her critique of both family reunification and asylum as grounds for immigration, Eithne Luibhéid emphasizes the way in which these systems uphold heteronormative nuclear families and U.S. dominance in international contexts. Furthermore she goes on to point out how asylum seekers, in particular, are lauded for the individualism they demonstrate in journeying from oppression to (supposed) liberation. In addition, my review of appeals to both asylum and family reunification have clearly shown their dependence on producing narratives of victimization (either through state-sanctioned threats and acts of persecution and torture based on sexuality in the former, or through the state's denial and disavowal of committed relationships and forced separation of bi-national couples in the latter). An emphasis on employment-based immigration threatens the very foundation of representations of queer immigrants that sexualized discourses of asylum and family reunification have established. Though this foundation's emphasis on victimization and individualism has been effective in

helping some queer applicants to obtain legal immigration status, it also dangerously reifies a heterosexist and racist immigration system.

Investigating employment-based immigration challenges existing discourses of queer immigration in productive ways. First, by distancing itself from the focus on seeking asylum it opens up a space to imagine queer foreign nationals as something other than victims of state sponsored homophobia. It is not my intention to deny that such state sponsored homophobia is occurring, or even to argue that we should not focus on these international violations of human rights. The International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association's recent report, "State-Sponsored Homophobia: A World Survey of Law Prohibiting Same Sex Activity Between Consenting Adults," by Daniel Ottosson clearly shows that legal discrimination is still internationally wide-spread. However, as long as a one-sided emphasis on homophobia is allowed to continue, other issues will continue to be overlooked. For example, also included in "State-Sponsored Homophobia" is the United Nation's 2008 declaration supporting the rights of LGBTI people, and the 66 countries that supported it (9-11), as well as a section that gives an overview of the legal rights (such as employment non-discrimination laws protecting sexuality and gender identity, recognition of anti-gay hate crimes laws, same-sex marriage rights, same-sex joint adoption rights, etc.) that LGBTI people have obtained internationally (48-54). These additions are muted and virtually hidden next to the narrative of victimization perpetuated by "State-Sponsored Homophobia's" focus on discrimination. What is needed is a more balanced and holistic approach that makes it possible for queer foreign nationals to be something other than victims, for other countries to be

something other than perpetrators of discrimination, and for the U.S. to be something other than an uncontested site of liberation. In particular, by disrupting the representation that the U.S. is the site of liberation for queer people persecuted in other countries, it becomes more possible to examine discrimination and persecution based on sexuality and other dimensions of identity, such as race and ethnicity, within the U.S. itself.

Another way in which a focus on employment-based immigration challenges existing discourses of queer immigration in productive ways is through disrupting the institutionalization and naturalization of the homonormative same-sex married couple as the only sanctioned queer family formation deserving immigration rights that is foreground by existing appeals to family reunification, such as the Uniting American Families Act. Again, it is not my intention to deny same-sex couples' desire or need for the social, cultural, and legal recognition of their same-sex partnership. There are very tangible material advantages attached to the recognition of same-sex partnerships, inside and outside of issues of immigration. However, seeking legal rights conditionally based on a monogamous, long-term partnership, does not account for all queers. In effect, such a strategy centered on same-sex marriage limits and confines the parameters of queer relationships according to dominant heterosexist norms and maintains pressures to assimilate and conform to those oppressive norms. Coupled with the pressures to racially and ethnically assimilate that immigrants are always already faced with, queer immigrants' lives are even further confined and circumscribed by hegemonic white American heterosexist norms. In addition, according to the 2000 U.S. Census, Asians in the U.S. have a marriage rate higher

than the proportion of the total U.S. population, suggesting an emphasis on (heterosexual) marriage among Asians (Reeves and Bennett 7). Taking into account queer API subjects and subjectivities, both immigrant and non-immigrant, reveals the degree to which marriage is a contested terrain and far from the idealistic solution presented by discourses of family reunification-based immigration.

Perhaps more subtly, investigations of employment-based immigration are also threatening in their disruption of the narrative of the heroic individual immigrant journeying from foreign persecution to U.S. liberation in so far as employer sponsorship is required. Exceptions aside, generally all categories of employment-based immigration require the sponsorship of a U.S. employer. Sponsorship requires that the employer demonstrate that no U.S. workers are able to fill the position through a labor certification from the U.S. Department of Labor, and then the employer must file an application for an employment-based visa and wait for approval (“Employment Based Immigration Process”). Unlike those individuals seeking asylum who are charged with providing evidence of their persecution based on sexuality or the threat of such persecution, and convincing immigration authorities that they qualify for asylum, the processes involved with obtaining employment-based immigration does not rest on the individual seeking to immigrate, but rather lies mostly in the hands of the sponsoring employer. The shift of responsibility and authority onto the employer to apply for immigration status on behalf of employees counteracts narratives of the individual immigrant heroically escaping foreign persecution. In fact, the heroism highlighted by the length to which employers must present a case that convincingly valorizes the skills of employees to successfully

obtain an immigrant visa for their employee is not about fleeing persecution, but is rather about the individual being an asset to the U.S. labor force and economy. Moreover, employment-based immigration mitigates the representation of the U.S. as savior and liberator by foregrounding its need for foreign national employees. In both these examples, any potential liability based on individuals' sexuality is alleviated by individuals' potential contributions to worker productivity.⁸⁰ Nevertheless, in light of the overwhelming number of Asian immigrants who have been able to immigrate to the U.S. through employment-based preferences since the 1965 Immigration and Nationality Act⁸¹, and the 2000 U.S. Census finding that "Asians were more likely than the total population to be in management, professional, and related occupations" (Reeves and Bennett 14), considering employment-based immigration for API immigrants of all sexualities remains a rich field, ripe for exploration.

Chapter Conclusion

In this chapter I maintain that an analysis of immigration specifically through a sexualized frame offers new ways to understand and evaluate the major avenues of immigration, particularly in regards to queer immigration. Immigration and sexuality have long been historically connected, often deeming only particular social and family formations as acceptable; however, what is considered acceptable varies for

⁸⁰ This argument could also prove useful in advocating for the passage of the U.S. federal Employment Non-Discrimination Act (ENDA) which would provide protection against workplace discrimination based on sexuality and gender identity. ENDA was not successful in its attempts to obtain Congressional approval, even when the amendment stipulating protection of gender identity was voluntary dropped from it, and to date in the 111th Congress, had not been re-introduced.

⁸¹ For example, in 2008, the number of people obtaining legal permanent resident status through employment-based preferences from Asia was 93,882. This was over three times the 28,601 people from Europe who obtained employment-based immigration status the same year, and Europe accounted for the second largest group of immigrants by employment (Department of Homeland Security "Table 10").

different groups of immigrants at different moments. Shifts in the connections between immigration and sexuality are signaled through the various effects of immigration laws on gay and lesbian immigrants. Some of these shifts include the various provisions excluding immigrants on the basis of “mental defect” and “sexual deviation,” the later changes in immigration law that repealed these exclusions, as well as the changes that designated persecution based on sexuality as grounds for asylum status and an eventual path to legal U.S. citizenship.

Using the anthology *Queer Migrations*, edited by Eithne Luibhéid and Lionel Cantú, as a cornerstone text, this chapter focuses on specific avenues of immigration. Asylum-based immigration is one of the two avenues that *Queer Migrations* seems to discuss at length. I offer a reading of Timothy J. Randazzo’s essay “Social and Legal Barriers” that extends his argument that immigration is not simply a movement from repression to freedom in order to underscore the effects of homophobia within the legal process and call for change from immigration officers, judges, and others involved in the legal proceedings of applying for asylum. A second avenue of immigration—family reunification, accounts for the largest number of people who qualify for immigration to the U.S. To a large degree, examining immigration through a sexualized frame based on family reunification revolves around the Uniting American Families Act (UAFAs), proposed legislation to change immigration provisions to acknowledge same-sex partnerships between foreign nationals and their partners who are U.S. citizens and/or legal permanent residents for the purpose of obtaining sponsorship for immigration. Evaluating both the cultural and legal discourses of the UAFAs reveals how these discourses have been shaped to advocate

for gay and lesbian immigration rights, from literal appeals to the “family” to emotional appeals based on the hardships bi-national couples must endure in their struggle to be able to remain together in the U.S. with legal immigrant status.

The work to obtain immigration rights for gay and lesbian people based on appeals to family reunification and seeking asylum continues, although the over-emphasis on these two specific avenues of immigration leaves other avenues unexplored and underdeveloped. Highlighting and investigating the potential that employment-based immigration has for advocating for lesbian and gay immigration begins to acknowledge another avenue. More specifically, employment-based immigration challenges existing discourses of queer immigration. First, revealing the confines of seeking legal rights conditionally based on monogamous, long-term partnerships disturbs the proscriptive relationships associated with family reunification. Second, emphasizing the U.S.’s need and dependence on foreign nationals in its labor force provides a stark contrast to the victimization associated with seeking asylum. By offering readings a greater sense of the intersectionality of immigration and sexuality in this chapter, the foundation has been laid for my later discussions of immigration through a kweer lens that considers race in conjunction with immigration and sexuality so as to center queer Asian American subjects and subjectivities.

Chapter 5: Politics of Racialized Sexual Representations: Intersectionality Within Kinging

Representations are one means through which to help broaden social imaginations and deepen people's understandings in the service of creating cultural, political, and legal changes. The isolation and erasure that has resulted from queer thought's relative lack of engagement with race as it pertains to non-whites makes representation an especially important issue for queer subjects of color.

Representations can be particularly effective tools to demonstrate that queer Asian American subjects and subjectivities are necessarily part of cultural, political, and legal citizenship discourses.

Working through the realm of representations, kinging culture has the potential to foster claims of belonging and reflect a generalized notion of citizenship within a context of queer identification. Kinging culture's questioning and challenging of gender has proved particularly potent in regards to gendered contexts, such as nurturing queer women's communities, building community across sex segregated gay male and lesbian spaces, and challenging mainstream culture's heterosexist patriarchy. Although it is perhaps kinging culture's contributions to discourses of gender that are most widely recognized and celebrated, its significance to analyses of the intersectionality of gender, sexuality, class, race, and nationality, in representations, performances, and beyond is perhaps even more crucial. It is the intersectionality within kinging that allows further explorations of belonging and citizenship within a U.S. context of queer identification and brings the issues of nationality and national belonging into stronger focus. In particular, I investigate how

centering the politics of representation more specifically along lines of race and nationality (rather than allowing gender alone to dominate analyses) opens up distinct discourses of citizenship around recognition, acknowledgement, and belonging.

Revisiting Camp and Kinging Through A Racialized Frame

While camp discourses such as ones that define camp as being in opposition to mainstream culture, and as a specifically queer discourse that challenges ideologies such as heterosexist patriarchy and sexist beauty ideals serve to demonstrate the ways in which kinging as a form of performance can be seen as having political roots, as well as to highlight the empowered queer visibility, art activism, and critical social commentary that is present throughout kinging culture, there are other camp discourses that reveal other aspects of kinging culture. Rather than reflect an establishing and asserting of citizenship through kinging, what is revealed through these other camp discourses are contestations and denials of citizenship, particularly for queers of color.

One such understanding of camp that exposes struggles over citizenship for queer subjects of color is the discourse of camp as exaggeration. Looking at camp as exaggeration in terms of race reveals the way in which the theatricality of white masculinities have been over-emphasized, while the theatricality of masculinities of color have been under-emphasized. A central point to this discussion of camp as exaggeration can be surmised by Susan Sontag's argument that "the essence of camp is its love of the unnatural: of artifice and exaggeration" (53). In part, it is this element of artifice that Leslie Feinberg is so strongly opposed to in his essay "Allow Me to Introduce Myself." As a self-identified transgender person, Feinberg

experiences discussions of gender expression as exaggerated as a judgment criticizing and ridiculing a person's gender articulation (25). From this vantage point, it becomes clear that Feinberg does not ascribe drag queen's and drag king's gender expressions as exaggerations as a show of respect for those gender articulations.

However, the reasons for the same absence of discussing parody, artifice and exaggeration when it comes to discussing kinging and masculinities of color aren't as clear. One of the few people who has published academic work specifically looking at drag kings and issues of race is J. Jack Halberstam. He argues that:

For the white drag king performing conventional heterosexual maleness, masculinity has first to be made visible and theatrical before it can be performed. Masculinities of color and gay masculinities, however, have already been rendered visible and theatrical in their various relations to dominant white masculinities, and the performance of these masculinities presents a somewhat easier theatrical task. Furthermore, although white masculinity seems to be readily available for parody by the drag kings, black masculinities or queer masculinities are often performed by drag kings in the spirit of homage or tribute rather than humor. (Halberstam "Drag Kings" 235)

In this passage Halberstam emphasizes the point that because of its position of privilege in our white supremacist, patriarchal, heterosexist society, white heterosexual masculinity is largely unexamined. He draws attention to the need to denaturalize white heterosexual masculinity, and in so doing makes evident its position of privilege and opens it up to being scrutinized just as other masculinities have long been. On one hand, pointing out the way in which white masculinities are

“readily available for parody” suggests the usefulness of discourses of camp as exaggeration in analyses of white masculinities. On the other hand, in reinforcing performances of black or queer masculinities based on homage and tribute, Halberstam distances these performances from discourses of camp as exaggeration, as well as from camp discourses more generally. Thus, while turning to camp discourses is useful in illuminating several aspects of citizenship, nationality, and national belonging in kinging culture, it is not often useful in specifically racialized contexts. Just as Quare Studies and Queer of Color Critique have transformed LGBT Studies and Queer Theory, similar intentional intersectional approaches are necessary for analyzing citizenship, nationality, and nationality in specific racialized contexts in kinging culture.

Frameworks For Analyzing Race in Kinging

A notable early text that highlights politics of racialized sexual representations in kinging culture is J. Jack Halberstam’s essay “Mackdaddy, Superfly, Rapper: Gender, Race, and Masculinity in the Drag King Scene” originally published in *Social Text* in 1997, later reworked for inclusion as the chapter “Class, Race and Masculinity: The Superfly, The Mackdaddy, and The Rapper” in *The Drag King Book* by Halberstam and Del LaGrace Volcano. The original essay examines two styles of drag king performances, exploring relations between masculinity and race within each style. The two styles are what Halberstam designates the “theatrical cabaret-style performances” and the “non-theatrical walk-on appearances...in drag king competitions” (“Mackdaddy” 105). To a large extent, Halberstam depicts the distinctions between these two styles as resting on amount of preparation that goes

into a performance, and the resulting elaborateness of kings' costuming and choreography ("Mackdaddy" 107-108). In the attempt to look at discourses other than camp to analyze kinging culture, in what follows I resist looking to the ways in which these designations of "theatrical" and "non-theatrical" can be mapped onto discourses of camp, and instead echo Halberstam's distinction of kinging from camp, as well as his emphasis on performativity.

More specifically, in the first part of his essay, Halberstam notes that in non-theatrical walk-on competitions, drag kings of color most often won because "the rapping and dancing of the black drag kings and the cool gangsta aesthetic of the Latina and Asian drag kings made the white drag kings look quite dull by comparison" ("Mackdaddy" 107). From this observation Halberstam goes on to discuss the way in which historical formations of white masculinity were predicated precisely on their being "nonimitative and nonperformative" (i.e., dull), as a means to explain why in drag king competitions, white masculinities were less successful than masculinities of color ("Mackdaddy" 107). While Halberstam does include the response of a white drag king named Mo B. Dick who makes clear his frustration that walk-on competition winners were often butch women of color who hadn't prepared an act, but rather who just walked up on stage in the clothing that they usually wear, he is also careful to foreground that these walk-on competitions should not be criticized for favoring masculinities of color, but rather that this bias should be critically analyzed for the ways it reveals the workings of white privilege, and more particularly white masculinity's status as unmarked.

After having established the position of white masculinity as invisible and unmarked, especially within non-theatrical walk-on competitions, Halberstam then discusses theatrical cabaret-style performances. He writes, “white masculinity for the drag king has to be made visible and theatrical before it can be performed” (“Mackdaddy” 112). Thus, theatrical drag king shows become the site where white masculinities can be visible and exciting. Moreover, through his research conducted in New York and London, Halberstam found that it was the case that cabaret-style performances were largely performed by white drag kings. In particular, Halberstam praised those white drag kings who have been able not only to make white masculinities visible, but also to scrutinize and critique white masculinities; he writes, “their performances tend to erode the myth of self-sufficiency that props up hegemonic masculinity and reveals its dependence on the vilification of working-class and queer masculinities as well as masculinities of color” (“Mackdaddy” 107). Just as Halberstam makes clear that non-theatrical walk-on competitions are best examined to reveal the workings of white privilege, he similarly illustrates that theatrical cabaret-style performances are a rich source for deconstructing white masculinities.

In terms of a framework for analyzing race in kinging, in the first part of “Mackdaddy, Superfly, and Rapper” Halberstam does an excellent job of drawing attention to white privilege, which is too often made invisible to maintain its being unexamined. In addition, it is refreshing to see whiteness in the foreground of a racial analysis, highlighting the fact that “race” is not synonymous with “non-white.” However, despite these important contributions that Halberstam makes to thinking

about white masculinities, I argue that his framework for analyzing whiteness does not allow for meaningful examinations of nuances in performances of masculinities of color.⁸² First, as important as focusing on white privilege is, it must also be noted that such a focus allows the consequences of hyper-visible masculinities for kings of color to be overlooked.⁸³ Second, because Halberstam so clearly positions white masculinities as dominant, and as the standard that all other racialized masculinities deviate from, there is little room left to imagine masculinities of color as having a subjectivity of their own. Even though he points out the dependency of white masculinities on masculinities that it can “other” (e.g., distinguish itself from, and through this distance attain a subject position as “self”), in making white masculinity visible he reifies it as a subject position. That is, “othered” masculinities, such as masculinities of color, exist only in so far as they are projections of white masculinities. This is similar to how Edward Said, in his book *Orientalism*, focuses on British, French, and to a lesser extent American formulations of “Orientalism” in order to study how the ways in which each country constructed “the Orient” reflects not on any real “Orient,” but rather on themselves. What both Said’s and Halberstam’s works make clear is that their real focus is on the “self,” the Occident in

⁸² Moreover, in centering his analysis on the distinctions between theatrical cabaret-styles performances and non-theatrical walk-on appearances, the framework Halberstam constructs to examine race evades the issue of socio-economic class. That is, by stressing the performativity of masculinities of color in contrast to the (non-)performativity white masculinities attention is drawn away from how some kings may not have access to leisure time to prepare for performances, or discretionary funds for elaborate costuming.

⁸³ To read more on the dynamic of differential presentations of race, see Sara E. Chinn’s book *Technology and the Logic of American Racism*, especially chapter 3, “Fixing Identity: Reading Skin, Seeing Race” where Chinn writes, “It is not simply that white people would hardly want to pass lower down on the social ladder; rather, black people are attentive readers, minutely aware of how color, class, and race intersect with self-presentations in a way that white people, assuming the transparent binary of racial difference, do not feel the need to be” (64). The effect of the burden on people of color associated with “the need to be [attentive]” is a crucial part of critiquing white privilege, yet such analysis is not always facilitated by focusing on whiteness.

the former, and white masculinities in the latter. Thus, while useful in examining whiteness in kining, this framework does not help to analyze masculinities of color in kining.

In the second half of “Mackdaddy, Superfly, Rapper,” however, Halberstam does look specifically at black masculinities. He tries to weave a thread from the history of cross-dressing blueswomen in the 1920s to the tradition for black male impersonation (“Mackdaddy” 106). Within this history Halberstam cites Storm DeLaverie as an early drag king pioneer. Black drag kings that Halberstam features more centrally are Dréd and Shon. Unlike white kings whom Halberstam characterizes as performing parodies, that is, “pok[ing] gentle fun at white masculinities,” in the case of Dréd and Shon he writes, “parody gives way to homage” (120).⁸⁴ Further demonstrating Dréd and Shon’s homage to aspects of black masculinities, Halberstam cites the carefulness with which they pick the songs they perform to, and mix rap with R&B classics, arguing that their act is a re-appropriation that challenges rap’s sexism and heterosexism rather than a reinforcement of those oppressions. This example is significant in so far as it highlights that traditions of kining can vary in different racialized cultural spheres, and foregrounds the

⁸⁴ While Dréd’s repertoire is ever growing and sure to include such acts of homage, it is interesting to note how Dréd himself says, “I parody a lot of African-American figures, really to bring attention to and take power away from the image by being a woman portraying them...I do it mainly through humor because it breaks walls and makes people able to see things that are different from what they know” (qtd. in *Boston Phoenix On-line*). Halberstam, however, does not mention Dréd’s parodic performances of African-American masculinities in either “Mackdaddy, Superfly, Rapper” or *The Drag King Book*.

possibility of empowerment through the re-appropriation of oppressive cultural productions.⁸⁵

Halberstam further develops this same argument of parody giving way to homage in *The Drag King Book*, highlighting the way in which “Dréd and Shon manage to pull off an incredibly sexy show which appeals less to the crowd’s sense of humor and more to their desires” (143). Once again Halberstam emphasizes these opposite yet paired tropes of kinging—the parody of white masculinities, critically addressing the dominance of white privilege and white masculinity on the one hand, and the homage to black masculinities, combating the devaluation and stigmatization of black masculinities by celebrating representations of them on the other hand. However, these two tropes of kinging represent strategies of performing masculinities that remain effective only within a narrow white/black binary where white masculinities express the dominance of white privilege (and hence need to be deconstructed), and where black masculinities are devalued and stigmatized because of how they are positioned in a white-dominated society (and hence need to be reclaimed and celebrated). This binary leaves no room for those whom the strategies of parody and homage may not be sufficient: for performers of white and black masculinities that do not conform to the above limited parameters (for example performers of subjugated white masculinities who wish to highlight the way in which despite having white privilege, they still face other oppressive forces, and performers of privileged black masculinities who wish to highlight the ways in which despite

⁸⁵ However, while acknowledging the potential of empowerment through re-appropriation in this specific example of Dréd and Shon, it is not necessarily the case that all acts of homage to racialized masculinities are exempt from being oppressive along other lines of difference. Thus, homage must not be assumed to be unproblematically celebratory, as it sometimes feels to me Halberstam implicitly suggests.

facing racial oppression, they have power over others); or, those outside a black/white framework, such as Asian/Pacific Islander kings. Another problematic aspect of this parody/white/humor versus homage/black/desire binary framework that Halberstam presents is that the discussion of Dréd and Shon's appeal to the crowd's desires (instead of the crowd's sense of humor) is not accompanied by an analysis of the too often familiar exoticization and hypersexualization of masculinities of people of color.

Whereas Halberstam's first framework centering whiteness does not help to analyze masculinities of color in kinging, this second framework positing the two tropes of white/parody/humor versus black/homage/desire helps to illuminate only a narrow range of black masculinities. Unfortunately, many drag king scholars since Halberstam have tended to uphold this limited white/parody/humor versus black/homage/desire framework. Lauren W. Hasten's drag king ethnography is just one text that argues, along similar lines as Halberstam, that "performances of black drag kings tend to be more respectful of black masculinity, offering up a sort of 'tribute,' rather than a [parodic] critique" ("Camp"). Hasten, however, sees herself as taking her racial analysis of black drag kings further than Halberstam in that she discusses the danger of a drag king (namely, Dréd) appearing as a black man in our racist society. More specifically, Hasten writes, "Camp is dangerous because it calls attention to itself; given facts of life such as racial profiling, it is not difficult to imagine why a black drag king might not want to call attention to himself on the street" ("Camp").⁸⁶ Hasten then goes on to suggest that black drag king's emphasis

⁸⁶ It is interesting to note here that both Halberstam and Hasten refer to the same experience of Dréd having trouble catching a taxicab as exemplifying that "masculinity, at least for kings of color, is no

on performances focused on homage and desire is closely tied to their conscious avoidance of performances of parody as a defense against racism. While respectful performances of black masculinities should be recognized, it is also important to acknowledge how using limited and binary frameworks will necessarily minimize the scope of analysis, as well as fail to account for complexity in performances.

Another framework for analyzing race in kinging revolves specifically around cross-racial performances—most specifically white kings performing black artists' songs and black kings performing white artists' songs. Though Halberstam does not delve into the exoticization and hypersexualization of masculinities of color, it is important to note that he does take the difference between white kings' and kings of color's performances to raise a discussion of cross-racial king performances, and their different meanings ("Mackdaddy" 125). In particular, Halberstam discusses the way in which black kings performing white artists' songs puts into the foreground hidden black influences, whereas white kings performing black artists' songs can be seen as a form of re-colonization ("Mackdaddy" 125). The framework that is established through this discussion makes central a history of anti-black racism in the U.S., and accordingly understands cross-racial performances by white kings as a perpetuation of that anti-black racism, and cross-racial performances by black kings as a resistance of such racism. While this framework, too, is limited by a black/white binary, it does help highlight the power differential in the availability of particular types of masculinities, racialized and otherwise, that certain performers may portray.

guarantee of access to forms of social privilege" (Halberstam, "Mackdaddy" 128). Hasten, though, goes on to stress that more than just being denied social privilege, black masculinity is also susceptible to physical violence.

One example of contestations of power within this cross-racial framework surfaced in postings on craigslist.org from mid to late August 2002. There was some heated discussion in response to a white drag king performing as a black character at the King of San Francisco 2002 contest. One anonymous person writes:

Any white woman who impersonates an obvious african-american [sic.] character should think twice before going on stage. While there may not be any ill-intent in her motivations behind her performance, a white person putting on a 'black' face is too reminiscent of the painful violent history of slavery in the U.S. and related mockery of black culture in the not so distant past. It is not cute nor funny, in my opinion, to watch a white person interpret what she thinks is black vernacular, gesture and the likes in order to gain a laugh.

This critic notes both the white king's cross-racial performance, as well as the white king's use of parody/comedy. Admittedly, it's not entirely clear if it's the cross-racial aspect, the use of parody, or the combination of the two that is most objectionable in this instance. What is clear in this post is that in some drag king communities there is little room for white kings to parodically mock black culture without dangerously straying over some people's ideas of lines of racial appropriateness in king performances. In fact, it seems that any cross-racial performance by a white drag king would fall to similar criticism, given the acknowledgment that even in the lack of any ill-intent on behalf of the performer a history of racism looms large. This proved to be the case at one particular performance during the fifth annual International Drag King Extravaganza (IDKE.5) held in Minneapolis, Minnesota

when one white-skinned king impersonated the black music artist Prince. Donning a dreadlock wig and clad in make-up to darken the color of his skin, the king's performance was met by surprise by audience members, followed soon after by their dismay and disapproval. Whether through turning their backs to the performer, audible boos during the performance, or withholding their applause at the conclusion of his performance, the audience made visible and vocal their displeasure. Conversations during other IDKE events the following day echoed these same disapproving sentiments, despite the performer's explanation that he was attempting to pay tribute to Prince through a performance in the vein of homage, rather than in mocking parody as the audience had perceived.

While certainly understandable that given the history of anti-black racism in the U.S., especially the proliferation of racist stereotypes through blackface, cross-racial performances by white kings are subject to a particular kind of scrutiny, proscriptions against cross-racial performances that prevent performers from exploring the range of facets of racialized performances seem to set up a disturbing precedent that hinders kinging culture's radical potential to deconstruct and transgress constructions of race, as it has with gender. Indeed, if, as has been the case, it is widely accepted that one can perform only one's own race/ethnicity, then the frame of reference for racialized representations becomes one of personal ownership and essentialized characteristics rather than one of social constructions and stereotypes. Instead of shying away from racialized elements of kinging performances (in favor of keeping a narrow focus on gender issues) and letting constructions of race within kinging culture go unexamined as long as they adhere to the binary framework of

parody/white/humor versus homage/black/desire, it is important to pay particular attention to and more closely examine these diverse elements within kinging culture.

In some ways my concerns here echo discussions about non-traditional casting in theatre. Non-traditional casting is defined as “the casting of ethnic and female performers in roles where race, ethnicity, or gender are not germane to the character’s or play’s development” (Newman 24). In response to the overwhelming degree to which theatre, film, and television remain dominated by all-white casts, non-traditional casting was conceived of to address the imbalance by opening up more opportunities to people of color, women, and people with disabilities who had been historically marginalized. Similarly, wanting to open up greater opportunities for kings of color and for thinking about racialized masculinities in kinging, I resist proscriptions against cross-racial kinging performances. However, whereas non-traditional casting is meant to be employed only when performers’ identities don’t disrupt their performances, in contrast I argue that in kinging culture we must always consider the significance not only of gender, but also of race and other dimensions of difference, and look to cross-racial performances as one source that promotes such examinations.

While I, too, have been disturbed by white kings performing in blackface, rather than simply condemn such performances, I argue that they open up productive spaces to explicitly discuss race in kinging because of the revulsion they elicit. In comparison, it becomes much more difficult to discuss the similar dynamics of race, power, and privilege at play when Latin kings perform songs by black artists, or when white or black kings perform Asian characters because of the extent to which these

performances are accepted as ordinary. Whereas audiences in the U.S. are acutely attuned to the racism of blackface, other manifestations of racism through Asian American and Latin American bodies and characters unremarkably circulate. It is my hope that in taking a kweer approach, I can promote a more conscious attention to performances of racialized masculinities in all kinging.

It is through maintaining intersectional analyses within kinging culture, particularly in regard to racialized sexual representations that I move towards Kweer Studies. In this way, just as intersectional analyses have transformed LGBT Studies and Queer Theory, fostering Quare Studies and Queer of Color Critique, I move towards Kweer Studies to better focus on racialized nuances and highlight issues of nationality and national belonging for non-white queer subjects and subjectivities, within kinging culture and beyond.

The Archetypal King of Color: Dréd

Existing analyses of race in kinging have overwhelmingly focused on and written about one particular non-white king, Dréd, positioning him in many ways to be the archetypal drag king of color.⁸⁷ There are several possible factors that could have contributed to Dréd being positioned in this way, for example: having achieved recognition in 1996 as Drag King of Manhattan (*Dréd Meet Dréd*), or all the rewards he's received since, or his charismatic on-stage presence, or the multitude of events at which he's performed, or the countless other credits in Dréd's king career, or the

⁸⁷ The pronouns preferred by kings vary from individual to individual; some kings use male pronouns in and out of drag, some use female pronouns in and out of drag, other use male pronouns only while in drag or when referring to their king persona. When I know kings' preferred pronouns, I use them accordingly; otherwise, I use male pronouns as the default when referring to kings.

wealth of resources on his king career that were easily accessible through this official website.⁸⁸ Dréd works hard to make his art visible, and he deserves to be so widely recognized for his artistry. I mean only to point out that Dréd's prominence as a drag king of color has contributed to putting blackness (along with whiteness) at the center of discussions on race and kinging. Looking at the clippings of Dréd that were formerly assembled on his website, it is clear that he has been the focus of numerous popular newspapers and magazines worldwide, as well as featured in several academic texts (*Dréd Clippings*).

Often, reviews of Dréd's performances focus on his "gender-blending powers;" reviewers amazed at the speed and ease with which he "morphs from Shaft into a drag queen impersonating Diana Ross into P. Diddy" in the course of a performance (*Boston Phoenix On-line*). It is this act, which ends with Dréd in a bikini top, "show[ing] that she is as much of a hot woman as a hot man" (*In-NYC On-line*), and pulling an apple out of his pants and taking a bit out of it that *Venus On-Line* states is his "most acclaimed piece." Similarly praising Dréd's skills as a gender illusionist, Laura Kiritsy's on-line article for *Boston Bay Windows* begins by saying "one would hardly expect a flock of lesbians at the Northampton Pride Festival to swarm the stage to ogle and catcall a superfly guy decked out in vintage 1970s pimp duds," but then goes on to explain that Dréd's "lesbian magnetism became as clear as a set of boobs in a skimpy bikini top. Because underneath the funky threads and mackdaddy attitude beats the heart of Mildred Gerestant, who is undoubtedly all

⁸⁸ Dréd once had quite an extensive website chronicling his career as a performance artist including, but not limited to his kinging. He has since switched from his own website in favor of using the increasingly popular social networking sites MySpace.com <<http://www.myspace.com/dredgerestant>> and Facebook, as well as YouTube.com <<http://www.youtube.com/user/mildredgerestant>>.

woman and all natural.” In transforming from sexy drag king to sexy woman, Dréd is able to foreground both his masculine and feminine sides, as well as to show his audience the many layers of (gender) identities that make up all humans.

Compared to the amount written about Dréd’s gender transformations, however, much less space is devoted to racial aspects of Dréd’s kinging, despite the ways in which he emphasized his Haitian-American identity on his website and publicity materials and consistently engaged race in his performances as Shaft, Grace Jones, P. Diddy, etc. To a large extent, it has been and continues to be the politics of gender deconstruction and gender transgression that are stressed within analyses of drag king performances. This focus is certainly understandable given that as a cultural phenomenon kinging’s notoriety is most directly associated with its performances of gender, particularly the extent to which female-bodied kings so seamlessly transform themselves into men on stage. Thus, in keeping with this early framework of making gender prominent in analyses of kinging, writings about Dréd have tended to emphasize gender over race in his kinging, regardless of his own efforts to foreground race. Halberstam’s and Hasten’s texts, mentioned previously, that discuss Dréd’s performances of black masculinities as ones of homage and tribute are two examples that do focus on racialized nuances of Dréd’s kinging. Yet, despite how these analyses broaden their focus to include considerations of race in the case of kings of color, they do so in narrow ways.⁸⁹

⁸⁹ I want to make clear here that despite my critiques of Halberstam and Hasten’s limited frameworks, I do recognize that they are among the few who are even writing about race and kinging at all, and that I am very much indebted to the groundbreaking work they have done.

In addition to Halberstam's and Hasten's texts, a third text that highlights racialized politics of kining through analyzing performances by Dréd is Sarah E. Chinn and Kris Franklin's 1998 essay, "King of the Hill: Changing the Face of Drag—An Interview with Dréd." More specifically, Chinn and Franklin chronicle Dréd's history of coming to kining and the process of developing his persona and act, focusing on him because of his position as "one of the few black drag kings" (151).⁹⁰ When it comes to discussing race specifically, Chinn and Franklin give Dréd the space to talk about the ways in which his black masculinity works against him—illustrated once again with the same example cited by Halberstam and Hasten, of an incident in which Dréd struggled to get a taxicab to stop for him ("King of the Hill" 154). Although by no means the only racialized aspect of Dréd's kining that has ever been written about, the taxicab incident is the aspect that is most consistently highlighted, suggesting the degree to which black drag king masculinities are understood as informed and circumscribed by the racist struggles facing black masculinities in society at large. While it is certainly apropos to point out racist inequalities that continue to plague black, as well as other communities of color in the U.S., it is also necessary to point out how other dimensions of difference intersect with racism, for example the way in which racism affects various classes of people of color differently (i.e. working-class Latinos versus upper-class Latinos), or the ways in which racism affects various groups of people of color differently (i.e. Blacks,

⁹⁰ Although I'm wary that Chinn and Franklin's assertion here that Dréd is "one of the few black drag kings" is a bit of an overstatement, I am inclined to believe that at the time that Chinn and Franklin were writing, Dréd was one of the few nationally well-known black drag kings to which they had access. However, even in a later *Venus* article featuring Dréd, he was once again cited as one of the few women of color performing in the kining community. It might be that the number of kings of color I have observed in D.C. is the exception and not the rule, especially given D.C.'s disproportionately high populations of African Americans and other blacks.

Asians, Latinos, etc.). However, in so far as these intersectional and racially nuanced analyses have not been predominant, it remains the case that discussions of race and kinking are centered around a black/white binary, more specifically where black drag king masculinities are understood within the limited framework of homage (to black masculinities) and victim (of white supremacy racism).

Another King of Color: Retro

Given the extent to which Dréd is represented as the archetypal king of color, it comes as quite a disappointment that aspects of race are so overshadowed by those of gender in analyses of his kinking, although not entirely surprising. The deployment of intersectional analyses is critical to avoid such privileging of any one dimension of difference above another, gender or otherwise. In addition, it is a challenge to disrupt the ways in which each dimension of difference has been naturalized; for example how race in Dréd's kinking has been too easily subsumed into performances of homage to black masculinities, or else reflections of white supremacy racism. By turning attention to non-black kings of color, especially Asian/Pacific Islanders (APIs), Asian Americans, and others with Asian Pacific heritage⁹¹, what emerges is the need for a more nuanced and complex understanding

⁹¹ One of the problems talking about "Asians" is that this homogenizes dozens of countries, each with their specific cultures, histories, etc. My use of "Asian/Pacific Islander," "Asian American," and "Asian Pacific heritage" here are all meant to signify different types of "Asians." I use "Asian American" when I refer specifically to "Asians" in the United States, as well as for multi-racial and multi-ethnic people that claim both Asian and U.S. heritage. I use "Asian Pacific heritage" for "Asians" living in non-Asian and non-U.S. countries, as well as for multi-racial and multi-ethnic people that claim Asian heritage. "Asian/Pacific Islander" can be used of "Asians" in Asian countries, or it can be used to refer generally to "Asians," as I do in this dissertation. To a large degree my preference for "Asian/Pacific Islander" over "Asian" reflects my personal ties to the Philippines, an archipelago in the Pacific Ocean.

of differences and their effects on nationality and national belonging within a U.S. context of queer identification, inside and outside of kinging culture.

Given the intense focus, by media and scholarly works alike, on a relatively small, select set of remarkable kings, locating a wider range of kings, particularly API kings proved a difficult task. In his essay “Mackdaddy, Superfly, Rapper” Halberstam briefly mentions an API king by the name of Retro (Kristabelle Munson) who performs as Uncle Louis, a “white trash American truck driver from upstate New York, newly out of prison” (126). Retro again resurfaces momentarily in Halberstam and Volcano’s *The Drag King Book* (146), as well as in Halberstam’s chapter on drag kings in his book *Female Masculinities* (264). In comparison to the amount written on Dréd, these are but fleeting glimpses of Retro, but important ones to emphasize.

Looking more closely at Retro’s kinging helps to reveal nuances within the intersectionality of gender, race, and sexuality. For example, in the chapter, “Drag Kings: Masculinity and Performance” in *Female Masculinities* Halberstam is able, through Retro, to raise the issue of gender in a racialized queer context. Halberstam writes, “Retro thinks that it is quite unusual to be out as a butch or transgender Asian woman, and she says that ‘many Asian dykes tend to identify as femme’” (“Drag Kings” 264), and upholds Retro as one example of positively identifying with the masculine labels like “butch” and “transgender.” Though by no means conclusive, Retro’s sentiments that most queer API women are femme-identified suggest that, contrary to the stereotype of lesbians being mannish, within a specifically racialized API queer context there are different gender configurations and stereotypes at play. The existing framework of theatrical cabaret-style versus non-theatrical walk-on

appearance for analyzing race in kinging centers analysis around the ways in which whiteness is unmarked, and thus would not be sufficient here to investigate the ways in which gender in an API context signifies differently than in either black or white contexts. Neither would the existing framework of parody versus homage, given its binary focus of parodying whiteness and paying homage to black masculinities, be useful in this case given the API context.

Retro helps reveal another nuance of intersectionality through his performance of Uncle Louis as a response to racism he has faced in his own life. Retro says, “Having experienced a lot of racism as a transgendered Asian Pacific Islander, I took a lot of pleasure in being able to spoof the visual image of a white trash guy” (qtd. in Volcano and Halberstam 146). However, instead of using Uncle Louis to re-enact the racism he has experienced, Retro makes Uncle Louis a loveable “daddy”/“bear” figure. Whereas Halberstam interprets Retro’s construction of Uncle Louis as a way “to eliminate the almost essentialist racist component with which white trash masculinity has been associated” (Volcano and Halberstam 147), I come to a different conclusion. In fact, I am disturbed by the way in which Halberstam’s interpretation of Uncle Louis frames and emphasizes Retro’s kinging as a means of recuperating white trash masculinity from its associations with racism. It’s not that I don’t see the validity of Halberstam’s analysis, or even disagree with the project of divorcing white trash masculinity from accusations of inherent racism, but rather, I am troubled by how in making white masculinity central, such framing takes the emphasis away from Retro’s experiences of racism, and the ways in which his performance of Uncle Louis is about him and a demonstration of his responses to racism.

In contrast to Halberstam's approach focusing on white masculinity, I argue that it's of utmost importance to center Retro's experience of his own racialized masculinity, specifically in the context of the racism he's faced. In particular, I think it's important to explore the significance of the pleasure that Retro admitted feeling in being able to portray a white man. As Halberstam notes, "Retro feels that there is real power in performing [Uncle Louis] and transforming his [Uncle Louis'] potential racism into other kinds of expression" ("Mackdaddy" 126). It's the actions of Retro performing and transforming that give him power, in the form of control over the white masculinity he is kinging. More so than taking pleasure from saving white trash masculinity from accusations of racism through the use of this power, I suggest that Retro's pleasure emerges from how he uses that power to save himself and other potential targets of racism. That is, in becoming Uncle Louis, Retro does more than simply recuperate white trash masculinity from accusations of racism; perhaps more importantly he also prevents instances of racism by fashioning himself as a loving/lovable daddy/bear. Instead of becoming Uncle Louis in order to usurp white power over others, Retro transforms into Uncle Louis in order to intervene in the perpetration of racism against people of color and instead promotes a figure of protection. In embodying Uncle Louis through a daddy/bear persona, Retro demonstrates *his* love and care for others. His choice of daddies and bears, both figures that signify comfort, reassurance, and reliability, is no mere coincidence. In other words, Retro may be kinging Uncle Louis, but his performance as a white man should not be understood as one that erases his own racialized self; Uncle Louis is precisely the kind of loveable white man that he is because it is Retro's API identity

shaping how Uncle Louis comes into being. Furthermore, I argue that unlike cross-racial performances by either black or white kings mired by a history of slavery, colonization, and anti-black racism in the U.S., cross-racial performances by non-black kings of color, of either white figures or black figures, present a distinct discourse that has yet to be fully explored.

Collectively, these fleeting glimpses of Retro reveal two crucial factors. First, focusing on representations of marginalized subjects and subjectivities provides valuable insights that are obscured by archetypes. Second, there is a need to develop and use a new framework for analyzing race in kinging, one that disrupts the way in which a black/white binary has been naturalized as the sole axis of race. Such a framework is vital in order to be attentive to other racialized subjects and subjectivities, and furthermore to promote a sustained focus on these othered subjects and subjectivities within the national body. The greater acknowledgment of non-black kings of color is a crucial step to this process of denaturalization, as is greater attention to the varied racial formations among different communities of color. The former literally disrupts black and white frameworks by introducing an outside element, and the latter encourages more complex and nuanced examinations of race and racism that are based on distinct racialized identities and locations that can account for differences in understandings of race and experiences of racism.

Chapter Conclusion

It is my contention that nationality and national belonging for queer Asian American subjects and subjectivities are closely tied to the politics of representation and discourses of cultural and political citizenship that emerge through kinging.

Demonstrating that established methods of analyzing race in kinging have tended to revolve around blackness and can't fully account for other racial positions, the necessity of a new framework for the analysis of queer Asian American subjects and subjectivities emerges. Relying heavily on J. Jack Halberstam's pioneering work on drag king performances, I present different frameworks for analyzing race developed by Halberstam through his various texts, particularly his tropes of non-theatrical walk-on competitions versus theatrical cabaret-style performances, the parody of white masculinities versus paying homage to black masculinities, and analyses of cross-racial performances. The majority of these frameworks operate within a black/white binary that, while helpful in revealing the workings of white privilege and combating the devaluation and stigmatization of black masculinities, are too narrowly constructed to adequately investigate other racialized kinging contexts. More specifically, a close reading of an API king named Retro demonstrates how maintaining a focus on API racial formations requires an alternative approach grounded in a distinct standpoint. My purpose is to make readers aware of the way in which blackness in an African American context has overwhelmingly dictated racial analyses of kinging performances in order to expose the need and value of a kweer approach that is better suited to analyzing other racial formations, such as those emerging from API kings. In the following chapter I go on to detail specific ways that a kweer approach informs racial analyses of kinging, paying particular attention to the ways API kings consciously construct their personas and performances in ways that critique the limits within which they are circumscribed while at the same time

pushing against those boundaries to expand the potential of kiting to denaturalize race.

Chapter 6: Kinging Culture Through a Kweer Lens

Washington, D.C. Saturday May 19, 2001

After waiting in a line that stretched several blocks and paying the \$15 admission fee, I finally made it inside the Black Cat, the site of “The Great Big Drag King Show” (Great Big). Held in conjunction with the Gender Public Advocacy Coalition’s⁹² annual conference, the Great Big had a line-up of performers featuring twenty kings from six cities, from various cities within the United States as well as Canada. I slipped through the dense crowd, doing my best to position myself with an unobstructed and centered view of the stage, and then waited again. Anticipating the start of Washington, D.C.’s biggest drag king show to date, I couldn’t help but be excited; judging from the vibrancy of the crowd, I wasn’t alone.

The show began and all around me the crowd, filled predominantly with queer women, was dancing, screaming, applauding, and otherwise making apparent their enjoyment. The range of kings’ lip-sync performances varied, from the earnestly dramatic to the excessively parodic, including: Drag King Ken’s dandy-like performance of David Lee Roth’s “Just a Gigolo/I Ain’t Got Nobody”; a tribute performance by Dréd to “Theme from Shaft” complete with leather trench coat and large afro wig; a campy performance to Irene Cara’s “Flashdance...What a Feeling” by Flare; and a performance by Pat Riarch and Ray Cruiter with sadomasochistic costuming and role-playing to George Michael’s “Father Figure.” It was exciting to

⁹² The Gender Public Advocacy Coalition (GenderPAC) worked to end discrimination and violence caused by gender stereotypes by changing public attitudes, educating elected officials and expanding legal rights. GenderPAC also promoted understanding of the connection between discrimination based on gender stereotypes and sex, sexual orientation, age, race, class, etc. As of 28 May 2009, GenderPAC was dissolved and is no longer in existence. For more information see <<http://www.gpac.org>>.

witness the creativity with which the kings interpreted and performed their songs. However, just before intermission my excitement was replaced with wariness when Hunter (Erin Hunter) and Juan Moorhead, two local white-skinned kings, performed a comedic routine to Carl Douglas' "Kung Fu Fighting." The performance predominantly featured physical antics as Hunter and Juan Moorhead, dressed in martial arts uniforms, ran about the stage parodying martial arts movements and generally behaving in comedic manners. Clearly they were keeping within the comedic spirit of the song and having fun, and judging by the audience's laughter, so was the audience. But as I stood there watching the performance, and listening to the audience's laughter, I couldn't help but feel slightly disturbed by how this parody felt harmful to the possibility of kinging Asian masculinity respectively, as well as how it seemed to render queer Asian American subjects and subjectivities as alien or always already foreign within discourses of cultural and political citizenship.⁹³

It must be said that Douglas' song has nothing explicitly to do with Asian masculinity; "Kung Fu Fighting" was a song that aimed to capitalize on white U.S.

⁹³ Discussing their reaction to and talking back at Douglas' "Kung Fu Fighting," the Bamboo Clan writes:

The first act we ever performed as the "Bamboo Clan" was in Asian mafia drag to the song "Kung Fu Fighting." I've always thought of that song as racist because it trades on Asian stereotypes for its appeal. Our aspiration for that act was to challenge Asian stereotypes through parody. For the performance, we fought each other with plastic nunchucks, whipped out toy pistols and incorporated bad karate moves ala "The Karate Kid", down to the crane stance. ("A Word About the Bamboo Clan" 35)

Similar to Hunter and Juan Moorhead, the Bamboo Clan's performance also makes use of parody. However, when employed by Hunter and Juan Moorhead, the aim of the parody is more ambiguous. On one hand, just as the Bamboo Clan does, they could be directly challenging Asian stereotypes, but on the other they could be upholding Asian stereotypes as they parody white fascination and consumption of those stereotypes. These two projects are certainly related, though the latter project does not necessarily accomplish the former.

culture's fascination with Kung Fu movies and magazines in the mid-1970s.⁹⁴ In fact, kinging to "Kung Fu Fighting" could be an effective way to comment on the way in which commodification, cultural appropriation, and consumption of Asian traditions and practices are perpetrated by white U.S. society.⁹⁵ However, given the history of how race in the U.S. has been framed largely in terms of a black/white binary, it's unclear to what extent the commodification, cultural appropriation, and consumption of Asian traditions and practices are even understood as racist practices in the U.S.⁹⁶ Ultimately, despite whatever Hunter and Juan Moorhead's intentions

⁹⁴ Actually, the 1970s U.S. craze with Kung Fu helped to make "Kung Fu Fighting" such a recording success that with this song Carl Douglas became the "first Jamaican to top Billboard pop charts" (*Carl Douglas*).

⁹⁵ A similar example of a critique against commodification and cultural appropriation is Danny Hoch's performance of "Flip." In this piece from *Jails, Hospitals & Hip-Hop*, the scene is set up in a way that Hoch performs the identities of a hip-hop star and a young suburban male as two distinct identities, although with the latter trying to be the former. On one hand Hoch's character is in his room playing out his fantasy of performing as a hip-hop artist and being interviewed on a late night show, on the other hand this fantasy is disrupted by the character's unseen, unheard mother who is making sure that he is getting ready for work and will be on-time. What is clear here is the way in which the young white suburban male hip-hop enthusiast becomes a hip-hop star in his fantasy-world through the ways in which he wears his clothes (baseball hat askew, baggy clothes) and the way in which he talks (cursing and using slang) and moves (strutting and posing). That is, by taking on its signifiers (of clothing, speech, movement)—the very things that have become commodified—and consuming hip-hop culture, Hoch's character is able to transform himself into Flip, the hip-hop star. However, this hip-hop star identity is deliberately revealed as a created identity through the mother's interruptions which force him to phase in and out of his hip-hop identity. This purposeful revelation serves to foreground one of the things at the heart of this piece—the character's struggles with his own white identity, and through that struggle Hoch's critique of cultural appropriation. Flip says, "I mean, what the hell I wanna be white for? The shit is stupid...Look at you, you're corny, Jay! If I had a choice between bein' like you—Jay Leno—or Tupac Shakur, who you think I'ma choose?...Tupac! I mean...he's dead. But at least he went out like a true thug nigga. *He's cool. You?* You're just a dick, Jay" (21). Where this example from Hoch deviates from Hunter and Juan Moorhead's performance of "Kung Fu Fighting" however, is that in Hoch's performance, the critique of white cultural appropriation is made evident through Flip's earnest desire to not be a stupid, corny, white guy, whereas Hunter and Juan Moorhead seem to simply play out a mock Kung Fu fight scene without making it clear if they are parodying the white fans of Kung Fu (similar to Hoch's critique of Flip), or Kung Fu itself.

⁹⁶ There seems to be a clear understanding of white appropriation of black culture as steeped in racism (e.g., minstrelsy, Elvis Presley). While not everyone might agree with the extreme to which Justin Driver, in his essay "The Mirth of a Nation," criticizes Chris Tucker and Chris Rock for choosing to make themselves into modern day coons, or even agree that Tucker and Rock are in fact modern day coons, there is wide acknowledgement of the coon as a racist figure that demeans Blacks. In contrast,

were in their performance, instead of feeling as if I had found a safe space away from oppressive forces, I came face-to-face with oppression and was left feeling like an outsider-within D.C.'s king culture and community. Patricia Hill Collins theorizes outsider-within as a subject position that straddles borders, neither an "insider" nor an "outsider," but both simultaneously. More specifically, Collins argues that Black women's position as outsiders-within is conducive to their finding anomalies within "normal" science, and therefore their perspectives should be privileged above "insiders" who are too entrenched within the systems they inhabit to be able to examine them as effectively as those on its borders. The significance with which Collins embeds her conceptualization of outsider-within in a specific context of Black feminist thought in order to place Black women's experiences at the center of analysis is of such importance that it would be doing an injustice to the very premise of outsider-within to use it in another context. Thus, though I am certainly indebted

instead of being recognized as Asian cultural (mis-)appropriations, kanji tattoos remain among the most popular tattoo choices. Also, in the Spring of 2002 clothing retailer Abercrombie & Fitch produced a line of graphic t-shirts that featured Asian caricatures and slogans based on Asian-related puns, including: "Wong Brothers Laundry Service—Two Wongs Can Make It White" featuring "two smiling figures in conical hats harking back to 1900s popular-culture depictions of Chinese men" (Strasburg); "Wok-N-Bowl—Let the Good Times Roll—Chinese Food & Bowling" again with a caricatured figure of an Asian man in a conical hat bowling; "Abercrombie and Fitch Buddha Bash—Get Your Buddha on the Floor" featuring a caricature of a smiling Buddha; and "Pizza Dojo—You Love Long Time—Eat In or Wok Out" featuring a caricature of a smiling Asian man serving pizza. Despite Abercrombie & Fitch's use of images reminiscent of Charlie Chan and the coolie stereotype, as well as stereotypes of Asians as "kung-fu fighting, fortune-cooking-speaking, slanty-eyed, bucktooth servants" (qtd. in Mikkelson) Hampton Carney, a spokesman for the company, said that the t-shirts were made with the hope of appealing to young Asian shoppers with a sense of humor (Strasburg). Reactions to the t-shirts by Asian American students, Asian American community groups and organizations, as well as others, however, included complaints via phone and e-mail messages, as well as rallies protesting the t-shirts at various store locations across the U.S. that ultimately resulted in Abercrombie & Fitch's decision to stop selling the t-shirts and to pull the remaining t-shirts from all their stores' shelves and catalogue. On one hand, the clothing retailer's decision to produce the t-shirts demonstrates the extent to which such stereotypical Asian images are considered marketable and profitable commodities. On the other hand, the uprising by those angered by the t-shirts demonstrates that the commodification of stereotypes of Asians is understood by some as a racist practice. Far from being the last incident of its kind, two years after this controversy, there was a similar controversy around *Details Magazine's* April 2004 issue which featured a spread by Whitney McNally titled "Gay or Asian?" that similarly attempted to use stereotypes as comedic satire, but resulted in outraging numerous Asian American communities and organizations.

to Patricia Hill Collins and borrow from her theorizations of the matrix of domination, I propose instead a kweer strategy, aimed at a similar project of purposeful denaturalization, but in a specifically queer context where hegemonic whiteness is assumed, or else blackness is naturalized as the sole focus of queers of color, in order to place the experiences of non-black queers of color at the center of analysis. Examining Hunter and Juan Moorhead's performance to Carl Douglas' "Kung Fu Fighting" through this kweer lens is just one attempt to promote a sustained focus on queer Asian American subjects and subjectivities within a U.S. context of queer identifications, and to consider their nationality and national belonging within discourses of cultural and political citizenship. In his book *Orientalists: Asian Americans in Popular Culture* Robert G. Lee writes, "without challenging the Orientalist representation and the structure of racial ideology on which it is built, Asian Americans are always vulnerable to being seen as the alien minion of a foreign power" (224), pointing to the degree which queer Asian Americans' national belonging is predicated on challenging racist, anti-Asian American representations, as well as the importance of a new structure of racial ideology. The use of a kweer lens is particularly useful for both these tasks.

Locating API King Communities

In order to place the experiences of queer Asian American kings at the center of analysis, I began a search to locate Asian/Pacific Islander (API) drag kings. Although J. Jack Halberstam briefly mentions an API king named Retro in his work,

there is not much published scholarship on API kings.⁹⁷ Given the power of representations, and the under-representation of API drag kings, promoting such visibility is an important kweer project in so far as it brings these marginalized subjects into more central and sharper focus. I began by seeking out information about the Bamboo Clan, an all-API drag king troupe based in Seattle, Washington who had been recommended⁹⁸ to me as a troupe whose four members (Jedidiah aka Sammy “the Shark” Chung, Morrison aka Billy Chin, Olson aka Metal Boy, and Truc Nguyen aka Dragonfly) were consciously dealing with issues of race and kinging in an Asian American context in their performances. Other early searches resulted in finding merely two⁹⁹ other API identified drag kings—Carlos Las Vegas (Reese Lagartera) from Winnipeg, Manitoba Canada who identifies as Filipino and Canadian; and Lee Bruce Lee from King Victoria in Melbourne, Australia who identifies as “Malaysian, half chink, half malay” (personal communication). Eventually I was able to make contact with four additional API kings: Shtik Rik (Carol Evelyn Thompson) who is biracial Filipino and Jamaican, grew up in Vancouver, Canada but then moved to New York City; Junoon, a self-identified Desi drag king born in Africa and raised in Asia that I met in Minneapolis, Minnesota; Charleston Chu (Sandy Chang) who is Chinese-American and performed in the San Francisco Bay Area as part of The Fly Guys and The Transformers, before moving to Brooklyn, New York where he joined the drag and burlesque group Eye Candy; and

⁹⁷ Other than Retro, the only other reference to an API king that I have seen in published academic work is about JJ Chinois, a virtual king created by artist Lynne Chan.

⁹⁸ I thank Gayatri Gopinath for first bringing the Bamboo Clan to my attention.

⁹⁹ In actuality, I was originally able to make contact with a third API identified U.S. drag king, but having lost touch with him in the course of this project, I have been unable to obtain his permission to include him in my discussions at this time.

Johnny Mozzarella (Maryanne Cassera) who is biracial Filipino and Italian from Portland, Oregon. A few API kings I became passing acquaintances with because we had mutual friends: Tin Hardware of The Transformers in the San Francisco Bay Area; Jake Badger of the Charm City Boys in Baltimore, Maryland; and Miles Long of the D.C. Drag Kings. There were also some API kings that I was able to locate through examining various drag king related websites, but did not make personal contact with: Mr. Wu Her from San Francisco, California; Kung Pao Johnny of the Chicago Kings in Chicago, Illinois; Nathaniel Prince formerly of the drag troupe, Disposable Boy Toys in Santa Barbara, California;; and J.J. Chinois (a virtual drag king created by Chinese American lesbian performer and artist Lynne Chan). In addition, through my membership of queernet.org's dragkings listserv¹⁰⁰, an on-line community of people with an interest in drag kings and kinging, I also found two self-identified API drag king fans with whom I engaged in extensive discussion about the politics of racialized sexual representations in kinging cultures: Danielle Chow Yamamoto, a self-identified "fourth generation Chinese-Japanese American, lesbian, queer high femme, into butch-femme exclusively" (personal communication); and Jen Feldman, who was then a budding drag king and head of New York University's LGBT undergraduate student group (personal communication).

Shortly after I joined the dragkings listserv late in February 2002, for most of March 2002 it was Yamamoto, Feldman, and I who were the most vocal on-list¹⁰¹ around the topics of race and kinging and API kings. Off-list, one fellow

¹⁰⁰ Although Queernet.org still hosts various listservs for groups, the dragkings listserv is now defunct (*QueerNet*).

¹⁰¹ I make this distinction of "on-list" clear here because there is no way to tell how many private e-mail conversations there were between list members.

queernet.org dragkings list member, Sir Real—a 33 year-old “WASP, femme/androgyn/queen, dragking/genderfuck performer” in New York City—commented, “as you can tell, it’s [race and kinging] a topic that folks don’t wish to comment upon much! Well, it is dangerous ground” (personal communication). While gender and race have both been theorized as social constructions, there is not the same willingness or ability to understand race as performative to the degree that gender is understood as performative. Thus, race becomes “dangerous ground” because racial categories and the boundaries between them remain fixed and intact.¹⁰² Instead of concentrating on the fluidity and construction of particular signs of racial markers, and hence the instability of racial categories, the sanctity of racial categories goes unchallenged. Given this context, it is not surprising that discussions of race and kinging happen less frequently, and are prone to consist of more heated debates.

I quickly came to understand that making API kings more visible was only one part of understanding kinging culture through a kweer lens. Indeed, looking more closely at API kings’ performances helps reveal nuances within the intersectionality of gender, race, and sexuality that are specifically revealed because of their positionality as neither part of hegemonic whiteness, nor queer of color critique’s naturalized focus on blackness. The revelation of these nuances is significant, and indebted to the centering of API subjects and subjectivities that partially defines a kweer strategy. However, as my discussions with Yamamoto and Feldman reveal, even those who are only fans and those who have yet to perform on stage also have much to contribute to discussions and theorizations of racialized

¹⁰² One historical example of the danger of crossing fixed boundaries remains lynching and witch-hunting, which Corpis and Fletcher attribute to “anxieties about the crossing of sexual and social boundaries” (283).

sexual representations in kining. Thus, to kweeer king culture one must not simply replace white and black kings with API kings as the subjects of analyses, but also disrupt the larger frameworks and contexts within which API kings construct themselves, and within which audience members encounter those representations so that these frameworks are better attentive to nuances within the intersectionality of gender, race, and sexuality. It is such intersectionally reformulated frameworks that will finally acknowledge queer Asian American subjects and subjectivities as integral to discourses of cultural, political, and legal citizenship within a U.S. context of queer identifications.

As I tried to push the issue of API kings further on the dragkings listserv, the people I connected with all shared the sentiment that there weren't many API kings. Thus, while making API kings visible is only one aspect of employing a kweeer strategy, it's also an element that seems particularly significant to many. Simultaneously noting the lack of API kings and stressing the importance of visibility, one API king wrote, "I think that's why it's important to stand up and represent." He made clear that as queer API people, there is a great significance of making ourselves visible, especially to offer perspectives beyond stereotypes. Relaying this conversation to a fellow Asian American drag king fan, it became clear to us both that it is vital to assume personal responsibility for contributing to API king visibility and not simply bemoan the lack of representation while in the same moment perpetuating it by idly standing aside. Spurred on by these discussions, it was then that I decided to become a drag king—as a way of standing up and representing, but even more so to call upon kining culture for its community building potential and to

highlight that the power of representation for API subjects and subjectivities lies not only in making visible what exists, but in the very acts of creating representations themselves. In fact, as Dana Y. Takagi suggests in the “Afterword” to Kevin K. Kumashiro’s edited collection, *Restoried Selves: Autobiographies of Queer Asian/Pacific American Activists*, there is a deep connection between recognition, like that which might come with visibility, and the self. Takagi writes:

being seen involves others as well as ourselves. Of course virtually everyone would agree that in an act of recognition, an Other sees and acknowledges another. Indeed, much activism is oriented towards changing the conventions, ideologies, and discourses uttered by others that we find repressive, limiting, and unjust. Social movements help transform prejudice into tolerance by changing ideas and selves. But perhaps it is less obvious that this activism is already linked to the self. What I mean by this is that, in effect, there is another aspect to recognition: the self-recognizing itself. Activism changes our own sense of self. (132)

Reflecting the connections between visibility, recognition, activism, and the self, in what follows, I share my observations about API kings and detail my own process of creating myself as a king as a way to examine kinging culture through a kweer lens.

Kweering King Cultural Productions

Creating myself as a Filipino drag king has not been without its challenges. For example, when I began to think of myself as a king in-the-making I felt constrained by U.S. mainstream stereotypes of Asian American men (because that’s what I would be kinging—Asian American masculinity) and wondered how to

perform Asian American masculinity without reinforcing what I viewed as negative stereotypes at the same time. Also, I felt constrained by race more generally in terms of doing cross-racial performances and wondered if there were limits to what song and/or artists an API king could and should do. I also questioned if audiences, who seemed willing (at least to an extent) to suspend their disbelief and accept drag kings as men, would similarly extend their suspension of belief to constructions of race and ethnicity if I chose to king a non-API persona. Kinging has become a recognized and revered strategy for denaturalizing sex and gender, but I have not seen, as of yet, it become that for race and ethnicity, nor is it entirely clear that most people in kinging communities want to push kinging in that direction. My project of analyzing kinging culture through a kweer lens is most directly concerned with opening up discussions around race and kinging beyond the current dominant black/white binary to be more attentive to the realities of API and other non-black kings of color, although it could conceivably work in the service of this larger project.

I am not, by far, the only one asking these questions about race and kinging. In their zine, “The Bamboo Clan’s Guide to Better Living Thru Drag,” each member of the Bamboo Clan writes explicitly about his relationship to race and kinging.

Similar to my own questions, Sammy ‘the Shark’ Chung writes:

Drag performers of color find ourselves facing the same questions we face in other creative endeavors. For instance, how much responsibility do we have as performers of color to ‘represent’? What would constitute integrity in what we do? Does satire allow for the ‘white folks’ to laugh *at* us? Does this laughter allow for the denial of the white skin privilege that perpetuates racial

stereotype? Do we always need to be addressing racial issues? Can the simple fact that we perform at all add to Asian visibility? Doesn't this visibility function as a powerful statement that the queer American community is not monolithically white? (particularly in cities where people of color are not as visible such as our own Seattle) After all, drag is also just fun. Drag can be hard work. Drag can be exhilarating and affirming. Of course, how much responsibility we feel to be political is a personal decision. Also, to what degree and consistency we maintain to be political is a personal decision. ("Sammy 'the Shark' Chung Muses About Drag" 6)

Contrary to the more usual issues surrounding how to be a drag king that involve how to's such as: how to apply facial hair, how to bind breasts, and how and what to pack¹⁰³, as well as tips on choosing an upbeat, well-known song as well as a sexually witty name, like the names some kings have adopted—Manuel Hung, Will Dewar, and Caesar Melons—Sammy's questions go beyond mere gender deconstruction and transgression, and call into question constructions and meanings of race.¹⁰⁴ At the heart of my becoming a drag king are these questions and concerns centered on race, and the way in which race interacts with all other aspects of identity. As Lisa Lowe writes in reference to literary cultural productions by Asian Americans in her book *Immigrant Acts: On Asian American Cultural Politics*, "cultural forms of many kinds

¹⁰³ "Pack," or "packing" as it is also known, here is in reference to females simulating the possession of a penis through such means as packing "rolled up socks, dildos or silicone replicas" in their underwear (C. Las Vegas "The How To's of Kinging" 10).

¹⁰⁴ This is not to say that the Bamboo Clan does not also focus on these more common issues of facial hair, binding, and packing—because they do (see Metal Boy's "How's My Package" 25-27; Metal Boy's "Keepin' it together 'the tie that binds'" 22-24; and Sammy 'the Shark' Chung's "Mustaches Wild!" 28-30); rather, I mean to highlight the Bamboo Clan's unique attention to constructing and performing as racialized API masculinities.

are important media in the formation of oppositional narratives and are crucial to the imagination and rearticulation of new forms of political subjectivity, collectivity, and practice” (158). Indeed, it is precisely through these cultural productions from which Lowe imagines empowered Asian American subjects arising.

It is through considering the cultural production of my kinging through a kweer lens that I attempt to promote non-sexist, non-racist, non-classist, non-transphobic, non-body fascist ways of kinging from which empowered queer API subjects and subjectivities, as well as other non-black queer subjects and subjectivities, can arise. In a way, I echo Laura Hyun Yi Kang’s critical approach from her book *Compositional Subjects: Enfiguring Asian/American Women*, which is “directed less at an unveiling of some truth that has been misrepresented than a foregrounding of the particular historical circumstances, ideological suppositions, and methodological tactics that enable and constrain that compositional instance” (3). Kinging has the potential of infinite possibilities, but while its possibilities related to gender seem to be expanding, its range related to racialized representations is limited. In Kang’s terms, compositions focusing on gender have been enabled, while those focusing on race have been constrained by the particular contexts of their formation. I look specifically at the processes involved in the cultural production of API kings to expose these contexts and their constraints.

Naming

To the ends of creating myself as a Filipino drag king, I began by adopting the name “Phil I. Pinas.” As Sarah E. Chinn asserts in her book *Technology and the Logic of American Racism*, “in order to be interpellated into an evidentiary role, the

body must above all be knowable” (10). Knowability for me began with my drag king name. In an on-line community, such as the one I participated in through the queernet.org dragkings listserv, a name and an e-mail address are key signifiers of identity.¹⁰⁵ In this virtual realm, as well as other web venues (e.g., websites), a drag name and corresponding e-mail address are embodiments that allow me to mark myself as a king, and to present that king self to others. Even “in real life,” from a baby’s birth to introducing ourselves to others, names play central roles—so in giving birth to my drag king self, and introducing him to others, I, too began with naming.

Having gotten into kinging specifically to stand up and represent APIs, I was committed to explicitly marking myself as an API king through my name. The same concern of using their drag names as ethnic markers is also reflected by other API kings, perhaps most obviously by Lee Bruce Lee’s reflection of his Chinese heritage through incorporating the name of Chinese-American martial artist Bruce Lee as part of his own; Junoon’s reflection of his South Asian heritage in using the Urdu phrase for “the passionate one” as his stage name; and Kung Pao Johnny, whose name invokes that of a well-known food dish from the Sichuan Province of southwestern China. Less obvious is the way in which Cassera, who easily passes as Asian, chose the name Mozzarella in order to reflect her less visible Italian roots.

More specifically, I wanted my drag name to mark me as Filipino; choosing Phil I. Pinas did just this. “Phil I. Pinas,” with the exception of the “H” becomes *Pilipinas*, the tagalog¹⁰⁶ name of the Philippines. It has been interesting to note,

¹⁰⁵ User profiles are another important source of identifying information, but in most instances, the minimum information required in a user profile include name and e-mail address only.

¹⁰⁶ Tagalog is one of the native dialects spoken in the Philippines.

however, how the way in which “Phil I. Pinas” proves multivalent depending on the audience and their varying knowledges: of me as Filipino, of the Philippines as a country, of seeing “Phil I. Pinas” in print, and of hearing “Phil I. Pinas” spoken. Shtik Rik, a Filipino and Jamaican drag king who grew up in Canada, saw a post of mine on the queernet.org dragkings listserv that I signed “Phil I. Pinas (in the making)” and replied to me “A Filipino drag king! This is totally something my mother [her Filipino parent] and I can bond over!” (personal communication). In Shtik Rik’s eyes, there was no mistaking my printed drag king name as anything other than a way of signifying my Filipino heritage. Other API acquaintances who know I am Filipino have also similarly understood my name as a play on *Pilipinas*. It is not as easily recognizable as such, however, for everybody. One person on the queernet.org dragkings listserv looked at my king name in print asked if my king name is actually supposed to be spelled P-E-N-I-S instead of P-I-N-A-S and/or if I merely spell it P-I-N-A-S so as not to make the pun on “penis” so obvious. Others to whom I’ve introduced myself verbally as Phil I. Pinas most often hear my drag name as a homonym that plays with “fill a penis” (instead of seeing it as referring to *Pilipinas* and the Philippines). Not surprisingly, rather than recognizing its ethnic resonances and deployment of a kweer strategy, these other readings of my name are in keeping with the dominant trend of drag king names being sexual puns. Having thus chosen a name, I then began to cultivate my look.

Hair Styling

Being known by the name Phil I. Pinas certainly was a large part of becoming a drag king for me. But, in our ever-growing visual environment, pictures are still

worth a thousand words¹⁰⁷; so, the second way in which I attempted to make myself knowable as a drag king was visually, beginning with hair. I made the decision that when applying facial hair, I would do so sparingly, mimicking the way in which my father and brothers grow—or rather don't grow—much facial hair. Most often, using spirit gum (a costume/make-up adhesive) I apply cuttings of my own hair in a simple strip down the front of my chin, and another small strip on my chin. I have also found that my natural sideburns provide a good enough base that I can simply and lightly coat them with mascara, lengthening, darkening, and making them appear fuller. Lastly, I apply a light coat of mascara to my eyebrows in order to make them appear fuller as well. As for the hair on top of my head, already having a “men's haircut” I fix it the same whether I am in or out of drag.

This choice to mimic my family's facial hair growth patterns is partly an attempt to present an authentic Filipino masculinity, an attempt to present a conventionally desirable heterosexual masculinity, as well as the product of a failed imagination that could not picture myself as a drag king with any less or more facial hair. As a whole, however, all the pictures of API kings I've encountered, as well as all the API kings I've seen perform have in common their minimal use of facial hair. Though the specific styling varied from king to king, there was a very small range from what I would characterize as slight to light when it came to the amount of facial hair API kings displayed.¹⁰⁸ A similar survey of non-API kings whose pictures and

¹⁰⁷ This is no less true for a listserv community whose main form of communication consists of text e-mails. In fact, it may actually be the case that pictures become even more important in such on-line communities whose medium allows for .jpgs and .gifs (digital files) to be readily and widely exchanged.

¹⁰⁸ The one exception is an image of Retro with a full beard, performing as the white character, Uncle Louis (Volcano and Halberstam 147).

performances I've seen yields a much greater range of both styling and amount of facial hair displayed, suggesting a distinct kweer difference when it comes to hair.

There is no minimum requirement for facial hair for kings. In fact, recent discussions on the dragkings listserv point to a growing majority of those in the community who feel that none of the technologies to materially transforming a (female) body into a drag king body—applying facial hair, binding breasts, packing—are actually necessary to becoming and being a drag king.¹⁰⁹ Despite this discourse acknowledging a continuum of masculinity—from the hairy to the hairless, from the A-cup breasted to those who have had mastectomies, from those who pack nothing to those who pack ten inch dildoes—however, these technologies still remain widely practiced strategies in creating a knowable drag king body.¹¹⁰

Costuming

Yet another form of evidence towards knowability of a drag king body is costuming. Similar to choosing a name that signifies an Asian ethnic heritage, certain costume choices can effectively reflect ethnic aspects as well. In terms of dress/clothing, in keeping with my character's pride in his API heritage, when I appear in drag I make a conscious effort to wear clothing that will help to convey that

¹⁰⁹ There are a couple of prominent figures, such as Elvis and Eminem, who are regularly portrayed by drag kings purposely without facial hair as a connotation to authenticity and a verisimilitude performance. I think it is important to note however, that in both these instances, the masculinity portrayed is of popularly well-known white heterosexual male bodies, who by virtue of their privileges do not necessarily face the same burden of demonstrating their masculinity through facial hair.

¹¹⁰ Also contributing to my thinking here is Donald M. Lowe's discussion of "bodily life" in his book *The Body in Late-Capitalist USA*. In his "Introduction" Lowe argues that different practices socially construct the body in the contemporary United States, and that "these practices define the limits and prospects of our bodily lives; changes in them change our bodily lives" (1). While there is much *discourse* on the wide range of bodies that drag kings can embody, because the *practices* of embodiment continue to involve application of facial hair, binding, and packing, there does not yet see to be a change in the bodily lives of kings.

API pride to others. For example one night I wore a Hawaiian shirt, another night I wore a shirt that had a large bamboo embroidered on it, and another night I wore my barong tagalog (a traditional Filipino shirt that is hand-sewn and often worn for special, formal occasions in the Philippines, analogous to wearing a suit and tie in the U.S.). Similar to Shtik Rik's sudden recognition of my name as a Filipino one, during a drag king show at Chaos, on my way to the bar I was stopped by a woman who saw me and with a smile on her face said, "you're wearing a barong tagalog. Are you Filipino?" We then talked for a bit, discussing where in the Philippines I was born, where I still had family, where in the Philippines she had lived, and who in her family knew she was bisexual and how they felt about it. In short, my barong tagalog and her recognition of it as such (instead of just a "nice shirt" which was one compliment I got from a white friend that same evening) served as a means to connect us on the level of our race and to facilitate conversation between us.

There are various ways that ethnic costuming can come into play. In his performance at the International Drag King Extravaganza 5 (IDKE.5) Showcase in Minneapolis, Minnesota in October 2003, Junoon wore a kurta top with what appeared to be salwar pants, and a turban headdress, which could all be considered relatively typical South Asian clothing. This ethnic costuming choice was actually quite distinct from Junoon's typical drag costumes which often paid tribute to Michael Jackson, complete with a red leather jacket with zippers and a single sparkling glove. Insight about the impetus behind the change came earlier in the day during the IDKE.5 Conference, at the session Junoon co-presented with Farheen Hakeem entitled "Desi 101: A Peek into South Asian Culture and Kinging." The

workshop's description in the conference program reads, "Come discover the difference between an 'FOB' and 'ABCD.' This is a great opportunity to learn more about South Asian Culture, as well as address stereotypes. Insight will also be provided into what it is like to be a 'Desi' Drag King" (27). As advertised, Junoon and Hakeem discussed a wide range of things including: racial discrimination, immigration, the diversity within South Asian communities, and Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code which criminalizes homosexuality. On a more personal note, Junoon discussed how prior to the attacks against the U.S. on September 11, 2001 he thought of kinging primarily as a means to entertain, and didn't really want to perform political acts. Afterwards, however, his outlook changed as a result of the heightened racism he saw, and sometimes experienced, directed against South Asian people. Junoon's choice of ethnic costuming for his showcase performance was one of the elements he incorporated in order to help him raise awareness about and combat the racism against him and other South Asian people.

Similarly, a year prior in October 2002 at the Showcase for IDKE.4 in Columbus, Ohio, Carlos Las Vegas had deviated from his usual repertoire of drag costumes in favor of a costume that more specifically signified ethnic clothing. Just as Junoon talked about his preference for highlighting the entertainment aspect of kinging through his impersonations of Michael Jackson, so too does Carlos prioritize putting on a good show. He says, "honestly, most of the times, I purposely play ignorant to race and work off the merit of my presentation" (Carlos Las Vegas personal communication). Known for his elaborate, showy, and often hand-made costumes, Carlos has logged countless hours performing on stage in a variety of

iconic masculine characters, including a cowboy, a pirate, a priest, a police officer, and Elvis Presley. Often his costumes are directly related to the specific image of masculinity he is portraying, for example: a cowboy hat and boots; a ruffled pirate shirt and a prop sword; a clerical collar and cassock; a police uniform with badge, belt, club, and hat; or a pompadour-styled Elvis wig. At his showcase performance for IDKE.4 however, Carlos wore an outfit stylized to look like it was a mandarin warrior's uniform from Ancient China, complete with matching hat and prop sword. While it might be said that the warrior aspect of this costuming falls in line with other images of masculinity Carlos has portrayed, taking into account the outfit's design and fabric pattern and colors, its primary resonance is with Ancient Chinese warriors in particular. Even if the ethnicity he portrays (Chinese) is not his own (Filipino), Carlos' deliberate attempts to signify an Asian ethnicity are clear.

Ethnic costuming can consist of a variety of clothing and styles, and can be employed for various purposes, even among API kings. Carlos' use of ethnic costuming, for example, is distinct from Junoon's. Whereas Junoon's entire performance centered on portraying a distinctly South Asian character in order to address and challenge post 9/11 racism, that Carlos' character was portrayed as Asian doesn't appear vital to his performance as a whole. In fact, looking at other elements of Carlos' showcase performance at IDKE.4, neither his dance choreography nor his choice of song, Seal's "Kiss from a Rose," were distinctly related to any Asian ethnicity. Interestingly, though, especially because it was a departure from their usual wardrobe, both Carlos' and Junoon's IDKE Showcase performances stand out because of how their ethnic costuming marked them as API kings in ways their

previous performances hadn't. That is, despite the evidence of their racialized API bodies, the limited racial scripts within kinging culture failed to mark Carlos and Junoon specifically as API kings until their costuming choices necessitated such a marking; this points to a certain invisibility of race and ethnicity that exists outside of a black/white binary, and foregrounds the significance of a kweer analysis.

Desirability

In conjunction with knowability, desirability is a key factor underlying many of the concerns around naming, hair, costuming, and other elements of a king's performance and identity. In contrast to my experiences of formulating myself into an API king, The Bamboo Clan's Metal Boy had a harder time reconciling his king look. He talks about how despite his bi-racial (Korean/Norwegian) API heritage he wasn't sure if he fit into an all-API drag king troupe. Metal Boy writes:

“I have to admit that when Daisy and Jed [fellow Bamboo Clan members] asked me to be in a drag act with them, inwardly I was kinda hesitant and scared. The idea was totally amazing—a troupe of 4 Asian drag kings—I mean that is so fuckin' killer. But as I was envisioning us on stage, I started to have second thoughts about being in the Bamboo Clan. I felt *overtly* white and HUGE in comparison with my bros. There is no denying that in fact I *am* happa...and that I *am* fat. (“And to Think I Almost Didn't Do It...” 20)

Clearly, in Metal Boy's thinking his fatness and whiteness worked against his knowability as an API drag king. While I don't share a fear about not looking Filipino, in creating myself as a drag king I was similarly worried about what my race

and my fatness might mean as a king. More specifically, I was worried that my race and fatness combined would make me an unattractive, undesirable king.

In the cultural system of kinging where desire seems everything, at times it doesn't seem worth it to try and be a king if I can't be a desirable one.¹¹¹ Similarly concerned about the desirability of his racialized king identity Carlos Las Vegas writes, "I originally sold myself as a drag king with a kind of 'latin flare [sic.]," almost hiding my ethnicity because yes, stereotypically Asians are portrayed as exotic and/or anything but sexy" (personal communication). In fact, in a *Washington Post* article on DC Drag Kings in which he was featured, staff writer Teresa Wiltz, describes Carlos as "a small-boned king with a certain Latin flair." Granted, Filipinos do have a history of colonization by Spain, and thus some connections to Latin cultures, and the name "Carlos" is often seen in both Filipino and Latin cultures, so Wiltz's (mis-)categorization is understandable. But, coupled with his sexy demeanor, his flair, and the predominant stereotypes of API men as meek and asexual and of Latin men as boldly exotic and virile lovers, I question the possibility of Carlos ever being seen as Filipino.¹¹² In his essay, "Looking for My Penis: The Eroticized Asian

¹¹¹ Initially my interests in kinging culture were driven by desires—the audiences' desires to be attractive to kings, as well as to be kings; kings' desire to please and pleasure their audiences, as well as to be pleased and pleased by them; and the desire to play out fantasies and (perhaps more importantly) realities of the sexually charged, complexly gendered, and socially and culturally engaged lives we want to, and do live.

¹¹² It is important to note here, however, that my alignment of Filipinos with asexual Asians against macho, desirable Latinos is not wholly unproblematic. There are historical narratives about the sexual prowess of Filipino men as exceptional and distinct from the more usual characterizations of Asian American men as feminized. For example, Ronald Takaki, in his book *Strangers From a Different Shore*, relates one California businessman's estimation that "'Filipinos are hot little rabbits, and many of these white women like them for this reason'" (328). Also, a *Time* article entitled "Philippine Flop" from 1938 characterized Filipino men as a "very superior grade of lovers." While I recognize these exceptional portrayals of Filipino men's sexuality in light of other Asian masculinities, I align Filipinos with Asians in strategically specific ways: to reflect the self-categorization of Filipino kings

in Gay Video Porn,” Richard Fung observes that “Asian men...have been consigned to one of two categories: the egghead/wimp, or... the kung fu master/ninja/samurai... sometimes dangerous, sometimes friendly, but almost always characterized by a desexualized zen asceticism” (183). Fung’s observations resonate with my own observations of the divide between API masculinity and desirability in kinging culture. Pushing a kweer analysis that not only moves past a black/white binary, but in doing so also allows for more diversity and complexity in images of API men would increase the possibility of Carlos being acknowledged as both sexy and Filipino.

While by no means the most predominant strategy for asserting Asian masculinities into king culture, a Filipino king enacting the role of “Latino lover” is significant for several reasons. First, unlike some strategies which are not race-conscious, adopting the role of “Latino lover” makes specific use of a particular racial trope. This allows for the potential to better think about the ways in which kinging is about the performance not only of masculinity, but also of race, and other dimensions of difference. Making the racialization of masculinities central in this way importantly shifts the focus and analysis of kinging culture to more intersectional ones. Second, the embodiment of the figure of “Latino lover” by a Filipino king allows for the simultaneous physical presence of Latino and Asian bodies into sites of kinging culture which remain largely white, although increasingly in some select locations white and black, communities of practice. This isn’t to say that kings of color haven’t always been a part of kinging communities, because they have. Still, a

as Asian, to reflect the multi-ethnicity of the category Asian, as well as to firmly ground Filipinos within a context of Asian American Studies.

Filipino king enacting the role of “Latino lover” is significant because it has most often been through the limited framework of blackness—and more specifically of black kings performing homage to black masculinities, combating the devaluation and stigmatization of black masculinities by celebrating representations of them—that race in analyses of kinging performances has been discussed. By forging such a connection to Latin culture, Filipinos demonstrate a post-colonial consciousness that it is no longer only white or black American cultures that serve as points of reference from which to construct their identities. Indeed, in resisting the temptation to situate himself in relationship to a black/white paradigm, a Filipino king who performs as a “Latino lover” might also be understood as enacting a strategy to construct new, distinctly racial king communities and cultures. Thus, a Filipino king performing as a “Latino lover” leads us to a welcome and overdue expansion of racial boundaries in kinging—from the performative practices, the academic analyses, to the imaginings of kings in the making. On a related note, a third reason that enacting the role of “Latino lover” by a Filipino king is significant is because in addition to challenging a limited black/white framework of the racialization of queer masculinities, it facilitates an approach where hybridity, as well as biraciality and multi-ethnicity, are key factors. In our ever increasingly complex lives, biracial, mixed-race, and multi-ethnic realities, especially those between and among communities of color, remains a largely unexplored area that a kweer strategy begins to uncover.

Being desirable as an API king is also a twofold dilemma for me. On the one hand, as I have written above, I worry that I will not, can not be an attractive and desirable API man—that such a subject position does not currently exist. On the

other hand, I also worry that if I am seen as an attractive and desirable API king, it will be because people are attracted to exotic “oriental” woman they assume to be underneath the king. Carlos’ situation is just one example that demonstrates the complexity of figuring out the dynamics of desire when race and gender (along with all other dimensions of difference) are taken into account, and the value of a kweer strategy in doing so. While it is beyond the scope of this paper to explore more fully the ramifications of desire and desirability in kinging, more and more it seems to me that these are central tenets in kinging that may provide the key to understanding current embodiment trends in kinging.¹¹³

Kweering King Cultural Possibilities

Making API kings more visible is an important first step in kweering king culture that helps highlight these often overlooked subjects. It is not sufficient, however, to simply put API kings at the center of analyses without also addressing

¹¹³ In many ways I see this next step of kinging analysis as similar to Ann DuCille’s project in her book *Skin Trade*, where she “explore[s] the link between race and cultural commodification...examin[ing] both the meaning and the merchandising of race and gender in contemporary society” (7). Kinging takes place in many different venues, but remains predominant in queer bar culture nationwide. Thus, it seems necessary to consider how the social and sexual setting of bars, as the predominant space in which drag king shows occur, affect the kinds of embodiments and representations that kings are able, willing, and wanting to adopt and portray. In other words, looking at bars as a space of social exchange of the self, how does the desire to be (or conversely, the desire not to be) a valuable/desirable commodity in that space affect performers’ constructions of themselves as king? For example, here in D.C., at the monthly drag king shows that used to take place at Club Chaos, the performances that typically got the loudest cheers and the most tips were the ones in which two or more kings were doing a choreographed dance that showed off their bodies and their skill in dancing. While there were still a good number of performances on each given show night where kings did neither of these things, it was the growing trend, especially for new kings, to follow this popular format and to construct their performances around their ever-increasingly naked, dancing bodies. Although I enjoyed these performances just as much as others, I worry that the more kings think that their audiences just want sexy acts, other types of performances will become less and less portrayed until they are almost non-existent, and that the audience members who like a variety of acts will become less and less satisfied with the overemphasis of sexy acts and stop coming out to see shows. Furthermore, taking into consideration the predominance of white audience members and that most of these choreographed dance numbers predominantly feature black drag kings adds to the complexity of desires being exchanged, bodies being commodified, and oppressions being maintained and those oppressions being challenged.

the contexts in which they create themselves as kings. Using a kweer analysis to investigate some of the specific elements—naming, hair styling, costuming, and desirability—that are a part of these contexts illustrates the way in which existing frameworks have been formulated in stringent ways that can not adequately account for the nuances within the intersectionality of gender, race, and sexuality that queer API and other queer non-black subjects and subjectivities bring into focus. The next step in kweering king culture is to explore how to reformulate frameworks to make them better able to account for minoritarian subjects and subjectivities. It is such an accounting that will finally acknowledge queer Asian American, and other queer non-black, subjects and subjectivities as integral to discourses of cultural, political, and legal citizenship within a U.S. context of queer identifications.

Although there is no dispute that, as J. Jack Halberstam writes, “masculinity within drag king acts is always inflected by race, class, and gender” (“Mackdaddy” 106), it is more often the case than not that politics of racialized sexual representations are not centrally figured in kinging analyses. Instead, what usually happens is that mention is made of the importance of examining the implications of race and class in kinging, but that focus is placed specifically on gender. For example, Tina R. Majkowski, who at the time was a graduate student in the Performance Studies at New York university, at QGRAD 2002 (an annual graduate student conference on sexuality and gender hosted by the university of California, Los Angeles’ Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Studies Program) presented a paper entitled “Gender and Performance: Drag King Theatre” in whose abstract she writes, “while it is my contention that for an accurate analysis of drag king

performance it is crucial to fully interrogate the various gender, class, and race identifications that are at work in a drag king performance, this paper specifically concentrates on drag as a site of possible gender transgression.” Despite the importance of factors other than gender in analyzing drag king performances that she herself acknowledges and raises, Majkowski still focuses solely on gender as her main site of analysis. She is by no means the only one to privilege gender over other dimensions, such as race and class, in analyses of king performances, but rather one concrete example that illustrates my point.¹¹⁴

The push to expand kinging cultures and communities is hardly anything new. The most visible transformation within kinging cultures and kinging performances has been the increased attention to the diversity of gender performances. At the third annual International Drag King Extravaganza (IDKE.3) in 2001, in Columbus, Ohio, there was a movement to make IDKE.3 less exclusionary by acknowledging bio queen performances—that is female-bodied people performing femininity—in drag king spaces. In response to discussions about the transgressive power of drag kings, Summer’s Eve (Jessica Eve Humphrey), Kentucky Fried Woman (Krista Smith), Miss Triss (Tristan Taormino), and Venus Envy wrote “The Bio Queen Manifesto,” in which they argue that it is not only drag *king* performances that were transgressive,

¹¹⁴ Examination of the *Drag King Anthology* quickly reveals the degree to which gender is foreground in drag king analyses (“gender,” “masculinity,” or “femininity” appears as a keyword in thirteen of the fifteen essays which provide keywords), as well as to the degree to which other dimensions of difference remain marginal (“race” appears in only four of the fifteen essays which provide keywords, see Piontek, Pauliny, Noble, and Crowley; “disability” appears only once, see Surkan; and “class” and “religion” do not appear at all).

but that “all active performances of gender, including those of Bio Queens” must also be understood as transgressive.¹¹⁵ The letter ends saying:

We’d like to begin a dialogue within our community in order to push at our boundaries and definitions. We assert that Bio Queens are already vital members of this community, and not just as back-up performers or cute side dishes. We make important contributions to drag performances and dialogues, and we want our participation recognized and respected. We do not want to be tolerated or even invited into *your* space. We want to work together in a shared space to build community, inspire each other, and challenge the mainstream world’s views on gender. (Summer’s Eve et al. “Bio Queen Manifesto”)

Asserting their value and place within the community the authors demand recognition and respect, calling upon the need to work together to rethink the existing borders of community that have positioned them as outsiders. Indications of their success were that the authors were able to present their manifesto at the closing plenary of IDKE.3, and also have it reprinted in the Fall 2002 issue of *Kingdom: International Drag King Magazine*, and made available through IDKE’s official website.

Continuing along the same lines of increasing attention to gender performances in order to make drag cultures and communities more accepting of diversity and less oppressive spaces, in 2002 at IDKE.4 a group of people met to

¹¹⁵ Further discussions concerned with challenging dominant mainstream understandings of sex and gender have led to the authors of “The Bio Queen Manifesto” to since question and reject their own use of the phrase “bio queen” because of its connotation of biological determinism. Not only does the existence of “The Bio Queen Manifesto” demonstrate how transformations in understandings of gender performances have been put into the foreground of drag (king) cultures and communities, but that the authors of the manifesto also continue to work towards more inclusiveness by rejecting “bio queen” indicates the extent to which gender and sex remain primary concerns.

discuss how to combat misogyny in drag king performances.¹¹⁶ This discussion generated “Returning the Gaze: Your Audience is Looking Back,” a seven-point letter that includes specific suggestions for performers. These points include, “4. Parody is not a blanket excuse. Neither is ‘entertainment.’ We are smart out here, and we know what parody means. Don’t shut down the conversation, tell us what you are parodying, why and how” and also “5. Artists are accountable for perpetuating oppressions. The right to artistic expression doesn’t mean freedom from accountability” (IDKE Open Space Committee “Returning the Gaze”). Speaking from the viewpoint of the audience, “Returning the Gaze” is geared towards suggestions for performers to avoid the perpetuation of oppression (misogyny most specifically, but with an eye towards other oppressions) in kinking performances, as well as statements that foreground performers’ accountability in perpetuating oppression and violence. Similar to the authors of “The Bio Queen Manifesto,” the authors of “Returning Your Gaze” assert their place within the community and claim their right to air their concerns as audience members, to performers and call for “critical discussion” that recognizes the effects of performances (IDKE Open Space Committee “Returning Your Gaze”). Just as what happened with “The Bio Queen Manifesto” a year earlier, time was given to present this letter during the closing plenary, and it was also posted on IDKE’s website.

¹¹⁶ It is important to note here, however, that this meeting was an “Open Space” discussion. According to IDKE’s website, “Open Space has been set aside for conference participants to discuss what might be missing from the already-planned portion of the conference” (“Open Space”). The facilitators of this discussion, Grover and Ryder, had initially proposed a conference session to address misogyny and racism within drag king performances, but their proposal was rejected by conference organizers, and so they were relegated to IDKE.4’s “Open Space,” suggesting that at the time, there might have still been some resistance of discussing such oppression within drag cultures and communities.

A third push to transform kinging culture to better acknowledge the diversity of gender performances surfaced once again in 2004 at IDKE.6 in Chicago, Illinois. Following up on discussions during IDKE.5 in Minneapolis, Minnesota about the divisiveness within the king community by Carlos Las Vegas and Si'le Singleton, there was a town hall meeting held at IDKE.6 to discuss the event's name. More specifically, at the town hall meeting the decision was made to officially change the name of the event from International Drag King Extravaganza to International Drag KingCommunity Extravaganza to be more inclusive of all performers, regardless of whether they were specifically drag kings. This name change is the culmination of the struggle that was first raised by the authors of the "Bio Queen Manifesto" for more acknowledgment of the diversity of gender performances at IDKEs, as well as evidence that it is possible to expand kinging culture to better account for diversity. In fact, these attitude changes around gender performances not only resulted in greater acceptance of bio queen performances, but also of kinging performances by both trans and cis-gendered men.

Although it is specifically attention to gender diversity that is highlighted by these struggles, they also provide a successful model of the strategic use of identity to assert a place in the KingCommunity and effect change. More specifically, what emerges from these examples is a theory of subjectivity and culture in which subjects emphasize their belonging to a community in order to demand that community's accountability to them as subjects, and thus shape the larger culture. In reference to a context of queer API kings, however, this strategy plays out in an interesting way. As my analysis of the elements of naming, hair styling, costuming, and desirability has

established, existing frameworks for creating oneself as an API king are circumscribed in ways that do not encourage more nuanced formations.

More specifically, kinging culture's primary focus on white masculinity overshadows ways in which racialized masculinities are constructed, unless done so in racially explicit, stereotypical ways. When it comes to naming, for example, names such as Phil I . Pinas and Johnny Mozzarella aren't as generally effective racial markers as Lee Bruce Lee, Kung Pao Johnny, Junoon, Charleston Chu, Sammy Chung, Billy Chin, El Pachuco, Nappy Grooves, or JJ Chinois. Of course, not all kings want their names to signify a specific race or ethnicity. In fact, the dominant tendency of individual drag king names is to be sexual puns: Otto O'Rotic, Randy Fiasco, Dudley Doherright, Izzie Big, Rudy Ramrod, Rhythm Method, Randy Shaft, Mister Fister, Manny Nuff, Boise E. Studley, Kenny Dewar, Will Dewar, Hugh E. Rection, Stan D. Rect, etc. Still, many kings also choose names that are sexually innocuous and rather focus on signifying masculinity: Ace, Tucker, Todd Tomorrow, Johnny Kat, Johnny Kingpin, Pat Riarch, Noah Boyz, Papa Lou, Mr. Paul, etc. Others choose names with other referents—animal, literary, popular culture, personal—or other word plays. Despite the range and variety of names, however, it seems to be the case that to disrupt the whiteness that is assumed by default, kings of color must use names that are marked in racially explicit ways. Thus, kings of color who want to be visible as such are reliant, to an extent, on signaling racial stereotypes or antiquated racial characters.

Similarly confined by white masculinity in regards to hair styling, many API kings conform to specific narrow conventions. One example involves API kings with

long hair. Although most kings have short hair, there are three common tips given to those with long hair: 1) “slick it back” for a wet look, or else a tight pony tail cinched at the nape of the neck; 2) “dishevel it” for the rock star look; or 3) cover it with a hat or bandana (Diesel “A Guide to Drag Kinging”). Indeed, I’ve seen each of these three techniques used by white drag kings, relatively to the same extent. But, among the handful of times I’ve seen performances by API kings with long hair, I’ve never once seen an instance of them employing the disheveled rock star look. When embodied by white kings, “the rock star look” most often refers to a U.S. aesthetic of music artists involved in hard rock/heavy metal bands of the 1970s and 1980s, popularly known as hair bands, like Aerosmith, Poison, and Twisted Sister. In the face of this image’s vivid referent and its almost exclusive whiteness, it’s no surprise that API kings eschew the rock star look and keep to more narrow conventions of hair styling. A second example involves how API kings style their facial hair in much more limited ways than either their black or white counterparts, often employing very slight moustache and/or goatee applications, and hardly ever styling themselves with full beards, bushy mustaches, or long/pork chop sideburns. Adherence to such narrow conventions results in a smaller range of diversity of hair styles among API kings and a misleading, seemingly less complexity in their representations/performances.

Perhaps most noticeably, however, are the costuming constraints around performances of racialized masculinities engendered by kinging culture’s permeating white masculinity. Aside from choreography, a large part of a king’s stage presence comes from his costuming, particularly his clothing. When it comes to methods of

kinging reflected by clothing, I posit three strands: impersonations, character costumes, and menswear. Each uses clothing for its own distinct purposes, as well as to its own distinct end.

Performers whose act is based on impersonation often go to great lengths to copy the same moves and style of dress as the figure they are impersonating. Providing sufficient clothing signals helps make kings' impersonations easily recognizable, for example: a red leather jacket with zippers and a single sparking glove for Michael Jackson; a white jumpsuit for Elvis; a black shirt and black pants for Johnny Cash; or a black leather trench coat for Shaft. In fact, the verisimilitude of a king's clothing alone is often enough of a signal for audiences to recognize his impersonation, regardless of his race or other factors. Thus, even if a king can't do the moon walk as part of his routine and doesn't have dance moves like Michael Jackson, or is South Asian like Junoon, wearing a red leather jacket with zippers and a single sparking glove are enough to convey to the audience that he is impersonating Michael Jackson. Ultimately, this means that the identity of the person being impersonated is mapped onto, literally by clothing, the performer, whose own identity becomes subsumed. Because of the lack of available API music and pop culture figures in the U.S. to impersonate, most celebrity figures chosen are either black or white, resulting in a lack of representation of racialized API masculinities, as well as an erasure of the race/ethnicity of the API kings who perform impersonations.

Besides impersonating specific cultural figures, a second method of kinging reflected by clothing that occludes nuanced formations of racialized masculinities is the use of character costumes. Typically, this method is based on iconic masculine

characters, such as cowboys, police officers, priests, and military personnel, signified through related clothing—jeans, boots, cowboy hat; police uniform with badge, belt, club, and hat; a clerical collar and cassock; and camouflage patterned pants and shirts, respectively. Rather than attempt to signify an individual as an impersonator does, this method of kining recalls stereotypical tropes of masculinity. One way in which this occludes racialized masculinities is by prioritizing signifying the particular character to the extent that the character is only one-dimensional. Thus, there is no more to the cowboy than his being a cowboy. However, there is a second-dimension possible in so far as these tropes of masculinity are represented by the character, but also represent a larger context within which the character belongs; thus, cowboys conjure up images of horses and ranches/farms; and military personnel conjure up images of barracks/bases and war. So, using character costumes is helpful in conveying a larger scene/setting to the audience. Yet, because even these larger scenes are focused around the character's being, once again the performer's own identity becomes subsumed. In fact, in the showcase at IDKE.3 Carlos Las Vegas used the trope of the cowboy as a way to “purposely play ignorant to race” and gain the audience's support (personal communication). He remarks, “who heard of a sequin drenched asian [sic.] cowboy?” (personal communication) making the point that because of the ways in which his costuming did signify him as a cowboy (through his cowboy hat, the cut of his shirt, the chaps, and cowboy boots he also wore), neither the sequins on his shirt or his being Filipino detracted from his performance. For Carlos, using cowboy costuming was a way to downplay his race and ethnicity by highlighting a familiar trope of masculinity that though racially

unmarked, is often presumed as white. In fact, most of these iconic masculine characters are racially unmarked but presumed as white, adding to the ways in which character costuming does not allow for nuanced racialized API masculinities to emerge.

While costumes for impersonations and character costumes often stand out and make dramatic impacts in performances, the most prevalent costuming that I've observed kings use is what most would consider menswear. Considering that monetary investments in character costumes, as well as costumes for impersonations can sometimes be substantially high relative to their limited potential use, it makes sense that many kings turn to what most consider common in men's clothing—jeans, t-shirts, button-down shirts, ties, and suits. Many times these are clothing items that kings already own and/or can acquire fairly easily at inexpensive prices. Whereas costumes for impersonations recall specific individuals, and character costumes recall actors within a larger scene, this third method of kinging reflected by menswear clothing makes a broad appeal to a generic masculinity. However, because of the predominant focus on white masculinity within kinging culture, appeals to a generic masculinity are in fact appeals to a hegemonic white masculinity. This becomes significant to a discussion of the formations of racialized masculinities in that API kings of color who want to be perform that race/ethnicity can not simply put on a shirt and tie, because that simply signifies white masculinity. Instead, like Junoon and Carlos in their IDKE performances, they must use clothing stereotypical to the race/ethnicity they want to represent. In other words, they must conform to racial

stereotypes in order to be recognized as performing something other than white masculinities.

Returning to considerations of Filipino kings' use of the role of "Latin lover" further pushes thinking specifically about the use of racial stereotypes, in relationship to desirability. Rather than forcing ourselves into a dichotomy of desiring either Latinos or Asians, I suggest that we take into consideration the connections/borderslands/blurriness between Latinos and Filipinos, and the possibilities and practices of building what Lisa Lowe terms horizontal community (36), and what Michelle Habell-Pallan specifies as "marginalized groups recogniz[ing] shared stakes in the struggle to create counter-hegemonic practices and communities (204).

It is this understanding of Filipino kings adopting roles as "Latino lovers" as subjects desirous for, and emblematic of, horizontal affiliations, borderland theory, and mixed-race studies that is crucial in thinking about nationality and national belonging within queer identifications. In part, we have seen such work explored in texts such as Brian Ascalon Roley's novel *American Son* and Rudy P. Guevarra, Jr.'s essay "Burritos and Bagoong: Mexipinos and Multiethnic Identity in San Diego, California." In the former, Roley writes of the exploits of Tomas and Gabe living out their mestizo (white and Filipino) realities, intentionally, and unintentionally passing as white and/or Chicano, and of being Filipino, American, and Filipino-American. In the latter, Guevarra attempts specifically "to initiate dialogue which will recognize and explore the formation of Mexipino multiethnic identity" (76). In particular, Guevarra discusses the concept of multiple passing, "where the individual can easily

pass and blend in and out of their cultures and ethnicities, as well as others not associated with their background” (84). Considering multiple passing is yet another means to more deeply consider constructions of racialized queer masculinities in kinging culture beyond black/white paradigms.

In addition, in adopting roles of Latinos, Filipino kings can be seen as engaging in similar strategies to open up discursive spaces as Robert Lopez does through his performance of *El Vez*. In her essay, “*El Vez* is ‘Taking Care of Business,’” Habell-Pallan critically discusses the ways in which Lopez superimposes Latino culture on to popular culture (namely, Elvis Presley) “enable[ing] a site where counter-representations of undocumented racialized immigrant voices...are considered” (201). While Latino culture is still marginalized in comparison to both white and black popular cultures in the U.S., it certainly enjoys more “cross-over” success than Filipino culture. Thus, in their adoption and adaptation of roles as Latinos, Filipino kings cull out a site for their own counter-representations. Furthermore, beyond just mere representation/identification and counter-representation/counter-identification, Filipino kings performing as “Latino lovers” also enacts performances of disidentification and subversive hybridity, or as Otalvaro-Hormillosa terms it, *(a)eromestizaje*, that labor to enact permanent structural changes that reflect an identify politics not bounded in essentialized notions of the self, but rather grounded in shifting notions of community and resistance.

Although bio queens and others fighting to highlight gender diversity in kinging culture emphasized their belonging to the community to demand its accountability to them as subjects, queer API kings can not necessarily access this

same strategy, or use it to achieve the same results. The predominance of white masculinity in kinging culture means that API kings' identities as racialized subjects can often only emerge in partial, simplified, and stereotypical formations. Just as in larger society, queer API king subjects and subjectivities are rendered as alien or always already foreign. Rather than understanding this as a disadvantage, however, a kweer analysis capitalizes on, and moreover, thrives on this strangeness as a way to disrupt existing frameworks by pointing to the specific ways white hegemony has been naturalized. In addition, because API king subjects and subjectivities are constrained by the current racial ideology of kinging culture where white masculinity is predominant and can emerge in only partial formations, they present contradictions between the king identities they can perform and the king identities white kings can perform. These contradictions "provide the grounds to imagine subject, community, and practice in new ways" (L. Lowe 96). While Lowe seems to consider these contradictions as apart from identity, and hence identity politics, I come to a different conclusion. API kings' partial and constrained identities as racialized subjects is a strategic deployment of an identity politics that gains them a place on stage from where they can be seen, see others, and begin building race-conscious kinging communities. That is, rather than be denied a place on stage as a racialized performer, API kings like Junoon and Carlos Las Vegas make use of narrow kinging conventions for their purposes of making themselves visible as API kings. Although these performances are constrained, the contradictions they raise around racialized sexual representations become useful in pointing out the hegemony of white

masculinity. Thus, it is through the very differences of their identities that queer API kings are able to expand kinging cultures and ultimately make it their own.

Chapter Conclusion

Having established the significance of greater acknowledgment of non-black kings of color in the previous chapter, in this chapter I argue that specific technologies of creating oneself as an API drag king are shaped by distinct racial formations in ways that have largely gone unexamined. One way in which I enact a kweer critique in this chapter is through putting queer API kings at the center of my analysis. I work at a localized level basing my racial analyses of kinging on performances by API kings I've witnessed through my ethnographic fieldwork, as well as my own processes of constructing myself as a Filipino drag king. A second way in which I enact a kweer critique is to scrutinize the means through which people construct themselves as kings, highlighting how these methods have inherent racial implications that distinctly affect communities of color. More specifically, methodically turning to select conventions and technologies involved in creating king personas—naming, hair styling, costuming, and desirability—delineates distinctions between creating a knowable drag king body versus creating a knowable racialized drag king body. In particular, I assert that analyses of kinging culture that foreground performances of gender above all else act as a barrier for API and other kings who must overcome the singular attention on gender as they attempt to reflect intersectional concerns about sex, gender, race, ethnicity, class, and sexuality through their performances.

In light of the limitations of existing frameworks of analyzing race in kinging performances that my analyses make apparent, I explore how to reformulate frameworks to make them better able to account for minoritarian subjects and subjectivities. Emerging as most salient, perhaps, is the strategic deployment of an identity politics by API kings that, though partial and constrained, grants them visibility and a means to building community. Alone, the strides that API kings succeed in making themselves visible within in kinging culture, in challenging the racialized conventions of creating oneself as a king, and in helping to imagine API kings and their performances in new ways are valuable, through perhaps limited in their effects. However, when these discussions of cultural citizenship and representation are combined with discussions of legal citizenship and immigration, the results reveal significant contributions to examining and understanding nationality and national belonging in the lives of queer Asian American subjects and subjectivities.

Chapter 7: Immigration Through a Kweer Lens

Those of us who are queers of color who are now U.S. citizens or have legal immigration status can afford to speak out about immigrant rights. It is part of our larger struggle against racism and for diversity in the gay/lesbian/bisexual/transgender/queer communities. Immigrant rights will never be part of the queer liberation agenda until we acknowledge queer immigrants and support their struggle for legal recognition and protection.

(Bau 61)

The first time I read Ignatius Bau's essay "Queer Asian American Immigrants: Opening Borders and Closets" and ran across the above quotation, it elicited a visceral response of fear. In fact, the trepidation I experienced coming out as a queer person paled in comparison to the panic and dread I was filled with at the mere thought of what Bau was calling for—speaking out about gaining legal immigrant status. My reactions to Bau's essay are deeply rooted in my experiences as a 1.5 generation¹¹⁷ immigrant to become a documented legal permanent resident in the U.S., as well as in the immigration experiences of family and friends around me. In Filipino contexts, there exists the tagalog phrase *tago ng tago*, or *TNT* for short, that literally translates into English as "hide and hide" and describes undocumented

¹¹⁷ I use "1.5 generation" to signify that I immigrated to the U.S. as a child. In some U.S. immigrant communities, adults who immigrate to the U.S. are considered "first generation" immigrants, and children that are born in the U.S. to parents who immigrated are considered "second generation" immigrants. Children and young teenagers however, who immigrate with their parents are recognized as "1.5 generation" immigrants reflecting the fact that they were not born in the U.S., but nevertheless largely grew up and were socialized in the U.S. Broadly speaking the use of immigration generation terminology suggests degrees of proximity to the "native" country and culture, as well as degree of assimilation to U.S. culture, with the first generation being most familiar with "native" customs and cultures (especially language and food), and the second generation being less familiar. Though the use of "first," "1.5," and "second generation" is not as detailed as the terminology describing Japanese immigrants (e.g., Issei, Nisei, Sansei, Yonsei) there are clear parallels.

immigrants who are “in hiding”/“hiding” (from immigration officials) because of their lack of legal status. I grew up belonging to a large Filipino immigrant community and came into contact with many people who were *TNT*. Eventually, I subconsciously incorporated the sentiment of hiding embedded in *TNT* as an inherent part of the immigration experience for all, regardless of legal status. The dissonance between the need for immigrants to hide that I had long ago naturalized and Bau’s call to speak out manifested itself as fear. Almost ten years later and despite having since become a naturalized U.S. citizen, I still feel haunted by Bau’s words, but have also grown to be inspired by his call for action.

There is too long a history of those of us who have too often found ourselves marginalized within minoritarian groups and movements, and have experienced that understanding intersectionality is not a luxury, but a necessity. Reflecting on his own positionality, Bau writes, “as queer Asian Americans, we can provide critical connections and help build political alliances between Asian American communities and the gay/lesbian/bisexual/transgender/queer communities” (57). At the center of Bau’s argument is the importance and power of queer Asian American immigrants coming out and being visible in their multiple communities—as queer in Asian American communities, as Asian American in LGBTQ communities, and as immigrants in the queer liberation movement. Aside from being an escape from silence and hiding, it is through such visibility that Bau posits queer Asian American immigrants’ multiple identities will finally be acknowledged, allowing them to live their lives more freely.

On Being Visible

Why visibility as a privileged telos? It's become a critical commonplace (though no less true) that visibility is a necessary first step in the founding of communities based on shared identity. (Stokes 160)

Not only is being visible an effective strategy for building community based on shared identities, as this quotation from Mason Stokes' book *The Color of Sex* points out, but maintaining visibility of multiple identities is also important to developing an identity politics that, although rooted in specific experiences of individuals' lives, avoids the pitfalls of essentialism and presumed homogeneity. Given the historical exclusions of queer Asian Pacific Americans in the U.S.—legally through immigration exclusion acts, culturally through their lack of representation in the media, and socially through the stigma of always being “alien” and outsider—visibility and the insistence of being recognized as subjects of the nation-state are significant to my project of exploring the dynamics of nationality and national belonging at play within a U.S. context of queer identifications, and of making kweer interventions into LGBT Studies and queer theory. In his essay “The Challenge of Lesbian and Gay Studies” Jeffery Weeks points out four commonalities of lesbian and gay studies. The first of these four commonalities is that “lesbian and gay studies must be about the recognition of the need to learn to live with differences and to find ways of resolving differences in dialogue with one another in an open and democratic fashion” (4). A kweer approach calls exactly for a greater attention to differences through the recognition and visibility of queer Asian American subjects and

subjectivities, as well as other queers of color. Yet, as Stokes' quotation makes clear, visibility is but a first step.

Visibility has certainly proven not to be a panacea, especially in the absence of a consciously-organized group political movement. Indeed, in the chapter "Politics and Power" of her book *Virtual Equality: The Mainstreaming of Gay and Lesbian Liberation*, Urvashi Vaid discusses the danger of visibility. She writes, "gay and lesbian visibility in mainstream politics fools us. We think we are stronger and more powerful than we actually are" (211). Emerging in part from Vaid's experiences formerly serving as the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force's Policy Institute Director¹¹⁸ as well as from her other experiences fighting for LGBT civil rights, Vaid warns us about relying solely on mainstream visibility as indication of political success. In addition, there is also the danger of becoming too transfixed at the sight/site of oneself. For example, Stokes writes, "although this history of whiteness studies shows it to have a rich and varied past, it's also clear that white scholarly attention to whiteness too often reproduces what could be called the founding tenets of white critical practice: narcissism and an extreme narrowness of vision" (182). I would argue, however, that identity politics when carried out in tandem with intersectional analyses do not produce a narrow vision that is restrictive like the white scholarly attention to whiteness that Stokes critiques, but rather a vision that is at

¹¹⁸ After publishing *Virtual Equality* Vaid also served as the Executive Director at the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force.

once more extensive and also more specified that allows for more careful and precise understandings of differences.¹¹⁹

It is in this vein of working towards a more nuanced understanding of the intersections of race, sexuality, and immigration that I conduct a kweering of immigration discourses. For many in the LGBTQ community, the stakes to stay in the closet about their immigration status are high. Bau writes:

Some [LGBTQ people] have entered into heterosexual marriages in order to remain in the United States, risking detection, criminal prosecution, and deportation for marriage fraud. Others remain undocumented or with false documentation, severely restricting their ability to obtain work, receive

¹¹⁹ In her book *Selling Out*, Alexandra Chasin warns against the dangers of identity-based practices. She writes, “identity-based movement and market activity—while indispensable and inevitable on both individual and group levels—ultimately promote sameness, leaving difference vulnerable to appropriation and leaving it in place as grounds for inequality” (244). While there is certainly the danger of promoting sameness when identity politics is narrowly carried out, what I argue here is that the promotion of sameness is not the inevitable conclusion of identity politics, in particular when intersectionality remains in the foreground. Chasin’s own work, however, as evidenced by her analogy *between* gay and ethnic identity (110) demonstrates her lack of attention to the intersectionality of sexuality and ethnicity. Given this oversight in her own work, it is no wonder that she does not imagine identity politics as ultimately desirable. Moreover, Chasin is further unwisely biased against identity politics in so far as she thinks that “the popularity of identity politics is based in the wish that the kind of psychic and cultural safety often felt in a community of origin would equate to political solidarity” (235). Such an appeal to “safety” and easy solidarity fails to acknowledge the rich body of third-world and women of color feminist texts that have argued, and continue to argue against understandings of “home” and “community” that fail to acknowledge the ways in which these are contested concepts fraught with conflict. See for example Crenshaw’s “Mapping the Margins,” Anzaldúa and Keating’s *This Bridge We Call Home*, Reagon’s “Coalition Politics,” and Hull et al.’s *All the Women Are White, All the Men Are Black, but Some of Us Are Brave*.

In contrast, writing in response to what she labels as the “Post-Identity Politics Paradigm” advocated by Riki Wilchins, gender activist and executive director of GenderPAC (Gender Public Advocacy Coalition), Pauline Park discusses the danger of such a paradigm. In arguing for identity-based politics Park presents two positions that speak to often cited critiques of identity politics. First, she argues that “sexual orientation is not only an important component of legal discourse—without which anti-gay discrimination cannot be addressed—it is also a legitimate organizing principle” (752). In raising the necessity of identity in legal discourse, Park demonstrates the necessity of subjection before the law. This point is also raised by Chuh in *Imagine Otherwise* (10). Second, Park argues that identity-politics and any exclusion it may entail are preferable to the post-identity politics standpoint that any exclusion is bad, and that all exclusions are equivalent to one another (752), which does not take into account power differentials and the way in which the exclusion of dominant groups from identity-based movements is not racist, but a response to racism. For more on racism, see Wallerstein’s “Ideological Tensions of Capitalism” in *Race, Nation, Class*.

government benefits, or travel freely in and out of the United States. When other family members—spouses, children, parents, and siblings—are either dependent on the queer immigrant for their own immigration status or are involved in the interrelationships that hide the undocumented status of the queer immigrant, the stakes become even higher. (60)

Although acknowledging the risk and fear for those queer immigrants without legal status, or whose legal status is tenuous at best, for those who are now U.S. citizens or have legal permanent resident status Bau says they “can afford” to speak out about immigrant rights. He does little to acknowledge the fears or risks they face, instead emphasizing only their personal responsibility to take action.

While actions on the part of queer immigrants are certainly necessary, it is just as vital to cultivate a wider support network from allies who do not directly identify with struggles for immigration, but who understand that they are nevertheless affected by them. In particular, in his essay Bau discusses the passing in November 1994 of California’s Proposition 187, denying education, health care, and social services to undocumented immigrants. He argues that rather than having to outright defeat the initiative among white voters, if the level of support among white voters was reduced and the level of opposition in communities of color was increased, the initiative as a whole could have been defeated (59). Grimly, in order to stress the need for allies, he points out that even if voting turnout for communities of color was 100% and unanimous in its opposition to Proposition 187, without reducing support among white voters, the initiative would have still passed (58). Similarly, in November 2008 California voters passed Proposition 8, an amendment to the California Constitution

banning same-sex marriage. Though much media attention initially cited the African American vote in favor of Proposition 8 as leading to its passage, little attention was given to factors other than race that contributed to the passing of Proposition 8.

Analysts have since shown that race was actually not the most important determining factor. In fact, according to one study, the four most influential characteristics for those supporting the initiative were: party identification (Republican); ideology (Conservative); religiosity (people who attend religious services once a week); and age (65 and over) (Egan and Sherrill). These examples demonstrate that working through identity politics alone is not enough; forming alliances among varied groups of people have the potential to bring about change more quickly and effectively. It is my hope that in expanding immigration discourses through a queer Asian American critique, the burden put on those marginalized within minoritarian groups and movements will be lessened while the foundation for coalition building is strengthened and their collective powers increased.

Kweering Immigration Discourses

As vital a task as making visible the experiences of queer migrants is, considering legal citizenship and other legislative regulations of the nation-state demands more of a cultural intervention than creating self-representations can provide. This is especially true for those who do not have the privilege and protections of being a U.S. citizen or legal permanent resident, and thus cannot appeal to their membership of the polity to “challenge injustice and claim decent treatment” (Phelan 83). Particularly vulnerable are those who do not have legal status because they are undocumented immigrants. In fact, under current immigration laws, the

visibility of undocumented immigrants has severe consequences. The Office of Detention and Removal (DRO) within the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement is focused primarily on identifying, apprehending, and removing undocumented immigrants from the U.S. At the hands of the DRO, undocumented immigrants in the U.S. face being held in federal detention facilities until they can be processed by immigration courts where immigration judges determine their legal status. If it's determined that an immigrant does not have legal status to be in the U.S., they then face removal (formerly known as "deportation") and return to their country of origin. A 2008 report by Steven Camarota and Karen Jensenius for the Center for Immigration Studies noted that "the number of aliens removed (including deportations) has increased significantly in recent years. In 2007, 285,000 aliens were removed, nearly double the number in 2002" (2). According to "Immigration Enforcement Actions: 2007" these figures do not include other foreign nationals who accepted offers to return to their home countries without a removal order, which for the 2007 fiscal year totaled more than 891,000 people (1). In addition, the Immigration and Nationality Act stipulates that people who have been in the U.S. without legal status for more than 180 days but less than one year will be prohibited from returning to the U.S. for 3 years if they leave, and that people who have been in the U.S. without legal status for one year or more will be barred from legally entering the U.S. for ten years [Section 212(a)(9)(B) 8 U.S.C. 1182]. While in some contexts of queer identifications visibility may importantly and powerfully assert existence, within the legal contexts of immigration and citizenship, existence is insufficient as a basis for establishing nationality and national belonging. In other words, successfully

making interventions into legal contexts requires a shift in the legal paradigms themselves. In what follows I challenge existing frameworks and discourses of immigration and offer suggestions on how they might be reformulated to account for a wider range of queer communities of color, including but not limited to queer Asian American subjects and subjectivities.

Right to Privacy

One strategy for obtaining LGBT civil rights has been through appeals to privacy. Perhaps most noteworthy in recent years was the U.S. Supreme Court's decision to invalidate Texas' anti-homosexual-sodomy law in *Lawrence v. Texas* through invoking the right to privacy protected by the Due Process Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment of the U.S. Constitution. In considering *Lawrence v. Texas* under the Due Process Clause, Justice Anthony Kennedy delivering the majority opinion writes:

The petitioners [John Geddes Lawrence and Tyron Garner] are entitled to respect for their private lives. The State cannot demean their existence or control their destiny by making their private sexual conduct a crime. Their right to liberty under the Due Process Clause gives them the full right to engage in their conduct without intervention of the government. "It is a promise of the Constitution that there is a realm of personal liberty which the government may not enter." *Casey, supra*, at 847. The Texas statute furthers no legitimate state interest which can justify its intrusion into the personal and private life of the individual.

Justice Kennedy's majority opinion makes clear that *Lawrence* and *Garner* were free to exercise their liberty because of the specific three-part combination of consensual behaviors, by adults, conducted in private. In fact, writing about the court's re-evaluation of *Bowers v. Hardwick*, the majority opinion's emphasis on the right to privacy becomes even clearer when Justice Kennedy points out that the majority deemed the reach of *Bowers v. Hardwick* into "the most private human conduct, sexual behavior, and in the most private of places, the home" to be an infringement on individual liberty. Ultimately, the Supreme Court's decision in *Lawrence v. Texas* made liberty through an exercise of privacy central.

While certainly a victory to the extent that it overturned *Bowers v. Hardwick*, declaring remaining anti-sodomy laws unconstitutional, the decision in *Lawrence v. Texas* is not without its faults. As Dwight McBride writes:

What many in the LGBT community have embraced as a radical step forward by a conservative court really represents a new challenge in the struggle for queer liberation. The decision of the High Court effectively protected gay sexuality by privatizing it. After all, the majority opinion is based on arguments centering on privacy rights. ...privatizing gayness does not necessarily pave the way to gay "marriage" or civil unions, open expression of one's sexual identity in the military, or any number of other radical potentials with which the court's decision is presently being endowed. ("Why I Hate Abercrombie & Fitch" 84-85).

As McBride points out, appeals to privacy do not guarantee other sexuality-related civil rights. In fact, *Lawrence v. Texas* offers no legal basis for same-sex couples

fighting for the right to enter into marriages or civil unions because in so far as same-sex marriage and civil unions are based on the government's formal recognition of same-sex partnerships, they are greatly removed from the narrow scope of the privacy of the home on which *Lawrence v. Texas* is focused.

Aside from the critique of the limited range of appeals to privacy, Michael Warner offers another critique of such appeals. More specifically he critiques appeals to privacy by arguing that they serve to mask the powers of the nation state.¹²⁰ For example, in his book, *The Trouble With Normal*, Warner outlines the way in which the politics of privatization of sex have not been effective in addressing the politics of shame around gay sex, but rather have served to more effectively stigmatize gay male sex while at the same time supporting a homonormative ideal as the way out of shame and stigma. Furthermore, Warner argues that the politics of privatization “destroys real privacy even as it erodes public activity” (172), pointing to the ways in which private and public are not mutually exclusive opposites, but rather have much overlap. While Warner challenges us to look past the ways in which public and private are constructed as separate and distinct spheres so that we may better understand his argument in favor of a public sexual culture, such an exercise is also useful in considering queer Asian American immigrant subjects and subjectivities.

To presume safety within the private sphere for queer Asian American immigrant subjects is to forget the multiple ways throughout history that Asian Americans with legal U.S. citizenship have been and continue to be targeted by the nation state under suspicions of treachery and terrorism, and to overlook the ways in

¹²⁰ See for example his essay with Lauren Berlant, “Sex in Public,” which demonstrates the way in which privacy “cloaks its sexualization of national membership” (170).

which Asian Americans without legal U.S. citizenship are doubly subject to surveillance and discipline by the nation-state in private and public spheres. Just as in Warner's argument, the latter case makes clear the need to highlight the overlap and blending of private and public. Pointing out an example of this overlap Renato Rosaldo writes:

The term 'illegal' misleads because it suggests that undocumented workers are illegal in the sense of failing to obey and living outside the law. On the contrary, they obey the law more punctiliously than most citizens because they know that the punishment for the slightest infraction is deportation. In this respect, they tend to be more law-abiding than citizens with legal documents. (256)

Rosaldo makes clear that individuals' supposedly private immigration and citizenship statuses have consequences in their everyday public lives. Even some who do have legal status to be in the U.S., but are not U.S. citizens or legal permanent residents, feel the effects of their immigration status in their everyday lives. Speaking about his struggle to maintain legal status as a foreign national in a same-sex bi-national relationship Rafael Jean says, "my whole life is organized around my visa status and everything I need to do to keep the visa" (qtd. in *Family, Unvalued* 43). There is much overlap between the private life Jean is trying to live with his same-sex partner in the U.S. and his struggle to maintain his legal status to stay in the country. These close connections between private and public facilitate the making of the personal political, as well as encourage the development of an identity politics that reflects multiple dimensions of difference (race, sexuality, nationality, etc.).

Moreover, when considering the application, interview, and other required paperwork (e.g., birth certificate, marriage certificate, proof of employment, etc.) and processes (e.g., being photographed, being fingerprinted for an FBI criminal background check, undergoing a medical exam, etc.) related to obtaining legal immigration status, there is ultimately very little privacy, if any, for applicants. Not only is information required to apply for a visa in order to enter the U.S. legally, as well as to obtain legal immigrant status to stay in the U.S., but this information is kept on file by U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services for other uses. For example, USCIS information and data is used in the Systematic Alien Verification for Entitlements (SAVE) Program, as well as the E-Verify Employment Verification Program (E-Verify) and other processes that authorize employment. SAVE is continuously used to verify the immigration status of people both applying for and receiving federally funded benefits. More specifically, SAVE is an inter-governmental initiative which allows access by several federal departments, and also all state and local agencies who administer federal benefits. Instances when information in SAVE might be accessed include applying for various federal programs, including: Temporary Assistance to Needy Families, Medicaid, Unemployment Compensation, Title IV Educational Assistance, and some housing assistance programs (“SAVE Governing Laws”). E-Verify is continuously used by participating employers “to electronically verify the employment eligibility of their newly hired employees” (“Fact Sheet: E-Verify Strengthening the Employment Eligibility Document Review Process for the Nation’s Employers”). Clearly, information related to a person’s immigration status is used far beyond the initial

application for legal immigration status. In this sense, to the degree that immigrants' identities are not their own, an identity politics approach could be understood as an empowering reclaiming of those identities.

Since the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965 changed patterns of immigration allowing for an increase of immigrants from Asian countries, the U.S. Census has reported high proportions of Asian Americans that are foreign born. In particular, the 2000 U.S. Census found that 69% of all Asian Americans were foreign born, and that of these 69%, half have already been naturalized as U.S. citizens, while half are still somewhere within the immigration process (Reeves and Bennett). This high proportion of Asian immigrants among the total number of Asian Americans in the U.S. means that an equally high proportion of Asian Americans' information is available through USCIS for programs such as SAVE and E-Verify.¹²¹ With the passing of additional laws in the last decade, such as the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996, the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act of 1996, and the Real ID Act of 2005, the growing trend is to increase federal control of and access to immigrant's personal information. Taking into account all these conditions combined, any allusion of privacy for queer Asian American immigrants is weak, at best.

Until we acknowledge how little right to privacy queer Asian American immigrants, as well as other immigrants as a whole, are afforded precisely because of their immigrant status, tensions between struggles for immigrant rights and struggles for sexuality-related civil rights based on appeals to privacy will continue. More

¹²¹ Given that immigrant status persists until an immigrant has successfully been naturalized as a U.S. citizen, it's unclear when, if at all, the information about naturalized U.S. citizens who were formerly immigrants, is removed from USCIS databases, including but not limited to SAVE and E-Verify.

specifically, queer Asian American immigrants will continue to be marginalized by gay civil rights struggles narrowly defined along appeals to privacy until the effects of the conditions of immigration they endure are understood. Aside from making central queer Asian American immigrants' multifaceted identity politics, another possible solution to dissipate the tensions between immigrant rights and sexuality-related civil rights is to take a different approach to fight for civil rights. An alternative approach could be by appealing to the Fourteenth Amendment's guarantee of equal protection of laws as Justice Sandra O'Connor does in her concurring opinion of *Lawrence v. Texas*, and as other well-known African American civil rights Supreme Court cases such as *Brown v. Board of Education* and *Loving v. Virginia* have done in the past. Still another possible approach is to be more forthright in admitting how immigration processes impinge on individuals' rights of privacy. Although it's highly unlikely that the USCIS will collect less personal information from immigrants or limit the accessibility to that information, especially given the U.S.'s renewed focus post 9/11 on immigration enforcement and border patrol, perhaps acknowledging that giving up privacy is a condition of immigration will facilitate conversations about how to successfully negotiate the need to regulate immigration while also maintaining applicants' basic human rights.

Legal Entry

A second way in which to reconsider immigration through a queer lens and make queer Asian American subjects and subjectivities central is by challenging the focus on (il)legal entry in contemporary immigration discourses. Though literally, migration denotes a movement across borders, and immigration more specifically a

movement into a new location/country, movement is just one element at play within the range of immigration. The elements of immigration that emerge as dominant are relative to time, place, and other contextual factors such as political climate, economic prosperity, and cultural values. Movement combines with these other elements to create particular discourses of immigration, and to distinctly shape and affect people's experiences of immigration during different periods of U.S. history.

Much early U.S. immigration history reflects a pre-occupation with the country's potential as well as actual population growth. Immigration regulations were maintained by individual states until 1790 when federal controls related to immigration began. Early U.S. immigration laws such as the Naturalization Act of 1790, Naturalization Act of 1795, and the Naturalization Act 1798 were concerned primarily with processes of naturalization, including establishing residency requirements, declaring intentions to seek citizenship, and other minimum requirements for naturalization ("Legislation from 1790-1900"). As the frequency and number of people traveling to the U.S. by ship began to increase, immigration laws like the Steerage Act of March 2, 1819 and the Passenger Act of March 3, 1855 then focused on establishing rules for reporting and tracking immigration through passenger manifests. Then, reflecting the concern about who was attempting to immigrate to the U.S., laws such as the Act of March 3, 1875 included provisions that prohibited "undesirable immigrants" from entering the country. Whereas the earliest U.S. immigration laws focus on nation-building, and how to extend immigrants the recognition as belonging to the nation and grant them citizenship rights, later U.S. immigration laws turn their focus to immigration restrictions, and limit who can enter

the country according to race and ethnicity (by excluding Chinese immigrants), socio-economic status (by excluding those “likely to become a public charge”), and criminal record (by excluding criminals and prostitutes) (“Legislation from 1790-1900”).

Since the late 19th century, U.S. immigration history indicates growing concerns for regulating immigration. On one hand, this comes as no surprise given finite resources in the face of an increasing population. On the other hand, the various regulations imposed demonstrate selective exclusions and point to intentions beyond merely control population growth. For example, the countless changes—both additions and subsequent repeals—to the list of grounds for excluding foreign nationals that first emerged in 1875 and still exists today demonstrate selective exclusions. So, too, do the various other means of immigration regulation throughout U.S. history illustrate selectivity—minimum requirements related to knowledge of the English language, minimum literacy requirements, requirements of tax payments, limits to the number of immigrants allowed to enter from particular countries based on a quota system, provisions establishing grounds to deport immigrants based on misconduct, etc. (“Legislation from 1901-1940”). Through its immigration regulations, the U.S. has been self-consciously shaping itself through the very people it allows and denies into its borders, and accepts and rejects as citizens that are part of the nation.¹²²

In the U.S. contemporary moment, concerns of regulating immigration seem most focused on moments of (il)legal entry. In recent years much attention has been

¹²² While detailing a full history of immigration to the U.S. is beyond the scope of this chapter, I offer evidence here to illustrate some of the shifts in discourses and representations of immigration.

paid to the twofold strategy of first, reducing the backlog of applications for immigration so that people can obtain visas to legally enter and permanently live in the U.S., and second, improving and increasing the surveillance of U.S. borders to better monitor people's movements into the U.S. to prevent any instance of illegal entry. While a focus on legal entry is far from new, there has been a substantial intensification of attention to it since the terrorist attacks in the U.S. on September 11, 2001. These terrorist attacks were particularly significant because of the large amount of civilian lives that were lost in the U.S. Following the attacks, national security—especially the security of U.S. borders and protecting U.S. soil against similar future attacks—became the center of U.S. politics. In particular, a main emphasis in the fight against terrorism was the call to secure our borders against outsiders, and thereby protect ourselves from foreign invaders. In working towards this goal, one response that specifically affected U.S. immigration was the re-organization of the former Immigration and Naturalization Services (INS) within the Department of Justice. More specifically, in 2003 INS was absorbed into the newly formed Department of Homeland Security and re-organized as the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, and the Customs of Borders Protection agencies. The reorganization separates the services and enforcement functions and allows for a greater focus on each. Other efforts to make our borders more secure that intersect with immigration and other movements across borders include the passing of the legislation like the Intelligence Reform and Terrorism Prevention Act of 2004 which includes the Western Hemisphere Travel Initiative and requires that all people, including U.S. citizens, entering the U.S. from

Canada, Mexico, Bermuda, and other countries of the Caribbean show proof of identity and citizenship through standardized documents (e.g., U.S. passports, U.S. passport cards, enhanced driver's license, etc.) ("Western Hemisphere Travel Initiative").

Another area in which a focus on (il)legal entry emerges is through representations of immigrants. Though representations of European immigrants arriving at the Statue of Liberty certainly still exist, more recent representations of immigrants emphasize those from Latin America, especially Mexico. Unlike the sentiment of welcome associated with the Statue of Liberty, re-enforced by the well cited lines, "Give me your tired, your poor,/ your huddled masses yearning to breathe free,/ The wretched refuse of your teeming shore" from Emma Lazarus' poem "The New Colossus," recent years have focused on installing an ever growing expanse of border fences with which to ward off, not welcome, Mexican immigrants attempting to illegally enter the U.S. ("Southwest Border Fence").¹²³ In fact, reinforcing borders (physical and otherwise) against entry by undocumented immigrants was one of the main features of the Border Protection, Antiterrorism, and Illegal Immigration Control Act of 2005 (H.R. 4437), which was passed by the U.S. House of Representatives of the 109th Congress in December 2005. Although this act never passed the U.S. Senate, it did strike up much public debate about immigration regulations, particularly its criminalization of undocumented immigrants and those that help them. On May 1, 2006, immigrants and supporters of immigrant rights took to the streets in protest against H.R. 4377 across the U.S. While May 1 has been

¹²³ With the passing of the Secure Fence Act of 2006, the Department of Homeland Security was charged with installing specific lengths of fencing around specific points by certain deadlines, along with other added border security in the form of physical barriers, lighting, cameras, and sensors.

celebrated as International Worker's Day, commemorating achievements of the labor movement, in the U.S. in 2006 it became specifically tied to immigrants as well, in a protest known as a "Day Without Immigrants." There was much news and media coverage at both the local and national levels leading up to the event, as well as for coverage of the event itself.¹²⁴ Overwhelmingly, representations tended to focus on Latino and Mexican immigrants, with only an occasional mention that other ethnic immigrant groups were also part of the protests.¹²⁵ While the recent report, "Estimates of the Unauthorized Immigrant Population Residing in the United States: January 2008," by Hoefer, Rytina, and Baker states that Mexico is the leading source of undocumented immigration to the U.S., they make clear that Mexico is not the only source. Given these statistics, it's not surprising that discourses and representations of immigration that focus on the illegal entry by undocumented workers centers on immigrants from Mexico.

The narrow focus on (il)legal entry within immigration discourses will continue to target undocumented immigrants from Mexico, and to elide queer Asian American immigrant subjects and subjectivities. Focusing on (il)legal entry serves to reify immigration as a simple binary between undocumented and legal immigrants, to enforce the stereotype that all Mexican immigrants are undocumented ones, as well as to entrench the southwestern U.S. border with Mexico as the site of illegal border crossings in popular imaginations and representations of immigration. In fact,

¹²⁴ A LexisNexis search using the keywords "day without immigrants" and "protest" and "2006" resulted in almost 1000 results from major U.S. and world publications and TV and radio broadcast transcripts.

¹²⁵ See for example Johnny Fairbanks "Oh Say Can You Si, Senor?"; Brian Knowlton "Immigrants, Legal and Illegal, Rally Across U.S."; Sheldon Alberts "Immigrants Demonstrate Their Clout"; and Dan Glaister and Ewen MacAskill "American protests."

immigration is a complex process and involves much more than just entering the country. Only when discourses of immigration are widened to consider the entire process of immigration holistically, instead of as a moment of (il)legal entry, will they account for a wider range of queer communities of color, including but not limited to queer Asian American subjects and subjectivities. In particular, more attention needs to be paid to immigration processes after entering the U.S.

One factor that is important to a kweer analysis of immigration is an acknowledgment that immigration is an ongoing process that continues after the moment of entry. Far from the end of an immigrant's journey, for many, entering the country is simply a beginning. Even immigrants who legally enter the country through family reunification grounds and have legal permanent resident status in the U.S. must (contrary to the literal name of their status) periodically apply to have their status renewed. More specifically, every ten years, every legal permanent resident must file the appropriate applications and pay the required fees, and still faces the possibility of their application for renewal of their permanent resident card being denied.¹²⁶ This process may not be an onerous task for many, but it does make clear that the process of immigration is a life-long ongoing one for legal permanent residents, who must keep track of their cards' expiration dates as well as maintain familiarity with the forms and procedures for filing their applications. Moreover, not only are all immigrants required by the Immigration and Nationality Act to have a legal permanent resident card, but they are also required to carry that card with them at all times. In contrast, there is no similar persistent requirement for U.S. citizens to

¹²⁶ Currently this renewal of a permanent resident card is covered by form I-90, and costs \$290, with a potential additional \$80 biometrics fee ("Application to Replace Permanent Resident Card").

carry proof of their citizenship. In fact, only U.S. citizens traveling internationally require a U.S. passport (or a U.S. passport card in certain limited circumstances).¹²⁷ Thus, beyond the moment of entry, immigrants face the constant requirement of demonstrating proof of their legal status at any given moment. Acknowledging this lesser publicized aspect of the immigration process better reveals how complex a system it is, and brings attention to possible effects of issues of race, ethnicity, and sexuality. For example, the need for queer legal permanent residents to maintain their status demonstrates that it is not simply queer people who are applying for asylum or who are foreign nationals in a same-sex bi-national partnership with a U.S. citizen that can be served by queer immigrant organizations.

Even keeping in mind the recent focus on queer migration based on asylum, attention to immigration as an ongoing process is important. Those who are successful in their asylum applications are granted asylee status and authorized to live and work in the U.S. indefinitely. An asylee, however, is not a legal permanent resident, nor is asylee status itself indefinitely guaranteed (that is, there are conditions under which asylee status may be terminated). While asylees are eligible for some benefits through the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' Office of Refugee Resettlement, they do not enjoy the full rights of U.S. citizenship, or even all the rights of legal permanent residents. Approaching immigration holistically may be particularly important for queer people who successfully obtained asylum because understanding that asylee status is distinct from both legal permanent resident status

¹²⁷ In comparison to legal resident cards for immigrants, U.S. citizens over the age of 16 who need to renew their U.S. passport can do so by mail for \$100, and/or for \$45 obtain a passport card valid for entry to the United States from Canada, Mexico, the Caribbean, and Bermuda at land border crossings or sea ports-of-entry ("Passport Fees").

or U.S. citizenship could be important to prompting asylees to formally apply to adjust their status to legal permanent residents, and perhaps to eventually apply for U.S. citizenship, to better secure their right to live and work in the U.S. When queer immigrant organizations focus simply on obtaining asylee status, they maintain a narrow viewpoint of immigration and overlook the continuing struggles that are present after gaining asylee status.

Legal permanent residents and asylees are just two of the statuses possible that exist between the range of being an undocumented immigrant and being a legal U.S. citizen. Just as with these two statuses, other statuses are directly affected by the ways in which immigration is an ongoing process that continues after the moment of entry. To fully understand nationality and national belonging for queer Asian American subjects and subjectivities, the whole of their experiences with immigration must be considered.

Model Minority

A third way in which to reconsider immigration through a queer lens and make queer Asian American subjects and subjectivities central is by challenging the myth of the model minority and its connections to sexuality and immigration. Though Asians have not always been welcomed as immigrants into the U.S., since changes to the Immigration and Nationality Act in 1965 the percentage of Asian Americans who are foreign-born in comparison to the total population of Asian Americans has increased dramatically. According to the *2007 Yearbook of Immigration Statistics* by region, it is people from Asia and North America that have consistently accounted for the two largest groups of people obtaining legal permanent

resident status from 1998 to 2007 (12). While about half of the people from North American obtaining legal permanent resident status are born in Mexico, the representation of Mexican immigrants as undocumented continues. In contrast, representations of Asian immigrants often tend to reflect model minority stereotypes that portray Asian Americans as particularly high achieving in education, working at good jobs, earning a good living, and who through their hard work have achieved “the American dream,” also setting an example, a model, that other minorities should follow. In keeping with this stereotype, Asian immigrants are often imagined and portrayed as successful doctors, engineers, and other professionals even though, as Claire Jean Kim points out, statistics reveal that “Asian immigration to the U.S. is distinctively bifurcated: many Asian immigrants are poor and unskilled and end up at the margins of the low-wage service economy, but many others are highly educated, skilled, and affluent” (23).¹²⁸ The echoing of model minority stereotypes in representations of Asian immigrants homogenizes Asian immigrants and prevents the experiences of immigrants from distinct Asian communities and countries from emerging.¹²⁹ Moreover, the predominance of the myth of the model minority in Asian immigration overshadows the experiences of a large portion of Asian immigrants who have struggled to immigrate, and continue to struggle living in the U.S. In these ways, the immigration discourses that do focus on Asians (instead of the more usual focus on Latinos) become narrow and do not fully allow for the

¹²⁸ For example, according to the *2007 Yearbook of Immigration Statistics*, even though in 2007 the number of Asians immigrating to the U.S. based on employment-based preferences outnumbered those coming from any other region, even both Europe and North America, the number of asylees and refugees from Asian countries was also higher than the number from any other region (27).

¹²⁹ For a more in-depth discussion of the model minority stereotype, see Stacey J. Lee’s *Unraveling the “Model Minority” Stereotype: Listening to Asian American Youth*.

consideration of the diverse range of Asian American subjects and subjectivities, including those who are queer.

When it comes to queer Asian Americans in particular, the effects of the model minority myth on their experiences of immigration are significant. To begin with, the model minority myth assumes heterosexuality. Although heterosexuality is not usually named explicitly in most definitions of model minority, it is specifically the assimilation into dominant white heterosexual middle-class culture that images of the model minority myth idealize. In addition, the overwhelming representation of homosexuality as a white, American phenomenon succeeds in distancing Asian American immigrants from queerness even more. In both these cases, there is little space for imagining the existence of a queer Asian American immigrant. The model minority myth and its underlying compulsory heterosexuality and the underlying racism of stereotypes of queers as white can become internalized, and affect queer Asian American immigrants on a more pernicious level, especially for those whom maintaining strong ties to racial and ethnic communities are a high priority. For example, countless stories in Russell Leong's anthology, *Asian American Sexualities: Dimensions of the Gay and Lesbian Experience*, express the difficulty of coming out because of tensions within both queer communities (around race and immigration), and Asian American communities (around sexuality) and the constant feeling of needing to have to choose one over the other.¹³⁰ In the face of this false dilemma of having to choose, a kweer approach invested in an identity politics that allows for

¹³⁰ See for example: Dana Y. Takagi "Maiden Voyage"; Martin F. Manalansan, IV "Searching for Community: Filipino Gay Men in New York City"; Cristy Chung, Aly Kim, Zoon Nguyen, and Trinity Ordone, with Arlene Stein "In Our Own Way: A Roundtable Discussion"; and Gayatri Gopinath "Funny Boys and Girls: Notes on a Queer South Asian Planet."

intersectionality is useful in fighting against the homogenizing force of the model minority myth and re-asserting an attention to differences among Asian American immigrants, as well as among queer community members.

Chapter Conclusion

In earlier chapters I focused on how discourses of legal citizenship and immigration obscured a focus on queer Asian American subjects and subjectivities. In Chapter 3 I discussed how an emphasis on queer people's second-class citizenship overshadows queer concerns about actual legal citizenship, as well as provided examples of API people being denied access to immigration and legal citizenship and/or being discriminated against despite their legal status. Then in Chapter 4 I examined the major avenues of immigration to the U.S., looking particularly at how sexuality is embedded within them. Finally in this chapter my analysis culminates in a three-part re-evaluation of immigration based on the centralization of queer Asian American immigrant subjects and subjectivities.

This chapter exemplifies that a kweer critique of immigration leads to different conclusions than other analyses suggest about how to understand the dynamic of nationality and national belonging at play for queer Asian American subjects and subjectivities. More specifically, my three-part re-evaluation of immigration: 1) works against LGBT political strategies that aim to secure rights based on appeals to privacy which assume a privacy that isn't afforded to queer Asian American immigrants; 2) rejects the narrow focus on (il)legal entry within immigration discourses, including queer immigration discourses based on seeking asylum and family reunification, that masks ongoing immigration processes after the

moment of entry; and 3) exposes the tyranny of reproducing model minority stereotypes in representations of Asian immigrants that homogenizes Asian immigrant populations, denying differences among them, including differences of sexuality. Illustrating how existing attention to privacy, (il)legal entry, and model minorities, respectively, is based on false assumptions that become glaringly out of place when considering the lived realities of queer Asian American subjects and subjectivities helps to distinctly mark my conclusions about their nationality and national belonging from other analyses of immigration and sexuality. Ideally, challenging and extending the boundaries that too narrowly circumscribe experiences of immigration to the U.S. will encourage further research on the intersectionality of immigration and sexuality that can better account for the differences in identities among queer Asian American subjects and subjectivities, and better encompass their experiences.

Chapter 8: Conclusion

Time and again, I consistently find myself pre-occupied with issues of identity, community, and belonging. I can easily see how my own personal experiences account for this, and I could offer countless stories, from my early childhood years throughout my life to the current moment, as illustrations of specific examples. Beyond just me, however, identity, community, and belonging have been and remain important. As political movements for social justice, historical formations of the Women's Liberation Movement, the Gay Liberation Movement, and the Asian American Movement employed an identity-based politics to build community, and then as a gathered force fought to assert their belonging within mainstream communities at large. The academic institutionalizations of Women's Studies, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Studies, and Asian American Studies have historically taken up identity, community, and belonging as key concepts as well. Throughout this dissertation, I have endeavored to attend to each of these three levels—the personal, the political, and the academic. These levels are by no means mutually exclusive from one another, and yet they remain distinct. For quite some time now, the definitions, boundaries, and significances of identity, community, and belonging have been contested. In particular, greater attention to the intersectionality and fluidity within and among identities, community, and belonging have pushed against former borders, adding to our knowledges, and perhaps most importantly expanding our capacity to understand—ourselves, each other, and the

societies we construct. To an extent, the situated knowledges¹³¹ I have to offer based on my personal stories and lived experiences are valuable and important to the basis of both Women's Studies and LGBT Studies in standpoint theory.¹³² Though by no means the only theory at play in either field, standpoint theory has been a major force used in both to develop feminist and queer epistemologies, and in my own work to develop a kweer epistemology that consciously contextualizes sex, gender, race, and nationality.

I initially began this research focused only on further exploring drag king performances and kinging culture. In particular, I was captivated by kinging's effects on community building—within its own realms, as kinging communities and kinging cultures were initially being formed and shaped (and re-shaped), and within larger spheres, as kinging facilitated queer community building across gender lines, as well as gained more visibility in the heterosexual mainstream. Moreover, not only did kinging challenge traditional gender norms, but the playfulness and wit with which performers executed these challenges were often alluring and easily lent themselves to analysis, not only of gender but also of consumerism, capitalism, and democracy. However, as my research continued, the dissonance between kinging's challenge to sexist gender norms and its limited portrayals of race and ethnicity, often maintaining racist stereotypes, grew. On both individual and cultural levels, the consciousness, fervor, and sophistication with which kinging critiqued, analyzed, and reinvented

¹³¹ For more on partial and situated knowledges see Donna Haraway's essay "Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective," which was first published as a journal article in *Feminist Studies*, but also appears as Chapter 9 of Haraway's book *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature*.

¹³² For more on the salience of standpoint theory in Women's Studies and LGBT Studies see, for example: McCann and Kim's *Feminist Theory Reader*, especially Hartsock, Narayan, Collins, Calhoun, and Zinn and Dill; and Weeks' "The Challenge of Lesbian and Gay Studies."

traditional gender roles soared, while the willingness and interest in similarly tackling scripts of race and ethnicity became difficult to maintain. In part, this dissertation contributes directly to discussions about racialized politics in kinking that have often been overshadowed by attention to gender politics.

It became clear that differences among kinkers' individual identities and experiences of belonging manifested themselves distinctively through their kinking, and vice versa, the ways in which kinking cultures were shaped were in direct relationship to who their members were. I consider myself quite fortunate in the number of kinkers and other kink community members that I have met and spoken with who were deeply invested in issues of race in kinking. Still, I was frustrated by the frequency and degree to which gender remained the primary, if not only, dimension of difference discussed within kinking.

At the heart of my frustration was not kinking in and of itself, but rather at singly-focused, and otherwise narrow approaches to understanding and analyzing differences within kinking and beyond. My focus, then, turned to deploying intersectional analyses in the service of exploring nationality and national belonging at play within a U.S. context of queer identifications, in order to more specifically account for the material existence of a fuller range of queer bodies of various colors. In particular, I have focused on developing a kqueer critique that centrally considers the experiences of queer Asian Americans. While my goals from the beginning have included raising the visibility of queer Asian Americans' existence and better understanding their experiences as racialized queer subjects, doing so was always meant to contribute to a larger conversation about how marginalized minoritarian

subjects negotiate the communities, institutions, and systems in which they find themselves. As such my work not only relies on individuals' lived experiences, but is also always concerned with the larger social and cultural contexts that circumscribe their lives.

Some elements of my dissertation may seem quite familiar to many. Indeed, I am not the first to raise issues of sexuality within feminist studies, or the first to call for greater attention to analyzing race within LGBT studies, or the first to point out the distinct racialization of Asian Americans in the U.S., or the first to examine connections between immigration and sexuality. Nor am I even the first to write specifically about queer Asian American immigration. Moreover, it is increasingly common to see both interdisciplinary and intersectional analyses. I am indebted to all those who came before me, and privileged to be following in their steps.

In many ways, though, I do set out on a path of my own. To begin with, my project is distinct from others in its insistence that sustained attention to queer Asian American subjects and subjectivities remains important at a time when Women's Studies, Queer Studies, and Asian American Studies are challenging the meaning of identity and the value of a subject of study, moving from a U.S. focus to more transnational and diasporic locations, and turning away from projects of visibility. In contrast to the trend of moving away from identity and identity politics, my dissertation is heavily invested in identities and revitalizing identity politics. One reason I am invested in identities is because they serve as a means to visibility through which to assert subjectivity, as I illustrated in Chapter 6 through API drag kings like Junoon and Carlos Las Vegas who purposefully enacted their race in

kinging performances in order to confront social issues and political battles related to racist oppression, or even in Chapter 7 through Ignatius Bau's call for queer immigrants who have legal U.S. citizenship to speak out about immigrant rights and foreground the struggle for legal recognition and protection. Another way in which identities figure importantly in my dissertation is through the way they reflect hierarchical power relationships in social, cultural, political, and legal structures. For example, the brief history I provide in Chapter 3 details immigration acts specifically excluded distinct groups of Asians (Chinese, Indians, Filipinos, etc.) at particular economic and political moments of U.S. history demonstrating the connections between those identities and social and cultural attitudes about race, nationality, and national belonging at the time. Similarly, in Chapter 2 my discussion of kinging as building queer community is directly related to responses to homophobic oppression and the need to form safe spaces based in identity politics. Throughout my dissertation attention to identity and identity politics have also been important to politics of representation and cultural productions, particularly in creating new imagined possibilities, whether of racially nuanced kinging performances or of a redefinition of family that allows queer people greater access to immigration based on family reunification.

In addition, another way in which my dissertation compares to prior scholarship is that it extends existing analyses. For example, I work from queer of color critique's focus on blackness to consider other queer racial formations. I begin by discussing the growing entrenchment of blackness in an African American context in queer of color critique in Chapter 1, and in the same chapter also delineate the

ways in which a black racial formation cannot account for queer Asian American subjects and subjectivities. Most directly, I follow this by providing examples from analyses of kinging performances in Chapter 5 that present frameworks for analyzing performances that are centered on a black/white binary, and then in Chapter 6 describe how specific API king subjects reformulate kinging frameworks to incorporate greater nuances of race in their performances. More indirectly, however, my dissertation's focus on immigration is meant in and of itself as a way to highlight a key element in the racial formation of Asian Americans.

Another example of how my dissertation extends existing analyses is by exploring the connections between immigration and sexuality. As I established in Chapter 4, much prior scholarship connecting immigration and sexuality has tended to focus on immigrating through family reunification and seeking asylum. In contrast, I assess both these appeals to immigration based on family reunification and asylum, demonstrating that in each emerges distinct areas of concern for queer immigration applicants, such as playing into a narrative of victimization when seeking asylum, and employing an assimilationist strategy in calling for immigration sponsorship based on the recognition of same-sex permanent partnerships. In addition, rather than stay focused only on these two major avenues of immigration, I encourage more in-depth exploration of a third avenue—immigration through employment-based appeals.

Perhaps most unique, however, is that my dissertation maintains a focus on identity and identity politics, and extends existing analyses of queer of color critique and queer immigration studies through a juxtaposition of kinging and discourses of

U.S. immigration that aims specifically to center queer Asian American subjects and subjectivities and better study the dynamic of nationality and national belonging at play in U.S. queer identifications. For many, the combination of kinging and U.S. immigration discourses is quite puzzling. By far, one of the most popular queries about my dissertation is how kinging and U.S. immigration discourses interact with one another and/or can be understood together in meaningful ways. There are several different replies to this that my dissertation offers, each of which to their own degree holds true. First, the operations of a kweer critique are clearly illustrated through each. Thus, in a parallel manner, kinging and U.S. immigration discourses both reflect their failures to account for queer Asian American subjects and subjectivities, and similarly each undergoes a transformation resulting in better attention to intersectionality following a kweer intervention. In this case, the seeming disparateness of kinging and U.S. immigration discourses is a testament to the interdisciplinary reach of a kweer critique. Second, the juxtaposition of kinging and U.S. immigration discourses allows for an analysis of citizenship that is multiple (e.g., cultural citizenship, legal citizenship) as well as layered (e.g., legal citizenship status as influencing demonstrations of cultural citizenship, queer cultural citizenship as affected by gender, race, and class). In so far as citizenship emerges as a key component of the dynamic of nationality and national belonging within a U.S. context of queer identifications that is central to the movement towards kweer I propose, these nuanced investigations of citizenship are vital. Third, kinging and immigration intersect in individuals' lives in so far as most of the Asian/Pacific Islander kings I made contact with were immigrants or had parents that were immigrants (though not

all to the U.S.). Fourth, as a queer political outlet, by extension, kinging could be used as a means of raising awareness about the ways in which immigration is a queer issue. Ultimately, although all these connections between kinging and immigration exist in my dissertation, I consciously refrain from making any one of them more important than another to emphasize the viability and importance of them all, as well as not to preclude additional potential connections.

From my vantage point the significance of my dissertation's combination of U.S. immigration discourses and kinging is that my project addresses the exact two overlapping issues—immigration and media representation—that were ranked as the top five most important issues for queer Asian Americans, as well as more broadly for all Asians and Pacific Islanders in the U.S. (Dang and Vianney 7). These rankings come from a survey created by the National Gay and Lesbian Taskforce (the Task Force) originally designed to: 1) “gather socio-demographic information about API LGBT people”; 2) “identify the most important issues facing the API LGBT community”; 3) “gather information about the experiences of API LGBT people at LGBT and non-LGBT API organizations”; and 4) “examine API LGBT political and civic participation” (Dang and Vianney 9). Initially, the survey was presented as a self-administered paper survey to queer Asian American attendees at the regional Queer Asian Pacific Legacy conference at New York University in March 2004, which the Task Force co-sponsored. In February 2005, the Task Force released “Asian Pacific American Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender People: A Community Portrait” by Alain Dang and Mandy Hu that reports on the data from that initial survey which reflected 124 valid surveys (Dang and Hu 15). In light of this

report, the Task Force decided there was a need to “collect and analyze additional survey data at the national level” (Dang and Vianney 9) and created a web-based version of the same survey which solicited participation from queer Asian American respondents from June through September 2006. More than 860 respondents from 38 states and Washington, D.C. participated, making this the “largest-ever survey of API LGBT individuals in the United States” (Dang and Vianney 1).

The first two questions of the survey asked respondents to identify the “most important issues facing all Asians and Pacific Islanders in the U.S.” as well as the “most important issues facing lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender Asians and Pacific Islanders in the U.S.” (Dang and Vianney 73-74). Although there were some changes to both lists of the top five issues from the 2004 to the 2006 results, both immigration and media representation remained among the top five issues and were, in fact, the only two issues that respondents identified as being important to *all* API people, as well as to *LGBT* API people. Literally, immigration and media representation are at the juncture of the intersectionality of API and queer API concerns. Another difference between the 2004 and 2006 results is that the gap in percentage between the top five most important issues has narrowed. So, for instance, in 2004 69% of respondents identified immigration as the most important issues facing all Asian-Pacific Americans in the U.S. (Dang and Hu 24), but in 2006, although immigration was once again at the top of the list, only 57% of respondents agreed that it was the most important issue (Dang and Vianney 50). In regards to the importance of media representation however, in both 2004 and 2006 it was the second most important issue, with 36% support in 2004 (Dang and Hu 24), and 38% support in 2006 (Dang

and Vianney 50). In comparison, when asked about the most important issues facing LGBT Asian Pacific Islanders in the U.S., in 2004 immigration was at the top with 40% with both media representation and hate violence/harassment close behind at 39% (Dang and Hu 25), and in 2006 hate violence/harassment rose to the top with 39%, media representation remained second with 37%, but immigration dropped to fourth with 32% (Dang and Vianney 52).

My dissertation's focus on kinging culture and discourses of U.S. immigration fall right in line with the top issues that queer Asian Americans have identified. Though seemingly an odd pairing to some, together kinging culture and immigration not only reflect the top concerns at the heart of queer Asian American subjects and subjectivities, but also serve as points of connection between all API people and LGBT API people more specifically. Thus, my dissertation's focus on kinging and immigration discourses is also significant for the coalitional concerns it reflects and attempts to facilitate. Moreover, my focus on kinging culture and immigration discourses brings about examinations of cultural, political, and legal citizenship that help explore the dynamic of nationality and national belonging for queer Asian American subjects and subjectivities in a U.S. context of queer identifications.

Another further connection between kinging and U.S. immigration discourses that my dissertation's focus on nationality and national belonging in a context of queer identifications lays a foundation for are transgender interventions. To a much greater extent than race, transgender interventions in kinging have already led to multiple and more complex scripts of what counts as masculinity, and how and by whom those various masculinities can be performed. In addition, transgender

activists make clear that the REAL ID Act of 2005, though intended to target and scrutinize the identity documents of immigrant populations, also acts as additional surveillance on transcommunities in the U.S. There is much space here to capitalize on the coalitional connections between queer Asian American and transgender issues, at a moment when Transgender Studies and Black Queer Studies are key growth areas of LGBT and Queer Studies.

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