In the academy today, those of us who work on issues and ideas concerning women, feminism, gender, sexuality, sexual ethics, or homosexuality are being surrounded by things "queer." Books are creeping into the gender studies sections of our bookstores that are about the business of Queering the Renaissance, Queering the Pitch, and Making Things Perfectly Queer. The titles promise to tell us what it means to be Queer in America, or how Queer Looks; the scope of their inquiries is vast, ranging from Queer Romance about queers in popular culture to Queer Words, Queer Images about queer communication theory to Queer Noises about queer musicians to Queer Blood about AIDS to Queer Spirits a queer mythology book to Queer Doings in the Navy. These books tell us we are living in a time of Queer and Pleasant Danger, while admittedly many of our straight neighbors seem to be living in Fear of a Queer Planet.

For many of us who came of age in the relatively stable reign of what academics now call "cultural feminism," the moves presented by queer theory sometimes seem precarious and disaccommodating. While earlier forms of feminism centered their politics on the transhistorical, transcultural subject of...
"woman," queer theory prods us to question our attachment to the stable categories of men and women; from this perspective, feminism misses the mark when it relies on the very bifurcation it is trying to correct. Where earlier forms of feminism taught us to retreat into private separatist domains to peacefully protect all that was special to our womanhood, queer theory has us out marching in the streets, banging down the walls of institutions that perpetuate injustice, "acting up" in the most unladylike fashions. Where we once thought that patriarchy was the underlying, oppressive force found in every culture and every time, queer theory invites us to think about the world, as Emily Dickinson might have it, on the "slant," searching for and recovering sites of resistance to normalcy in many different locations. What precisely is all this queer theory? What is its relationship to more conventional studies and theories about gay and lesbian life? And more importantly for this essay, what ought to be its relationship to contemporary feminism?

As a term "queer theory" was first used by Teresa de Lauretis in her introduction to the "Lesbian and Gay Sexualities" issue of Differences in the summer of 1991 (iii). Since that point, a good number of books and even more articles have been produced under the sign of "queer theory." No systematic endeavor has been made, however, to delineate what these works share in common, or to define queer theory in general. In this essay, then, I will attempt to take a stab at defining the movement by suggesting that "queer theory" is loosely constituted by a set of four assertions regarding the nature of gender and sexuality today. These four generalizations aren't necessarily comprehensive for every self-avowed queer work, nor does every self-avowed queer text engage in all four of these aspects. Rather, these four points constitute my own attempt to delineate the heart of what is new, innovative, and exciting about queer theory. I recognize that reducing queer theory to four assertions or beliefs is a risky approach as I will certainly omit, distort, or misrepresent many aspects of many people's
works. However, it seems important to begin to codify the major propositions associated with queer theory in order to evaluate the phenomenon from related perspectives, such as feminism. Although, as I will demonstrate, this collection of assumptions sometimes produces social arrangements that conflict with some forms of feminism, I believe that these four assertions of queer theory have opened up a distinctively new and exciting approach for both criticism and social theory in the academy today.

The first assertion of queer theory is the recognition of the role of interpretation in understanding all aspects of human life. That is, queer theory assumes that events, attitudes, relationships, etc., are never self-evident or self-interpreting but always require some grid of interpretation or key to decode and make sense of them. Queer theorists assert that what we often see as a fairly uniform past is in fact filled with glitches, differences, and irregularities smoothed over by our own interpretive impulse to make things "normal." Queer theorists are thus devoted to rereading past events, texts, and social theories—especially those related to sexuality—with an eye toward disruption, on the slant if you will. As Michael Warner explains it,

Almost everything that would be called queer theory is about ways in which texts—either literature or mass culture or language—shape sexuality. Usually, the notion is that fantasy and other kinds of representation are inherently uncontrollable, queer by nature. This focus on messy representation allows queer theory, like non-academic queer activism, to be both assimilationist and anti-separatist: you can't eliminate queerness, says queer theory, or screen it out. It's everywhere. (19)

Being queer is not a matter of being gay, then, but rather of being committed to challenging that which is perceived as normal. There is no fool-proof membership criteria for queerness other than the willingness to seek out sites of resistance to normalcy in any possible location; in recognizing that it is the structure of our own lives that provides the impetus of normal, the interpretation of things as "queer" has the effect
of locating us in a different past and placing us in a different social landscape.

This move to recognize the importance of interpretation in the process of social change ought to sound familiar to many feminists, especially to those who have attachments to the study of literature. Crucial to the development of contemporary feminist theory was the declaration that any text—indeed, every text—had something to say about women. As feminists, this assertion enabled us to move beyond the idea that we could only study artifacts that directly addressed "women's" concerns; even those representations that contain no women at all could now be read as a commentary on gender differentiation, male dominance, etc. Our job became the enormous yet exciting task of understanding how all texts contributed to the patterns of gender dominance affecting women. As Warner draws this interpretive link between feminism and queer theory, "queer theory is opening up in the way that feminists did when they began treating gender as a primary category for understanding problems that did not initially look gender specific" (xiv).

The second proposal upon which queer theory is built—and again one that I think will be familiar and possibly even agreeable to many feminists—is the idea that sexual identities as well as gender itself are historically contingent, socially constructed categories which can and have been assembled differently at different times. In his extensive research on the sexual practices of ancient Greece, for example, David Halperin found that the set of practices we commonly refer to as homosexuality during that period looks very little like what we know as homosexuality today. For the Greeks, Halperin explains, sex was not tied to love or emotional commitment but was rather a way of representing oneself in the political order. In ancient Greece, he argues, there was no single perception of "the sex act"; instead all acts which we would call "sexual" were organized into two categories: active (meaning to insert one's penis into another's anus or vagina)
and passive (meaning to receive another's penis into one's anus or vagina). The active person signified his superior place in the political realm through and with this act of sex; likewise, the passive partner affirmed his or her inferior status through the event. Sex was not about an intimate relationship between these two people but rather functioned as a way of marking individuals in a political order. Moreover, in Halperin's reconstruction of ancient Greece, the gender of the passive sexual partner was not a fact worthy of notice. A (male) citizen might have chosen either a woman or a man as his passive partner, but there was absolutely no expectation that he would be consistent over time with regard to that choice. There is no sense in which a given citizen "was" homosexual because there was no cultural strategy to distinguish men from women at the level of passive object choice. As Halperin writes it, "sexual partners came in two significantly different kinds—not male and female but 'active' and 'passive'") (33). Whether a man's object choice was male or female was of little consequence as long as the chosen person understood herself or himself as passive.

In a similar fashion, George Chauncey's study of the construction of sexuality in nineteenth-century New York City argues that significant differences in sexual practices and identifications existed among working class men only a century ago. According to Chauncey, there emerged in the 1880s "a third sex" of men that came to be known as "fairies" who identified themselves as different by dressing as women and soliciting sex with more "masculine" men. As Chauncey narrates,

The fundamental division of male sexual actors in much of turn-of-the-century working-class thought was not between heterosexual and homosexual men, but between conventionally masculine males, who were regarded as men, and effeminate males, known as fairies or pansies, who were regarded as virtual women, or, more precisely, as members of a "third sex" that combined elements of the male and female. The heterosexual-homosexual binarism that governs our thinking about sexuality today did not yet constitute the common sense of working class sexual ideology. (48)
Chauncey demonstrates that the fairy—consistent with his identification as a woman—took the passive role in sex. As in ancient Greece, women could be substituted for fairies and fairies for women in the framework of most masculine males; the determining factor involved in one's choice of sexual partners was not his or her genitals but rather his or her identification as passive. Unlike our concept of homosexuality which focuses solely on the narrower issue of sexual object choice, masculine men in nineteenth-century New York chose both women and passive men as their sexual partners; the point was not the biological choice but preferences regarding certain roles and activities during the event of sex. Homosexuality as we know it today—in which a person expresses a seemingly natural desire for sex with other persons of the same gender regardless of dress, cultural codings, or roles assumed during the sex act—emerged only out of a complex, uneven process, marked by substantial class and ethnic differences. These queer histories that investigate differences among sexual practices help us recognize how relatively new and culturally contingent today's sexual codifications of homosexuality and heterosexuality really are.

Queer theory also seizes on works that suggest that gender and biological sex, like sexual preference, are socially constructed. They note that a homo/hetero system wrongly presumes that everyone has either an obvious penis or vagina, that every person has an uncomplicated, positive relationship to that biological entity, and that owning that piece of equipment necessarily correlates to certain ontological characteristics. The categories of homosexual and heterosexual, they suggest, are themselves built on the assumption that everyone is either male or female and that that gender identification is itself self-evident to all observers. These queer theorists note that the concept of gender is also socially constructed and very often exists on an unstable background of tacit assumptions and fantasies about both "men" and "women." Although the man/woman distinction has been much more pervasive in
history than the homo/hetero binary, queer theorists attempt to articulate the political possibilities of a radical critique of the categories of gender identity. Just as we cannot use the natural, transhistorical concept of homosexuality to combat the oppressions that accompany the particular categorization of "homosexual," they argue that we can no longer appeal to the transhistorical concepts of "woman" or "woman's essential nature" as a grounding for contemporary feminism for to do so is to assume the validity of the very idea that creates the oppression in the first place. As Judith Butler articulates it, "an uncritical appeal to the system which constructs gender for the emancipation of 'women' will clearly be self-defeating" (2).

Queer theorists remind us that there are no fool-proof scientific tests for gender; there is no hormonal, chromosomal, or anatomical test that can be administered which in every case guarantees that the subject being tested is either a man or a woman. If gender does not equate or reduce to chromosomes, genes, genitals or hormones, it can only be "produced," they suggest, by a wide variety of social events, strategies and fantasies: who makes more money, who wears a dress, etc., all work to help us organize all people into these two tracks. Like homosexuality or heterosexuality, being a "man" or being a "woman" are our only two options; these identifications, queer theorists argue, are constructed not by biological or natural "facts," but by a culture that constantly and consistently places us in one category rather than the other. Gender (and particularly the idea that there can only be two of them), then, is also a matter of social construction; whether one acts as male or female is a matter of performance—i.e., doing the things a woman or man does and thereby coding ourselves as such—not ontological certainty. The more we do the things that—say, as in my case—a woman does, the more we feel ourselves to "be" a woman at our core. Our gender, then, is not a function of an ontological or even biological certainty. Rather, it is established through a widely accepted social grid that teaches even young children to identify themselves and behave as either a
boy or girl. It is, queer theorists argue, something we (as part of culture) "do," not something we "are." As Butler expresses it, "there is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender; that identity is performatively constituted by the very 'expressions' that are said to be its results" (25). Gender isn't something we're born with; it is something that we are born into. It consists of a catalogue of performances that organize experiences based on the binary man/woman.

The queer theorists today prod us to question our attachment to a stable category of woman. To think of women’s liberation as a separate event involving "women only," they say, is not only to miss the complexities of oppression, it is also to assume and posit the very category that itself perpetuates injustice. The lines should not be between women and men, they say, but rather between those who espouse progressive politics, especially around the issues of sexuality, and those who advocate repressive "family values." They defend a construction of a multiplicity of genders as a way of disrupting the binary that keeps us locked into the hierarchical man/woman system. They point to concrete social locations where bifurcated notions of gender are currently problematized—such as in the activities and self-presentations of transgendered people—and suggest that such practices subvert the dominant paradigm precisely because they remind us that genders are performances rather than biological facts.

And like gender, sexual preference is seen as a performance. Although gender identity and sexual identity are in some senses interrelated (how could we articulate preference without a sense of stabilized gender?), they are also, according to queer theorists like Butler, separate systems with distinct but interrelated histories. Thus, just as gender is seen as a set of practices that lead to an identity, so, too, homosexuality is constituted by a set of contingent and concrete discursive practices that allow a particular gay or lesbian identity to become visible at a given moment in history. Queer theorists contend that although that visibility can be configured into a site of res-
istance (as in the contemporary gay rights movement), it is also possible to disrupt heteronormativity by finding examples of peoples and performances that did not and could not fit into dominant or visible categories. In other words, they contend that classifications like heterosexuality and homosexuality do not account for the wide range of sexual practices and desires existing in the world at any given moment. Thus, one goal of queer theory becomes the acquisition of new, non-heteronormative models of performance.

The result of the deconstruction of gender and sexual preference is a politics not based in identity. That is, queer theorists argue that because identities such as race, gender, sexual preference, nationality, etc., are designed to exclude some faction of the population, "queers" should resist all identities in favor of more of progressive politics. As "queers," we need to transcend these fantasies of exclusion by reinscribing difference only along political—not identity—lines. As Alexander Doty expresses it,

"Queer is something ultimately beyond gender—it is an attitude, a way of responding, that begins in a place not concerned with, or limited by, notions of a binary opposition of male and female or the homo versus hetero paradigm usually articulated as an extension of this gender binarism. (xv)

Where categories such as male and female, gay and straight stand in the position of normal, queer theorists compel us to look for places where this normality breaks down, where it is shown to be inadequate. Queer theory stands against the policy of categorization on a presumed ontological basis and is invested instead in building coalitions of difference along political lines.

This insistence on the primacy of politics over identity brings me to the third assertion of queer theory. Queer theorists recognize that new progressive politics they advocate will not be placidly accepted by those in power in reigning institutions; consequently, queers take up an aggressive and confrontational style in their political activism. Closely tied to
organizations such as Queer Nation and ACT-UP (AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power), queers take to the streets with non-accommodationist, anti-assimilationist, "in-your-face" techniques designed to draw attention to issues of sexuality and sexual preference in the public sphere. As Verta Taylor and Leila Rupp discovered in their study of the lesbian community of Columbus, Ohio, "lesbians [involved with] Queer Nation [...] reject the tradition of nonviolence and female pacifism when they adopt the 'Queers bash back' response to violence against lesbians and gay men" (5S). Queers demonstrate against the Roman Catholic Church's repressive policies on condoms by disrupting Catholic Masses; they protest the wedding of heterosexuality and capitalism by staging "kiss-ins," where same sex-partners engage in heavy petting in suburban malls. They defend and promote cross-dressing, uninhibited displays of sexuality, tight black leather, spikes, and body piercings. According to Alexander Doty, "to identify as a queer means to be politically radical, to paradoxically demand recognition by straight culture while at the same time rejecting this culture" (2). Queer politics are explicitly and intentionally designed to make "straight" people feel extremely uncomfortable in order to make them think about how contingent the foundations of the repressive "normal" world really are. As Warner portrays it, "if queers can be understood as protesting not just the normal behavior of the social but the idea of normal behavior, they will bring skepticism to the methodologies founded on that idea" (xxvii).

Related to this third maxim of aggressive organizing is the fourth assertion of "sex-positivity." Queers in principle are opposed to any ethical program that attempts to pass judgment on any sexual behavior. All sex, at least when it is mutually consentual, is good sex. Because "queerness" in the pejorative sense has always been defined by its negative relation to a particular moral code, the new queer theorists today assert that it is time to eliminate the barriers presented by all moral codes. As Gayle Rubin articulates it,
Most of the discourses on sex, be they religious, psychiatric, popular, or political, delimit a very small portion of human sexual capacity as sanctifiable, safe, healthy, mature, legal, or politically correct. [A] 'line' distinguishes these from all other erotic behaviors, which are understood to be the work of the devil, dangerous, psychopathical, infantile, or politically reprehensible [...] we should [instead] judge sexual acts by the way partners treat one another, the level of mutual consideration, the presence or absence of coercion, and the quantity and quality of the pleasures they provide. Whether sex acts are gay or straight, coupled or in groups, naked or in underwear, commercial or free, with or without video, should not be ethical concern. (282-283)

Like their idea of building political coalitions independent of identities, queers also want to build a sexual underground completely free of the confining strictures of ethics. What is good in terms of sex no longer has anything to do with procreation or even intimacy, but is related only to what makes us feel good, what gives us pleasure. Thus, many aspects of queer culture show intense interest in alternative sex practices such as sadomasochism, pornography, and man-boy love, affirming in every case the perverse, the chaotic, and the non-monogamous. Sex, for queers, is good and any ethical dictums that restrict, confine, or limit it need to be challenged as part of the hegemonic force that keeps the idea of "normal" intact. Queer theory thus challenges not only the construction of male and female as "normal," it also disputes the idea that sexuality has any "normal" parameters at all. From this viewpoint, because sex itself is liberating, new and innovative ways of expressing sexuality are to be explored and encouraged. As Steven Seidman articulates it,

In challenging sexual object choice as a master category of sexual and social identity, queer theory suggests the possibility of legitimating desires other than gender preference as grounds for constructing alternative identities, communities, and politics. Hence, queer theory advocates non-conventional sexualities. (123)

Thus, queer theory becomes loosely affiliated with issues and practices involved in exploring the boundaries of sexual pleasure, such as sadomasochism, man-boy love, group sex,
cross-dressing, leather bars, and other erotic subcultures that exist in America today. Queer theory is interested in affiliating with those communities that challenge the dominant notion of normal both in the construction of gender and in the act of sex itself.

In the abstract, each of these four assertions can be endorsed by some faction within feminism. Feminists associated with literary studies, for example, can certainly accede the value of interpretation in political agendas. Similarly, feminists such as Joan Scott, Judith Butler, and Denise Riley, sanction and approve of the move to deconstruct gender and sexual preference on feminist grounds. Indeed, I would suggest that the drive to move beyond gender into a multi-gendered, post-gender, or androgynous space has had an impact on a wide variety of academic disciplines ranging from philosophy to history to medicine to religious studies. Aggressive political tactics and sex-positivity are also no strangers to feminism. Sex-positive feminists such as Arlene Stein, Pat Califia, Gayle Rubin, and Susie Bright suggest—along with queer theorists—that sexual expression and experimentation is good in and of itself; women's liberation happens, they argue, not only in the workplace but also in the bedroom as women are freed up to explore the limits of erotic pleasure (2). In principle, each of the major assertions associated with queer theory has a traditional, feminist translation; feminism and queer theory, then, ought to be major allies.

In practice, however, tensions often arise between queers and feminists. That is, queers and feminists often find themselves at odds with each other even though they often agree on many central principles and tenets. These conflicts arise, I suggest, not out of theoretical differences between the two camps, but rather as a result of hidden and often unconscious assumptions. Although many aspects of queer theory could be used to serve feminist ends, in the reality of much queer theory today, this particular deconstruction of gender sometimes inadvertently functions as yet another cover for sexism and
male-dominance. That is, the desire to break open the dichotomy between men and women has often lead to the valorization of those things previously associated with the male sphere. Rather than challenging the division of the world into those two narrow categories, queer theory has sometimes inadvertently eliminated or ridiculed many of the attributes associated with women. To be queer often means to be public, hard, aggressive, "in-your-face"; those attributes historically associated with women which reproduce both children and daily life, such as relationality and caretaking, are sometimes dismissed as soft and accommodationist by the new queer discourse.

The current controversy over the history and content of the category "lesbian" will help demonstrate this point. Pre-queer, "woman-identified" feminist historians and writers such as Lillian Faderman, Caroll Smith-Rosenberg, and Adrienne Rich had earlier theorized lesbian experience in various historical forms of same-sex bonding among women. Smith-Rosenberg, for example, considered early nineteenth-century white middle-class American women who shared deep emotional bonds with other women friends—bonds which, as she demonstrated, conveyed erotic, sensual feeling—"lesbians," even though no such category existed for them to name themselves as such and little evidence can be found to verify that these women participated in acts of genital sex (at least as we define them today). These women were quintessentially middle-class Victorians who attended to the moral and spiritual needs of their families by using their "special female nature" as an opportunity to form intense emotional bonds with other women. These female bonds, as Smith-Rosenberg described them, very often took primacy over a woman's bond with her husband. For Faderman, Smith-Rosenberg, Rich, and a whole generation of feminist scholars, women who wrote love letters to other women were unquestionably lesbians; to name them as such meant not only to claim concrete historical lineage, but also to recognize, for ourselves, that the category of lesbian was larger than what we did in bed.
In moves analogous to those of Halperin and Chauncey above, a new generation of scholars informed by and participating in anti-essentializing queer discourses criticized these earlier feminist scholars for the inaccuracy of their transhistorical description of lesbianism. These new scholars noted that our conception of homosexuality is historically unique, and that little commonality exists between our construction of "lesbian" and a nineteenth-century woman who had some sort of "special friendship" with another woman. In fact, these new scholars charged that in using the emotional bonds that existed between middle-class women as the foundation for understanding lesbianism the earlier feminist historians had virtually ignored the working-class women who, at the turn of the century, began to organize themselves into erotic communities based on butch-fem aesthetics. As Elizabeth Kennedy and Madeline Davis articulate it for example, the earlier scholars, "give minimal attention to the explicitly sexual lesbian communities of the turn of the century, treating their (butch-fem identities) as problematic" (12). The new generation of queer scholars attach themselves to these working-class butch-fem lesbian histories and thus retheorize lesbianism on the axis of sexual activity rather than emotionality; they downplay the "female worlds of love and ritual" and make more visible the "self-defined mannish lesbian" as well as her "lipstick-lesbian" fem partner. Lesbianism, in these new discourses, is understood as a multitude of performances around both gender and sexuality, performances that have no correlation to emotionality or domesticity. Lesbianism is no longer defined by spiritual connection or care-taking but rather by public, sexual roles.

What is at stake in this controversy over lesbian history, I suggest, is a disagreement not only over what should count as "lesbian" sexuality but also whether those aspects of emotionality associated with nineteenth-century Victorian womanhood are traits to be valorized and retained by political progressives today or critiqued and dismissed. Underlying the early feminist narratives is the impulse to recover the passioned emotional
and spiritual complexities found in the lives of Victorian women, to hold up those dimensions of femaleness as markers for feminism today. Conversely, the narratives of the new queer studies people discredit and disavow those notions of womanhood as repressive and asexual; what is held up in this new wave of queer reconstructions is the freedom for women to break out of the prison of private domesticity and to identify themselves as explicitly sexual in the public sphere.

While I do not want to underwrite the move to impose the category "lesbian" in a period in which the concept would have had no meaning, I am deeply concerned that contemporary queer narratives virtually dismiss the domesticity, emotionality, and spirituality associated with the private sphere in favor of the dynamism, development and aggression of the public. The problem is not that queer theory deconstructs gender, but rather that it sometimes tacitly assumes that liberation is synonymous with participation in a narrowly defined "public" life. In their focus on frank discussions of sexuality, many new queer discourses have virtually eliminated the need for care-taking and other elements historically connected to the realm of privacy. Early feminists articulated a sense of sexuality (or at least sensuality) which was intrinsically tied to (what was thought to be) women's spiritual nature. In rejecting that notion of womanhood, queer theorists have thrown out also the need or desire for many attributes associated with woman's worlds.

Sustained attention to the activities associated with the private realm is important, I believe, because these tasks reproduce daily life for most human beings. The cooking, the cleaning, the washing, the child-care, the errands, the gift-buying, the grocery shopping, etc., must be done in order for people to continue with the more public life of work and politics. Somebody has to do these things, and if they're not done by queers, they will be done by women, and if some "women" manage to get out of these tasks by identifying themselves as queer, then the work will be done by women of color and other disenfranchised people who cannot afford the
luxury of an identity like queer. For example, if we're working hard all day at our universities, it seems innocent enough to stop at "Boston Chicken" on the way home for dinner in order to avoid grocery shopping, cooking and cleaning; in doing so, however, we are helping to create and support an underclass of African-Americans and other minorities who work continually for minimum wage with no prospect of advancement or recognition. (When was the last time you saw a white person over twenty working at a fast-food restaurant?) The social reproduction of daily life is hard work and our culture has consistently passed those "unwanted," unglamorous jobs off to minorities (paying them very little) and women (and not paying them at all). Queer theory's valorization of the public and political parts of life and dismissal of the tasks associated with the home, I suggest, often leads not only to sexism, but to racism and the exploitation of the working classes as well.

As a result of the fact that women have historically been connected to the home and to the jobs associated with the social reproduction of everyday life, many women—and especially many feminists—have developed a tempered style of political organizing in the public sphere. It is worth pointing out that the aggressive in-your-face style of organizing associated with queer theory is historically associated with and largely sustained by men. After all—the queer narrative goes—gay men have had more experience organizing and have more access to material resources and channels of political power; why not make use of those assets in the current struggle? Thus, the popular wisdom of the new queer coalitions holds that the beings we used to call "women" have become much better political organizers as a result of their affiliation with those beings we used to call "men." An excerpt from Sarah Schulman's *My American History* illustrates this point, "Pre-ACT UP lesbians," Schulman writes:

had difficulty finding efficient, empowering tactics, setting winnable concrete goals, and having a clear idea who was supposed to be affected by our organizing efforts. There was something in the amorphous, generalized
nature of our policies that guaranteed defeat. But it was only through ACT UP that [we] understood how to sequence political action. First make a demand that is possible. Then propose it brilliantly. When there is no response hold direct actions until your target is forced, through embarrassment or necessity to respond, in some way and then work with them to see the proposal through, whenever possible. Not only can this kind of focus bring you closer to your ultimate goal, but it creates positive and satisfying experiences for fellow activists and motivation for strategizing for political change. I remember the first time I participated in an ACT UP demonstration where protesters sat in at government offices, and I realized that while the early 80's feminist movement encircled the Pentagon, we never walked in through its front door.6 (67-68)

As Schulman’s narrative demonstrates, an inadvertent association often takes place between being genderless, being powerful and aggressive, and being male. The deconstruction of gender for “women” means that we are no longer “bound” by woman-based ideologies that “guaranteed defeat” in a male dominated world; we, too, can have access to (male-dominated) public spaces and (male-oriented) aggressive political power.

Additionally, the issues most often brought to our attention by queer actions are related to the AIDS crisis; Pat Califia articulated her reservations about this center of focus:

while the health crisis is a dire emergency that every thinking, caring person must address, it alarms me to see queer men blindly absorb women's caretaking without making much of an effort to reciprocate. The majority of gay men remain woefully ignorant about feminism, and too many are contemptuous of women's bodies and hostile toward lesbians. When I see a mass movement among queer men to raise money for breast-cancer research, or a volunteer army of queer men who are taking care of women with chronic and life-threatening illnesses, this resentment will be appeased. (25)

Although she herself is a sex-positive feminist, Califia gives voice to the skepticism many of us feel about this new movement. Although in theory queerness transcends or deconstructs gender, in reality it sometimes feels like another way that men are allowed to wield the power, set the agendas, and be taken care of.

As feminists interested in using and identifying with queer theory, I suggest that we don't discard the things historically
associated with women and women's work in this new move to queerness. Because we are all descendants of the nineteenth century, in America today women often do the work that reproduces daily life for all family members. In deconstructing "men" and "women," it is vital that we not inadvertently disavow those things that have historically been associated with women's sphere. It is critical that we hold up and take seriously the emotional and connective work that has been traditionally assigned to women, and that we understand that this is the work in which all of us must now participate. Some forms of feminism have taught us to resist the male-produced notion that the social reproduction of everyday life is menial work that only morons (i.e., blacks and women) should have to do. In the last generation, I suspect that many of us have learned to enjoy our children more than our mothers enjoyed us, (and to live with dirtier houses than they did as well); we have become adept at balancing our public and private worlds to enjoy both. Such a balance, in my thinking, is one of the strongest outcomes of contemporary feminism. I suggest that if the new queer nation hopes to be truly strong, it will need to valorize activities such as preparing safe and comfortable homes, cooking for others, raising and teaching our children, being hospitable, thinking about how to be a good friend and neighbor, and organizing social activities. Queer theory needs to understand that these are tasks that all of us should undertake regardless of our gender. Thus, while we may not need the ontological categories of "men" and "women," we do need to recover and value the work historically assigned to women's realm.

From a certain angle, these strategies might appear contradictory (why focus on "women" or women's sphere if that's the very category we're trying to free ourselves from?). My point here is that we need to live with this contradiction for some while, that, we need to focus both on women and beyond them in order to prevent a new queer world from becoming another cover for the discrimination and disregard of women. Queer
Queer theory can provide us with interesting visions of a non-gendered, politically progressive world, but only if we recognize the need for feminist analysis as well. To my thinking, feminists today need to attend both to new queer analyses and to feminist methodologies if we hope to pursue a world that strives to be truly beyond gender discrimination rather than one that simply hides it. Queer discourse on academic and popular levels can help us avoid configuring gender as an ontological necessity and see it instead as something we construct and perform. Moving beyond the male/female binary will free us from unnecessary gender discrimination currently present in many aspects of social life. We also need feminism, however, to help us consciously focus on and recover "women's work" as a central concern in the new queer discourse. As feminists striving to live beyond gender, we need to actively remember the important relational and emotional work that has been done throughout the ages by the people called "women." Seeing "women's work" as engaging, important work throughout history will reshape the landscape of our own lives today.

I suggest that what we need is a "feminist version of queer theory," which would see itself not as a set of instantaneous, deconstructive moves but rather as a collection of staggered events and uneven developments that pursue two conflicting goals simultaneously. In this feminist version of queer theory, we must strive to pay as much attention to the role of (what we used to call) women, as we do to overcoming or rising above such categorization. By understanding a feminist queer agenda not as one move but as a process, we can then see that both types of work help us reshape the world. Queer theorists and feminists agree on the idea that the secret of rebuilding the world lies at the level of interpretation. Rather than struggling over whether an event or text is either queer or feminist, we need to recognize that both interpretations are necessary and ought to exist side-by-side. In building a new feminist queer theory in this dialectical fashion, the struggle to recover
women and to move beyond them emerges as an agenda that can offer a better world for people of all sexual and gender identifications. This version of queer theory understands finally that without feminism, queer theory will simply be another fight among boys.

Notes

1. See, for example, the widely cited essay by Suzanne Kessler, "The Medical Construction of Gender: Case Management of Intersexed Infants," in *Theorizing Feminism: Parallel Trends in the Humanities and Social Sciences*, Anne Herrmann and Abigail Stewart, eds. (Boulder: Westview Press, 1994), 218-237. The essay carefully chronicles many incidents of children born with some combination of "male" and "female" reproductive features, and demonstrates that physicians often make an arbitrary decision about which sex the child will become. Kessler is critical of the "incorrigible belief in and insistence upon female and male as the only 'natural' options" (218).


4. See also Lisa Duggan, "The Trials of Alice Mitchell: Sensationalism, Sexology, and the Lesbian Subject in Turn-of-the-Century America," in *Signs* (Volume 18, Number 4, Summer 1993), 791-814. For an interesting essay that compares the differences between these two strands of lesbians in one geographic area, see Trisha Franzen, "Differences and Identities: Feminism and the Albuquerque Lesbian Community," in *Signs* (Volume 18, Number 4, Summer 1993), 891-906.

5. It should also be noted here that the butch-fem lesbians have a much longer history of association with gay men than do the lesbian separatists invoked in earlier frameworks; coalition under the sign of queer is thus made much easier.
6. It is important to note that Schulman herself is sensitive to the sexist
dynamic of new queer politics.

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