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When I first received an invitation to speak at the University of Michigan's "Gay Shame" conference, I felt immediately that this conference was not for me. The idea of gay shame felt anachronistic, even though I knew about the activist groups who organized under this rubric to critique the consumerism of gay pride festivals.¹ The more I thought about the conference and its theme, the more I became convinced that gay shame, if used in an uncritical way, was for, by, and about the white gay men who had rejected feminism and a queer of color critique and for whom, therefore, shame was still an active rubric of identification. A quick glance at the list of participants a few months before the conference confirmed this notion, as at least seventeen white gay men were scheduled to speak out of a list of about forty-five participants and only a handful of people of color were listed for the entire event. I considered sending an e-mail to the conference organizers to ask about their understanding of the place of race in queer studies today, but I thought better of it and presumed that the list of participants was still under construction and would look very different when the conference began. As it turned out, the list of participants did change slightly; one of the queer people of color invited, Samuel Delany, could not attend, and so Hiram Perez was one of two people of color at the event who was speaking on a panel (as opposed to moderating a panel). At a conference where disability studies was given a panel all its own (and an excellent panel at that) and the scope of the discussion was supposed to extend beyond the university and into activist and performance communities, the omission of people of color, or at the very least of queers explicitly working on race, was ominous.

How do we explain the absence of both a panel on race and sexuality and queer people of color at a major queer studies conference in the year 2003? Is it the case that gay shame is not a rubric that relates to racialization? Has there been no relevant work recently on gay shame and race? Is queer studies white? Is queer activism white? Is race somehow not an important rubric for queer studies? Obviously, the answer to each of these questions is "no": there has been a huge amount of work recently that foregrounds racial processes and indeed implicates shame in producing queer

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identities. New books by Rod Ferguson, Robert Reid-Pharr, Juana Rodriguez, Licia Fiol-Matta, and David Eng immediately come to mind, and older work by José Esteban Muñoz, David Roman, and Jacqui Alexander provide the critical backdrop against which and from which this new work emerges.² Queer work on race has become central to the queer project in academia, and queer studies has moved far beyond readings of canonical white gay male authors and artists by tenured white gay male professors. So why, again, would a major national conference on queer studies include little to no work on queer race by published scholars in the field? I want to answer this question by providing here an expanded version of the paper I gave at the conference and then conclude with a brief summary of a series of skirmishes that developed at the conference around the topic of white gay male hegemony. In the course of this essay, some of my remarks, particularly those directed at white gay men, actually take on the form of shaming itself. While I realize that this performance of shaming is not the best way to dislodge its effects and influence, my argument throughout is that we cannot completely do without shame and that shame can be a powerful tactic in the struggle to make privilege (whiteness, masculinity, wealth) visible.

Let me say at the outset that some (not all) of the white gay men behaved as if they represented a block interest; at times the discussion was wholly dominated by white gay men discussing issues of interest to other white gay men, and the point was made, during one such discussion, that while women and people of color are willing to write and think about whiteness and masculinity, white gay men show very little interest in writing and thinking in reciprocal ways about race and gender.³ This kind of narrow interest in the self can only be termed *identity politics*. My hope here is to use the conference to unravel and make visible the deeply invested identity politics of white gay men that have obscured more radical agendas; this is an identity politics moreover that, like the identity politics of other white male scholarship, hides behind the banner of “general interest” or simply “knowledge.” The future of queer studies, I claim, depends absolutely on moving away from white gay male identity politics and learning from the radical critiques offered by a younger generation of queer scholars who draw their intellectual inspiration from feminism and ethnic studies rather than white queer studies.

Gay Shame: A White Gay Male Thing?

In my presentation at the Gay Shame conference, I offered some thoughts on “gay shame” intended to provoke and encourage discussion. I pre-

sented my remarks in three sections, each with its own polemical thrust, each with a set of questions, and each intended to add to a general concern about the romanticization of gay shame, a romanticization that, I believe, glosses over both the particularity of this formation and the damage of its myopic range.

Shame Is to Childhood as Queer Is to Adulthood . . .

If queer is a politically potent term, which it is, that's because, far from being capable of being detached from the childhood scene of shame, it cleaves to that scene as a near-inexhaustible source of transformational energy.

—Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Shame and Performativity: Henry James's New York Edition Prefaces*

Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick,⁴ and others who have written so eloquently about gay shame, posit an early childhood experience of sexual shame that has to be reclaimed, reinterpreted, and resituated by a queer adult who, armed with a theoretical language about his or her sexuality, can transform past experiences with abjection, isolation, and rejection into legibility, community, and love. Gay shame, in this scenario, becomes the deep emotional reservoir on which an adult queer sexuality draws, for better or for worse. The sexual and emotional scripts that queer life draws on, and that oppose the scripts of normativity, are indebted oddly to this early experience with shame, denial, and misrecognition. When we seek to reclaim gay shame and we oppose the normativity of a “gay pride” agenda, we embrace these awkward, undignified, and graceless childhoods, and we choose to make them part of our political future.

The annexing of shame to queer within the temporal space of “anteriority” has been a huge part of several influential projects in queer studies: Michael Warner's critiques of “normal,” Sedgwick's theory of “shame,” and Leo Bersani's work on “homos” all find rich archives of sexual variance in what Elizabeth Freeman has called “the temporal lag between homo and gay.”⁵ And in Douglas Crimp's new work, “Queer before Gay,” queer is very explicitly the prehistory of gay, a history that must not be left behind in the rush to gay pride but which must be excavated in all its contradiction, disorder, and eros. While these projects make some useful disconnections between queer life and the seeming inevitability of homonormativity, there are also some problems that attend to characterizing shame as normal's “other” and then positioning it as a past that must be reclaimed. The three most obvious problems have to do with glorifying

the pre-Stonewall past; idealizing youth itself, the territory of gay shame after all; and, as Lauren Berlant suggests in *Regarding Sedgwick: Essays on Queer Culture and Critical Theory*, focusing perhaps too much on interiority. Berlant asks: “Must the project of queerness start ‘inside’ of the subject and spread out from there?”⁶

Why are these things problematic? Well, focusing excessively on a mythic queer past or overinvesting hope in a queer future or building a queer project from the “inside of the subject” actually produces a romanticized notion of a gay past (this is what Raymond Williams calls “tradition”)⁷ and then neutralizes the potency of critiques of that past that emerge in the queer present; in a present-day context, for example, we may find that a contemporary antihomonormative queer politics emerges from racialized groups and immigrant communities specifically as a critique of the mythologizing of the queer past that goes on in white gay communities. For example, Martin Manalansan has already made a very different critique of North American gay pride celebrations (different from those critiques made by “gay shamers”) and the traditions that they both mobilize and consolidate. In an essay about the twenty-fifth anniversary celebrations in 1994 of the Stonewall Rebellion titled “In the Shadows of Stonewall: Examining Gay Transnational Politics and the Diaspora Dilemma,” Manalansan specifically took aim at the internationalizing of a U.S. gay movement: “Who bestows legitimacy on the narration of Stonewall as the origin of gay and lesbian development? What does this narrative of origins engender? What practices and locations are subordinated by a privileging of Stonewall as origin?”⁸ His questioning of the “globalizing of gay identity” (502) reminds us of the global framework within which celebrations like gay pride take place, but it also reveals the problem of universalizing debates within which gay white men occupy all available positions: after all, the critics of homonormativity and pride are, like the homonorms themselves, white gay men.

Recently in gay and lesbian communities, we have witnessed a startling new focus on gay youth. Youth groups have sprung up everywhere along with gay schools and gay-straight encounter groups in high schools. Youth groups, to be very general, rescue young queers from the potential bullying and isolation that awaits the adolescent with same-sex desires or alternative gendering, and they offer a safe space among peers and counselors within which to develop contrary sexualities. Unfortunately, some youth groups also install, perhaps prematurely, both a sense of a fixed identity and a context of hurt and damage within which to understand that fixed sexual identity. Much of the organizing around gay shame in activist circles has come from queer youth who turn their rebellious instincts away from straight culture and direct many of their most searing indictments at older

gays and lesbians. The generational conflict that gay youth groups inadvertently inspire works in turn to normalize the temporal rhythms of queer life.⁹ While in the past, queer intergenerational dating allowed older men and women to pass on information, sexual practices, and historical information from one generation to the other, now gay youth are “protected” from the “predations” of older queers. In the past, oedipal dynamics could be avoided in queer communities because the divide between youth and older people was underemphasized; now, gay youth very much want to supplant an older generation’s models of identity, community, and activism. Gay shame, again, with its emphasis on claiming the abject materiality that “pride” disregarded, increases these generational divides and enables young gays to direct their political anger at the very gay and lesbian activists who made gay youth groups possible in the first place.

In other words, gay shame has a tendency both in its academic and in its activist incarnations to become a totalizing narrative that balances out the consumer focus of “gay pride” with the faux-radical chic of white gay shame; because of its binary structure, shame/pride then seems to have covered the entirety of gay experience. When we make gay pride into the sum total of contemporary queer politics, we simply are not looking closely enough at the alternatives. Gay pride may well be a massive consumer opportunity as its critics have astutely pointed out, but not everyone is “buying.” For some folks, gay pride is the only “gay” thing they do all year; for others, the opportunity to march within ethnic groups that tend to be marginalized by white gay communities makes gay pride an important site for the disruption of a monolithic association of gay identity with white gay masculinity. Gay groups like SALGA, TRIKONE, and the Audre Lorde Project are not merely offering themselves as new targets for niche marketing at gay pride, nor are they rounding out the diversity proclaimed by the ubiquitous rainbow flags; these groups come to queer politics with specific radical agendas, specific forms of queer culture, specific forms of queer world making, and in this respect they are far removed from the floats that advertise a new gay bar or a new gay church or a new gay hardware store.

So while gay shame stabilizes the pride/shame binary and makes white gay politics the sum total of queer critique, gay shame also has a tendency to universalize the self who emerges out of a “shame formation”: at the microlevel, the subject who emerges as the subject of gay shame is often a white and male self whose shame in part emerges from the experience of being denied access to privilege. As I discuss later, shame for women and shame for people of color plays out in different ways and creates different modes of abjection, marginalization, and self-abnegation; it also leads to very different political strategies. While female shame can be countered by

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feminism and racialized shame can be countered by what Rod Ferguson calls “queer of color critique,” it is white gay male shame that has proposed “pride” as the appropriate remedy and that focuses its libidinal and other energies on simply rebuilding the self that shame dismantled rather than taking apart the social processes that project shame onto queer subjects in the first place. This is why, as Berlant states, we might want to question the notion of a queer politics that begins “inside the subject.” The notion that social change can come about through adjustments to the self, through a focus on interiority without a concomitant attention to social, political, and economic relations, can be a disastrous tactic for queer studies and queer activism.

Finally, discussions about gay shame, even those that want to counter a politics of pride, betray a kind of casualness about the effects of shame on others—Michael Warner warns about this when he writes, “What will we do with our shame? . . . the usual response is to pin it on someone else.”¹⁰ Warner is exactly right in describing how shame is projected away from the self and onto others; what he is less precise about is how the projection of gay shame elsewhere is neither random nor unpredictable. For example, in the infamous Warhol *Screen Test #2* that Douglas Crimp writes about in “Mario Montez: For Shame,” which was screened at this conference, the body made to bear the visible marks of gay shame (Warhol’s, the drag queen’s, the viewer’s), forced to squirm under the camera’s gaze and be painfully vulnerable, belongs not to a white gay man like Warhol but to a Puerto Rican drag queen. In this excruciating screen test, the drag queen consents to be a kind of marionette for a “casting director” (not Warhol but Ronald Tavel) who manipulates Montez from behind the camera and only ever registers in the film as a disembodied voice. Crimp gives us an example of Montez’s humiliation:

Poor Mario. Now begins his humiliation. Tavel tells Mario to repeat after him, “For many years I have heard your name, but never did it sound so beautiful until I learned that you were a movie producer, Diarrhea.” Mario is obliged to say “diarrhea” again and again, with various changes of inflection and emphasis. Then to lip synch, as Tavel says it. “Mouth ‘diarrhea’ exactly as if it tasted of nectar,” Tavel instructs. Mario obeys, blissfully unaware of where this game of pleasing a producer named Diarrhea will lead.¹¹

Crimp only mentions the fact that Montez was Puerto Rican in passing to point out that some of the religious abjection to which Tavel subjected Montez would have been very humiliating, but nowhere does Crimp address the racialized dynamic of the brown body dancing to the tune whistled by an invisible white director; and nowhere does he credit Montez with some agency in her own performance.

Crimp’s interest in the Montez screen test, he says, has to do with the

encounter it affords between the viewer and “the other’s shame,” a shame, nonetheless, that he claims: “We accept as also ours, but curiously also ours alone” (67). Curious indeed that this shame, the other’s shame, so seamlessly becomes “ours”; how does this happen? Is it that the white viewer feels the racial shame of whiteness by watching the brown body squirm? Is it that the white gay viewer recognizes that his pride depends on another’s abjection? Not exactly. Crimp implies instead that he (we?) accesses his own sense of vulnerability by watching it course through another body, and he affirms: “I am thus not ‘like’ Mario, but the distinctiveness that is revealed in Mario invades me—‘floods me,’ to use Sedgwick’s word—and my own distinctiveness is revealed simultaneously. I, too, feel exposed” (67). How perfect! The white gay man, just like the white gay man in the Asian porn films described in Richard Fung’s classic essay “Looking for My Penis: The Eroticized Asian in Gay Male Porn,” does not have to be exposed because there is a racialized body well positioned to be exposed in his place. In the films that Fung described, the white gay male fantasizes his own vulnerability by imagining himself as an Asian man when he is being fucked.¹² David Eng has expanded on Fung’s reading and provided us with a name for this process: racial castration.¹³ In the scene that Crimp describes, Montez, the Puerto Rican drag queen, performs her castration so that Warhol/Tavel/Crimp can access the pleasure of humiliation without actually having to embody the shame himself. As Larry La Fountain-Stokes recently wrote to Douglas Crimp in an open letter: “For me the shame of Mario Montez becomes that of Frantz Fanon, faced by a child who stares at him in horror, the shame of Gloria Anzaldúa and Cherríe Moraga and Audre Lorde, of those Puerto Ricans and other diasporic people of color shamed every day for being a subjugated and racialized people, and particularly, the shame of the Puerto Rican queer.”¹⁴ At the conference, when asked about the racial dynamics of this scene, Crimp referred the audience to excellent work on Warhol and race by a graduate student, Taro Nettleton; while it was important for Crimp to refer to this work, it also had the effect of assigning the task of really poring over white gay shame elsewhere . . . yet again.

Shame Is to Femininity as Rage Is to Masculinity . . .

Obviously shame is multifaceted and can be brought on by psychic traumas as brutal as physical bullying and as seemingly benign as mute indifference. But the physical experience of shame records in dramatic fashion (a blush, vertigo, overwhelming panic) a failure to be powerful, legitimate, proper—it records the exposure, in psychoanalytic terms, of the subject’s castration, be it racial, gendered, class-based, or sexual. Since

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gender is the dominant framework in psychoanalysis, one would be tempted to say that castration as theorized in psychoanalysis is central to shame and that shame is central to femininity. If the current social arrangements of power reserve and protect certain forms of legitimacy for white, phallic subjects, then, inevitably, those bodies neither white nor phallic will find that their maturation processes and even their adult lives must pass through the territory of shame. And, at the same time, white and phallic subjects will find that their only shame may lie in not claiming their historically mandated privilege. And so, the shame experienced by white gay men in childhood has to do with exposing their femininity and dramatizing their failure to access the privilege that has been symbolically reserved for them. The sissy boy is the incarnation of shame, and so we should not be surprised to find that the centerpiece of today's gay pride movements has to do with reclaiming gay masculinity.

It needs to be pointed out in any discussion of gay shame that for the butch lesbian, her masculinity is not in and of itself shameful when she is a child (hence tomboy tolerance). It is the butch's failure to become properly feminine at adolescence that prompts the shame, and so we should say that some lesbian subjectivities have much less to do with shame than most gay white male subjectivities, and indeed butch embodiment has been theorized by Butler in relation to "melancholy," and it is situated in the two most famous novels of lesbian masculinity, *The Well of Loneliness* and *Stone Butch Blues*, as defiant singularity in one and heroic isolation in the other.¹⁵ Butchness gives rise to the blues, to rage, and finally to a political sensibility shared by other female subjects who experience themselves as disenfranchised—namely, feminism. Shame is, I am claiming, a gendered form of sexual abjection: it belongs to the feminine, and when men find themselves "flooded" with shame, chances are they are being feminized in some way and against their will. Feminists, over the years, have used consciousness-raising, support groups, political marches, and activist anger to counter the widespread effects of the shame associated with womanhood. Most often, feminists have produced complex analyses of the social structures that have inscribed certain forms of female and feminine embodiment with shame: we have analyzed the compulsions to feast and fast, to binge and purge, to fuck and be celibate, to harbor masochistic desires, to entertain thoughts of abuse. Feminism has thoroughly scrutinized shame because feminine subjects have so consistently lived in shame. And so now, at an event geared toward examining the particularities of gay shame, it becomes all too obvious that the only people really lacking a politically urgent language with which to describe and counter shame are gay white men.

Finally, while I see why people may want to hold on to shame, nourish and nurture a close relation to shame, build on the negative but deeply erotic nature of shame, I want to close by offering a caution against any deep investments in gay shame by quickly considering Pedro Almodóvar's film *Talk to Her* (2002). This film, which should have been given the subtitle "because she is in a coma and cannot talk back to you and she won't know or mind what you do to her even if you rape her while seeming to be basically a good guy if a little closeted," breaks its audiences down into those who hate it and those who love it. I would even offer a gross generalization and venture that lesbians hate it and gay men love it (straight women seem to like it and straight men could not care less, just for the record). Falling into the category of those who hate this film, who despise its pathetic dependence on aesthetic mastery to represent the most trite and insulting narratives about women and men, I nonetheless understand that *Talk to Her* has much to say about gay shame and its consequences.

Talk to Her opens with a gorgeous dance performance in which a woman stumbles blindly about a stage as a man scurries to move objects out of her path. In the audience sit two men, Marco (Darío Grandinetti) and Benigno (Javier Cámara), who separately watch this performance unfold and then leave the theater to reenact it in some form or another. Each man idolizes a woman who remains unattainable, and each man harbors secret homoerotic desires that they repress out of some sense of shame. Benigno worships a ballerina, Alicia (Leonor Watling), and stalks her, and Marco is obsessed with a female bullfighter, Lydia (Rosario Flores). When Alicia is hit by a car and falls into a coma, Benigno takes care of her at the hospital, bathing her, moisturizing her prone body, and talking to her as she lies mute and unconscious. Marco inserts himself into Lydia's life after she has a fight with her boyfriend, another bullfighter. Marco clinches a romantic relation to Lydia when she sees a snake in her home, panics, and he comes to her rescue. When Lydia is gored in a bullfight and becomes comatose, Marco attends her bedside. He is befriended by Benigno, and the relationship between the two men, the central bond in the film, unfolds against the macabre backdrop of the two mute and comatose women. The silent women become the occasion for male bonding, and their presence provides an alibi for the enactment of desires that would otherwise be suppressed within the shame mechanism that we call "closeting."

Benigno's gayness is both hinted at in the plot and discussed overtly by nurses at the hospital. Marco regards Benigno with both wary skepticism and obsessive regard as Benigno cares for his dancer and chats away

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to her while encouraging Marco to do the same. Eventually, Benigno crosses a line, and he rapes the inert dancer. When Alicia is discovered to be pregnant, a short investigation by the police results in Benigno's arrest. He is abandoned by everyone except Marco, who visits him, and eventually Benigno kills himself. As even this brief plot summary reveals, the plot itself is a puerile, aggressive, and violent fantasy about the role of women in animating bonds between men. If there was any doubt at all that this was a regressive narrative, one sad scene confirms the viewer's worst fears. By way of hiding the sheer brutality of the rape scene, Almodóvar presents Benigno's assault on Alicia in the form of an animated sequence in which a tiny man clammers on the slopes of a huge naked woman. He travels down her body and enters her pubic area where, after some deliberation, he pushes his way into her gaping vagina. This is high-school-level misogyny in its miserably unimaginative understanding of the relations between men and women, its deep-seated fear of the female body, and its slick camouflage of ugly violence with seemingly benign cartoon representations.

A plot summary alone would not convince anyone that this was a film worth watching, contemplating, or celebrating; yet the critics (outside Spain) loved it, and *Talk to Her* was hailed as one of Almodóvar's best films. The richness of Almodóvar's aesthetic sensibility apparently makes up for the fact that the two lead women, women engaged in active and highly aestheticized professions, barely speak and in fact are inert through most of the film. The film's stunning colors, the clever use of camera angles, and the long pauses and moments of silence all gloss over the dramatic silencing and stilling of two very active women. What Almodóvar's film does do well, however, is to dramatize the precise mechanics of white gay male shame. Indeed, Almodóvar's film offers us three solutions to the discomfort of white gay male shame.

Work It Out or Normalize It The film, and contemporary gay pride politics, suggests that gay white men can work through gay shame by producing normative masculinities and presenting themselves as uncastrated, muscular, whole. This occurs by cleaving to the ordinary and the quiet; in the film, this role is fulfilled by Marco, the seemingly straight man who pursues the masculine woman, the bullfighter, and whose desire is triangulated through her onto her ex and Benigno. To distance himself from the shameful desires he may have for men, in other words, Marco first selects a masculine woman to stand in for the real object of his desire, and then later he uses her comatose form as a prop while he pursues his relationship with Benigno.

Project It Elsewhere or Aestheticize It The white gay male experience of shame is often managed through the act of projection, which Douglas Crimp describes so well in his essay on Mario Montez. There, Andy Warhol, the original “thin white duke,” projects shame, castration, and vulnerability onto the feminized and racialized body of a Puerto Rican drag queen and in the process creates an illusion of mastery. In *Talk to Her*, it is Benigno who projects his shame elsewhere—onto the body of a mute woman, a dancer who lies in a coma after a car accident. And Marco preserves his facade of heterosexuality by lingering at the bedside of the “gored” phallic woman who fought bulls but feared . . . snakes (Symbolism 101 anyone?). The two women represent two different types of gay male projection directed specifically at women (as I have shown, white gay male shame may also be projected onto bodies of color). While the former female bullfighter is essentially the “fag hag,” the castrated and unlucky woman whose castration stands in for the fag’s own shame and who often becomes a source of humor, the former dancer occupies the role of the diva—Koestenbaum’s Jackie Onassis or opera singer, Warhol’s Marilyn Monroe—the idealized and phallic woman who often becomes an excuse for exquisite but dangerous investments in beauty and art.¹⁶ While the fag hag is used and abused, the diva is cared for and talked to; the fag hag is an emblem, the diva a trophy, the fag hag is openly despised and secretly worshipped, the diva is openly worshipped and secretly despised. Both are summarily massaged, admired, and utterly destroyed.

Feminist Gay Shame An option that neither Almodóvar nor Warhol entertain is that gay shame can be used, in all its glorious negativity, in ways that are feminist and antiracist. The glory of the drag queen is that she takes pride in her shame: just the names alone—Vaginal Davis, for example—step in where others fear to tread.¹⁷ The form of subject formation that José Esteban Muñoz, in reference to Davis’s work, has called “disidentification” also leads us to a place where shame can be transformed into something that is not pride but not simply damage either. Muñoz uses the work of Davis to critique the gay/antigay binary that, like the pride/shame binary, critiques white homonormativity without really examining the racial and sexual politics that the homonorms and antihomonorms share. Muñoz writes: “The forms of ‘anti-gay’ thinking put forward by Vaginal Davis’s work are vastly different in origin and effect than (Mark) Simpson’s Anti-Gay. Davis’s brand of anti-gay critique offers something more than a listless complaint. This additional something is a sustained critique of white gay male normativity and its concomitant corporate ethos.”¹⁸ Muñoz and Davis (whose name is taken

as an homage to Angela Davis) find supple and vital models for identification in feminisms of color, and they cleave to an alliance with women rather than anxiously unyoking themselves from all things feminine, from the contaminating matter of feminine castration.

As if to remind us that the white gay male text, in all its aestheticism, does not necessarily have to detest and destroy women, Michael Cunningham's novel *The Hours* offers a counter to Almodóvar's *Talk to Her*. This novel helps us see how the sensibility of gay male shame can be routed through women without destroying them in the process. *The Hours* produces compelling schemas of queer temporalities as each woman—Virginia Woolf, Laura Brown, Clarissa Vaughn—lives through the cracks and broken moments in the lives of the others.¹⁹ Each woman experiences a kiss with another woman, each takes care of a man she does not love, and each chooses whether to continue living at odds with time, art, life, and love. *The Hours* shows us vividly the meaning of queer before and after gay, and it depicts in unflinching detail the deaths of at least two of its main characters; but at its conclusion both shame and the woman have survived—a small triumph and a signpost to the next queer moment.

Conclusion

Even though the Gay Shame conference was quite enjoyable and had some great moments (the disability panel comes to mind), the plot summary of the conference resembled the script of *Talk to Her* more than the script of *The Hours*. In short, the conference fulfilled predictions that gay shame was a subject cultivated by white gay men but projected elsewhere, and this precise dynamic was acted out in several sessions. The implicit identity politics exercised by white gay men at the conference became explicit when Ellis Hansen chose to illustrate his talk about Plato's *Symposium* and desire between professors and students with images of his favorite Puerto Rican porn star. The images of the naked brown body immediately resonated with the excruciating visibility of Mario Montez that we had already witnessed and discussed, and it made clear the function of the brown gay male body in the narrative of white shame. Hansen was asked a few pointed questions about his presentation, but in general conference participants tried to forget what they had seen. It was left to Hiram Perez, one of the very few people of color presenting work at the conference, to address an angry and impassioned critique at Hansen when Perez finally had his turn to speak on the last panel of the conference. Hansen responded defensively to Perez, and shortly thereafter the conference disintegrated into the usual formulaic exchanges at the open

mike about who was and who was not represented on the panels. The painful session only ended when Michael Warner grabbed the mike and mimicked Montez saying “diarrhea.”

The spectacular dissolution of communication at Gay Shame was predictable and in a way inevitable. The punctuation of the conference by the apparently humorous but actually deeply offensive image of a white gay man (Warner) mimicking a drag queen of color (Montez) who is lip-synching to the voice of another white gay man (Tavel) captures perfectly the racial dynamics of the conference as a whole. Perez found himself very much in the position of Montez: he could speak, but he would always be read as a queer of color performing as a person of color and leaving the space of articulation open to the *real* gay subjects: white gay men. Hansen, Warner, and others left the conference unscathed, as the gay shame that they so “proudly” wanted to claim had been successfully projected elsewhere. Gayle Rubin’s moving call earlier in the day for a little “humility” and Esther Newton’s apology to Perez for leaving him with the task of upbraiding Hansen went unheard by the white gay men to whom these remarks were directed. And the story of the conference, soon after it was ended, began to circulate as the tale of another scholarly project hijacked by the identity politics of queers of color! The truth is, it is hard to find a more rigid identity politics than that articulated in Michigan by white gay men. If queer studies is to survive gay shame, and it will, we all need to move far beyond the limited scope of white gay male concerns and interests. As Sedgwick herself reminds us in *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire*, there is a thin line between homosociality and homosexuality, and white men (gay or straight) pursuing the interests of white men (gay or straight) always means a heap of trouble for everybody else.²⁰

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Notes

1. I should add, however, that David Halperin was very gracious in his invitation to me and invited me to address my concerns about the rubric of “gay shame” at the conference itself. Halperin has been a dignified interlocutor for my less than cordial thoughts about this topic and the event it inspired, and I thank both him and Valerie Traub for the original invitation and for their editorial comments.

2. Jacqui Alexander and Chandra Talpade Mohanty, eds., *Feminist Genealogies, Colonial Legacies, Democratic Futures* (New York: Routledge, 1997); David Roman, *Acts of Intervention: Performance, Gay Culture, and AIDS* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998); José Esteban Muñoz, *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999); David Eng, *Racial Castration: Managing Masculinity in Asian America* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001); Robert Reid-Pharr, *Black Gay Man*

(New York: New York University Press, 2001); Licia Fiol-Matta, *A Queer Mother for the Nation: The State and Gabriela Mistral* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002); Roderick Ferguson, *Aberrations in Black: Toward a Queer of Color Critique* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003); Juana Maria Rodriguez, *Queer Latinidad: Identity Practices, Discursive Spaces* (New York: New York University Press, 2003).

3. Not all of the white gay men at this conference, obviously, felt loyal to white gay male identity politics. George Chauncey, for example, made some illuminating remarks about the interactions between men of color and white gay men in the history of gay New York.

4. Sedgwick was cast as the conference's intellectual progenitor, and her absence was cast as the most notable and palpable absence at the conference (as opposed to, say, the absence of people of color). Indeed, a decision was made to include an essay by Sedgwick in the conference volume, but similar essays were not requested from José Muñoz, David Eng, or Robert Reid-Pharr. I in no way want to suggest that Sedgwick's contribution will not be valuable and crucial, and I agree that her work, which I cite approvingly, has provided the most generative and insightful models for thinking about gay shame. However, the casting of Sedgwick as the absent center for this conference glossed over the more outrageous omissions of queer scholars working on race.

5. See Leo Bersani, *Homos* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996); Michael Warner, *The Trouble with Normal: Sex, Politics, and the Ethics of Queer Life* (New York: Free Press, 1999); and Elizabeth Freeman, "Packing History, Count(er)ing Generations," *New Literary History* 31, no. 4 (2000): 1–18.

6. Lauren Berlant, "Two Girls, Fat and Thin," in *Regarding Sedgwick: Essays on Queer Culture and Critical Theory*, ed. Stephen M. Barber and David L. Clark (New York: Routledge, 2002), 74.

7. Williams insists that we regard "tradition" not in terms of inert fragments that survive from the past but as a narrative that shapes the past that a current ideology requires. He writes: "What we have to see is not just 'a tradition' but a *selective tradition*: an intentionally selective version of a shaping past and a pre-shaped present" (Raymond Williams, "Traditions, Institutions, Formations," in *Marxism and Literature* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977], 115–20).

8. Martin Manalansan IV, "In the Shadows of Stonewall: Examining Gay Transnational Politics and the Diasporic Dilemma," in *The Politics of Culture in the Shadows of Capital*, ed. Lisa Lowe and David Lloyd (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1997), 486.

9. I have written about the problem, with an emphasis on youth in queer communities, in a book of essays on queer space and time: Judith Halberstam, *In a Queer Time and Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives* (New York: New York University Press, 2005).

10. Warner, *Trouble with Normal*, 3.

11. Douglas Crimp, "Mario Montez: For Shame," in Barber and Clark, *Regarding Sedgwick*, 57–70.

12. Richard Fung, "Looking for My Penis: The Eroticized Asian in Gay Male Porn," *Q&A: Queer in Asian America*, ed. David L. Eng and Alice Y. Hom (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1998), 115–34.

13. Eng, *Racial Castration*.

14. Lawrence La Fountain-Stokes, "An Open Letter to Douglas Crimp," 22 March 2003.

15. Radclyffe Hall, *The Well of Loneliness* (New York: Anchor, 1990); Leslie Feinberg, *Stone Butch Blues: A Novel* (New York: Firebrand, 1993); Judith Butler, "Melancholy Gender/Refused Identification," in *The Psychic Life of Power: Theories in Subjection* (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 1997), 132–66.

16. Wayne Koestenbaum, *The Queen's Throat: Opera, Homosexuality, and the Mystery of Desire* (New York: Vintage, 1994); Koestenbaum, *Jackie under My Skin: Interpreting an Icon* (New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 1995).

17. Vaginal Davis also sometimes goes by the name "Vaginal Crème Davis," the middle name having been given to him by a journalist. The fabulous embellishment of vaginal with crème suggests a total disregard for shame and its tortuous pathways.

18. Muñoz, *Disidentifications*, 111.

19. Michael Cunningham, *The Hours* (New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 1998).

20. Sedgwick, *Shame and Performativity*.

