Asian Pacific Queer Reflections in Writing: On Identity, Discourse, and Politics

by

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Abstract

Identity, as it is conceived in U.S. society today, plays a significant role in the politics of community, and the community of politics. A mechanism for understanding experiences, for articulating resistance to oppression, and for establishing relations of support and power, "identity" represents a focal point for the discourse of minorities and other oppressed peoples. Examining the writing in three anthologies that address Asian Pacific American lesbian sexuality, this thesis discusses the varied ways in which identity is invoked by Asian and Pacific Islander writers. The dialectic between identity as a site of discourse and discourse as a creator of identity highlights how power relations are often negotiated in politics and in identity-based communities. An exploration of how queer APIs participate in this identity discourse both contributes to, and enables an analysis of, the API queer movement.

Thesis Supervisor: Elizabeth Wood
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Preface

It is with a certain level of uneasiness that I have taken on this project of writing about Asian and Pacific Islander lesbian identities as an API lesbian myself. During the process of developing, researching, writing, editing, and finally submitting this paper, the question “So what are you doing your thesis on?” continued to accost me. Friends, professors, family members, coworkers, colleagues—each person who asked with interest and concern about my choice of topic propelled me into another bout of uncertainty and inadequacy. As I continued to swallow my confusion over these feelings, the unsettling panic at having to explain and justify my work began to irritate me into investigating the source of my discomfort.

As a part of academia for over four years now, I have been successfully instilled with its notions of sufficient rigor, appropriate subject matter, and suitable jargon. Given these “standards,” my uneasiness over the topic I have chosen for this thesis seems to reflect some of the tensions in producing minority discourse. The project of writing about people of color or about queers, much less about queers of color, generates an insidious brand of trouble for the author. Bringing the issues and subjectivities of oppressed peoples into focus and highlighting the problematic structures and institutionalized injustices of the dominant culture are acts of resistance, and
as such are undercut by the dominant majority with an ensemble cast of mechanisms for exclusion. Tokenization, marginalization, and dismissal are only some of the ways in which the majority subverts and nullifies any struggle to validate and center the lives, experiences, and theories of queer APIs. To choose the subject of Asian Pacific lesbians as the premise of my work is to hazard these perils.

Being a member of the minority group about which I write leads to another difficult situation. When discussing issues of their own oppression, writers from the margins often find themselves squeezed into a double bind. On the one hand, I share with other APIs, lesbians, and API queers the imperative to address experiences and subjectivities unique to ourselves. Writing by minorities often emphasizes the value in giving voice to the ideas, thoughts, analysis, and theory that center our communities and issues. On the other hand, my position as a lesbian of color writing about lesbians of color potentially ghettoizes the work I hope to accomplish. If minority discourses only exist in marginalized spaces, what level of change can these texts effect within an oppressive regime? In other words, speaking from the margins about the margins necessarily risks the unfortunate possibility of (mis)leading minority writers into a corner.

My motivation for expressing these issues from an explicitly invested subject position stems from an impulse to acknowledge these potential risks and costs. Why write from this perspective, why be so specific, and why insist on articulating these tensions—all before presenting the body of my work? Because I see this paper as a part of the body of literature that I will be examining, as a part of queer Asian Pacific discourse, the concerns I have outlined in this section reflect some of the conditions under which other queer APIs write. As Trinh T. Minh-ha explains, the writer "usually writes
from a position of power, creating as an ‘author,’ situating herself above her work and existing before it, rarely simultaneously with it."² It is my intention to situate the writing that follows within the framework of the API queer writing I examine.

In an atmosphere of struggle and resistance, queer APIs maintain a tenuous access to the established modes of critical and political theory and analysis. The writers in this paper and of this paper all participate in the turbulent space of discourse on race, sexuality, and oppression; and this section is an effort to make explicit the political nature of my project, and to set a self-reflective and dynamic tone for the remainder of the paper.

Chapter 1

Which Came First?: An Introduction

We must conceive discourse as a series of discontinuous segments whose tactical function is neither uniform nor stable...

We must make allowance for the complex and unstable process whereby discourse can be both an instrument and an effect of power, but also a hindrance, a stumbling-block, a point of resistance and a starting point for an opposing strategy.3

Lesbian or Asian Pacific American? Second generation Chinese American or Woman? Asian heritage or U.S. pop culture? College-educated professional or grass-roots activist? Identities, communities, and allegiances seem at once to propose a space of inalienable coherence and consistency, and at the same time to confound the notion of innate, monolithic “truths” about people. That is, the politics of “identity,” the politics of being defined and defining oneself within a socio-political category, is both a source of solidarity and a fount of frustration. As people take sides and stake out positions, identification with a particular group somehow translates into a bond of

common understandings, similar convictions, and familiar tactics that serve as a means of support and camaraderie, of comfort and validation. But all too often, as I try to play out the myth that “identity” ensures community, I find disappointment, misunderstanding, and even betrayal where I had hoped for safety. Group boundaries and membership criteria become a site of struggle and tension, all in the name of establishing so-called community “solidarity” and presenting a “unified” voice. Mediated through the rhetoric of identity politics, the art of self-articulation surrenders to a disciplinary compulsion to demarcate, detail, disinfect, and authenticate one’s subject position.⁴

As an Asian American lesbian living in the 1990s—amid backlash against affirmative action, political struggle for same-sex marriage, and violence threatening abortion clinics—the cultural currency of my “identity” remains relatively undefined in the market of political camps and campaigns. My various and continuing searches for community have led me to gay organizations, to feminism and Women’s Studies, to people of color coalitions, to literary criticism, as well as to popular culture critique and analysis. Within each of these territories, Asian and Pacific Islander American queers are both included and excluded, either as analogous subjects and dissonant exceptions. It is possible for me to participate and engage in these arenas to the extent that API issues can be subsumed under each particular banner, or rather to the extent that I am willing to ignore any differences or specificities of API lesbian experience. Racism in the larger (white) gay community, tokenism in coalitions of “color,” homophobia in Women’s Studies, prejudice between API ethnicities, sexism in gay academia,

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⁴ The distinction I make here between an art of self-articulation and a discipline of categorization is taken from my readings of Foucault, specifically *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (New York: Random House, Inc., 1977), and from discussions (in class and otherwise) with Prof. David Halperin, Kristen “Nummi” Nummerdor, and Joe Powers.
heterosexism in ethnic groups, xenophobia in U.S. minority communities—the list of combinations of oppressions, even in already marginalized groups, is not only long, but largely unrecognized in contemporary politics.

Indeed when writing about Asians and Pacific Islanders in the U.S., the diversity of cultures and experiences within the category itself requires recognition and an almost compulsory disclaimer: just what do I intend for “API” to mean in this paper? The racial category of “Asian/Pacific Islander” was first introduced by the U.S. census to designate all peoples from the countries that comprise Asia, the Middle East, and some of the Pacific Islands. Hardly a term embraced by most Asians and Pacific Islanders, the “A/PI” brought into focus the ludicrousness of applying a single “identity” to so many and varied peoples. And yet the term has since been wielded by Asian Pacific Americans as the name for the “identity” and for the “movement.” For just as it is the government who chose the categorization, so it is the government who imposes many structures in our lives; and for the sake of political efficacy, Asian and Pacific Islander Americans take up “API” as the label that adorns our banners. I seek to address the development of, investment in, and claims on this “API” identity for people choosing to use that label. Primary and secondary sources for this paper refer to a range of ethnicities in both Asia and the Pacific Islands, with individual essays and articles describing the label “API” within different contexts. It is the tensions manifest in the varying texts and the varying uses of the term that inform the crucial aspects of my thesis.

The word “queer” also provokes a rather compulsory explanation, so I take this opportunity to be explicit about my use of the word. “Queer,” as it appears here, names a subject position in opposition to heteronormativity. Defined in Saint Foucault as “whatever is at odds with the normal, the
That is, the term connotes a wider range of sexual practices and sensibilities than that of "lesbian," "gay," or "bisexual," creating a useful handle for discursively invoking transgressive sexualities without explicit definition of acts, partners, or desires. While both "queer" and "API" are similarly claimed by some people for political effect and efficacy, the word "queer" is a pejorative slur that has since been "taken back" by lesbian and gay, AIDS, transgender, and other activists as an act of empowerment. In this paper I use "queer" in the spirit of this activism.

Taking the two words together, "API queer" or "queer API," introduces a category that is just beginning to be noticed. The pattern in other political movements seems to suggest that in agitating for recognition of queer Asian Pacific issues, "API queer" must also be established as a coherent community and politics. An unknown quantity, the "movement" for Asian Pacific queers is new to the cultural parlance of the U.S., and as such enjoys that "new-identity" smell—ambiguous, multifarious, accessible, promising. The discursive evidence of a queer Asian Pacific politic is just beginning to surface, and it is at this point in history that questions of identity and "identity" formation are particularly engaging. Is there a queer API way of

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6 I must make a comment here on the ordering of "API" and "queer" throughout this paper. Most prominently addressed in a 1990 issue of *BLK Magazine*, as well as in subsequent essays and articles by and about black gay men, the order of the labels for race and for sexuality in identifying queers of color has become a point of contention. According to the article in *BLK*, whichever category one chooses to list first represents the part of one's "identity" that is most important. Another way to read a compound label emphasizes the last word (the noun) as one's primary identification, with the other "identities" (the adjectives) acting merely as modifiers.

While I understand the rationale for these distinctions and declarations of loyalties, my view on identity provokes a perhaps flippant response to the ordering of labels. In this paper "API" and "queer" are combined in a variety of ways—sometimes to introduce a subtle distinction in the meaning of a sentence, sometimes to effect a particular aesthetic in the rhythm of a phrase, and sometimes not to make any statement at all.
approaching identity? How do we create it, how do we play with it, how do we trouble it? What does gender transgression or subversion mean in the context of a raced and sexualized body that is both API and queer? What does it mean for us to perform identities,7 and which ones do we choose to perform? How do we form communities from our networks of strength, support, and inspiration, and in what roles do we position ourselves within those communities? The discourse of identity provides a way for the movement and politics beginning to claim the name “API queer” to explore its tensions and troubles.

1.1 Identity as Discursive Site

Whatever its particular role in the development of a given political movement, identity indisputably occupies a formative place in the history of U.S. politics. Struggles for social justice consistently unfold on the rocky terrain of identities and alliances—from women’s suffrage to affirmative action, from immigration policies to HIV/AIDS prevention and services. People identify, or are made to identify, with certain groups, communities, and coalitions based on a range of perceived commonalities and a variety of personal resonances. A way of understanding our experiences, of having control over the meanings we create, and of making the personal political, the dynamics of identity (trans)formation saturate the arena of politics. The issues and sensibilities of individuals in their personal lives affect and transform society, blurring the lines between public and private spheres.

7 The notion of identity performance that I use here and throughout the paper is taken from Judith Butler’s formulation as I have read it in Gender Trouble (New York: Routledge, 1990). See section 2.1 for more references to Butler’s work and how it pertains to my analysis of API queer identity performance.
As a vehicle for political agitation, identities materialize, struggle to the surface, blur into each other, condense, diffuse, and disappear. Continuous (re)negotiation of inclusion and exclusion characterizes these politics of identity. Categories like the ones listed at the beginning of this chapter are often paradoxical: separate yet overlapping, stable yet unstable, allied yet oppositional. And each has meaning in particular situations and toward particular ends. Manipulation of the boundaries and alliances of an identity politic generates a proliferation of discursive effects of identity. That is to say, rather than define and clarify particular “identities,” figuring identity as a form of discursive production promotes a more effective understanding of how the notion of identities is used in the political arena.8

Serving as a vessel for navigating subtleties of definition and commonality, identity discourse must be examined for ways in which it is produced and ways in which it is read (or misread). We have “identities” to the extent that we can produce the appropriate signifiers of a given category, to the extent that those signs are read by others, and to the extent that they believe what they read—that is, to the extent that we can achieve “authenticity” in the playing of our particular roles. Statements like “She’s not really Chinese; she can’t speak the language,” or “She’s so straight looking,” are just two popular forms of marking boundaries, of establishing requirements for authenticity in identity. It is the performance of an

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8 The shift in perspective from framing “identity” as a discrete and definable object to focusing instead on the discursive effects of identity is patterned after Foucault’s treatment of sexuality in History of Sexuality, Volume 1. I am partial to this strategy for approaching a seemingly over-defined subject because it foregrounds a kind of politics that takes power and power relations to be polyvalent and fragmented—the roles of oppressor and oppressee are loosed from their static positions and there is more room for manipulation and effective resistance. To be more precise, framing the question in terms of discourse frees me from the burden of having to define “identity,” and especially “API queer identity.” Instead I examine the effects of identity as other writers define, refuse to define, and trouble it; and as a result the multiple relations and dynamics of power can be explored.
"identity" that characterizes the "identity," which in turn imposes the criteria for effective performance: a rose (by any other name) is only a rose if it smells sweet enough. This dialectic of defining a category that is always in the process of (re)generating itself has the potential for creative shifting in alliances and coalitions, but contemporary identity politics seems to instead perpetuate the disciplinary mechanisms of self-monitoring and surveillance. Through continual assessment of our performance in producing identities, we corral ourselves within the perceived boundaries of these "identities," alternately taking pleasure in the ways we "fit in," and then policing our adherence to the "rules" of the category.

To focus on identity as discourse is to highlight a unique vantage point from which to analyze socio-political categories and categorizations. Identity politics, as it has figured in U.S. culture, privileges specificity and legibility in self-articulation, and as such it reinforces a discrete set of dynamics in society. We must recognize identity as both an effect of and a tool for discourse, in order to facilitate an analysis of its role in political movements. As the epigraph for this chapter relates, "discourse can be both an instrument and an effect of power, but also a hindrance, a stumbling-block, a point of resistance and a starting point for an opposing strategy." Thus identity-as-discourse virtually compels an exploration of resistance, strategy, and power in contemporary politics.

1.2 Writing API Queer

In my research on the writing and politics of other Asian and Pacific Islander lesbians and bisexual women, discourse on identity became the nexus of my
interests. In lesbian feminism and gay male criticism, in multiculturalism and ethnic studies, the discursive production of identity permeates critical theory and analyses of oppression for both queers and people of color. Identity becomes a touchstone from which communities, groups, and even individuals negotiate criteria for inclusion, rights to authority, and authenticities of voice. Who gets to say what—and who listens to whom—is determined in a space saturated by the palpable tension between defining oneself and being defined by categories of race, sexuality, gender, class, age, citizenship status, and more. Exploring the development of API writing on identity presented an intriguing approach to research on queer Asian Pacific politics.

Given the long history of APIs in the U.S., the literary presence of APIs has been depressingly fleeting. Texts by and about Asian Pacific lesbians have for the most part been scattered and scarce, appearing in anthologies focused on other groups, such as collections of work by women of color, or lesbian fiction, or lesbian of color literature. At best, these disparate works produce a hodgepodge reflection of lesbian APIs; at worst, the sporadic, token inclusion of an Asian Pacific writer ultimately undermines any substantial recognition of API lesbian experiences. Only recently have compilations of essays, stories, and other work by, about, and for Asian Pacific lesbians been published, and it is within these texts that the story of an API queer identity⁹ might be pieced together.

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⁹ My reference to a “queer identity,” rather than a lesbian one, in the context of writing by lesbian APIs draws on what I perceive to be the gender-neutral quality of the word “queer.” In my experience the term does not particularly invoke either gender, though I do not mean to imply that so-called queers are gender-less or receive gender-blind treatment. For more on how gender effects my use of “queer identity,” see my discussion of using essays by gay men in Asian American Sexualities later in this section.
Examining three anthologies, this paper will focus on the deep-seated implications of discourse on identity politics for lesbian APIs. Specifically, the methods of discursive identity production throughout the three collections will be picked out and scoured for the residue of an approach, of a strategy that could be called "queer API." The purpose of this endeavor is not so much to strip away the motivations and meanings of each individual writer in order to somehow bind their writing to a bedrock of queer API politics, but rather to trace the effects of API writing in these collections, as the authors articulate through and against the subject of identity.

The collections Making Waves, The Very Inside, and Asian American Sexualities\(^\text{10}\) have been chosen for this analytic survey as the three major compilations of writing about API women and sexuality. Making Waves is the oldest of the three, published in 1989 to record the experiences of Asian American women. Meant to debunk the stereotype of Asian women as passive and submissive, the book assembles essays and poems to describe the many and diverse ways that Asian American women have "rocked the boat." Immigration, war, identity, and activism are some of the subjects these writers take up, often only implicitly discussing Asian women's sexuality and sexual identity—in terms of work environment, family relations, or societal prejudice. More simply, the authors in Making Waves, as its Preface explains, are "recording the experiences of Asian women in America."\(^\text{11}\)

Dealing more explicitly with women's sexualities, and more specifically with queer women's sexual identities, The Very Inside was published five


\(^{11}\) Making Waves, p.xi.
years after *Making Waves*. Asian and Pacific Islander lesbian and bisexual women comprise the writers in this collection, meant to be the first book wholly dedicated to API queer women. The editor makes clear in the Introduction that the writings in *The Very Inside* are compiled to relate experiences of racism and homophobia, to rebel against the tokenism of queer API women in lesbian or women of color anthologies. Compiled in 1994 the book reflects many of the contemporary feminist theories and analyses of sexuality and identity as they apply to Asian Pacific queer women.\(^{12}\)

The most recent of the three books, *Asian American Sexualities* consists of writings on Asian Pacific American queer sexuality. Again, there is a context from which the pieces in this volume emerge.\(^{13}\) Postmodernism and deconstructionist theories background the writing in this anthology as API queers describe, define, and contradict themselves. The writers published in the book reference personal experience, political analysis, and academic theory to effect their own versions of queer API identity. The editor explains in the Introduction, “if we have a memory, we have a future... we are whatever we call ourselves.” In *Asian American Sexualities*, queer APIs call themselves many things and interrogate identity formation and its

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\(^{12}\) It is important to note here some of the other contemporary anthologies, that provide an picture of the kinds of writing and thinking that surround the publication of these three books. Volumes like *Home Girls: A Black Feminist Anthology* (New York: Kitchen Table: Women of Color Press, 1983), *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color* (New York: Kitchen Table: Women of Color Press, 1981), and *Making Face, Making Soul: Creative and Critical Perspectives by Feminists of Color* (San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 1990) are groundbreaking publications that fundamentally influenced the direction and texture of feminist theory for issues of identity, sexuality, and sexual identity. Writers in *The Very Inside* formed many of their theories and analyses on API queer identity with these writings as their foundation.

\(^{13}\) Notably some of the essays in this anthology have also been published in *The Lesbian and Gay Studies Reader* (New York: Routledge, 1993), and as such the foundation of theory and politics is similar in both collections. Lesbian and gay studies, gay male literary criticism, and queer theory are all visibly influential bodies of academic work for the writers in *Asian American Sexualities*. Indeed many of these writers research and publish under the lesbian and gay studies or queer theory discipline.
connections with a (raced, gendered, and sexualized) body politic. I have included from this anthology some essays written by gay API men, doing so because the points made in those works apply to a more general API queer sexuality and identity. Mindful of the de facto reference to men when “people” are talked about, I nevertheless feel that the comments made by the Asian Pacific gay men on API queer sexuality apply within the context of this paper to API queer women’s sexuality and identity.

In each of the three volumes, the notion of queer API identity is inscribed and re-inscribed, disputed and essentialized, exploded and reconstituted—at times in a single article. Finding, articulating, constructing, deconstructing, and authorizing an “Asian and Pacific Islander queer” voice are struggles that color the rhetoric and subject matter of the various works. What does it mean to speak for APIs, to speak as an API, or to represent oneself as an API? Identity hangs like a specter over the shoulder of each writer—as a driving force, a counterpoint, a preoccupation, an underlying assumption. The three anthologies encapsulate a slice of the discursive production of API sexual identity, and the forms they take necessarily affect the articulation of an API queer movement and politics.

It is the intention of this paper to explore API women’s sexuality by examining Asian Pacific writing for its patterns in, insights on, and analyses of the discursive formation of queer API identity. Chapter 2 addresses some of the contemporary critiques of “identity” as they pertain to Asian Pacific queers, reflecting the tension permeating discourses on identity. Specifically, feminism, queer studies, and Asian American studies have informed the
politics of these APIs and their pioneer efforts at claiming a space for their raced and sexualized selves. The chapter's survey of relevant discourse in the intersections of these three fields of study will provide an overview of background and influences on API theory and writing and will outline the structure and paradigm through which my exploration of API discourse on identity will proceed.

Chapter 3 continues with an analysis of API literature for its participation in the discursive production of identity. The kaleidoscope of "identities" presented in the three anthologies addressing Asian Pacific women's sexuality highlights the tensions and strategies within API queer politics. By understanding the function of identity as a form of discourse in a so-called queer API movement, we can apply pressure to the critical points of influence and articulation around Asian Pacific activism and struggle against oppression. Chapter 4 involves a discussion of the possible consequences of reading API queer identity formation as a discourse on politics, with emphasis on how identity folds together relations of power in the private and public spheres.
Chapter 2

The Chicken: (con)Textualizing the Figures

I find myself observing the girls. Goddess preserve me, the girls. They look like they're in a (soy) milk commercial. The easy confidence of the girls, their natural hipness relaxes me, seduces me into another realm... suddenly, I realize, I've never been here before: Asian America.14

The discursive production of identity is perhaps nowhere more exciting than in the growing pool of writing by API queers—if only because that "identity" is as yet undefined. Make no mistake: of course, people of Asian Pacific heritage have long been among those who transgress gender norms, oppose heterosexist culture, agitate for policy change, march on Washington, participate in demonstrations, perform in drag shows, wear buttons with pink triangles and rainbow flags, and have sex with people of the same sex. But "queer API" as a so-called identity category, as a recognizable community, as a readable style, as a legible text, has not emerged from all of that activity.

Though APIs contribute to a myriad of causes and movements, the images of Asian Pacific lesbians continue to be shrouded in an imposed

14 "Suddenly, You Realize...," by Margaret Mihee Choe, The Very Inside, pp.281-3.
silence. "What does an Asian lesbian look like anyway?" is not a question that has a ready answer. Indeed, the question is rarely asked. The invisibility of lesbian APIs plagues queer communities, Asian Pacific communities, and other communities in which we invest ourselves. Whether in ethnic language newspapers, lesbian ‘zines, academic journals, or progressive magazines, representation of lesbian APIs is sorely lacking. Film and television images also contribute to societal ignorance of APIs as anything more than stereotypes and racist icons. And the API women who are involved in community organizations and other forms of activism are summarily overlooked or erased, which further exacerbates a situation where mechanisms for support, history, and legacy are debilitated by the absence of role models.

Through the slowly increasing number of API lesbian writers, and writing about queer APIs in general, the formation of an Asian Pacific queer "identity" is beginning to unfold. Writers, biographers, historians, theorists, and activists are producing texts that insist on invoking an "API queer" identity. By positing an articulated experience, a body of writing that describes queers of Asian Pacific heritage, these writers participate in a queer API politic mediated through identity as a site of discourse. Analysis of this writing by APIs for its discursive production of identity will trace the terrain of politics and activism toward a movement for Asian Pacific queers. Aspiring to the easy grace of the (soy) milk commercial girls described in the epigraph above,

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15 Many writers have addressed the film, television, and other media images of Asians and Pacific Islanders. Among them some notable essays include "Lotus Blossoms Don't Bleed" by Renee E. Tajima in Making Waves, "Looking for My Penis" and "Seeing Yellow" by Richard Fung in Asian American Sexualities and The State of Asian America (Boston: South End Press, 1994) and "A Shift in Power, A Sea Change in the Arts" by David Mura and "The Heat Is On Miss Saigon Coalition" by Yoko Yoshikawa also in The State of Asian America.
we can perhaps explore this newly emerging place, this place we can imagine as Asian Pacific Queer America.

2.1 Reading Queer API: Discourse through Identity

Without the cultural tools to recognize a set of issues that are not anchored to a corresponding "identity," the attempts of queer APIs to articulate experiences and concerns seem to have no currency in the socio-political arena. She who is at once queer and of Asian Pacific descent remains effectively inconceivable to larger society as an agent or subject, without the label of a recognizable "identity." As explained in *Gender Trouble*, "identity is performatively constituted by the very 'expressions' that are said to be its results." As explained in *Gender Trouble*, "identity is performatively constituted by the very 'expressions' that are said to be its results." In other words, the traits attributed to one's identity are established by the performance of those traits in conjunction with that identity. Because queer APIs do not occupy a place within the current field of coherent and established "identities," we arrive at the apparent paradox of performing a legible sexuality in an unread body. To perform an Asian Pacific lesbian "identity," one must replicate the "expressions" that characterize that identity. But for Asian Pacific lesbians these "expressions" or performances are hardly noticed, much less recognized as depicting an "identity." Not only is there a dearth of meanings ascribed to the "lesbian API" identity, but the existing recognizable identities of API women seem to be incongruent with the potentiality of lesbianism. The prevailing comprehension of their sexuality remains confined to heterosexual and racist stereotypes like the Japanese geisha or the submissive wife. Even the perception of an "API queer" on the

16 *Gender Trouble*, p.25. For more background and a deeper explanation of Butler's formulation of the performativity of gender, identity, and gendered identity, see *Gender Trouble*.
street by fellow lesbian, bisexual, and gay people becomes a stumbling block for anyone engaging in activism by or for queer APIs. How does one exercise one's voice or agitate for social change, if one is un-seen from the start?

In the works examined in this paper, the subject of identity is invoked in differing ways, as an assumption or perhaps as an object of criticism. That is to say, identity represents at times a framework of analysis and at times the object of analysis, shifting between hypothesis and example, between proposal and proof, between cause and effect. The first of the two passages below creates an Asian American lesbian identity out of commonality:

Women are able to combat, or at least discuss, the problems they face as Asian American lesbians with women from similar backgrounds and with similar experiences. Making such contact gives many Asian lesbians a new family, one that is finally sensitive to their needs.17

while the second uses Asian identity as proof of its message on Asian American women in politics:

[A]dherence to Asian values, that is, obedience, familial interest, fatalism, and self control, tends to foster submissiveness, passivity, pessimism, timidness, inhibition, and adaptiveness, which are not necessarily conducive to political activism... For Asian American women to develop their political potential, they must develop a positive self-concept and maintain psychological well-being.18

While both passages address Asian women within the framework of their "selves," the first one urges sharing of experiences in support of an "identity,"

while the second one describes specific “Asian values” attributed to the “identity.” The first quote gestures toward the building of a community, whereas the second refers to a political potential that can be realized through individual development—how each of these excerpts invokes notions of “Asian,” “woman,” and “lesbian” characterizes to some extent the writer’s investment in her agenda for an API sexual identity.

The tension between these subtleties and nuanced complexities of writing centered on identity reflect the incoherent affects of “identity” for API queers. In one respect, the experiences of queer APIs in communities, in grass-roots organizations, in the academy, in government agencies, in dance clubs and bars—the various roles performed by APIs effect in some ways the production of a discursive API sexual identity. Asian Pacific writers detail and critique API “identity” by documenting the history of and enabling a legacy for queer APIs. In another respect the writing on API sexual identity also sets limits and narrativizes what it means to be “API queer.” As one writer explains, “our search for authenticity of voice will be tempered by the realization that in spite of our impulse to clearly (de)limit them, there is perpetual uncertainty and flux governing the construction and expression of identities.”

Identity in discourse is often molded to the narrative scheme, where linear progression, clear boundaries, and established voice are constants. And tension arises when the multiple modes of performing “queer API” are stripped of their complexities and streamlined into the (default) simplicity of a narrative form. The discursive field then can be seen as a particularly interesting arena in which to examine this struggle for a


20 My understanding of the disciplinary effects of the narrative have been inspired by gay male literary criticism, as taught in David Halperin’s class on literary interpretation Foucault and Gay Male Criticisms. In particular see Paul Morrison’s “End Pleasure,” published in GLQ.
coherent incoherence in API politics on sexuality. That is, how do APIs write sexualities and sexual identities that are adequately multiplicitous within a discursive paradigm that is almost overwhelmingly narrativizing? Through these texts, I hope to tease out an understanding of how APIs engage in discourse on identity, how APIs articulate their situations as "API queers," and how APIs produce theories of their resistance and existence.

In doing this work I must be clear about my conflation of "API writing" and "API critical theory." Part of the goal in my analysis of these writings is to proceed within a paradigm where theory and activism are inherently connected, where experience and analysis occur dialectically. The works examined in this paper are from many different genres—theory, autobiography, fiction, art, exposition; but whatever the type, the production of discourse on identity informs and reflects the ways in which queer APIs seek to play with, destroy, create, and complicate their notions of identity. The prospect of this form of analysis is exciting to me in that I am both searching for and contributing to a "queer API" theory through my examination of individual writings by APIs on sexuality. Looking at how the identities of Asian Pacific lesbians are constructed, defended, and troubled through discourse, I seek to invest my readings of the writing styles and perspectives in the texts with the textures of an "API queer theory."

2.2 Realizing API Queer: Politics through Identity

How an identity is represented in text and what the author chooses as an effective strategy can reflect significant tenets of the socio-political movement from which it derives. In this paper API writing on sexuality and on sexual
identity will be interrogated for its characterization of queer API forms of resistance and for its description of an API queer movement. I will now take the time to explicate the structure of my analysis and this chapter.

In my survey of the various tactics and discursive forms in these API writings, I have delineated three areas in which identity is invoked. One tactic I have termed the "synthetic" method, which promotes as its goal the creation of a single queer Asian Pacific identity. That is, writers who use a "synthetic" approach propose a specific set of defining characteristics for queer APIs, drawing on commonalities to foster a foundation for political efficacy. Often the writings that fall into this area of identity production describe characteristics of API sexuality through asserting definitions, delimiting boundaries, and positing universal traits. Identity represents the unifying force and rallying cry for political action and for community building.

Another tactic is characterized by a rhetoric of opposition, where self-delineation is achieved through rejection of the not-self. That is to say, the writers produce a notion of queer API identity by differentiating themselves from a prevailing definition of "the queer," "the API," or "the feminist." Established "identities" are problematized in the context of Asian Pacific culture, homophobia, xenophobia, and experiences of racism in U.S. society. I characterize this tactic as "oppositional" in that API queer identity is produced in terms of a negation of both API and queer discourse on a single totalizing identity. We are meant to understand who API queers are by understanding who they are not—by understanding how they differ from the groups and categories that would subsume them under one or another universalizing identity.

The final tactic, "fragmentation," focuses on the multiplicity of experiences within so-called API communities. Because the term "Asian and
Pacific Islander” spans so many individual countries, nationalities, cultures, and histories, API “community” is always already fraught with cleavages of difference. The myth of monolithic categories of racial identity is undermined by the heterogeneity within the API “race.” Writing about issues like immigrant status and ethnic or language specificities, the authors destabilize the concept of “API,” and of “API queer.” In some cases of the “fragmentation” tactic, the revelation of “Asian” as a constructed category—created by the U.S. government to delimit citizenship, exclusion, affirmative action, and other issues—highlights the complexities and instabilities of API as a racial identity. Other works focus on the varied spectrum of experiences for APIs and for individuals in general, insisting on the falsity of monolithic truth or universal identity. However, “fragmentation” pieces also most often end by re-stabilizing Asian Pacific community through a political (re)definition of API as an identity based on a common struggle against racial oppression. In the context of unifying resistance forces, any discussion of API (homo)sexuality exists as just another part of that struggle.

In outlining each of these forms of producing discourse through identities, I seek to begin to articulate the issues facing the API queer community through an analysis of identity politics. The discursive function of identity in self-representation of queer APIs permeates the three anthologies, unique in their collection of writing by APIs on women and sexuality. And an analysis of the discourse serves to investigate, or perhaps formulate, a theory and strategy of API queer politics.
In this shrinking universe, where white media appropriates black rappers, Asian ethnic fashions, and technology, and pretentious Zen car commercials find their way to television, who can really say Who is influencing Whom?21

In writings that posit a queer API political movement, the vital issues for Asian Pacific lesbians largely center around the effects of the interplay between API, queer, and women's subjectivities and agendas. As one set of issues blends into, eclipses, problematizes, or replaces another set, those who occupy the interstices between and navigate the overlap of the three camps must juggle the subsequent repercussions. Writing about API women's sexuality, about Asian Pacific experiences, and about queer sensibilities, the authors cited in this chapter employ a myriad of tactics to articulate their situations and paradigms. Some focus explicitly on interactions between the different cultures and loyalties they sustain as queer APIs, and others focus on a single aspect of their racial, sexual, and gendered positionality. One set of

writings presents a kaleidoscopic view of multiple experiences, and another
set discusses only one characteristic as the (most) defining element for Asian
Pacific queers. The collection of works quoted in this section illustrates the
interlocking identities of "API," "woman," and "queer" within lesbian API
experiences.

Likewise in discussing the three tactics of writing an "API queer
identity" that I defined in the previous chapter, it is important to recognize
that the categories are not independent or exclusive. That is, the boundaries
of each tactic are indistinct, with works categorized as one strategy often
employing another tactic in the course of their discussion on "identity."
Introducing different perspectives and paradigms as a complement to or an
extension of the writer's message, the strategies in a given piece of writing are
often difficult to delineate and cordon off as clearly one and only one tactic.
Indeed, some writings introduce elements of all three tactics. It is my goal
merely to explore the manifestations of these loosely defined tactics, and
deploy the categories in order to analyze the productions of queer API
identity.

Needless to say all the pieces in the three anthologies will not be
examined in this paper. While I do not intend to write about all of the
stories, or to engage in all possible readings of these works, I will survey the
books as an important part of the articulation of API sexualities and sexual
identities. The works examined below were chosen in part, both by the
editors of the respective collections and by myself, because of the ways in
which they articulate "API sexual identity." And when tracing patterns of
identity formation, as the epigraph above notes, "who can really say Who is
influencing Whom?" The lines of influence in our MTV soundbite-filled
society often become tangled amid the shifting effects of discursive
production. Rather than identify each element, I hope to study how this sometimes dissonant collection of meanings and causes reflects and informs the politics of API queers.

3.1 Learning about Queer APIs: Homo-Synthesis and You

In the anthologies *Making Waves*, *The Very Inside*, and *Asian American Sexualities*, some authors present distinct portraits of API women’s sexuality. The topics and issues that they write about range from family history to racism, from culture to activism, but each has a primary focus on “synthesizing” a so-called identity that represents Asian Pacific women’s sexuality. The pieces I have marked as “synthetic” are bound together only through the resemblance in their discursive strategies. Indeed neither the proposed “identities” nor the theoretical foundations of the writings are consistent from writer to writer, and the motivations for forming a cohesive “identity” for API queers differs for many of these pieces as well. But forming identity into a material and coherent reality is consistent throughout these works, and it is the common tactic of producing these “identities” that can be described as “synthetic” discourse.

For some of the writers discussion of “identity” centers around the impetus to claim, live, and proclaim the (truth)fullness of one’s person. Often steeped in the language of self-acceptance and unified solidarity, these essays use “identity” as the vehicle for political action and personal peace. The examples below all utilize the notion of identity as a coherent social, political, and personal truth. In an essay surveying North American South Asian women’s groups, the following quote insists on visibility:
We felt there were many issues that were unique to our situation... Our goal is to work towards social change and create a visible... identity for Asian Indian women... whether along lines of ethnicity or sexual preference.\textsuperscript{22}

Another passage taken from one woman’s account of a national Asian lesbian retreat asserts,

[We must] recognize our identities and then fight for the right to love them all equally... Therefore, I say to identify as queer Asian American woman is a revolutionary act.\textsuperscript{23}

And finally an address made on the steps of the Washington monument makes the call for API queers to “come out” of the closet:

I am an Asian American woman, a mother and a lesbian... [W]e need to come out of the closet for not to do so would be living a lie... To our closeted [sisters and brothers], I would like you to consider how we become accomplices to our own sexual and racial oppression when we fail to claim our true identities.\textsuperscript{24}

While each of the passages speaks to subtly different motives for establishing an API American lesbian “identity,” they all promote a unifying notion of identification, a compelling claim for truth. Another writer echoes the impetus to synthesize “a community of women and a movement for social change” by referring to “the emergence and beginning unification process of

\textsuperscript{24} “Living in Asian America: An Asian American Lesbian’s Address before the Washington Monument (1979),” by Michiyo Cornell, \textit{The Very Inside}, p.84.
Asian and Pacific Islander lesbian and bisexual women.” The notion of identity represents the conduit through which lesbian APIs can achieve not only self empowerment, but collective strength. By invoking an overarching banner of API lesbian community, these writers “synthesize” their experiences, positionalities, and political as well as personal agendas into coherent “identities.”

The particularities of these Asian Pacific lesbian “identities” are detailed in other works, with both disparate and resonant themes. Two essays from The Very Inside paint especially explicit portraits of lesbian APIs, both in the context of recognizing Asian Pacific “sisters.” The first excerpt is another reaction to the first Asian Pacific Lesbian Network retreat in 1989:

My awe at seeing 170 queer API women came from the overwhelming and visible fact that, “Yes, Ann, there are other women like you in the world,” who looked and dressed like me, had short hair, and were proudly outspoken.

On a smaller, individual scale, the next passage from The Very Inside reflects on the experience of an Asian Pacific lesbian in New Mexico:

I continue to search. For more Asian queers, who can understand what it is to be slanty-eyed and short, [and] to love someone of your own gender... I've always thought maybe Cousin M was a dyke too... [S]he had short hair, was thin and kind of boyish, plus she had that certain quality, that I can only describe as “absence-of-trying-to-attract-the-opposite-gender.”

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26 “All at Once, All Together,” p.121.
27 “New Mexico APL,” by Tze-Hei Yong, The Very Inside, pp.7-11.
In each of these passages the respective author sees in other API lesbians a version of herself; and through the process of identifying with that image, she not only reinforces the notion of identity as bedrock for queer API empowerment, but also posits a set of traits for API queer “identity.”

The phenomenon of attributing a specific set of characteristics to lesbian APIs more commonly pertains only to the women’s Asian Pacific heritages, rather than to their sexualities. According to one author in Making Waves, API lesbians face unique issues within the larger queer community as the result of underdeveloped self-image and self-worth. The essay attributes the low self-esteem to Asian cultural influences, insisting that those factors must be overcome before API lesbians are “able to hurdle the more difficult obstacle—developing an identity as a lesbian.”

The author continues with a gamut of examples describing the tenets and attitudes of Asian Pacific culture that she attributes to API women’s (under)development—from female infanticide, to interpersonal modes of contact, to sexuality as taboo, to media influences. In addressing the experiences and situations of Asian Pacific lesbians, this writer and others effectively synthesize an API “identity,” equipped with beliefs, behaviors, and styles.

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29 Two other essays in Making Waves, contribute detailed descriptions of API American “identity” and characteristic sets of attributes. Sucheng Chan, in “You’re Short, Besides!,” describes her experiences as a disabled Asian American woman, making continual references to Asian culture and its influences on how Asian Americans interact with her: “Asians [believe] that physically handicapped persons are morally flawed. How Asian Americans treat me with respect to my handicap tells me a great deal about their degree of acculturation. Recent immigrants behave just like Asians in Asia; those who have been here longer... behave more like their white counterparts” (pp.270-1). Chan creates an API American “identity” that functions as a zero-sum combination of Asian Pacific culture and American culture; the intersection of the two cultures produces individuals with complementary amounts of each heritage—how American one is reflects exactly how un-Asian one must be. In this paradigm the dual influence of Asian and American identities produce nothing more and nothing new, only replacing some of one culture with some of the other.

Asian American “identity” is also depicted in Felicia Lowe’s “Asian American Women in Broadcasting” (also in Making Waves). Describing a common belief among API women
Attaching a specific style or meaning to Asian Pacific heritage appears more implicitly in some other works. In these writings culture itself is the indicator of “identity,” informing the lives of lesbian APIs in an intimately personal manner. In a published interview one artist, who works with the Committee against Anti-Asian Violence in New York City, attributes her artistic sensibility to her cultural heritage:

Interviewer: [W]hen I first saw this painting the colours seemed to me very Bengali and the figure... appeared to me as a Bengali woman.
Ray-Chaudhuri: [T]here’s [sic] elements of the visual language that I learned growing up that are Bengali and I think my sensibility about colours is probably from Bengal.30

The use of “Bengali” in the above quote parallels the phrase “yellow women” in the following one, invoking an implicit history and set of characteristics to describe the writer.

 born into the
 skin of yellow women
 we are born
 into the armor of warriors.31

Though neither of these examples explicitly argues for an API or an API queer “identity,” they both utilize identification with an understood Asian Pacific heritage as a discursive tool in their writing.

broadcasters, Lowe comments that “one of the most difficult aspects of reporting is overcoming a cultural tendency not to be aggressive. As Asian Americans, we are taught to be polite and to stay out of other people’s business” (pp.178-9).
Regardless of whether API culture is directly or indirectly written as a unifying "identity," the "synthetic" tactic insists on presenting an always already existing core behind the lives of lesbian APIs. The following brief passage from a poem describing the writer’s mother illustrates this phenomenon:

twenty-five years she's been here
still
she cries in japanese.\textsuperscript{32}

The enduring presence of culture in API lesbian lives also prevails in an essay on Asian American feminists, which asserts

Ethnicity, however, cuts across all the class sectors, and provides a form of identification and social bonding among Asian American women... Class barriers are thus much easier to overcome.\textsuperscript{33}

Parallel with the model of "ethnic identity," these passages posit lesbian APIs as not only embodying a heritage presumed to be coherent, identifiable, and understood, but also experiencing their Asian Pacific identity as taking precedence over other issues, like citizenship and class barriers. Here "identity" is reinforced by privileging racial commonality in the lives of lesbian APIs, and as such the writings function as "synthetic" texts through the construction of what constitutes the Asian Pacific "identity."

Through the discursive production of API and API lesbian “identities,” the writers featured in this section participate in an identity politic that seeks to build a coherent portrait of API women’s sexuality. The “synthetic” tactic consists of varied works and a range of perspectives, but the paradigm of naming and claiming a particular set of experiences colors the disparate writings above a similar shade. That is, the varied motivations and messages presented in these passages are routed through a single discursive site of defining identity. “Identification” is the political strategy. “Synthesis” is the path to queer API efficacy. The question is, “Who are we?”

3.2 API and Queer: Maneuvering for (op)Position

While some of the pieces in Making Waves, The Very Inside, and Asian American Sexualities discuss lesbian API identity by positing various definitions and characteristics, others contribute to the discursive field by focusing on erroneous identifications of Asian Pacific queers. That is to say, through a denial of “false” images, generalizations, and expectations within the larger communities we occupy, the writers of “oppositional” pieces also effect queer API identities. Rather than specifying what it means to be Asian Pacific and queer, these works articulate the ways in which we are misunderstood, erased, and stifled. In “opposition” to prescribed “identities,” these writers also participate in the discursive field of identity.

One type of “oppositional” writing focuses on the broader category of Asian Pacific women, refuting stereotypes as well as racist and sexist images

34 “Identities” centered around the positionalities of lesbian, lesbian-of-color, woman, and woman-of-color are also ways in which lesbian APIs participate in a “synthetic” discourse of identity.
in U.S. culture. The authors of these pieces do not make specific comments on lesbian APIs, but their critiques do engage in a discourse on Asian Pacific women’s sexuality that undeniably interlocks with the discursive field of API lesbian identity. In fact I argue that “oppositional” writing which challenges stereotypes of API culture, without specific reference to sexuality, is also intimately entwined with Asian Pacific lesbian “identity.” Like the respective “synthetic” writings in Section 3.1 which focus on the broader category of API identity, poems such as The Very Inside’s “For Naan” and “Shrapnel Shards on Blue Water” [35] name racist and colonialist ideas that have been significant in the authors’ lives; and by denying the images that those oppressions promote, both writers participate in the discourse on API queer identity.

Complicating the landscape of API oppression with issues of gender and sexuality, one writer examines the images of API women presented in American films:

> Asian women in film are, for the most part, passive figures who exist to serve men, especially as love interests for white men (Lotus Blossoms) or as partners in crime with men of their own kind (Dragon Ladies). [36]

She describes the China Doll, Geisha Girl, and Polynesian Beauty stereotypes, and analyzes the circumstances and effects of the popularity of these images. The stereotypes that prevail in the mail-order bride industry are explicitly listed in another essay: “docile, compliant and submissive,” “less intimidating,” “family oriented and... old-fashioned,” “faithful and devoted,” “unspoiled and loving,” “very feminine, loyal... and virgins!,” “properly

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grateful,” and “totally dependent.”—a barrage of the adjectives that are used in the objectification of API women’s sexuality. The writer analyzes the business of buying and selling Asian Pacific brides, describing the colonialist notions that initiated and continue to support it. In each of these essays, the overwhelmingly shallow and one-dimensional caricatures of Asian Pacific women and their sexualities are insistently challenged; and through the films that one author criticizes and the catalogs that the other one quotes, both works affect lesbian API identity. By documenting the stereotypes and “false” notions of Asian Pacific women’s sexuality, both writers carve out an “oppositional” space for the “reality” of API women’s sexual identities. The discursive effects of writings like these often negate, affirm, or ignore Asian Pacific lesbians, and as such contribute to the discourse on API queer identity.

Works that address specifically queer API sexuality with the “oppositional” tactic also describe racism and sexism as defining aspects of Asian Pacific (lesbian) women’s experience. The two passages below make reference to the exoticization of APIs as excitingly foreign and titillatingly unknown, with the first excerpted from a poem about the question that accosts so many Asian Pacific Americans, “Where are you from?”

When they ask me where I’m from
they want described an exotichappyspiritual Limbo Land
A nowhere place in brochures
and Funky Camp catalogues,

and with the second taken from an essay on finding a safe place for gay Asian men,

What troubled me just as much, however, is how many white people perceive this fascination with our Otherness as a confirmation of their progressive politics. They are not aware that their desire, when based on fantasies and stereotypes, shares the same source of a bigot’s hatred.39

The experience of racism in each quote demonstrates the ways in which APIs strain against the patronizing ignorance that constricts many of our lives.40 Identity becomes an issue in these writings, as the authors denounce the identification of their faces, their ethnicities, and their heritages with inferiority. The mechanisms by which others impose marginalizing (mis)conceptions on Asian Pacific peoples and the tactics with which APIs “oppose” those ideas are both intimately anchored to discourse on identity.

Aside from blatant racism and discrimination, writers also focus on other issues where (white) mainstream U.S. culture conflicts with Asian Pacific sensibilities. The following passage describes this kind of friction in terms of coming out as lesbian to an API family and community:

For me, coming out on the Hawaiian side means more about talking about what I’m doing, not who I am... They wouldn’t see being gay as being haole [white], but they would see saying “I am this,” naming an individual identity would be really haole.41

40 In much of queer API writing, and in API discourse on “identity” in general, racism is often cited as the unifying experience of Asians and Pacific Islanders. With the category API encompassing a wide range of ethnicities and nationalities, the political efficacy of an Asian Pacific “identity” stems only from shared racial oppression for these writers. An excellent discussion of racism as “the equalizer” among APIs is featured in the work “In Our Own Way: A Roundtable Discussion” in Asian American Sexualities, by Cristy Chung, Aly Kim, Zoon Nguyen, and Trinity Ordona, with Arlene Stein.
Here, the trappings of haole or white gay "identity" are detailed and invoked in opposition to Asian Pacific culture. Coming out, as the proverbial "confession" scene, is questioned and ultimately discarded as a convention of the (white) queer community. While honesty with and about oneself is not condemned as a generally positive way of life, the declaration of one's "identity" as lesbian, bisexual, or gay is tagged as a white script for "liberation." In effect this passage uses the "synthesizing" tactic described in the previous section to invoke white queer "identity," reifying one positionality in order to oppose it with another. Though this passage deploys its "oppositional" tactics with different nuances, the effects on queer API identity discourse remain significant.

The tensions between generalizations by the larger gay community and expectations by the larger API communities are also addressed in "oppositional" writing, as authors deny both racist stereotypes and homophobic imaginings. Reacting to personal experiences, some API queer writers give voice to the frustration and devastation of being attacked within the very spaces that have been "liberated" for support and validation. From an essay in Asian American Sexualities one writer asserts,

But we know who we are not: We are neither corrupt, assimilated perverts, nor submissive, domesticated [geishas].

And excerpted from a poem in The Very Inside, another author writes on her positionality as a queer South Asian woman:

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42 The issue of coming out in an Asian Pacific community involves several possible factors and considerations for an API queer. For example, Pamela H.'s essay "Asian American Lesbians" discusses the difficulty in explaining one's lesbianism to family members whose native tongue does not include the word for "lesbian": "Saying 'I'm a lesbian' to parents who do not understand the word 'lesbian' is like speaking a foreign language—comprehension is minimal" (p.285).

43 "Preserving the Paradox," pp.79-80.
WHO AM I?
I am not your little Indian doll
to be hung in living rooms to soothe your white guilt...
I am not your little Indian doll, your guriya
to shove, beat
idolize, pedestalize
then stick your prick into...
I am not your oh-so-oppressed little Indian doll
wound up to sing and dance
and add color to your ranks...
I am not your little Indian doll to
be given away to the first gudda
who comes with a huge festive baraat...
I am not your plastic doll.44

This passage comes from a piece describing lesbian APIs' experiences as an “other”:

An Asian Pacific lesbian faces an alienating lesbian community and a hostile Asian Pacific community... I want acceptance from both communities.45

Each of the above quotes articulates a different pattern of API queer oppression, with the first and third excerpts confronting the dual demonization of those who straddle two communities, and the second depicting the array of situations that confronts a multiply objectified position. Clearly asserting what they are not, the writers stake out the particularities of queer API resistance, and differentiate API lesbians from the groups that would subsume them.46 Also, in “Looking for My Penis: The Eroticized

46 Some queers of particular ethnicities within the umbrella term “API” also insist on making distinctions for themselves based on their own specific heritage. Asian American Sexualities
Asian in Gay Video Porn,” the author examines both the lesbian/gay movement as well as the Asian Pacific communities of support for ways in which each render queer APIs invisible. Whether through racist ignorance and erasure of Asian Pacific queers by other gay people, or through homophobic ostracization by API community members, those who seek to participate in both groups often find acceptance and understanding in neither. In identity discourse articulation of the multiplicity of oppressions for queers of Asian Pacific heritage is another expression of an “oppositional” tactic.

In the context of subverting “false” notions of API queers, each of the works cited in this section address identity through their participation in the discourse on identity. Instead of formulating a “true” queer API identity, these writers affect the discursive representation of their “selves” by refuting other claims to define API queers. “Opposition” is the political strategy. “Contradiction” is the path to API queer efficacy. The question is, “Who are we not?”

3.3 Constructing Queer APIs: Fragments of Yellow ‘n Pink

Works that employ the “fragmentation” tactic, which addresses issues of queer API identity from manifold yet parallel perspectives, also affect identity contains an essay describing the specificities of gay Filipino styles and aesthetics. “Searching for Community: Filipino Gay Men in New York City,” by Martin F. Manalansan IV, traces the history of a particular gay community, and the aspects of its legacy that bears the distinct mark of Filipino heritage.

In a more broad-based differentiation within the API movement, Pacific Islanders also chafe at the overarching term “Asian and Pacific Islander.” In The Very Inside (p.391), Trinity A. Ordona’s “Cross-Racial Hostility and Inter-Racial Conflict: Stories to Tell, Lessons to Learn” is an excellent description of the tokenization that often occurs for Pacific Islanders in the discussion of “API” women and lesbians.

as discourse. That is, "fragmentation" writing inscribes API sexuality as a 
collage of images, experiences, and agendas, problematizing the "universal 
identity" and broad applications of API and queer identifications. Writing 
API queer identity as a fragmented and malleable tool in politics and in 
society, the authors discussed in this section often approach "identity" as a 
means to an end, or as a societal affect that can be manipulated. Whether 
documenting how "identity" undermines community building, or detailing 
how APIs employ their "identities" as tools for efficacy, the writings direct 
their efforts through the discursive site of identity. Writers of the pieces 
examined below produce identity discourse that highlights some of the ways 
in which conventional identity politics is clumsy and cumbersome when 
faced with the multifarious spectrum of API queer experiences and 
circumstances. In building a movement for queer APIs, "identity" as a pre-
existing nature of each individual cannot survive the various twists and 
knots introduced by "fragmentation" texts.

Some works reject the notion of identity altogether as a sufficiently 
descriptive mode for understanding individuals and their experiences. Both 
of the following passages detail reactions to the destructively generalizing 
effects of "identity." The first is taken from an essay in The Very Inside:

[No matter what label we are either forced or choose to wear... [i]t's not really 
about sexual preference or orientation or gender [or race], but about human traits 
of love, respect, decency, and conscience.48

Excerpted from a letter calling on queer women to learn acceptance and 
tolerance for the diversity in their own communities, the second passage 
exclaims,

We are so goddamned full of it! As human beings we don't fit neatly into one category so the permutations that provoke shit are endless.49

The authors of the above pieces have different tones, and employ different styles of writing, but the message is the same. Eschewing labels and categories, both writers reject the notion of identity as a rigid delineation of static characteristics and personalities. A different concept of recognizing the individual emerges such that, as the second quote continues, “unity comes not from uniformity but from accepting the fucking fact that we [are individuals]”. Another piece discusses the ways in which the political currency of “identity” results in a piecemeal version of herself, as she struggles to produce the appropriate “identification card” in each situation—woman of color, South Asian, lesbian, and lesbian of mixed race.50 The unifying characteristic of each of these writings lies in their refusal to participate in the identity politics of deploying labels, categories, and identifications. Rather, each author discusses the notion of identity as a tool in socio-political interactions between groups and people. Whether dismissing “identity” as damaging, or re-inscribing “identity” as an individuated sense of self, the works all critique the politics of categorizing individuals under immutable labels; and by re-writing in a fundamental way the concept of identity, they all contribute to the discourse of identity.

The specificities of individuals and their life situations are also reinforced in other works that both describe the author’s experiences in self definition and acknowledge the spectrum of possibilities for the “API queer.”

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From a personal narrative, the quote below describes one dynamic view of identity:

I believe it is important to encourage the continual process of self-examination and self-definition... Whichever way I decide to describe myself, the meaning will be one of my choosing and my design.51

And the next excerpt is taken from an essay seeking to re-define activism, explaining that

I feel that I have a responsibility to use my privileges in a way that will be productive to myself and to those around me. In order to change the world around me, I must start with myself.52

The emphasis in these two passages on self-creation effects a kind of obliterating of identity in the categorically rigid sense of the word. That is, by insisting on the individual's choice and responsibility to craft themselves rather than subscribe to a pre-defined "identity," both writers propound an idea of the personal design of one's self. In a poignant example the poem "A Recognition" describes one woman's excitement at discovering a Trinidadian lesbian "sister" and the other woman's need to remain anonymous, autonomous, and free to define herself as Trinidadian, lesbian, or otherwise.53 The piece acknowledges the importance of community building and visibility for some people, but at the same time the poem respects each person's choices of identification and community. Though the first woman's excitement at meeting a fellow Trinidadian lesbian highlights her investment

in commonality, the final stanza of the poem acknowledges the importance of individual circumstances in defining oneself. Here identity and individuality blur together, such that lesbian API identity is not only fragmented, but complicatedly specific to a person’s situation.

Notions of identity as a fragmented or fluid descriptor of individuals are most often articulated in writing by and about multiracial and/or adopted people. Drawing on experiences of multiple cultures and belief systems as an integral part of childhood development, these writers often promote strategies for maneuvering identity that rely on difference and multiplicity. For example one writer problematizes the categories of racial identity from the perspective of a biracial lesbian, noting the failure of identity categories when a “mixed” person is (mis)read by those around her:

Is passing for me passing both as straight and white?... Why is it some people assume I’m white and others know I’m not? [B]eing hapa, am I really too white to be Asian? What does other mean when you’re half and half?54

Passing, or successfully performing a “false identity,” introduces questions that begin to break down the boundaries between categories that are otherwise presumed to be “natural.” For those who are hapa, or half-white and half-API, the immutability of those “identities” is often disproved by the very makeup of their heritage.55 Another “fragmentation” essay involving mixed-

55 One essay, titled “Mesliza Girlhood: Interracial Families in Chicago’s Filipino American Community since 1925” from Making Waves (p.282), disagrees with the other mixed-race essays cited in this chapter by describing mestiza identity as largely removed from the API aspects of its heritage. In the context of Filipina immigrant community and culture, Barbara M. Posadas writes, “the mestizas, like many others of multiple heritage, acknowledge their parental background, but function more as the products of an American mass culture than of an ethnic enclave.” In this piece, the mestizas are not portrayed as occupying an interstice between the cultures of their heritage, but are instead painted as effectively “American” in their cultural fluency.
race issues describes a self-declared “displaced Pacific Islander.” The author supplies a list of names that have all been applied to her: “chink, jap, nigger, faggot, dyke, injun, po’white trash.” She writes,

What are you? They want to know... When politics turn to angry didactics, when the banners go up and numbers must be counted..., I know who I am then and who I must become: Call me Pacific Islander. Call me Working Class. Call me Lesbian. Call me Your Worst Fucking Nightmare.

Today, I don’t want to reduce myself to these bite-size morsels, free for your consumption. Listen: I’m not telling you what you want to hear today because I don’t want us to dissolve the most-radical potential I think my experiences offer, a potential that represents infinite possibilities for self-meanings.

In her essay the author writes from her mixed-race subject position to both complicate “identity” and acknowledge its efficacy in politics and “banner waving.” Identities that presume to be always already coherent and complete collapse under the scrutiny of writers whose lives reflect a multiplicity of experiences and apparent paradox. Beginning from an analysis of bi- and multi-racial experiences, each of these writers effect a “fragmentation” tactic in navigating the discourse of identity and in deploying a politics of resistance.

Strategies for resistance often result from “fragmentation” writing, as authors disintegrate rigid identification practices and complicate the notion of identity. Some writers demonstrate these strategies in the context of stereotypes about API women, pointing out some of the ways Asian Pacific women of any sexuality can manipulate existing situations as a form of

57 Ibid., p.15.
resistance. As an example, after interviewing South Asian women cannery workers, one writer concludes that

the Punjabi women with whom I talked are anything but passive... [T]hey actively influence and interlink the public sphere of work and the private sphere of family. Indeed, they are often able to gain the upper hand by manipulating the stereotypic images of their supposed domesticity, passivity, and inarticulateness.\textsuperscript{58}

Detailing specific situations and issues around which these women effect change and agitate for their quality of life, she argues that Asian Pacific women are not only aware of the stereotypes, but deploy them as weapons against the racism and sexism that they experience. Another essay on API American women in mainstream politics also refers to exploiting the stereotypes of API women as accommodating, passive, and simple.\textsuperscript{59} These women use the racist images to their advantage in campaigning and in securing political positions where the “compromising Moderate” appeals to the majority of voters. Though each of these essays recognizes the incorrect identification of all Asian Pacific women with “weak” traits, that identification is reformed into a tactical maneuver. Writers promote a “fragmentation” reading of identity and subvert the effects of a traditional form of oppression to their own benefit.

Other writers focus on the tensions between identities as a means for establishing new and creative appropriations of established tactics and

\textsuperscript{58} "Ladies on the Line: Punjabi Cannery Workers in Central California," by Marcelle Williams, \textit{Making Waves}, pp.149-50.

strategies.\textsuperscript{60} That is, one form of "fragmentation" writing emphasizes the possibility of claiming aspects of stable "identities" and cultures to re-inscribe them as one’s own. One author describes this process below:

I suggest we consider the local struggle, and I believe, the responsibility to incorporate our daily life experiences as bisexuals, homosexuals, and transgendered individuals, as well as members of specific Asian and Pacific Islander cultures into our various local and particular landscapes.\textsuperscript{61}

The essay suggests several specific actions and behaviors as a part of this "local struggle" that the writer construes as uniquely "API queer" resistance. Another author adds to the collage of activities, styles, and conventions that result from giving an API spin to queer sensibilities and queer-ing Asian Pacific cultures. He focuses specifically on the 1992 staging of a traditional Filipino procession called Santacruzan in front of New York City’s Lesbian and Gay Community Center. Held every year in the Philippines, the street procession was conducted in Manhattan by gay Filipinas in drag:

By describing the procession..., I am presenting what can be interpreted as a collective representation of identity and community. It is in this ritual where idioms of American and Philippine social symbolisms are selectively fused... establishing a sense of collectivity.\textsuperscript{62}

\textsuperscript{60} In “Maiden Voyage,” for example, Takagi critiques Asian American studies for its essentializing perspectives on racial identity, presenting the theoretical analyses of queer theory as an avenue through which API queer and API politics can move forward. As I have alluded to in earlier parts of this paper, racial identity and specifically the ethnic minority model of identity discourse tends to focus on “identity” as an inherent aspect of each individual. Takagi’s essay posits a postmodern, “queer theory” approach to race and racial identity, urging Asian Pacific American Studies toward a more contextual and “fragmented” paradigm of identity.

\textsuperscript{61} “Strategies for Queer Asian and Pacific Islander Spaces,” by Eric Estuar Reyes, \textit{Asian American Sexualities}, p.87.

\textsuperscript{62} “Searching for Community,” p.61.
The author incorporates rituals and figures of both API and queer communities to posit a more fluid definition, with fragments of Asian Pacific heritage and queer culture; the stability of how one defines “API” and “queer” is brought into question. In an essay describing queer Asian Pacific activities, another writer also interrogates the idea that queerness belongs only to one group or camp. He details several instances through which South Asian queers appropriate rituals, cultural meanings, and other signifiers of API heritage and of queer camp, brought together and re-created as uniquely API queer. While acknowledging the “global structures of imperialism and neocolonialism” that shape the way queer people relate to and between communities, he maintains that API participation in the rituals and aesthetics of one community or another can [not] be read solely as mimicry... Consumption—whether of identities or style or modes of organizing—can be a productive, imaginative act, where what is consumed is not simply and passively digested but more often than not reworked and forced to resignify.

Resignifying the trappings of the larger Asian Pacific and queer communities in some ways begins to produce queer API “culture,” in the midst of the varied and conflicting spaces it occupies. Another essay examines the conventions of coming out, introducing the complexities involved in using the “closet” as a tool for API queer resistance. Describing the particular issues concerning immigrant API lesbians, the writer questions the idea “that there is only one closet and one way to come out.” She asks,

63 “Funny Boys and Girls.” As just one particularly entertaining example, the essay describes a drag show lip-sync contest in which the contestants sang and danced to South Asian bhangra music.
64 Ibid, p.124.
Does the politics of coming out invalidate the politics of a double identity? I
survive by remembering that going in and out of closets is a strategy for working
to remove the conditions that make my closets necessary in the first place.65

The author depicts coming out and the strategic invoking of the closet as both
useful political tools and imposed conditions on activism for queer APIs.
Issues of citizenship and nationality are inextricably tied to identity and to
identity politics.66 And the ways in which Asian Pacific queers can harness
the effects of the closet (inside and outside) represent yet another form of
queer API resistance. As each of these writers articulates the possible tools—to
subvert existing paradigms and to create new ones—for an Asian Pacific
queer activism, the notion of identity remains fragmented, and the writing
reinforces the "fragmentation" tactic.

Through all of the essays described in this section, the notion of queer
API "identity" is at once a focus for discussion, and a site of trouble and
complication. The writers all find ways to explode the concept of a coherent
and knowable "identity" for queers of Asian Pacific descent, but at the same
time they promote the idea of the "queer API" as a form of resistance, as a
source of activism, and as a site of creative re-signification. "Fragmentation"
writing participates in the discourse of identity by presenting disjointed,
manipulable "identities" for queer APIs. As a means to politicization and

66 In "Funny Boys and Girls" the issue of nationality also represents a concern of the queer API.
Referring to the authors of "Queer Nationality," a treatise on the construction of a queer nation,
the writer criticizes the "uninterrogated assumption of queer citizenship as the starting point"
of an activism that relies on "its ability to exploit the disjuncture between queers having access
to the state and its juridical privileges, that is, to citizenship, and being simultaneously denied
access to the nation, to full national subjectivity." He continues, saying "citizenship, queer or
otherwise, is not something that [queers of color] can ever take for granted. Rather, we enact a
much more complicated navigation of state regulatory practices and *multiple* national spaces—
one that is often profoundly mobile, contingent, and evasive, and that demands a more nuanced
theorization of the interplay of state and nation."
revolution, API queer identity emerges in coherent incoherence. "Complexity" is the political strategy. "Fragmentation" is the path to API queer efficacy. The question is "How do we perform who we are?"

3.4 Producing Identities: Pieces of API Queer Politics

"Synthetic," "oppositional," and "fragmentation" tactics—each of these categories represents a particular paradigm for identity in the lives and activism of queer APIs. While I have labeled each of the above works as belonging to one or another tactical camp, some of the pieces straddle two or three categories at once or in different parts of the writing. Still other essays could not be relegated to any of the paradigms I have presented. From essays on the construction of identity⁶⁷ (coherent or incoherent) to simple presentations of an individual lesbian API’s story,⁶⁸ a montage of people, backgrounds, and experiences occupies the discursive space of the identity "API queer." Some texts claim to represent all Asian Pacific queers, and some implicitly create a space for queer API identity through references to "false" or incomplete identifications. Still others explode the notion of identity to include multiplicity, or to transform existing assumptions. The effect of the above discussion, however, remains focused on a single notion: the discursive production of identity, from whatever perspective and with

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⁶⁷ One form of "identity" construction for queer APIs is described in Asian American Sexualities" "Notes on Queer 'N' Asian Virtual Sex," describing the electronic bulletin boards on the InterNet that focus on various issues of sexuality. "On these boards, APIs are truly 'breaking the silence' about taboo sexualities. In the process, APIs are empowered to voice our own forbidden desires and to reconstruct our own sexual identities" (p.161).

⁶⁸ Among these kinds of stories, there were several in The Very Inside that stood out as extraordinarily poignant and singular: Peou Lakhana's "Who Am I?" (p.40), "Lost Pictures" by Sharon Lim-Hing (p.70), "Slowly but Surely, My Search for Family Acceptance and Community Continues" by Susan Y.F. Chen (p.79), and Linda Wong’s "Mini Liu, Long-time Activist" (p.345).
whatever motivation, provides intimate knowledge of the tensions, fractures, and fissures in queer API politics.

Politics and activism on the part of Asian Pacific queers are inextricably tied to identity, if only because of the prevalence of identity politics in issues of minority oppression. One essay addresses identity in its analysis of API political action and theory as follows:

"API" must be based on coalition politics, not identity politics... We must reopen, redefine and continuously question the boundaries of "Asian Pacific Islander" because a coalition is a temporary unity. And "API" can work only as a coalition.69

Focusing on the temporary nature of coalition-based alliances, the authors eschew identity as a useful basis for political efficacy. Another writer also acknowledges the damage that identification can effect when the politics of exclusion and the definition of "identities" dominate politics:

The terms "lesbian" and "gay," like "Third World," "woman," and "Asian American," are political categories that serve as rallying calls and personal affirmations... But is it possible to write these identities—like Asian American gay—without writing oneself into the corners of exclusive identification.70

The task of harnessing the usefulness of identity without succumbing to the control of rigid categories becomes one of the underlying struggle within the politics of a queer API movement. Rather than, as one writer in Asian American Sexualities puts is, "develop any totalizing or linear narrative

70 "Maiden Voyage," p.23.
around these questions"71 of identity, we can instead identify the dynamics of how these writers coalesce, diffract, and re-negotiate "identities." The goal of this chapter was to analyze the API queer contribution to this discursive field of identity politics. That is to say, through the examination of the role of identity discourse in the politics of queer APIs, we can realize and appreciate a dynamic, ever-changing movement for Asian Pacific queers.

71 "Funny Boys and Girls," p.119.
Chapter 4

Does It Make a Sound?: Some Conclusions

cuz every tool is a weapon
if you hold it right.72

In a climate where people experience oppression—based on race, ethnicity, gender, sexual preference, economic status, age, and more—sources of solidarity and support are invaluable to members of a minority group as well as to the marginalized group at large. Community and strength in numbers are common avenues to both personal survival and cultural validation. U.S. society and politics, as they exist at the end of the twentieth century, locates these pockets of safety and mechanisms for cooperative effort within the notion of identity.

But more than simply a vehicle for political efficacy or a label that names a set of experiences, identity has become one of the most weighted forms of cultural currency. That is, “identity” is not just a shorthand expression for marking a particular position in society. Rather, it

72 Lyrics from “my IQ” from the album Puddle Dive, by Ani Difranco (Buffalo: Righteous Babe Records, Inc., 1993).
overwhelms the conception and the definition of the self. Our "identities" are the sound-bites for our existence; and following the trend in media where a pithy phrase represents the entire story, the words on banners and in chants monopolize the ways in which we think of the self, community, and politics. From Democrat to Republican, from the Left to the Right, and with Progressive, Liberal, Libertarian, and Conservative—the realm of politics has also been simplified into camps, labels, and "identities." Identity is not so much a means for description, but the static substitute for a changing self.

To the extent that people conceive of "identities" as the (perhaps only) potential structures for community, validation, and power, "identity politics" continues to be useful. Discourse that perpetuates a unifying image, experience, and agenda is characterized by the continuous re-negotiation of position in the currency of "identity." Defining categories of people, establishing standards of authenticity and membership in a group, and claiming the authority to speak on behalf of or about a particular position are all tied to the contemporary notion of identity.

Focusing on discourse as a conduit for negotiating identity, this paper has tried to observe and compare the ways in which queer API identity is evolving. How do API writers approach sexuality in the context of an identity politic? Identity and the ways in which it is deployed demonstrate the range of agendas and situations of API queer politics. As the epigraph above says, "every tool is a weapon if you hold it right," and identity has been both a tool and a weapon for queer APIs and against them. Examining the discourse on identity in which Asian Pacific queers participate provides a unique perspective on their strategies and potentialities for manipulating power relations.
4.1 Cutting Down Trees: Effects of Discourse

From the essays, poems, and other works examined above, it is clear that the majority of the writing in Making Waves, The Very Inside, and Asian American Sexualities participates in the discourse on identity. As three published collections addressing API women’s sexualities, the prevalence of tactics in identity discourse is indicative of the substantial role identity plays in API queer analysis, creativity, and theory. Though not every piece of writing made explicit mention of “identity” formation, Chapter 3 has shown the ways in which they contribute to identity as discourse. “Synthetic,” “oppositional,” and “fragmentation” tactics characterize the writings, and the range of works that invoke a queer API identity merits further examination for possible implications.

At the outset of my analysis of these anthologies, I expected to find that the distribution of writing employing each of the tactics named above would parallel the publication dates of the books. Because postmodernism has introduced a paradigm of multiplicity and situational analysis, “fragmentation” approaches to identity would seem most likely to occur in works written later than those deploying a “synthetic” tactic, where one’s “identity” is not tied to the context and circumstance of the identification. That is, I expected more “synthesis” writing to appear in Making Waves with the earliest publication date, more “oppositional” writing in The Very Inside, and more “fragmentation” writing in the most recent arrival Asian American Sexualities. However, the distribution of the three tactics is fairly even throughout the books, indicating a consistent breadth of strategies in API writing over the last decade.
The contribution of queer APIs to the discourse on identity reflects to some extent the politics of Asian Pacific queers and the impact we seek to have on society at large. While I do not presume to articulate the intentions of these writers by attributing discursive tactics to their work, their participation in identity discourse through the avenues of synthesis, opposition, and fragmentation does influence the political arena in which API queers struggle to survive. Each author directs her writing through the site of identity in discursive negotiation of the “queer API.” Their approaches to identity and their place in identity politics reflect the varied patterns of discursive strategy API queers employ, engaging in the dynamic space of articulation of the “self.” That is, their strategies in manipulating identity indicate their intentions and agendas for accessing power.

4.2 It’s About Power: Making a Sound

In the current arena of politics in the U.S., identity represents the most common vehicle for negotiating power relations between different peoples. The shifting and polyvalent relations of power that mark our interactions as API queers with the larger society are often accessed through claims to “identity.” “Identities” become lifeboats for oppressed peoples as the means for establishing a clear subject position, for promoting a visible image, for providing an entity around which to rally, and for excavating a safe space. A mantle of power, “identity” is the predominant way for people to “know ourselves,” conflating the mechanisms of identification with self-definition, self-creation, and self-styling. As a result, efforts to establish agency and sustain activism are funneled through the site of identity. Access to power
becomes dependent on access to "identity." "Who has the power, and what can that power do?" operate as the crucial questions in this identity-based approach to politics.

As it is popularly conceived, identity maintains an especially powerful influence in society precisely through the collapsing of the public arena into the purview of the private one. That is to say, because self-articulation exists almost exclusively as categorization and identification, and because "identity" remains one of the most well-worn routes to political agency, the so-called public space of politics and societal change must cater to the sensibilities and morality of the "private." The Alchemy of Race and Rights addresses this blurring of public and private, commenting that there is today precious little 'public' left, just the tyranny of what we call the private. In this nation there is, it is true, relatively little force in the public domain compared to other nations... But we risk instead the life-crushing disenfranchisement of an entirely owned world. Permission must be sought to walk upon the earth. Freedom becomes contractual and... paired not with duty but with debt.73

The notion of identity participates in this privatization of the public, where questions of self-conception and self-styling are conflated with political rights and freedoms. Through "identities" and "identity politics," mechanisms of power relations in the private sphere translate into tools of influence in the public realm. Issues around racial conflict, economic depression, national loyalty, and others become individuated, such that personal "identity," health, and morality permeate the field of discourse. A daunting set of tools,

the strategies for "private" relations (of power) become the most effective ways to navigate the public arena.

By the same token (albeit the other side), a politics that is dominated by identity also makes public what we call our "private lives." For if one's personal identifications with particular traits, cultures, or agendas are the guidelines by which political camps are delineated, those "identities" are inseparably connected to the public sphere. Further, not only do the details of our lives influence what "identities" are acknowledged or empowered as political agents in society, but those "identities" in turn dictate much of how we live our lives. That is to say, self articulation becomes an act of self-discipline, with discrete "identities" representing the only categories in which to conceive the "self." Crossing the public and the private spheres, "identity" determines each in terms of the other.

An understanding of identity as a means of privatizing public discourse and publicizing private beings creates the possibility for hybrids and mutations of mainstream notions of identity and of effective politics. While an "identity politic" is the predominant tactic of contemporary political efficacy, in this paper I have figured it as just one route to efficacy in power relations. As such I am implicitly positing that there are, or should be, other ways to mobilize the situational particularities of queer APIs. That is, recognizing identity as one strategy and one vehicle for accessing power in politics and in society at large, Asian Pacific queers and others can more effectively maneuver relations of politics and activism, perhaps expanding the range of available tools and strategies for change. And for me, the questions shift from who and what to how and when. Rather than continuing to ask who we are and what those identities mean, perhaps it will
be more effective to ponder how to invoke and provoke identities, and when it is most effective to deploy which strategies.
Bibliography


