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## **Examining Forty Years of the Social Organization of Feminisms: Ethnography of Two Women's Bookstores in the US South**

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Examining Forty Years of the Social Organization of Feminisms:

Ethnography of Two Women's Bookstores in the US South

by

Mary Catherine Whitlock

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy  
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College of Arts and Sciences  
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## **DEDICATION**

To my friends, family, parents, and everyone committed to our feminist future.

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## ABSTRACT

At the height of their popularity in the 1990s, there were 140 feminist bookstores in the US and Canada (Onosaka 2006). Today, in 2017, there are thirteen left. Feminist bookstores began opening in the 1970s promoting ideas about lesbian separatism, woman only spaces, and nurturing a feminist community. Although many functioned as for-profit stores, many also operated community centers and non-profit organizations. Feminist bookstores provide an excellent site for scholars view decades of social movement organizing merging theory, practice, activism, and academics. As a social movement organization, feminist bookstores as are the quintessential node of academia and activism. Of the thirteen bookstores left, only two are located in the US South: *Charis Books and More* is in Atlanta, GA and *Iris Books* is in Gainesville, FL. During my yearlong ethnography, I gathered archival data, field notes and ethnographic data, interview data, and oral histories This is the first comprehensive ethnography of feminist bookstores which looks at the ways feminist theories are used by social movement organizations to create, maintain, and alter collective identities and to reach feminist movement goals. Through my study of these two bookstore owners, workers, and boards, I illuminate the social organization of feminist social movement organizations in the South. In chapter two, I show how the bookstores see the *existence* of a tangible space to allow for contestation about collective identities and “home work” as a successful social movement outcome. In chapter three, I find that participants believe that southern identity, which is steeped in understands of the past, have created a need for the bookstore’s longevities and for progressive communities. In

chapter four, I demonstrate that due to the unique positioning of the histories of racism and slavery in the South, these feminist organizations believe a central problem of feminism is to actively name and confront racism within *both* the South and feminism. In the fifth chapter, using two gender disputes a decade apart, I argue that the narrative of gender progress understood as inclusion of queer issues as well as transgender and gender variant identities touted by many scholars (Whittier 1995; Jagose 1996; Armstrong and Crag 2006) inaccurately represents the intricacies within practices of feminism. When it comes to feminist identities, politics, and civil rights discourses, our current political climate has illustrated that there is not room for linear narratives of progress—within movements or individual identities. Focusing on the combination of histories and demographics, with an emphasis on race and queerness, this project analyzes how the US South provides a complex space to understand the challenges of intersectional and white feminist communities and social movements.

## CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

At the height of their popularity in the 1990s, there were 140 feminist bookstores in the US and Canada (Onosaka 2006). Today, in 2017, there are thirteen left. Feminist bookstores began opening in the 1970s promoting ideas about lesbian separatism, woman only spaces, and nurturing a feminist community. Although many functioned as for-profit stores, some also operated community centers and non-profit organizations. Of the thirteen bookstores left, only two are located in the US South: *Charis Books and More* is in Atlanta, GA and *Iris Books* is in Gainesville, FL. Through my study of these two sites, I illuminate the social organization of feminist social movement organizations in the South. Following Robinson (2014) and Rushing (2017), I delineate that the South as a place, culture, and idea without hardened geographical designations. Even though academics have argued that the South is, in relation to the non-South, culturally unique with heightened conservatism on issues such as gender equality (Reed 1993; Howard 1999; Robinson 2014), it is curious that these bookstores were opened and continue to survive here. And while many similar establishments (such as feminist sex shops, feminist women's health clinics, and lesbian bars) are closing nation-wide, their existence tells a distinct story about feminism, social movements identities of place, and social change. Feminist bookstores provide an excellent site for scholars to understand decades of social movement organizing which merges theory, practice, activism, and academics. As a social movement organization, feminist bookstores as are the quintessential node of both academia and activism. Focusing on the combination of histories and demographics, with an emphasis on race and

queerness, this project analyzes how the US South provides a complex space to understand the challenges of intersectional and white feminist communities.

Social movement scholars have moved away from theories of rational choice and political processes to find themselves calling on pragmatism and feminism to fill in previous gaps in the literature. These gaps are about practical actions, social movement organizing, and social change (Jasper 2011). Following Whittier (1995:37), I look toward various places that were a “...geographic center for the feminist community and gave member organizations meeting space, access...and a measure of legitimacy.” Combining issues of collective identities (i.e., multiple people can identify with an identity supported by a movement, via emotion, narrative, framing, and collective memory), I explore the ways multiple feminist movement identities have shifted over the years. Others focused on how part of the women’s movement was about establishing “organizations, such as rape crisis centers, battered women’s shelters, feminist bookstores, and women’s studies programs, that aimed both to improve women’s lives in the present and to lay the groundwork for more sweeping social transformation in the future” (Whittier 1995:1). The establishment of these stores provided a space for the practice of feminist theory and activism and perhaps they still do. Although Whittier just hints at it in her 1995 monograph, Taylor and Whittier (1992) explain that one of the major ways social change occurs is through collective identity. And just as other social movement scholars have explored, collective identity is not stable. Just like the movements themselves, collective identity is fluid, contentious, and abstract.

Feminist collective identities have been studied on multiple levels; however, collective identity of feminists in the South has not. By highlighting the South, I am able to better understand the complexities of intersectional identities within social movements. The feminist

South opens up important questions and possible implications for intersectional feminist analyses of region/place and social movements because it tells an important story about race, conservatism, feminism, and history that have not been heard.

In addition, queer theory offers important critiques to my discussion of feminisms. While sociologists have debated the importance of queer theories in the study of social movements, sexuality, and gender, it is clear that there is no consensus. Instead, there are vast disputes about the practicality and usefulness of postmodern and queer theories in the modernist empirically driven discipline of sociology. However, what is productive are the useful moments where scholars are applying queer theories to methodological design and empirical evidence (Green 2007; Valocchi 2005; Crawley, Broad, and Foley 2008; Crawley 2013), especially with regard to topics on gender and sexualities, such as feminist SMOs. Even further than that, queer theory actively questions and critiques feminism by interrogating who it includes, excludes, and is about. Hence, I focus on the ways members in this study understand and change their identities, their feminisms, and their activist pursuits in attempt to apply queer theory. This provides an important starting place for the content of the study but also my own research design and methodologies.

Resulting from conflicts in the academic literature, what is not clear and is yet to be understood is the linkage between theory and practice for activists. Is it possible for theories to literally become activism or for activism to become theory? A significant tenet of second wave feminism was activism; it was developed and maintained through consciousness-raising groups that sought to address obstacles facing women. This is precisely the conundrum Gamson (1995) discusses over twenty years ago in wrestling with the implications of queer theory for identity politics. As he illustrates, amongst others (e.g. Taylor and Whittier 1992), theory has not been

congruent with practice in the past within the cultural feminist movement and therefore spearheaded its own destruction. This was nearly the fate of feminist bookstores. One of the main conundrums of the feminist bookstores find themselves in is how their organization begins to question and incorporate queer theories.

## **Chapter Overview**

I start by reviewing the relevant literatures of feminisms, queer theory, social movements, the South, and feminist businesses. Within these literatures, scholars address issues with feminisms, social movement goals, Southern conservatism, and feminist sex shops, yet none of them explore feminist bookstores as sites of social movement organizations in the South. Further, I identify gaps in literature on feminism, the South, and social movements.

Next, I detail my methodological goals. My data are exhaustive. I collected archival, observational, interviews, visuals, and more. I detail how this data was collected and why this kind of data was collected. From there, I detail my analytical and coding technics. Also, in this chapter, I explain the settings of the bookstores and the regional settings of Atlanta and Gainesville. Finally, I offer an explanation of the ethical quandaries and limitations.

The first data chapter will explore the relevancy of feminist bookstores and communities to social movement scholarship. Social movement scholars point to feminist bookstores as important organizing spaces (Taylor and Rupp 1993; Reger 1994; Whittier 1997; Staggenborg 1998; Haenfler 2004). None of these scholars, however, have completed a study on feminist bookstores. The only large studies that have been concluded are from English and Historical perspectives focusing on literacy movements—and none engaging the social movement literature. That brings me to consider: do participants, workers, and owners of feminist bookstores see themselves as social movement organizations? What are their goals? How do they

conceptualize outcomes? I argue the bookstores, as SMOs, see the *existence* of a tangible space to allow for contestation about collective identities and “home work” as a successful social movement outcome.

The next chapter focuses on how participants make sense of Southern feminist identities. Something neglected by all studies on feminist bookstores, but prevalent in studies about social movement organizations, is the complication of geographical place (Reger 2002; Reger and Staggenborg 2006). I answer the following question: how has the cultural geography of these organizations influenced their identities? The cultural geography of the two organizations alters the way they conceptualize, present, and understand their respective organizations. While the identity of the South is hegemonically positioned as counterproductive for progressive movements, these bookstores find support within identities and cultures of the South. I argue Southern identity, which is steeped in understands of radicalized and politicized histories of the South, have created a need for the bookstore’s longevities and for communities.

The following chapter focuses on white feminism and color-blind racial politics. Much research done on feminist spaces (Taylor and Rupp 1993; Reger 1994; Whittier 1997; Staggenborg 1998; Haenfler 2004) have neglected ideas about race. Currently, feminist organizations – as well as other progressive organizations—are cast as understanding and cognizant of racism. We know this is not always the case. These organizations or ideological communities are responsible for (knowing and unknowingly) using color-blind racist politics (Bonilla-Silva 2002). Feminism, and therefore white feminism, is not outside of this. Do these historically white organizations address racism within an assumed “post-racial” United States? Yes, these communities confront color-blind racism by locating their stance through the space of geography (i.e., the South) and of ideologies (i.e., white feminism) as being conscious of racial

issues. I argue that, because of the unique positioning of the histories of racism and slavery in the South, these feminist organizations (in the past and currently) locate a central problem of feminism is to actively name and confront racism within the South and feminism.

My final data chapter focuses on two gender disputes in 2005 and 2015 about transgender inclusion within the feminist bookstores. These disputes rose out of the supposed shift from lesbian separatism to the incorporation of queer theories and activism. Feminist bookstores as organizations are the very nexus of academic discourse and community activism. Hogan (2008, 2016) has been the only scholar to emphasize the importance of academic theories in feminist bookstores. I answer the following question: have trends in feminist theory (such as queer theory) altered the language, programming, and activism of these organizations? By using these two gender disputes a decade apart, I argue that the narrative of gender progress touted by scholars (Whittier, Armstrong, etc) inaccurately represents the intricacies within multifaceted definitions of feminism. Scholars have not focused on feminist social movements outside of northeast, west coast, or metropolitan geographic places, lived experiences of those in the movements, and the kinds of programming supported by these organizations.

My conclusion will revisit the previous chapters with a particular focus on the futures of feminist space, communities, and organizations. I discuss larger implications, limitations, and future research. I also include a reflection on white feminism(s), the terminologies related to trans exclusive or trans inclusive feminisms, and the current wave of conservatism within the presidential administration.

## **CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW**

In order to fully understand the complexities of my argument, data, and contributions to the discipline, it is vital to review relevant literature. Based off of findings and data, I explore the inspirations and gaps within previous research in the fields of feminisms, postmodernism, queer theories, social movements and collective identities, feminist social movements, and the South. In tandem with my own thought process, I begin with a review of definitions of and about feminisms. I explore the major areas of contentions, as well as the critiques offered by queer theory. From there, I unpack the major critiques of queer theory from feminist scholars by way of social movements, gender, and sexualities theories. Next, I interrogate social movement theories, specifically those concerning collective identities or feminist social movements. I then review the research detailing feminist businesses and bookstores. I end by investigating the sociologies of the US South and provide a survey of analyses about culture and region. Although this is a large survey of literature, these major bodies of work became increasingly important while analyzing my data.

### **Feminisms: A Herstory**

While the first wave of feminism is important for the holistic understanding of feminisms, it is not a focus of my project. For that reason, I focus on the feminisms during the time periods that are being studied. Since most feminist bookstores began in the 1970s, I begin with second wave feminism.

Second wave feminism was not only concerned with academic understandings of gender but also with the daily lives of women. A significant tenet of second wave feminism was activism; it was developed and maintained through consciousness-raising groups that sought to address obstacles facing women. As a movement, feminists were concerned with biological and social issues of gender and accountability to the female body, especially reproduction, such as mothering (Chodorow 1978), intersections of capitalism and reproductive capacity (Firestone 1970; Rubin 1975), and psychoanalysis (Irigaray 1985).

The indivisible tie of gender and sexuality is central to the second wave feminist theory. Wittig (1992) argued that heterosexuality reinforces gender hierarchies. She maintained that because lesbians are not part of this heterosexual structure, they are without patriarchy, and therefore cannot be defined as women (Wittig 1992). Frye (1983), MacKinnon (1989), and Rich (1980) take up similar arguments regarding the importance of studying heterosexuality and gender. They argue the conceptualization of lesbianism is outside of the oppressive patriarchal heterosexual and gendered norms (Frye 1983; MacKinnon 1989; Rich 1980).

These arguments concerning the radical feminist importance of lesbianism led to cultural feminism and lesbian separatism. These strands of feminism sought to enact theories put forth by radical feminists (Taylor and Whittier 1992; Taylor and Rupp 1993). Cultural feminists believed in “creating and maintaining a healthy environment—free of masculinist values and all their offshoots such as pornography—for the female principle” (Alcoff 1997: 332). Related to cultural feminism, some feminists believed political lesbianism—in which women were to reject heterosexual relationships and focus on women-only connections was necessary to challenge patriarchy (Tong 2009). Many others argued lesbian separatism was a viable and necessary way to enact both feminist change and deconstruct patriarchy (Radicalesbians 1970; Frye 1983).

While this community quickly became fractured, there have been quite a few empirical studies locating the practical and theoretical importance of cultural feminist communities (Krieger 1983; Taylor and Whittier 1992; Taylor and Rupp 1993; Stein 1993).

Other factions of the feminist movement became entrenched in practices and institutions. For instance, feminism is now institutionalized in higher education. This move was greatly influenced by the growing popularity of feminism outside of academia, particularly within activist communities (Scott 2008). Feminist community centers and bookstores began to sprout up, creating a physical platform to discuss issues such as abortion, gender wage gap, and sexuality. With this surmounting social change, there was resistance within the discipline of sociology where academic feminists and social scientists had yet to take sexuality seriously into the mid 1970s (Rubin 1975). These events and academic conversations laid the groundwork for the focus on both gender and sexuality as intertwined.

In 1974, the Combahee River Collective wrote a statement defining and explaining Black<sup>1</sup> feminism, the problems of organizing, and issues within Black feminism. The landscape of feminist theory began to shift. Feminists began to problematize racial and class assumptions within second wave feminism (hooks 1982, 1984; Walker 1983; Frye 1983; Lorde 1984; Collins 1986, 1989, 2000; Crenshaw 1989). This strain of thought became known as Black feminist thought, which was interested in directly challenging to and critiquing second wave feminism, maintaining that feminism had been a study for and about middle-class, white, heterosexual woman, some women of color chose to distance themselves from this narrow (and potentially racist) focus (Moraga and Anzaldua 1981; Walker 1983). Their goal was not to dismiss feminism, but to introduce racial, sexual, and class marginalization into the conversation

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<sup>1</sup> Following the conventions of Black feminist thought and Critical Race Studies, I capitalize the racial identity of Black and not white to respond to the pervasiveness of power, inequalities, and status.

(Moraga and Anzaldua 1981). Since then, feminist paradigms shifted towards exploring and reflecting on these intersections (Anzaldúa 1987; Brodtkin 1992; McIntosh 2003). And out of this shift, there was a move to incorporate and explore other theories of difference. As a Black lesbian, Lorde questioned her own political loyalties in her biomythography, *Zami* (1982). Her exploration is a predecessor to the issues expressed by Crenshaw (1989), who reasoned that intersectionality, in her case, pertains to the certain situation of Black women being both raced and gendered. Intersectionality can be further extended to understand and analyze multiple oppressions within certain groups of individuals.

Key sociological theorists have explored intersectionality (Collins, 2000, 2004; Nagel, 2000, 2001, 2003). There have also been a number of sociological ethnographies incorporating intersectional analyses (Schippers 2000; Bettie 2000; Pascoe 2005). Similarly, the onset of intersectional analysis also sparked the start of masculinity studies (Connell 1987; Pascoe 2007; Kimmel, 2006, 2009). Following the conceptualization of Crenshaw (1989), these researchers argued that intersectional study allows for a richer analysis of oppressions.

As the generation of second wave of feminists began raising daughters, some of these progeny began to critique the second wave for its limitations, defining themselves as the so-called third wave. As for much of feminism (Mendes 2011; Reger 2002), there has not been a singular definition for third wave feminism (Mann 2013; Snyder 2008; Mann and Huffman 2005; Gillis and Munford 2004). In fact, the definitions have been contested time and time again (Snyder 2008; Gillis and Munford 2004). Rebecca Walker was the first to define herself as a third wave feminist, and in so doing, cited a plethora of issues within second wave feminism (Walker 1995; Mann and Huffman 2005). In particular, she pointed to second wave feminism as judgmental and not understanding of multiple identities (Walker 1995). Self-described third

wave feminists Baumgardner and Richards assert this new wave as an opportunity to explore the empowering possibilities of popular culture for women (2000, 2004).

Because of a wide array of definitions, third wave feminism is not only open to a variety of people; it is also open for a great deal of critique (Tong 2009). Gills and Munford (2004) note that third wave feminism largely rejects the academy, while they posit that they have thrown out their own theoretical underpinnings. It is not that all third wave feminists completely discontinued the work of second wave feminists; even so, they have been critiqued for overlooking previous feminist work (Tong 2009; Snyder 2008; Henry 2004; Gillis and Munford 2004). With this seemingly haphazard rejection of analytical engagement with second wave (Snyder 2008) and overwhelming celebration of pop cultural notions like “stop worrying and love the thong” (Baumgardner and Richards 2004; Bailey 1997), the validity of third wave has been contested (Snyder 2008; Gillis and Munford 2004).

The “waves” of feminism all have their own main goals, which are not linear and certainly do not agree with one another. Contemporary to the emergence of these “waves” of feminism, postmodern ideas offered ever further complications to feminist organizing.

### **Postmodern Ideals: The Emergence Of Queer Theory**

Offering a critique of modernist notions of “truth” and “science,” queer theorists were directly critiquing previous feminist scholarship about gender and sexualities. That critique is central to uncovering the usefulness of feminist organizations. Queer theory is a theoretical paradigm that was birthed out of postmodernism in which the general goals are to dismantle normative discourses, such as gender, sexuality, race, and nationality, especially those that rely on binary logics. For sociologists, the most influential queer theorists are typically defined as

Foucault, Butler, and Sedgwick (Crawley and Broad 2008). Foucault has been the most influential for my study.

Foucault's first major work focused on the uses of power, order, medicine, language, and discipline as a way to control bodies (1961, 1963, 1966, 1969, 1977). Drawing from this line of argument, he definitively initiated queer theory with his first volume of the history of sexuality (1976), in which he argues that religious and medicinal discourses have helped to historically and socially construct ways to typify and normalize sexualities. In his second and third volumes, Foucault dealt further with sexuality as it pertains to ancient Greek and Rome. Similar to the first volume, he deconstructed the way discourse uses morals and history to control sexuality. Foucault's theories disrupted and challenged many disciplines, including sociology.

Foucault's "historical archeology" and "genealogy" had profound effect on gender and sexuality studies, sparking scholars to historicize (Jagose 1996). In line with Foucault's methodology, theorists were concerned with uncovering sexuality of the past (D'Emilio and Freeman 1988; Warner 1999; Somerville 2000; Stoler 2006; Love 2007). ). Although reclaiming queer history became central to queer theory, there were also a slew of critiques from historians concerning methodological and theoretical issues (Mohr 1992). Mohr (1992) critiqued Halperin (1989) for monumentalizing Foucault as a beacon of the field. Halperin (1995) responded with a book-length defense sarcastically titled *Saint Foucault: Towards a Gay Hagiography*, arguing the centrality of Foucault's unrecognized queer activism. Years later, Halperin (2002) maintained his original argument but advanced the concepts of historicizing homosexuality, by contending that evidence matters and it is possible to obtain, even when studying societies thousands of years old.

It was not until the 1990s that queer theory was “named” as a type of study. In 1990, Sedgwick published her foundational monograph, *Epistemology of the Closet*. In it she helps deconstruct previous understandings of heterosexuality by exploring history through literature. She highlighted the pervasiveness of the sexual binary of homosexual and heterosexual. She takes the analysis further by explaining this binary as an organizing principle of social order. Additionally, she emphasized to the significance of questioning binaries in queer theory.

Also in 1990, Butler wrote groundbreaking theoretical books theorizing a queer take on gender and sexuality. While she did not cite West and Zimmerman (1987), Butler’s book *Gender Trouble* (1990) echoed their sociological ideas of “doing” and being accountable for, or as she asserted the performativity of gender. Following radical feminists (Frye 1983, [1990] 1992), Butler (1991) brought up the postmodern conception of subjectivity to lesbianism, arguing that restrictive language is a fragment of this impossible selfhood. Similarly, Warner (1999) argued that heterosexuality is an accepted societal discourse, in that everyone is assumed to be heterosexual. He termed this concept heteronormativity. Warner (1999) and Butler (1991) both contended that everyone is expected to be heterosexual and that homosexuality cannot be fully realized because of this strict expectation.

After much critique from *Gender Trouble* (1990), Butler began to reconceptualize her theory of gender. The main criticism she received claimed she had inappropriately dismissed corporal lives. Because of this criticism, she wrote a rebuttal (Butler 1993). In her response, Butler made a similar argument to *Gender Trouble* (1990) but focused on the materiality of gender, sex, and sexuality. She claimed the body is “a process of materialization that stabilizes over time to produce the effect of boundary, fixity, and surface we call matter” (1993:9). While

maintaining that her previous work (1990) was still relevant, she further explained the ways these theories and social understandings get put onto the body.

As a critique to Butler's (1990) monograph, *Gender Trouble*, feminists took issue with the neglect of the body in queer theory (Grosz, 1994, 1995; Crawley, et al, 2008). Feminists chose a variety of paradigms to explore bodies, like incorporating psychoanalysis (Grosz 1994). Grosz (1995) also theorized the transformative possibility of applying queer theory to a study of the body. Since then, many feminists have followed the argument of transgression through bodies, in both critique and support (Crawley 2002; Heyes, 2003). Linking historicity and bodies, feminist scholars have been able to utilize queer theory as a building block for deconstruction of gender, race, and sexuality (Somerville 2000). In one of Halberstam's (1994) first essays, she claimed that all bodies are gendered. By focusing on non-normative female masculinity and transsexuality, she maintained that gender is only real in its perception. Halberstam (1994) argues that for transsexuality, gender is performed on the body by way of manipulating hormones, surgery, and negotiating normative notions of psychiatric disorders. Looking more directly at films where the main characters are ambiguous in gender, Halberstam offers a slightly less complex, but nonetheless similar analysis of gendered bodies as Butler (1993). These studies, however, were missing an important element central to queer theories historicity.

### **Feminist Responses To Queer Theory**

Postmodernism and queer theory greatly affected feminist discourse, in both productive and undesirable ways; some found it productive (Nestle, Howell, and Wilchins 2002; Bartky 1990; Scott 1991), while others did not (Edwards 1998; Cohen 1997; Jefferys 2003). The biggest feminist critique was that queer theory and the theories themselves were male-dominated and

masculinist in their views. These theories overlooked experiences that were outside of white, upper-middle-class men. Many feminists were particularly critical of Foucault, noting that he did not attend to women at all.

Jefferys (2003) made a similar overall argument, but offered a harsher critique of queer theories by arguing they were displacing and erasing the histories, identities, and importance of women and lesbianism. Jeffereys (2003) argued that queer theory was simply reiterating work done previously by lesbians, who then would be forgotten from history and the academic canon. Although her critique is grounded in lesbian feminism, her work shows many similarities with transfeminists. However, this gap in his initial work allowed for feminists to utilize his theory as a way to understand gender. Bartky (1990), for instance, applies Foucauldian discourses of disciplined bodies to women and beauty standards, something Foucault neglected. The academic and feminist turn towards queer theory drove a variety of other theoretical directions.

Many feminists turned to history to better understand discourses of gender, sexuality, and academia itself. Scott (1991), who follows and critiques Foucault, argues that history needs to dislodge itself from its own discourse. Feminist historians needed to question assumed “facts” or “truths” and explore the possibilities of experiential evidence (Scott 1991). Feminists took the queer turn as an opportunity to reexamine past histories and theories alike.

Feminists were not shy to harshly criticize queer theory; many saw the implementation of queer theory in academia as doing the polar opposite of what it argues (Edwards 1998; Cohen 1997; Jefferys 2003). Cohen (1997) asserts that queer theory touts the deconstruction of binaries and identities, while reconstructing a binary of queer and not queer. Therefore, queer theory itself is not holding to its own theoretical guidelines. Even further, Cohen (1997) argues very little radical or transformative has come from queer theory. She argues it has taken over the

academic space for theorizing and leaving everything outside of queer theory in the metaphorical doghouse (Cohen 1997). Cohen (1997) urged scholars to consider who is “doing” queer theory, who is reading it, and for what purpose. She asserted that this a major issue, because while it critiques categories and power relations, it reifies them within the ivory tower (Cohen 1997). The issue she addresses also stems from the lack of reflexivity regarding lived experiences, which is also the issue I bring up in feminist theory’s lack of racial reflexivity.

In addition to criticism from race scholars, transgender identified scholars offered similar criticisms of queer theorists’ tendency to ignore embodied experience. Transfeminism has a rich, but sometimes hidden, history on the margins of lesbian feminism, political feminism, and histories of gay liberation. From the Michigan Womyn’s Festival to the 2000’s Human Rights Campaign’s dismissal of trans\*<sup>2</sup> identities, trans identities have walked a contentious space in feminist communities and theorizing. Quite a few scholars have studied the histories of transgender inclusion in the LGBT and feminist movements (Stone 2009; Connell 2012; Williams 2016). Queer theory reinforced this divide of trans/non-trans while at the same time neglecting the physical bodies of those participating in these theories (Heyes 2003). Adding to queer theory, the addition of transgender studies to feminism aided in the development of critical areas to explore the ways transfeminism can help to better conceptualize identities than queer or feminist studies alone (Enke 2012) through looking at policy implications (Spade 2012) and the “woman question” (Noble 2012; Watson 2016). The number of queer scholars studying transfeminisms and transgender inclusion in the feminist movement has drastically increased in the past decade. Watson (2016), for instance, offered an open letter urging radical feminists to see trans women as concrete women who they can work with toward a common goal. Similarly,

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<sup>2</sup> The term “trans\*” includes an asterisk to denote the fluidity of identities and experiences of those that fall under the umbrella of transgender identities. For further information about these identities, please see Enke 2012.

scholars have argued the history of transgender inclusion within feminism movements have conflated radical feminism with Trans Exclusive Radical Feminists (TERFs) or RadFems (Williams 2016) and that the lineage of epistemologies of trans\*feminism is already intersectional (Simpkins 2016).

Overall feminists are not in agreement about queer theory, but a review of the literature demonstrates that all these critiques actively question the idea of a singular “feminist” definition. While this has been extremely influential for feminist theorists, not all sociologists have been as receptive to queer theoretical critiques. The practices of *doing* sociology are much more complicated, as they do not always provide a linear, clear way to incorporate multiple epistemologies (e.g., feminism, postmodernism, queer theory).

### **Queer Empiricism?: Sociological Research After Queer Theory**

The epistemological assumptions of postmodern queer theory disrupt those of traditional sociology. However, because of the theoretical influence of queer theory, sociologists have cautiously attempted to make amends so to relate queer theory to lived everyday practices (Crawley, et al. 2008; Green, 2002, 2007; Valocchi 2005; Crawley 2013). Sociologists of gender and sexualities are especially apt to understand the limits and possibilities of queer theory. Because of that, sociologists urge one another to incorporate queer theory while being rigorous as to not falter epistemologically (Green 2002).

At the very core of queer theory rests a postmodern critique of empiricism and science altogether, which complicates its applied methodological potentials. Applying the method/ology of deconstruction to sociology from queer theory is a valuable addition to sociology (Green 2007). Valocchi (2005) also attempted to explore the constraints of practical possibilities. He

assessed empirical sociological studies to suggest ways to make them “more” queer saying they should be:

“combining sensitivities of ethnography with the sociologically informed queer concepts...can result in gender and sexuality research that represents individuals’ lived experience in ways that honor the complexity of human agency, the instability of identity, and the importance of institutional and discursive power” (768).

Both Green (2007) and Valocchi (2005) argued that queer theory provides wonderful tools, theories, and concepts that can be used by empirical sociologists to self-reflexively critique traditional concepts and methods. Before beginning that analysis, however, I turn to another area lacking attention in feminist sociological analyses.

### **Defining Collective Identities and Social Movements**

Current sociological understandings of collective identity have been conceptually articulated from a variety of epistemological places. The Marxist understanding of collective identity was developed from theories of class-consciousness, which occurs when there is a strong identification with a group who share a common relation to the means of production. For Marx, however, he argues that identity is only related to class and economic emancipation. Many social movement scholars have moved beyond the singular economic tie to collective identity. Due to collective identifications, identity necessitates collective action and solidarity (Hunt and Benford 2004).

Contemporary research helps conceptually formulate collective identity. It has filled gaps within structural, strain, rational choice, resource mobilization, New Social Movements, and political process theories of social movement. These theories historically neglected relevant social psychological, cultural, and emotional issues. Following strict Marxist theories, the focus on the collective identities has been relegated to static class-based identity movements, such as

the American Labor movements (Clemens 1996). Not all scholars, however, have upheld these strict conceptions of collective identity.

As it draws from a number of different epistemological paradigms, the definition of collective identity is contentious among social movement scholars. Whittier explained that collective identity is “located in action and interaction-observable phenomena- rather than in individual self-conceptions, attitudes, or beliefs” (Whittier 1995:16). She noted that, in the instance of feminist collective identity, women within the same age cohort have a shared understanding of collective identity.

In contrast, Polletta and Jasper located the definition of collective identity as “an individual’s cognitive, moral, and emotional connection with a broader community, category, practice or institution” (2001:285). Their definition of collective identity is under the umbrella of social psychology. They make a point to differentiate their definition from a traditional Marxist conceptualization of ideology. They do so by noting that collective identity “carries with it positive feelings for other members of the group” (Polletta and Jasper 2001:285).

Snow argued that previous definitions of collective identity have been “slippery” (2001) in their conceptualization. He argued that collective identity functions as a shared space that is “embedded within the shared sense of we is a corresponding sense of collective agency” (Snow 2001:2). This same idea of “we-ness,” which is almost an understood collective aura of identity, is one that has been expressed by many other scholars who study collective identity (Snow, Cress, Downey, and Jones 1998).

Similar to Polletta and Jasper (2001), Hunt and Benford (2004:437) explained that collective identity as having “replaced class consciousness as the factor that accounts for mobilization and individual attachments to new social movements.” They dissect the typologies

of collective identity (Hunt and Benford 2004). Scholars have more recently grappled with the addition of emotionality as a necessary factor for the formation of collective identity.

Emotionality is also utilized within sub-cultural collective identity formation (Futrell and Simi 2004; Haenfler 2004). No matter the size of the movement or the mainstream acceptability, scholars claim the affective ties to a movement are imperative for collective identity (Hunt and Benford 2004; Futrell and Simi 2004; Haenfler 2004).

Another less prevalent, yet innovative, theory of collective identity is collective memory. Many scholars have explored collective memory as a vital part of a cohesive collective identity (Zerubavel 1996; Harris 2006; Gongaware 2003, 2011). Harris described the term to mean “a group’s shared sense of the past could contribute to collective action by strengthening bonds of group identity” (2006:20). Collective memory is theorized as “a process that involves integrating personal remembrances to be shared by all” (Zerubavel 1996)” (Gongaware 2003:487). Drawing from Zerubavel’s theoretical argument for the importance of remembering and collective memory, Gongaware utilized empirical ethnographic research to further illustrate the importance of collective memories in the creation and sustaining of collective identities.

In order to define a collective identity, scholars have argued social movement organizations must define what the identity is not (Gamson 1995, 1997). Within social movements, this has been termed boundary work (Taylor and Whittier 1992; Gamson 1995, Lichterman 1995; Rupp and Taylor 1999; Hunt and Benford 2004). Invoking a dialectical understanding of identity construction, social movement scholars have explored the ways social movement organizations create and draw boundaries. Gamson (1997) takes up the famous case of the Michigan Womyn’s festival’s policy excluding transsexuals from the woman’s- only music festival. Based out of second wave feminist separatist politics, the festival had a man-free

policy. After much deliberation, they decided transsexuals broke that policy, as they were born male. Gamson argued this story points “to the importance of the symbolic aspect of *symbolic* boundaries” (1997:192, emphasis in original). In this article, Gamson addressed the conundrum of queer identity, as a categorical identification birthed out of queer theory, which argues for the destruction of categories. Gamson points to the historical moment of the queer turn where these definitions of identities have been influenced by theories, yet, create a crucial problem for the creation and maintenance of collective identity.

Many social movement scholars posit that previous definitions of collective identity implied conditions that were overly stable and concrete (Polletta and Jasper 2001; McDonald 2002; Hunt and Benford 2004; Forminaya 2010). Instead, these scholars push toward a messy, complicated definition of collective identity, a definition that is a living, breathing part of the movement. Polletta and Jasper describe their definition below.

Collective identity describes imagined as well as concrete communities, involves an act of perception and construction as well as the discovery of preexisting bonds, interests, and boundaries. It is fluid and relational, emerging out of interactions with a number of different audiences (bystanders, allies, opponents, news media, state authorities), rather than fixed. It channels words and actions, enabled some claims and deeds by delegitimizing others. It provides categories by which individuals divide up and make sense of the social world. (2001:298)

Their definition of collective identity is both individual and fluid. In contrast to that conception, Forminaya dislodged collective identity from the individual altogether through a discussion of symbolic signifiers, shared meanings, and social psychological aspects of collective identity (2010). She locates her definition outside the realm of the individual. Fluidity is a recent and beneficial way of describing collective identity.

Scholars became attentive to the problem of fluidity—or lack thereof—and began restructuring their definitions of collective identity to incorporate a more unsolidified model. In

regards to their empirical studies of feminism, Rupp and Taylor (1999: 366) argued, “a collective identity approach...both avoids a static notion of identity and sheds light on how feminists with conflicting interests and ideas are able to talk across their differences.” In this case, they argued the fluidity of collective identity aids in the movement’s overall success.

The arguments surrounding the validity of collective identity definitions have shifted over the years, especially with the introduction of feminism and postmodernism. Scholars have addressed the influence of feminism but very few have even mentioned the centrality of queer theory and postmodernism to the alteration of collective identity theories. This is key for my study. These theories of collective identities, however, will be examined throughout analysis and data collection. The focus on the fluidity of identities is a major point of queer theory, and in particular when discussing feminist collective identities; it becomes a chief topic of contention.

### **Feminist Social Movements**

Reger (2002) and Lichterman (1995) explore ways the biographies of participants alter their collective identities. For Reger (2002), National Organization for Women (NOW) local chapters had different forms of feminist collective identities depending upon where the organization was located. The varieties of collective identities of feminist, themselves, become an outcome of participation (Reger 2001). Within the feminist movement, for instance, many times emotions such as pride and passion are major engines of the movement. However, that is not always the goal. Sometimes the organization’s goal is to create and sustain anger. As demonstrated by Hercus (1999), anger can be a useful organizing tool for women’s and feminist organizations. Much of the research on feminist social movement organizations indicates solidarity occurs through these highly emotive organizational practices (Taylor and Whittier 1992; Whittier 1995, 1997; Polletta, Jasper, and Goodwin 1999; Reger 2001, 2002, 2004; Dugan and Reger 2006).

Consciousness-raising was a popular form of feminist organizing during the mid-1960s until the early 1980s. Feminists would organize groups, typically at the local leftist, liberal, queer, or feminist organizations, to help women deal with emotions such as anger, oppression, and isolation. These emotional matters helped organizations create mobilization through the use of emotion. The social movement actors would become cohesive and, therefore, mobilized. As noted by Aminzade and McAdam, “the mobilization of emotions is a necessary and exceedingly important component of any significant instance of collective action” (2001:14). While looking at feminist social movement organizations, Reger and Straggenborg argued “...the ability to maintain organizational stability and collective action is influenced by internal organizational characteristics and strategies as well as by external factors” (2006:297). These internal and external characteristics are emotional ones that help aid in collective action.

This ambiguity, however, can also lead to conflicts within the movements. For instance, a feminist social movement organization is framed within the context of liberal feminist ideologies of rights and policies, feminists who do not necessarily frame their own social movement organizations under that context, branch off. Or, as explored by Whittier (1995), different generations make up certain social movement organizations; there are conflicts about the stability of certain narratives. These narratives are created and sustained through framing. Benford (2002:63) argued, “frames are inextricably linked to narratives inasmuch as they are the interpretive screens through which the past, present, and future are filtered and subsequently imbued with meaning and significance.” The combination of narratives, emotions, and framing helps social movement scholars better understand the contextual story told by social movement organizations.

As a result of the wide varieties of feminisms, there has been great debate within social movement organizations and among social movement scholars as to how to appropriately define feminist collective identities. Perhaps the most influential scholar on this topic is Reger. She had studied a variety of feminist organizations over different periods of time to examine the ways the organizations recruited members, mobilized and maintained collective identities (Reger 2002, 2001; Reger and Staggenborg 2006). In doing this, she highlighted the changes in not just generational gaps but in geographic spaces and collective identity (2002). She also identified the importance in the incorporation of the personal identity of mother into the social movement organization's collective identity (2001).

While NOW was her social movement organization case study, Reger found it was important to look at NOW as not just a national organization, but one with local organizations as well (2002). She also found that social movement organizations had a difficult time representing a "diverse" membership because of "personalities." While NOW is a large and historically relevant feminist social movement organization, they have a reputation of representing one particular brand of feminism: one that is white and privileged. To extend her research over ten years later, she is directly discussing the importance of positionalities in the formulation of collective identities within feminist social movement organizations. Incorporating this into the conversation allows for a more complex analysis.

Over twenty years ago, Whitter discusses the context of feminist identities in her book, *Feminist Generations*. This study is a last long-term account of the feminist movement, and while it is almost twenty years old, there has not been a study to update it. Since her study also ended at the start of third wave feminism, there is much for advancement. Moreover, there have been very little studies on the incorporation of queer theory into social movements, particularly

the feminist movement. In 1987, which happens to be the year I was born, Gamson began a conversation about the incorporation of queer theory into the feminist movement; and since that time, no scholar has reinvigorated it. Instead, scholars have focused on the rise of “post feminism” and movements like SlutWalk. These are glaring omissions. A similar one, which has not been fully fleshed out, is the organizational and institutional significance of feminist businesses, and for my purpose, feminist bookstores.

### **Feminist Businesses and Bookstores**

Can businesses be feminist? Those who operate, work at, and patronize feminist businesses (e.g. feminist women’s centers or feminist sex shops) certainly think so. The assumptions of feminist ideologies and capitalist-driven businesses do not always compliment one another (Loe 1998, 1999; Thomas and Zimmerman 2007; Evans, Riley, and Shankar 2010). Loe (1998, 1999) has explored how feminist sex shops negotiate their feminist identities with their capitalist endeavors through pro-sex agency. Evans, et al., (2010) whose study took place ten years after Loe, argued that pro-sex positivity is rooted in postfeminism, a paradigm that argues gender equity has been achieved and feminism is no longer needed, while neglecting the rich history of sex debates within feminism. Loe (1996:99) argued that there are “historical tensions within feminism over sexualized bodies in the daily running of a business.” She found in an alternative study about the same site, that the historical change in feminist ideologies allows for long-term preservation of the organization. Thomas and Zimmerman (2007) argued that feminist ideologies that were prevalent in feminist women’s health clinics have been co-opted as a way to create profit for health clinics. The literature suggests that feminist businesses are not an oxymoron; instead they provide instantaneous disputes about the landscape of feminism—and feminist organizations—themselves.

A number of social movement scholars have argued that feminist bookstores were a central place of organization and mobilization for the feminist movements and lesbian feminist (Taylor and Rupp, 1993; Reger, 1994; Whittier, 1997; Staggenborg, 1998; Haenfler, 2004).

Taylor and Rupp argues the following about the founding of feminist organizations...

...alternative institutions founded by early radical feminists-including rape crisis centers, battered women's shelters, bookstores, newspapers, publishing and recording companies, recovery groups, support groups concerned with health and identity issues, spirituality groups, restaurants and coffeehouses, and other women-owned businesses-have increasingly come to be driven by the commitment of lesbians and women in the process of coming out. Women find in this world a social context supportive of lesbian relationships and identity that was unavailable in early feminist organizations or in the predominantly male gay liberation movement. (1993:38)

Even though many feminist social movements scholars mention the significance of bookstores, they have not empirically interrogated them. And unlike other feminist businesses such as battered women's shelters or health clinics, feminist bookstores provide community outreach and support groups. The bookstores do not provide services for clients; they just provide spaces and opportunities that bring together feminist (and potentially feminist) populations. Haenfler (2004:797) argued some movements engage in a more generalized 'resistance' rather than singling out a particular opponent." He went on to explain that some movements fight culture as a whole by, which "might include creating alternative institutions (e.g., lesbian feminist bookstores; support groups)" (Haenfler 2004:797). The alternate spaces these women created had very detailed purposes: to bring together community, to create a safe space, and to promote feminism.

Quite a few Historians, Women's Studies, and English scholars have researched feminist bookstores (Chesnut and Gable 1997; Adams 1998; Hogan 2003, 2006, 2008; Liddle 2005; Onosaka 2006). Adams (1998) took up the history of lesbian feminist publishing that started out of leftist politics. She stated, "before there were women's centers or bookstores, health clinics or

credit unions, the newspapers represented a place where women could put a face on the ideas and experiments of feminism by joining with other women to read and write and talk about them” (Adams 1998:118). These communities were started as capitalist endeavors in order to keep the cultural feminist movement financially possible. Similar to the bookstores themselves, these newsletters and publishing houses took up capitalism and—as argued by Adams—believed it to be revolutionary.

Hogan, an English scholar, has singularly produced the greatest amount of work on feminist bookstores (Hogan 2003, 2006, 2008). In her first publication, she described the thirty feminist bookstores left and their difficult struggle to stay open (2003). Her dissertation (2006) focused on the feminist bookstores as providing literary activism. She relied on research completed by the (now defunct) newsletter, *Feminist Bookstore Network*. She focused on the following bookstores: *New Words* in Cambridge, Massachusetts; *In Other Words* in Portland, Oregon; *Womanbooks* in New York, New York and *Old Wives’ Tales* in San Francisco, California. In her analysis, she focused on the kinds of books that were available at the stores and how they helped to create a feminist canon of literature. Hogan (2016) published her dissertation as a book.

She followed up her dissertation by publishing an exploration into how the movement to institutionalize Women’s Studies departments is connected to a reciprocal dependency on bookstores (2008). Hogan (2008) historically categorizes themes by decades to explain the main highpoints. Again, she looks at stores in Oakland; Portland, Oregon; Cambridge, Massachusetts; and New York City.

In the 1970s feminist bookstores helped to support, collect, and organize vital texts for women’s studies; in the 1980s the institutionalization of women’s studies changed the bookstores’ organization of texts, and feminist bookstores provided resources to women’s studies programs as well as individuals; and in the 1990s and 2000s, collaboratively

revised feminist bookstore formats modeled a public practice for women's studies. In our current decade feminist bookstores continue to close even while these revised feminist bookstore projects continue to evolve. (Hogan 2008: 618)

By exploring the historical stages of feminist bookstores, Hogan highlighted their importance for creating and maintaining a community for academic activists.

Liddle (2005) found something similar in her analysis of feminist bookstore's customers. She focused on the lesbians in her data set, which were over half of her one hundred respondents. Liddle found the lesbians in her study thought of feminist bookstores as central to their identities and vital to their coming out processes within the lesbian community. While she provided a snapshot of who the customers are at the feminist bookstores, Liddle did not provide any analytic questions or answers about organization of the bookstore in terms of social movement organizing or feminism. I seek to fill those gaps.

Onosaka (2006), a historian, wrote her doctoral dissertation on feminist bookstores and their importance in maintaining women's literacy and voices. The dissertation, published as an e-book through Routledge rivals Hogan's (2006) study in length but tends to focus on a similar theme: literacy movements. She looked at alternative publishing and women's print movements as creating opportunities for feminist bookstores to begin opening. Her historiography focused on the years 1970 through 1990 and uses archival data from the *Feminist Bookstore Network* newsletters. While this study is comprehensive, it lacks rich empirical evidence that could explain more of the cultural context, such as individual owners' stories, specific bookstore archives, and current ethnographic work. Furthermore, Onosaka addressed the issue of racism in the feminist movement but does so through documents alone. Epistemologically, sociological research will provide answers to questions that historiographies could not initially ask or answer.

A key issue none of the studies have addressed is the context of the bookstores. Liddle (2005) and Chesnut and Gable (1997) are the only studies that have included a bookstore in the US South. Both concentrated on a place that I also will focus on: *Charis Books and More* in Atlanta. Unlike the other studies, Chesnut and Gable's (1997) article is the only one to focus on *Charis*. They argued that *Charis* was a central organizing part of the lesbian feminist community in Atlanta. When the store opened in the 1970s, activist communities in Atlanta went through growth and change, and the feminist movement was just a part of it. Chesnut and Gable (1997) explored the ways the *Atlanta Lesbian Feminist Alliance* worked with *Charis* and others in the lesbian feminist community. Thus far, this is the only scholarly interrogation of feminist bookstores in the South, and moreover, it is one of the few studies of feminism in the South. An implication of the study of feminism in the South is the significance of race, which has been largely neglected. This provides ample space for sociologists to begin to understand the feminist potential of the South.

As I have shown throughout this section, there is a great deal of research on feminisms. Social movement scholars have actively called on feminist bookstores as an organizing site (Taylor and Rupp 1993; Reger 1994; Whittier 1997; Staggenborg 1998; Haenfler 2004). Yet, the work that has been done so far on feminist bookstores is overall sparse. Scholars have focused on literary movements—and in particular women's literary movements and women's print movements (Hogan 2003, 2006, 2008; Onosaka 2006). These studies provide key historical contexts to understand the bookstores themselves. However, few scholars even examined feminism as a social movement (Chesnut and Gable 1997; Onosaka 2006; Hogan 2008, 2016), and none have discussed it in terms of collective identities. Another central aspect of my study is the component of place and identity.

## **Somewhere Between Place and Culture: Sociologies of the South**

The South is a mix of place, region, culture, and identity. Starting with Gieryn's definition of place as a "geographic location... material form... and investment with meaning and value" (2000:464-465), the South can be first understood as a place. Next, regional identity with the subset of the US South has been a popular line of research since the 1940's (Cash [1941]1991; Reed 1972; Reed 1993; Lloyd 2012; Rushing 2009, Rushing 2017). A recent Annual Review of Sociology article written by Lloyd (2012) argued for the importance of studying the South; and although he noted there is no quintessential definition of the South. He found the South is particularly significant to study because of later rates of urbanization (versus the non-South) it has become an immigration destination and played a vital role in the Civil Rights Movement (Lloyd 2012). A variety of studies on the South have also explored the tendency of a more conservative political paradigm than in the rest of the U.S. (Cash [1941]1991; Reed 1993; Howard 1999; Lloyd 2012). Along with conservative political ideologies, the majority of Southerners evidently hold more traditional gender attitudes, such as believing women should stay home with children instead of working (Powers, Sutor, Guerra, Shackelford, Mecom, and Gusman 2003). This research reiterates stereotypes of Southerners explored by Reed (1993). Sociologists have spent a great deal of time on the idea of regional difference (e.g., Cash [1941]1991; Reed 1972; Reed 1993; Lloyd 2012; Rushing 2009, Rushing 2017), and more recently in the interdisciplinary space and place literature (e.g., Gieryn 2000). Overwhelmingly, Southerners have also argued their own difference (Powers, et al. 2003; Robinson 2014), especially regarding ideas of race (Smith 1995; Robinson 2014), politics (Gaddis 2011; Robinson 2014), and regarding the possibility of progress (Chesnut and Gabe 1997; Robinson 2014; Rushing 2009, 2017). As I will discuss throughout my dissertation, these

conceptions and understandings of the South offered by my participants echo much of the literature though three main themes: cultural hospitality and interpersonal warmth, political conservatives, and the history and culture of racism.

Touching on all three themes, Rushing (2017) identifies a major problem of researching and representing the South within current and past academic literature.

Perceptions of the South as a problem-ridden place, an American “other,” and a regional suspect have dominated social science research for decades. The Southern exceptionalism perspective typically explains the Problem South as a product of a regional history of slavery, civil war, segregation, and resistance to civil rights, as if somehow these events could be separated from national history. (2017: 294-295)

Rushing separates traditional inquiries about the South from those that she believes would be useful for academic research. This exploration is both useful and divisive. I use them together to explore the South through a phenomenological lens. I do so by first drawing from the Rushing excerpt in addition to one from Robinson:

As a discursive product, the South is a strategic accomplishment, both in popular media and in people’s everyday lives. Black and white folks, the cultural elite acting on their behalf, and corporations are all interested in accomplishing a particular vision of the region that suits their specific ends. Representing, accomplishing, and doing an authentic South, then, is integral to people’s everyday negotiations of identities; to cultural elite’s attempts to shape the discourse around Southern publics; and the corporations’ attempts to sell various products, from tea, to chicken sandwiches, to television shows, to barbecue sauce, to multiple publics, Southern and beyond (2014: 194-195).

Thanks to Robinson’s definition, which floats between macro and micro, I can delineate my own definition of the South—one that falls outside of state lines, blurs cultural references, and questions histories. While the South is clearly place, culture, and idea, most centrally it is hospitality and warmth. It is an amorphous idea that, in addition to place, is as described from Robinson (2014), is defined between capitalist endeavors and people’s lived experiences. Scholars have not been able to agree on a definition for the South because it is—by definition—a fluid target. It changes between different contexts and histories but the experience of the South as

an idea has not changed. Indeed, it is through lived experiences where I find the definition of the South: it is a feeling, understanding, idea, culture, nostalgia, and capitalism associated with an authentic regional place. It is unique in demographics and histories, but most importantly, in people's understandings *of* the South.

One thing Robinson does highlight, which is missing in most of the research on feminist social movements, is the history and culture of racism. A key issue scholars have examined in the South is the matter of race and racial tension that will prove important in my study as well. While racial tensions are present throughout the U.S., many scholars have argued that because of the historical and societal past of slavery, race, and racism in the South, frictions are heightened (Smith 1995; Lloyd 2012; Robinson 2014). Barnett (1993) discusses the ways black women were historically marginalized within the Civil Rights Movement because of their gendered and raced status—making them secondary to both the Civil Rights Movement and the feminist movement. Because of Southern histories, the awareness of race and racial tensions is amplified (Smith 1995; Robinson 2014). Just as any other region, issues of class and gender are persistent; yet the visibility of racial tensions and racism is more heightened here than elsewhere.

Additionally, many scholars have written about individual experiences of lesbians and people with queer identities in the South (Cooper 2012; Gaddis 2011; Johnson 2008; Wright 2003; Chesnut and Gable 1997). In these ethnographic explorations, scholars have noted that an emphasis on politically conservative ideologies fosters negative consequences for people identifying with non-normative sexualities (Cooper 2012; Gaddis 2011; Johnson 2008; Wright 2003). Moving beyond collecting life histories will be an important addition to this body of literature. Additionally, most studies focus on gay men opposed to women. The study of queer women and lesbians is vital for the study of the South it has been neglected.

Lastly, a less prevalent but growing area of research considers the South as transformative. Scholars have explored the South outside of its stereotypical constructions of aggressive closed-mindedness, instead examining the South as a place of transgression beyond conservative beliefs. Many scholars argued that the South is welcoming to feminism (Smith 1995; Chesnut and Gable 1997; Keane 2009). Feminist organizing has historically been an act of rebellion (Chesnut and Gable 1997) and in the South the feminist rebellion is still occurring (Chesnut and Gable 1997; Keane 2009). The area of Southern studies is budding and is rich with historical and contemporary possibilities that have been previously ignored (Howard 1997). For instance, many scholars have noted the progressive politics of Southern history (e.g., Brown-Nafin 2011; Hornsby 2015; Kruse 2007).

Additionally, the demographics of the South illustrate the higher prevalence of people of color. For instance, according to 2010 US Census Data, Atlanta's population is 420,003, whereas Gainesville was 120,689. In Atlanta, 54% of the population identifies as Black or African American, whereas 36.3% identifies as white, non-Hispanic or Latino. In Gainesville, 23% identify as Black or African American and 64.9% identify as white. These numbers are in a pretty stark contrast to the overall demographics of the US in which 72.4% identify as White and 12.6% identify as Black or African American. The high numbers of people of color is very important to my discussion, as it complicates constructions of the South. Scholars and activists within the last twenty years have begun taking up the cause of uncovering histories and telling contemporary stories of the marginalized Southern past. These are important starting points for my own academic pursuits in the dissertation. Sociologies of the South provide some answers about region but offer up questions about collective identity.

## **Research Questions**

Following the literature review above, I am interested answering the following questions:

- (1) How do the social organization of feminist SMOs and the subjectivities of feminists alter over time from 1974 until 2016?
- (2) How has the cultural geography of these bookstores influenced their identities?
- (3) Have trends in feminist theory (such as queer theory) altered the language, programming, and activism of these bookstores?
- (4) How do feminist bookstores provide a space for social movement organizing?

Many scholars have explored feminism SMOs over time (Taylor and Rupp 1993; Whittier 1997; Reger 1994). Instead of addressing the sites of bookstores themselves, they have suggested the study of bookstores to understand feminist SMOs, or even the feminist or lesbian movements (Taylor and Rupp 1993; Reger 1994; Whittier 1997; Staggenborg 1998; Haenfler 2004). I am adding to these initial calls to understand feminist SMOs over time by focusing on the site of feminist bookstores as SMOs. I explore this through oral histories, archival data, participant interviews, and ethnography. While some scholars have examined partial histories of feminist bookstores (Chesnut and Gable 1997; Adams 1998; Hogan 2003, 2006, 2008, 2016; Liddle 2005; Onosaka 2006), none have done so using ethnography or with an emphasis on subjectivities and collective identities.

Aside from the lack of scholarly work on feminist bookstores, scholars who have focused on feminist bookstores have not studied the implications of place or region. There are, however, many prevalent in studies about SMOs and geographical place (Reger 2002; Reger and Staggenborg 2006). The region of the South is very important when looking at self identifications (Robinson 2014; Rushing 2017) and organizational definitions (Chesnut and Gable 1997).

Trends in feminist theory, specifically the incorporation of queer theory, have not been studied empirically. I fill that gap. Feminist bookstores as organizations are the juncture of academic discourse and community activism. Hogan (2008, 2015, 2016) has been the only scholar to emphasize the importance of academic institutions in feminist bookstores. What I illustrate, however, is how academic languages and trends translate into practice and meaning making.

Social movement scholars point to feminist bookstores as important organizing spaces (Taylor and Rupp 1993; Reger 1994; Whittier 1997; Staggenborg 1998; Haenfler 2004). None of these scholars, however, have completed a study on feminist bookstores. The only large studies that have been concluded are from English and Historical perspectives focusing on literacy movements.

### **CHAPTER THREE: METHODS AND DATA**

Ethnography does not necessitate an epistemological stance, as feminist methodologies do. For instance, my use of ethnography throughout my dissertation highlights major tenets of feminist methodologies, such as focusing on the marginalized, questioning the taken for granted structure, and acknowledging the foundations of assumptions and expected knowledge(s). The use of ethnography is widespread within the feminist community because of the lessened power differentials, opportunities for reflexivity, and the possibility for participatory action (Fonow and Cook 1991). While it is important to understand the complexity of postmodern theories and the postmodern moment, I am not naïve in thinking that my perspective is much different from traditional or the “old guard” of ethnography (Atkinson, Coffey, and Delamont 2003). Although my project methodology is primarily ethnography, it is important to include a brief overview of other methodologies that help to deconstruct and understand the potential messiness of intertwined data, such as comparative-historical, historical ethnography, and queer methodologies.

Conventional notions of comparative-historical methods seek “to make sense out of different cases by piecing evidence together in a manner sensitive to chronology and by offering limited historical generalizations that are both objectively possible and cognizant of enabling conditions and limiting means—of context” (Ragin 2013: 363). This method is based on grounded theory in order to gain a better understanding of how the data—or experiences of people—explains social order (Neuman 2011). The comparative-historical method has been

useful for social movement scholars to examine the ways social movements vary across time and cultures (Cohen 1985; Blee 1991; Armstrong and Cragg 2006; Walder 2009; Lange 2012). While the method has been particularly useful, it lacks the depth ethnography can offer (Lange 2012). It allows scholars to incorporate the past into the present by configuring past events with use of, in my project, archival documents, ethnography, and interview data. Lange (2012:15), a comparative-historical methodologist, argues, “in general ethnographic methods cannot be used to analyze historical phenomena.” Much of the comparative-historical tradition has focused on positivist correlational studies (Ragin 2013). The data sources tend to be comprised of archival data, which is considered primary data (Neuman 2011).

There are, however, disadvantages to comparative-historical methods. There are issues with validity and applicability of sources. For instance, there is a constant doubt about the centrality and importance of certain archival documents, such as the reliability of notes from events. Although comparative-historical methods have the *potential* to include analyses of power at their methodological base, it is not exclusively a critical method. Now, since feminists and queer theorists, such as myself, argue that power is omnipresent, mainstreaming analyses of power is imperative for a feminist and queer analysis.

Postmodernists and queer theorists have critiqued sociologists for neglecting history, especially in regards to sexuality (D’Emilio and Freeman 1988; Warner 1999; Somerville 2000; Stoler 2006; Love 2007). I agree with this critique. Theorizing queer ethnography has become more popular over the past decade—and within humanities in particular (Graham 2010; Taylor 2010; Jackman 2010; Dahl 2010; Rooke 2010). The discussion of queer ethnography allows for mindfulness of “temporality, ethics of intersubjectivity, the emotional nature of research, the limits of the queer self, and reflexivity, and more broadly, the relationship between ontological

and epistemological locatedness” (Rooke 2010: 39). Queer methods, as discussed by a number of scholars (Jackman 2010; Taylor 2010; Dahl 2010; Rooke 2010), are particularly interested in reflexivity of the scholar and their own personal and academic identities.

Historical ethnography offers “an attempt to elicit structure and culture from the documents created prior to an event in order to understand how people in another time and place made sense of things” (Vaughan 2004: 322). In her study of the Challenger accident, she relied heavily on secondary data collected by governmental organizations (interview transcripts and archival data) and combined it with her own interviews. Throughout her analysis, her interviewees remained as sources of knowledge creation. Methods such as this seek to consciously integrate the importance of history into traditional ethnographic lens (Rosenfeld 2003; Vaughan 2004). What they have not done, however, is integrate feminist analyses of power into the methodological design.

After reviewing the intricacies of and issues concerning historical-comparative, historical ethnography, and queer methodologies, feminist ethnography offers a way fill in the gaps as it “pays attention to the dynamics of power in social interaction that starts from a gender analysis” (Davis and Craven 2016: 9) and “makes women’s lives visible” since they have been historically silenced (Reinharz and Davidman 1992: 48). Not only does feminist ethnography allow for a critical analysis of gender, but also one of difference, privilege, oppression, and power. Epistemologically, feminist ethnography is based out of critical theories, which is missing from comparative-historical methods, empiricism that is lacking from queer methodologies, and a critique of power that is missing from historical ethnography (Reinharz, and Davidman 1992; Kirsch 2005; Tillmann-Healy 2006; Fields 2013; Schrock 2013; Davis and Craven 2016).

## **Data Sets**

There are a total of three different data sets in my study: archival data, field notes and ethnographic data, interview data, and oral histories. In line with ethnography, I was the instrument of analysis by finding the organization of ethnography. As part of the ethnography, I generated field notes, interview data, visual data, participant observation, and oral histories.

### **Archival Data**

Following comparative historical methods and ethnography, it is common for sociologists to utilize archival data (Rushing 2001; Gongaware 2003; Linders 2006). For the archival data, I used the *Charis* archives at Duke University. The archives are *Charis*'s personal archives, which they chose to house at Duke University's archive on the feminist movement. I first attended Duke's special collections on feminist histories in the summer of 2013. While visiting, I was able to survey the kinds of documents in the archives and to think through the ways the archives were curated. During this initial visit, I obtained around three hundred documents. After receiving a scholarship from Duke to attend the archives again, I went back in summer of 2015. At the archives, there are 42 boxes of documents ranging from 1974 until 2008. Of those boxes, I focused on around 20 pertinent boxes. The data, which encompasses all years, ranges from financial statements, to youth group feedback, to internal email. I reference a number of these documents throughout my dissertation.

*Charis* also had their own in-house archives at the office in the bookstore. During my ethnography, I was able to review around eight hundred of those documents. While doing so, I helped to organize and prepare them for Duke to be able to later procure them. Overall, I ended up with well over one thousand documents from *Charis*.

Due to the unstable history of *Wild Iris Books*, archives that were supposed to be housed on site had disappeared. After being told I had access to them, upon arrival they were nowhere to be found. During data collection, I learned it is because of its tremulous history that there are no archival records of said history. Having said that, one of the current owners was gracious enough to allow me to look through the (unorganized) desk drawers at the store. There, I was able to locate a around fifteen documents that later became important to conduct my analyses.

### **Interviews and Oral Histories.**

Interviews were a major source of data collection. I completed conversational interviews where the interviewee and myself “take turns speaking and indicate when...[our respective] turn is through” (Rubin and Rubin 1995: 123). Following this structuring of the interview process, the interview questions I provide in the appendix were used as guidelines (Rubin and Rubin 1995; Holstein and Gubrium 1995). Similarly, oral histories are a *subset* of interviews that instead of particular questions or goals, records a “chronicle of events obtained during an interview of a person who recollects past events, beliefs or feelings” (Neuman 2011:480). As a feminist researcher interested in social interaction, I actively thought about “the issue of *what* question to ask, [and then] there is also the *how*” in the interviews themselves (Warren 2012: 132). While taking these oral histories and interviews I am particularly thoughtful about potential “relational slippages...[such as those] between ‘old time lesbian’ and transman” (Nash 2010: 141). The example put forth by Nash (2010) is particularly important for my own work tracing the histories of the bookstores from cultural feminism to queer theoretical approaches.

My use of interview and oral history are purposeful. I begin by interviewing twenty-two participants, bookstore workers, and volunteers to gain their understanding of the bookstores. I conducted nineteen interviews between *Charis* and *Wild Iris*. The interviews lasted between

forty-five minutes up to two and a half hours. I chose to use interviews as opposed to oral histories for participants of these organizations because their past were not as instrumentally important to answering my research questions. Instead, I was interested in how they live in and understand the present, allowing me to understand their lived experiences.

In order to practically gather the richest data possible, I tape-recorded the interviews because it is “the best method of securing discursive data” (Holstein and Gubrium 2009: 35). Similar to the interview participants, all identities of individuals are confidential in accordance to the USF Institutional Review Board. And while Holstein and Gubrium do admit that recording everything is an impossible (and sometimes illegal), researchers must be able to quickly adjust their own methods on the spot. These interviews took place wherever the participant felt most comfortable or requested. These places ranged from bars, to their homes, to coffee shops, to the bookstore themselves. Three interviews took place over the phone because of their schedules.

In addition to recording, another way I captured data is through visuals, such as recordings or photographs. This was a standard way for me to set contexts to all texts from my interviews. Although these data did overlap with participant observation (Campbell 2006), it is important to note that these were more formalized notations about others and not myself.

After completing the interviews, I moved on to conducting oral histories with a total of three current owners of the bookstores. This includes two in Atlanta and one in Gainesville. I chose to use oral histories opposed to interviews with the owners because their life stories are integral to the organizations. And while they might not have spent their whole lives as a part of the organization, or even engaged in feminist—or other—social movements, their stories provide key background aspects to the respective organization’s archives and the larger sociopolitical historical contexts. Oral history interviews typically took place over a few sessions, resulting in

two to five hours. After the interviews and oral histories are over and while I completed my dissertation writing process in Tampa, I maintained contact with my interviewees about the project as well as their lives (Rubin and Rubin 1995).

### **Observational Field Notes and Participant Observation.**

Ethnographic field notes allow researchers to grasp a holistic picture of their site. As a constructionist, I use Holstein and Gubrium's (2008: 378) "discourse in practice," which allowed me to look at "*how* reality is constructed" through "questions regarding the discursive resources, or the *whats*, from which social realities are produced." By focusing on how realities are constructed, I sought to construct how my participants see their lives and realities (Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw 1995). Opposed to inserting my assumptions into the situation, I learned from my participants their "truths" (Emerson, et al. 1995). By molding all the "truths" together—on my own and with my participants themselves—I have created a semi-stable narrative. Additionally, by piecing together field notes from different instances in addition to my interviews and oral histories I focused in on *who* holds power in certain situations (Emerson, et al. 1995).

I spent the year of 2015 in the field. I was working with *Chairs* in Atlanta from January until mid-August and then moved to Gainesville, where I worked with *Wild Iris* until late December. I have over one hundred and fifty pages of field notes from both sites. I took notes throughout events, interviews, conversations, and time spent at the bookstores. I initially planned to attend all events put together by the bookstores and non-profit organizational meetings of *Charis Circle* and *Friends of Wild Iris Books*. Unfortunately, I was not granted access to *Charis Circle* meetings because of potentially sensitive information, such as financials, discussions about intimate relationships, and ethical issues discussed in the board meetings. After moving to

Gainesville, I was informed *Friends of Wild Iris Books* was on a “permanent break.” I did, however, volunteer at all events and in the bookstore. And while it was not easy, I gained “insider” knowledge by spending time at both stores and their respective events. In a manner similar to my field notes, I made journal entries, or reflexive field notes, about my work, experience, emotions, and concerns in the field in order to illicit as much reflect on my time in the field as possible (Emerson, et al. 1995; Puddephatt, Shaffir, and Kleinknecht 2009). Following the thought process that the personal is political, personal experience and embodiment is essential to my study as it reiterates the integration of queer methodologies (Nash 2010).

### **Participant Selection**

*Charis* has had five owners, one of which is still present in the bookstore. Since it’s opening in 1992, *Wild Iris* has had six owners. At both stores, some of the previous owners are still alive and engaged in feminist organizing, so I hoped they would want to discuss their time at the bookstore and with the feminist movement. That was not the case for either store. The original owner of *Charis* was not available to interview, and the past owners of *Wild Iris* were not interested in discussing the bookstore. It is important to note, however, that I did not begin by pursuing these interviews. For the volunteers, event participants, and worker interviews, I did not have a traditional sampling because of the small number of potential participants. Based off of previous archival research and some online research, I created a list of people at both bookstores I thought would be important to interview. I met with the owners of each store to review and discuss the list. They gave me pointers and “inside” knowledge about past relationships, friendships, personalities, and their current perceptions about the participants, such as, “oh, let me know...she doesn’t come here anymore” or “she likes a good party.” I reached out to about fifty people in the *Charis* community and about fifteen in the *Wild Iris* community. Of the fifty

related to Charis, only one declined and the rest did not get back to me. Of the fifteen from Wild Iris, only two declined. One potential participant who was suggested as a contact emailed me the following, “I’m not the person to talk to on this issue. I have no contact with *Wild Iris* at the moment. I suggest you find someone locally in Gainesville active in the ‘feminist’ movement.” He then provided me with a link to a Google search for “feminism in Gainesville Florida. The other decline was because of their scheduling and the others either were out of town or did not feel they had time or did not get back to me. As discussed above, after interviewing the participants, I completed oral histories with three current owners. This sequencing is important to understanding the dynamics of power within these organizations and during the larger historical contexts.

### **The Participants.**

All participants filled out a demographic form. Below, you will note their age, race/ethnicity, gender, and sexual identity is self-disclosed. Pseudonyms were assigned by to maintain anonymity. Additionally, participants also have full access to their own interviews as well as the whole contents of this dissertation.

**Table 1.** Participant Details

<b>Pseudonym</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Race/ Ethnicity</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Sexual Identity</b>	<b>Location</b>	<b>Position</b>
Dana	64	White	Female	Lesbian	Atlanta	Past Volunteer/Board Member/Fundraiser
Jennifer	61	White	Female	Hetero	Atlanta	Past Volunteer/Employee/ Board Member
Rita	47	White/ Ango/ Agorean	Femme	Queer, femme dyke	Atlanta	Past Intern/Employee/ Management

**Table 1.** Participant Details (Continued)

<b>Pseudonym</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Race/ Ethnicity</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Sexual Identity</b>	<b>Location</b>	<b>Position</b>
Hannah	48	White	Cis female	Bisexual	Atlanta and Gainesville	Patron
Fannie	69	Black	Female/Woman	Lesbian	Atlanta	Past Volunteer/Patron
Albert	50	White/ Irish	Male (trans experience)	Queerly- straight	Atlanta	Volunteer/Patron/ Community Activist
Emma	42	White	Female/Woman	Lesbian	Atlanta	Board Member/Patron
Elijah	39	Afro- American /Black	Man (male) of Trans* experience; male	queer	Atlanta	Employee/Community Activist
Sky	50	African American	Woman (don't really believe in gender)	Lesbian	Atlanta	Past Board Member/Volunteer/ Patron
Rose	63	Black	Woman	Lesbian	Atlanta	Past Board Member/ Volunteer /Patron
Diane	63	White	Female	Lesbian	Atlanta	Board Member/Volunteer/ Fundraiser
Grace	48	Middle Eastern	Female	Lesbian	Atlanta	Employee/Manager
Alice	73	White Italian American	In between- happy as female	Queer lesbian	Atlanta	Past Board Member/Patron
Alex	35	White	Butch/ transmasculine	Queer	Atlanta	Employee/Community Activist
Madelia	64	Mestiza	Woman	Lesbian	Gainesville and Atlanta	Patron/Volunteer/ Community Member
Eloise	83	Caucasia n	Celibate	Celibate / lesbian	Atlanta	Community Activist/Patron/ Volunteer/Past Board Member
Nora	48	White	Cis Female	Bisexual	Atlanta and Gainesville	Patron/Academic
Violet	43	Black	Woman	Lesbian/ bisexual	Atlanta and Tampa	Employee/Patron/ Volunteer

**Table 1.** Participant Details (Continued)

<b>Pseudonym</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Race/ Ethnicity</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Sexual Identity</b>	<b>Location</b>	<b>Position</b>
Olivia	45	Black	Woman	Heterosexual	Gainesville	Employee/ Management/ Community Activist
Lou	26	White	Transmasculine	N/A	Atlanta	Past Intern/Board Member/Volunteer/ Patron
Elle	30	Multi- Ethnic	Cis Woman	Straight	Gainesville	Volunteer/Patron/ Community Activist
Ava	34	White	Woman	Straight	Atlanta	Board Member/Volunteer

### **Data Analysis**

I collected a wide variety of data—and similarly, the purposes of the documents range, therefore the analyses changes due to context. To analyzing the data, curating concepts, and making meaning, I utilized Becker’s “way of developing concepts is in a continuous dialogue with empirical data” (109:1998). By reviewing my data contextually in accordance to their different purposes, I was able to gather unspoken and spoken certainties from my participants in order to better understand their worlds.

Analyzing archives and field notes were very different. As stated by Arondekar, using the archive does not automatically or “reveal the truth about the history of sexuality in the colonial period” (2005:11). Instead, she offers a critique of traditional archival methods that do not critique, take note of, or engage with the context of the documents as well as the position of the institution housing the archive. Following that, I did not read archival materials as “truths” or “discoveries.” Instead I read them as they were produced—as a curated long-term representation of the history of *Charis* with help from archival librarians at Duke and the employees of *Charis*.

I also compared and contrasted the different sites—as well as the different temporal moments. Following my own epistemological framework, I traced the different academic discourses as they arise. Using feminist ethnography, I was able to offer a historical analysis of the context of the bookstores during different time periods. These various comparisons are the crux of my analysis.

During data collection, certain themes became increasingly pronounced. After gathering all data, I began initial coding. After going through these initial codes, I was able to narrow down my codes with focused coding, which allowed me to better encompass the main findings. A technique I used to do this was using a concept chart that allowed for flow and overlap in order to not oversimplify my findings. Following these techniques, the main concepts led me to my four data chapters: social movement goal as sustaining, the south as a positive for the movement, racism within Southern feminisms, and changes in feminist organizing, such as transgender inclusion. These chapters, while they can stand on their own, offer overlap in their arguments and concepts, which allows me to highlight the complexity of my argument, the data, and the lives of the people I worked with.

Although I may have been ‘playing’ researcher during my ethnography, the friendships I made served as a site of reciprocity throughout the writing process (Tillmann-Healy 2006, Kirsch 2005, Reinharz, and Davidman 1992). Meaning, I allowed for an open line of communication during my analysis in order to correctly and fully illustrate the arguments I map. As noted by Kirsch, “interactions with participants are most often based on friendliness” (2005: 2170). However, as a researcher, it is my responsibility to subjects and to friends made during that process, to make a clear distinction that my “research” has ended, not that our friendship has. As the case with much research, my relationships with these people will inevitably dwindle, but will

always be maintained as a close friendship (Tillmann-Healy 2006, Kirsch 2005, Reinhartz, and Davidman 1992).

## Settings

As exemplified in Table 1, there are currently only twelve feminist bookstores in the US. Therefore, the possibility for selection was limited. Of those thirteen, three are in the South: *Wild Iris Books* in Gainesville, Florida, *Charis Books and More* in Atlanta, Georgia, and *BookWoman* in Austin, Texas. In this dissertation, I did not attend *BookWoman*. Revisiting Robinson's (2014) and my own definitions of the South, the definition is amorphous. The South is not a state-bound setting. Because of that, Austin, TX is—by many standards—not the South (Robinson 2014). Instead, I suggest the cultural milieu of Austin to be that of the Southwest. Focusing on cultures, this delineation places *BookWoman* outside of the scope of this particular study.

**Table 2.** Existing Feminist Bookstores in US<sup>3</sup>

<b>Feminist Bookstore Name</b>	<b>Place of Bookstore</b>	<b>Year it Opened</b>
Antigone Book	Tucson, AZ	1973
Bloodroot Bookstore and Restaurant	Bridgeport, CT	“mid-1970s”
Bluestockings	New York, NY	1999
BookWoman	Austin, TX	1974
<i>Charis Books and More</i>	Atlanta, GA	1974
Common Language	Ann Arbor, MI	1991
In Other Words	Portland, OR	1993
People Called Women	Toledo, OH	1993
A Room of One's Own Books & Gifts	Madison, WI	1975
<i>Wild Iris Books</i>	Gainesville, FL	1992
Women and Children First	Chicago, IL	1979
Womencrafts	Provincetown, MA	1976

Demographically, Atlanta and Gainesville are quite different. According to 2010 US Census Data, Atlanta's population is 420,003, whereas Gainesville was 120,689. In Atlanta, 54% of the

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<sup>3</sup> Additionally, while writing my dissertation one bookstore, Northern Women's Bookstore in Thunder Bay Ontario permanently close. However, another store L'Eguelionne opened in Montreal in mid-2017.

population identifies as Black or African American, whereas 36.3% identifies as white, non-Hispanic or Latino. In Gainesville, 23% identify as Black or African American and 64.9% identify as white. Although both places are in the South, they have two different historical trajectories. Atlanta, because of its demographics and the Civil Rights Movement, is well known as a hub of racial activism. Since the 1970s, Gainesville has been a hotbed for feminist organizing with New Left organizing, feminist health clinics, and a few feminist bookstores in the city's history (Giardina 2010). Both Atlanta and Gainesville, however, are pockets of liberal activity in a vast conservative region.

### ***Charis Books and More.***

Linda Bryant *Charis Books and More* opened in 1974 in the Little Five Points neighborhood of Atlanta as a Christian bookstore. During the first few years of *Charis*, Bryant began working with local gay and lesbian organizations, such as the Atlanta Lesbian Feminist Alliance, and civil rights organizations. Bryant, who is a spiritual Christian, also is an out lesbian. Her identification as a Christian lesbian altered the trajectory of the bookstore from Christian to quickly becoming a space dedicated to lesbian feminism. As quickly as the store opened, it began having financial issues. During this time, the store employed the owner, or several owners, and minimum wage booksellers. The positions were highly competitive, and as mentioned by some participants, even elevated the worker to a desirable position within the lesbian community. The positions of booksellers, however, were far from lucrative and made it difficult to maintain a full staff. *Charis's* financial troubles necessitated a critical change.



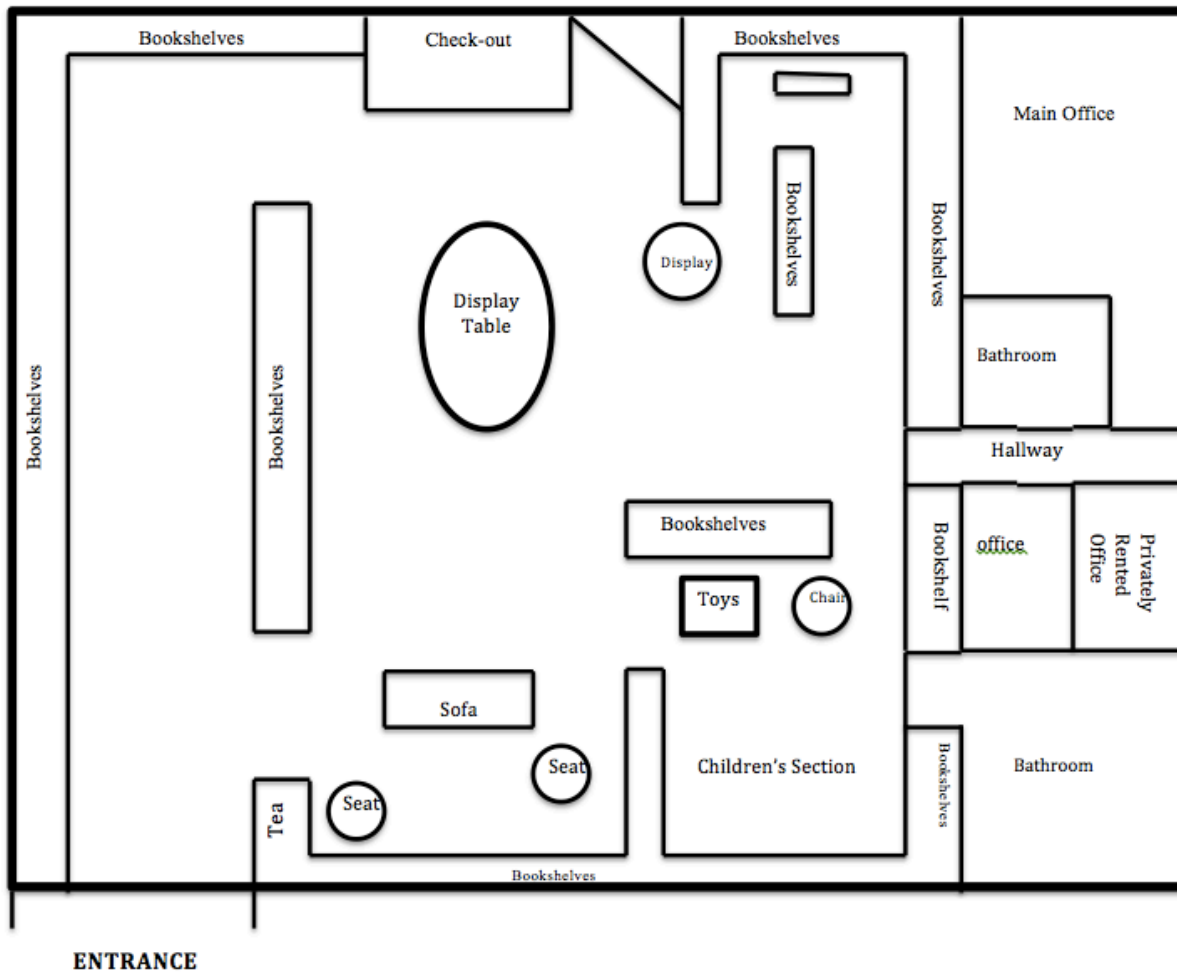
**Figure 1.** *Charis Books and More* at original location on Moreland Ave in Little Five Points, Atlanta.

In 1996, *Charis* became the first feminist bookstore to expand the bookstore into a separate non-profit, *Charis Circle*, which through grant writing was able to offset costs associated with the business. *Charis Circle* was also able to function as an activist arm to the feminist bookstore business. The *Circle* hired a director and set up a board of directors to curate outreach, fundraisers, and other events. During this time Bryant began transitioning out of positions of power by bringing on a few other owners whose presence at the store was short-lived.



**Figure 2.** *Charis Books and More* location from 1993- 2017 on Euclid Ave in Little Five Points, Atlanta.

The two current owners took charge in the early 2000s. Currently the bookstore and non-profit only have one full time employee: the director of *Charis Circle*. The current owners only work part time and one of them has a full time job outside of the bookstore. That person is in charge of an endless list of tasks that include recruiting board members, programming, creating committees, website upkeep, and more. Aside from the director, they have consistently worked closely with the community to create programming and outreach opportunities for underprivileged people. For instance, they currently work with LGBT organizations in Atlanta and Black Lives Matter Atlanta. The bookstore has about six part-time staff members. *Charis Circle* has twelve board members. They are open daily from eleven until six. They average three events a week, with many being weekly or monthly. For instance, they offer donation-only yoga every Sunday morning, almost weekly book events, a monthly writing group for people in health and education professions, a monthly racially conscious parenting workshop, and a monthly feminist coding workshop headed by graduate students from Georgia Tech. Since the events are all donation based and the bookstore does not bring in enough money to break even, they rely on fundraising and grants from *The Circle*'s non-profit status.



**Figure 3.** Layout of *Charis Books and More* in 2017.

In order to provide a guide for the layout of *Charis*, I have included a drawing of the current bookstore in Figure 3. As you can clearly see, there are places to sit, drink your tea, read, or just chat with employees or friends. On a typical weekend day, you will see people sipping hot tea talking on the couch, children playing with toys in the children's section, people browsing titles, Jasmine, the owner's adorable dachshund, and a staff member answering phones. The hallway, second bathroom, and offices are not open to the public. As of 2017, both parts of *Charis* are still active.

### ***Wild Iris*: Gainesville, Florida.**

To my knowledge there has been no academic exploration of *Wild Iris*, and therefore, there is a lack of information about the history of the bookstores. In order to understand the story of feminist Gainesville and *Wild Iris*, I will quickly explain the history of feminist bookstores in Gainesville. Similar to *Charis*, the first feminist bookstore, *Womanstore Bookstore*, opened in Gainesville in 1974. The store closed later that year. In 1975, Amelia's, another feminist bookstore opened in Gainesville. It closed in 1982. While the site of *Wild Iris* is not linearly tied to these histories, they are important for my analysis. After a decade of no feminist bookstores, lesbian couple Susan Keep and Kerry Goodwin opened *Wild Iris*. In 1996, ownership shifted to another lesbian couple, Dotty Faibisy and Bev White. During these first years, the bookstore was quite successful while enjoying a large space, good business, and a lucrative relationship with the University of Florida for book orders for courses offered by feminist faculty. After Faibisy and White split up, Faibisy ran the store for a few years by herself. Once she was ready to retire from the bookstore, Faibisy sold the bookstore to current owner Cheryl Calhoun and her lesbian partner. On trend with the legacy of the lesbian owned feminist bookstore, Calhoun and her partner split up in 2004. After the couple split up, Calhoun's partner left town, the bookstore, and the feminist community. In order to have a functioning business to continue fostering the feminist community, Calhoun hired a new business partner, Olivia. In addition to the already dramatic break up, Olivia unknowingly created a large amount of controversy because she identified as a Black heterosexual. This dramatic turn of events drove a wedge in much of the feminist community in Gainesville, therefore, making data collection complicated.



**Figure 4.** *Wild Iris* at original location on University Ave in Gainesville, Florida in 2010.

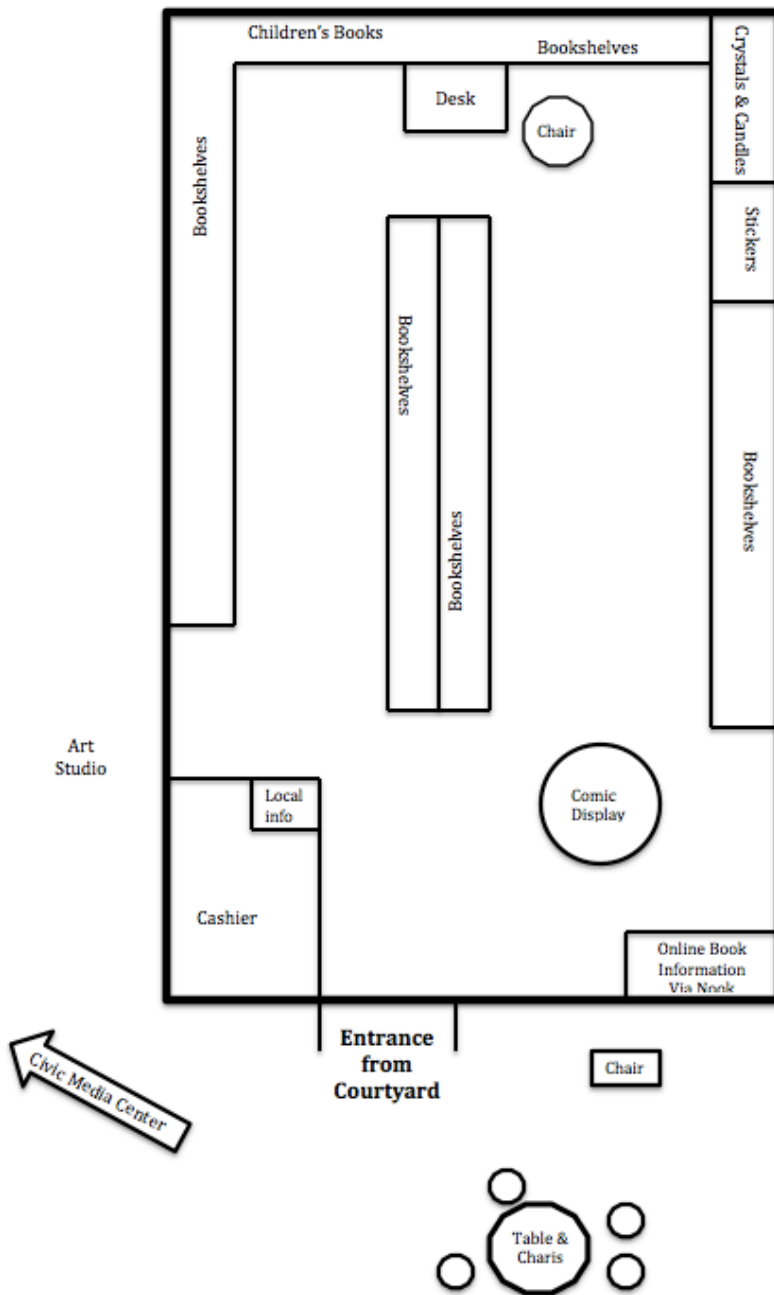


**Figure 5.** *Wild Iris* at current location off Main St in Gainesville, Florida in 2016.

In 2011, *Wild Iris* store moved from a location walking distance from the University of Florida to a much smaller space further away from the university. This move physically and ideologically removed *Wild Iris* from the university culture because the owners wanted to be “focused on social justice and activism” in Gainesville and not just at the University. One of the

owners argues that because the store is removed physically and ideologically from the University of Florida, they are allowed space for a larger counterculture outside of academic ivory towers. The tie to the university, as described by a number of volunteers at *Wild Iris*, is non-existent, if not hostile. Due to financial hardships, the bookstore currently is only open two days a week, Friday (one to five) and Saturday (noon to six). Since the bookstore is only open ten hours a week, current owners and a rotation of two volunteers are the only staff. *Wild Iris* holds events a few times a month. During the school year, they offer more events on a monthly basis, such as Trans Affairs and Feminist Vent. The one event they do monthly year round is Free Store, which focuses on clothing homeless and impoverished people.

Similar to many university towns, Gainesville has an energetic activist community. As you can see in Figure 6., the small space of *Wild Iris* is taken up by bookshelves with very little room for sitting or hanging out. This is a great reduction in space from the prior location on University Avenue, which for a time had a small coffee and baked goods shop within in it and was used as a small meeting space for feminist groups. *Wild Iris* is about a third of the size of *Charis*. Thankfully, the bookstore is housed in a small building that shares a courtyard with the Civic Media Center, an anarcho infoshop and library, the Citizens Co-op Grocer, and two different art studios. *Wild Iris* has an agreement with the building that the events either take place in the Civic Media Center when it is warm outside or the courtyard over winter. The radical block of businesses the bookstore inhabits within Gainesville is important, as it allows for a greater variety of activist goals.



**Figure 6.** *Wild Iris* layout at Main St location Ave in 2016.

## **Ethics and Biases**

There are a number of ethical quandaries for my research. Perhaps the largest are my own biases. I clearly had high hopes for *Charis*. For over ten years, *Charis* has felt more like a personal dream realized than an actual physical place. Having grown up 45 minutes away from the store, it was a mecca of my youth. I have currently and have had many friends who work and volunteer for them—and therefore I had expectations about what *Charis* would be like. Particularly, I hoped they would be attentive to communities of color, queer/trans\* communities, and critical of its own beginnings as rooted in second wave feminism. While some of these expectations were inklings based on preliminary empirical findings, many were my own hopes for the store.

And while I am not as personally tied to *Wild Iris Books*, I did expect similar levels of feminist reflexivity in their practices. In fact, because of their tie to University of Florida, I expected even more academically inclined dialogues. My expectations were not necessarily founded. Many people I met who were not at the university were quite articulate in their disgust with UF culture and politics. Since I was at the juncture of academic, punk, queer, and feminist identities, I was able to transcend those categories. I was surprisingly enjoyed my time in Gainesville by connecting with lesbian, academic, punk, and feminist communities.

I also would have loved both bookstores to put feminism in a positive light— especially academic feminisms. That would combat the growing literature on post feminism, which posits that feminism is no longer "cool" for young women because we have reached gender equity. As discussed by Fields (2013), I also kept in mind moral ambiguities within fieldwork. The most pressing them because of my whiteness and the topic of feminism in the South was the relevance of race. During analysis and data collection, I consistently reflected on my being white,

researching people of color, and racial difference in the field (Fields 2016). It also would reify my own biases that feminism is still relevant as a way to understand intersectionality and race. Again, this was not always the case; I explore that in later chapters.

Fortunately (or so you would think), I am a feminist and look the part (think: nose ring, tattoos, comfortable clothing). Because of my presentation, I foresaw the bookstore and feminist communities being open and welcoming of my research. That was not at all the case. Moving beyond rapport, I incorporated “queer reflexivity... which draws attention to the erotics of knowledge production” (Rooke 2010: 35). I also expected many of the people that work, participate, and own these stores to be queer or lesbian identified, so I expected my own queer/lesbian sexual identity would help put participants at ease. And while I thought I would be considered a cultural insider because of my own identity that was not the case. Gaining entry and rapport to both communities was trying. I spent the first four out of eight months in Atlanta gaining entry, cultivating trust, and growing friendships. The whole four months spent in Gainesville was focused on this goal as well—with little to no headway. These intricacies became a part of my data as well as a part of the analysis.

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **TROUBLING HOME AND IDEALIZED IDENTITIES: THE SOCIAL MOVEMENT GOAL OF PHYSICAL SPACE**

...its like home is not like paradise. Home is a place of joy, a place of sorrow, a place of all these different things. Emotions. Ups and downs. - Violet, a younger woman of color, *Charis Books and More*

In our increasingly digitalized society, physical community space is declining. At the height of the feminist bookstore movement in 1991, there were over 140 bookstores in North America (Hogan 2016). There are now thirteen. As suggested by my participants, the decline in physical space could be traced to the rise in the popularity of online booksellers (such as Amazon), the dissemination of feminism into other community spaces, and the lessened cultural emphasis on reading physical books as well as potentially unrelated factors like increasing income stratification and rising cost of real estate making feminist brick and mortar businesses harder to sustain. Those issues, however, are not what I am concerned with in this chapter. For those in my study, what was important was the continuation of a community space itself. For decades, social movement scholars point to feminist bookstores as important organizing spaces (Taylor and Rupp 1993; Reger 1994; Whittier 1997; Staggenborg 1998; Haenfler 2004). None of these scholars, however, have completed ethnography of feminist bookstores. The only large studies that have been concluded are from English scholars and Historians focusing on literacy movements—and none engaging the social movement literature (Hogan 2016). For this dissertation, there are many different places to start<sup>4</sup>. My current focus, and the most pressing within the current political climate, however, is how the bookstores have succeeded for over

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<sup>4</sup> In a related project, I am using Armstrong and Cragge's (2006) argument about mythmaking within social movements and using this data to critique Taylor's (1989) argument on abeyance structures.

forty years. New Social Movement (NSM) theories focus on identity as a social movement goal—for better or for worse (Melucci 1985; Bernstein 1997; Gamson 1997; Haenfler 2004; Cherry 2015; Lauby 2016) and feminist movements, in particular, have been a critical part of this line of theorization (Reger 2001, 2002). Physical space, similarly, has been a goal for many organizations (Whittier 1997). SM scholars have noted these spaces have been described as “safe” or as inclusive havens (Coyle 2004; Bairstow 2007). Bookstore participants argued the goal is to hold a space of welcoming contention, where strife and disagreement are embraced. That brings me to consider: How did participants collectively understand the goal of the bookstores? How does feminism fit into this goal? What did the participants see as unique about the term “home” in reference to the bookstores? Since definitions of feminism are contentious and therefore makes collective identity difficult to maintain, I argue the challenges concerning feminist bookstores are thought of as “home,” which is addressed through insular meaning-making and boundaries regarding feminist ideals, needs, goals, and identities through the term “home work.”

I first start with a review of relevant literature concerning place and home. I then explore the ways “home” is defined by participants as a place of safety, connection, and contention. Drawing from those conceptions, I argue the concept of home concepts aids in constructing and sustaining feminist collective identities.

### **Defining “Home”**

After spending months in the field talking to people about the bookstores, I had to confront my own past assumptions and youthfully naïve joy about the stores themselves. The first time I went to *Charis* in Atlanta, I was fourteen. I wandered over to the bookstore after buying myself a vinyl purse that had “Fuck You” written across the front. In an attempt to find

ease in my identity as an angry “hardened” feminist punk, I was both comforted and confused by the bookstore space. It smelled like patchouli and was mostly filled with older white women in flowing skirts. It was intimidating and not what I had expected after a few years of dedicating my ears to riot grrrl punk bands such as Bikini Kill and L7. As a (not yet out) young, white girl from the suburbs, I assumed I would have had a very different experience at the bookstores from my participants. Instead, through the lens of their own biographies and positionalities, participants discovered an uneasy comfort within the bookstore communities.

Following Gieryn’s assertion that place is understood as having three features: “geographic location... material form... and investment with meaning and value” (2000:464-465), the bookstores certainly qualify as places. I asked my participants what the goals of the bookstores were, and across the board, it was to hold the space—and to have a home of sorts. Although I ask my participants to define “home,” there is a rich literature concerning this definition. In addition to Gieryn’s guidelines for defining a place, Easthope believes “home is also understood as an open place, maintained and developed through the social relations that stretch beyond it” (2004:136). Yet based on participant’s understandings of home, emotions and feelings are central. Mallett argues the home “...can be associated with feelings of comfort, ease intimacy, relaxation and security and/or oppression, tyranny and persecution” (2004: 84). These feelings are vital when considering people who may have marginalized identities from their “given” families. Weston (1991) notes that gay and lesbians are forming their own friendship and family networks because of potential hostility, unease with their given families. The need to belong is the missing piece in these definitions. As suggested by Kusenbach and Paulson (2013), belonging is a major part of defining the home. These definitions taken together, home is a

geographic location, material, created and sustained through the social, strong emotional connotations, either a “given” or chosen group of people, and a place of belonging.

Eloise, one of my older white participants, described growing up in a conservative household in the 1950s, her marriage to a man, and her eventual departure from her sheltered young adulthood to her current iteration as an anti-racist lesbian activist. As we were sitting around her kitchen table joking about retirement, lesbian drama, and our mutual obsession with cats, she explains her first time in *Charis*. She says, “I remember being a little uneasy, I did not know what a lesbian was until I was in my thirties.” We both laugh as she goes onto explain how the store aided in her later identification as a lesbian and conceptualization of lesbian feminism. Eloise, who is now retired and excited about the amount of time she can give to activist organizations, warmly remembers the importance of *Charis*, and the lesbian community as a whole, to her own identity.

Eloise’s coming out story was a very common one discussed by bookstore participants in interviews and archives. Dr. Jamie Perch, whose thank you note to *Charis* in the early 2000s, was found in the archives. In it, she recalls, “I have been out for twenty years. When I came out as an eighteen year old in Atlanta, *Charis* was a welcoming sheltering home.” Included in the note, Dr. Perch offered a donation to *Charis* in order for them to maintain the space for others to experience the same experiences she did twenty years ago. This was a very common narrative within the bookstore communities throughout interviews but also in their fundraising activities. Because the histories of both feminist bookstores being lesbian owned, sexuality is a central part of these communities. Not only was it a place for lesbians—but a place for people with marginalized identities to gather, decompress, or just to get away from the stress of their lives.

People who identified as outside of hegemonic masculinity, such as those who identified

as non-cisgender, feminine, or femme identifying, found a home space within these bookstores. Elijah is a younger queer transman of color who works as an activist focusing on health outreach, has additionally worked at *Charis* for over five years. He described his recent feelings about being a queer person in the space, “I could kinda hang out, it was home....No one judged me ya know, no one asked a lot of random questions.” The “random questions” Elijah is referencing specifically concern his gender presentation, as he does not present within a clear and traditional conceptions of hegemonic masculinity. Elijah attributes the warmth of home to *Charis* because of his negative experiences as a queer person in other places outside of *Charis* in Atlanta.

The feelings of hospitality and desire were echoed across gender and race. Rose is a middle-aged lesbian of color who has been active in the *Charis* community since the mid-1990s and a past member of the *Charis Circle*. She described the experience of finding *Charis* as “someplace that I had been longing to be... And just really learn and immerse myself... and so it just felt like I was home.” While articulating her idea of “home” as *Charis*, she mentioned it was somewhere she “had been longing to be,” even though it was something she did not know she was missing or even that it existed. After becoming comfortable with the idea of learning from and becoming comfortable with folks in the space, she relaxed into the space as if it were her idea of home.

While not everyone used *Charis* out of need, some saw it as an alternative space outside of their daily lives. Jennifer is a middle-aged straight white woman, a past employee of the *Charis* non-profit, a past active board member of *Charis Circle*, and a past volunteer for *Charis* events. Although she has not be an active part of the *Charis* community for over a decade, she was excited to reminisce about finding a haven in *Charis* while she worked at a non-profit focused on masculinity. During our interview she described her unease as a feminine woman at

the non-profit. In a male-dominated space that catered directly to the needs of men and masculine folks where she worked, she felt constantly on edge and under attack.

*Charis* became then, for me, a real retreat. And just at sometimes I just would leave the office and go over to *Charis* just to- ya know...its just that kind of feeling of “oh, good, I don’t have to have as many walls up. And I feel, ya know I feel more at home here” and so ya know, that was the next kinda thing that *Charis* evolved to for me. And then when I worked there it was um, it was home.

*Charis* provided a space for Jennifer outside of her career and home life to feel comfortable and welcomed. She felt a need during this time in her life to find a place to feel important and like her positionality and emotions were a vital part of how she related to others. Her story, while it directly concerns a harrowing workplace experience, illustrates the everyday complexities and significance of having a place to feel at ease.

While most participants spoke about their own experiences, some also discussed meeting other people over the years that came into the bookstores in order to share the impact of the bookstores in their lives. Violet is a younger cisgender lesbian/bisexual/queer Black woman who has been active in the Atlanta lesbian and feminist communities for two decades. She has worked at *Charis* as a bookseller on and off for the past ten years. She shared quite a number of stories about people who visited over the years who wanted to share their experiences at the bookstore. She said, “people can come [back] and they have been in college—in high school—and its still here. For them it’s so much warmth...this has been here since I knew—or was coming out—or whatever. So I know it has a place for people...kind of home like and warm in a way.” Violet describes both first and second hand how people have experienced *Charis* in a variety of ways that change as they grow older and as the space alters over time.

This kind of nostalgia aids to both reaffirm and reconfigure how people need these spaces. Alex is a younger, butch/transmasculine, white, queer person who has been involved

with *Charis* for the past twenty years and currently works at *Charis*. Because of our similar life trajectories and overlapping friends groups in Atlanta, we became quite close during my time spent at the bookstore. One afternoon we were talking about how *Charis* was an atypical space within Atlanta that supported teenagers and young adults to engage in self-exploration. Alex presented an analysis of their own experiential nostalgia in combination with visitors share their experiences of homemaking.

For me...when I talk about *Charis* for other people, I talk about the importance of third spaces and community...places that are neither home nor church nor school nor work that are community gathering spaces that allow you to explore and expand on parts of your identity that are not as codified as those other primary spaces. And I think that *Charis* very much functioned as that for me particularly when I was a teenager, it was a place to try on and flesh out my ideas.

Alex articulates and summarizes their own understanding of how folks during the past twenty years have described the bookstore as gathering, welcoming spaces. *Charis* became a place to solidify identity while, similar to what Elijah mentioned, being a space to explore without judgment. These spaces, as I illustrated, offer an uneasy space to work out differences, ideas, and identities, which were also identified as an extension of “home” through community building, networking, and feeling comfortable.

### **Connection And Safety**

As described above, feelings of home and belonging are important to maintain the bookstores as physical spaces and hubs of movement activities. During my interviews, I asked participants what they thought the purpose of the bookstore is—and almost all participants offered same answer: connection and safety. While *Wild Iris* currently focuses on expanding the boundaries of a “feminist” or “women’s” space, many folks affiliated with *Charis* focused on reminiscing about the past importance and power of women-dominated space. Jennifer, a middle-aged straight white woman, a past employee of *Charis Circle*, a past active board

member of *Charis Circle*, and a past volunteer for *Charis* events, talks about these spaces as community but also as a place of growth and connection.

I think that it has been and has really still is a safe physical space and a gathering space for women who feel they need that. Women who don't [think they need the bookstore]—whether they're aware that they need it or not, but particularly for people who and not necessarily women who you know don't find all of the spaces in the world very safe. So you know safe space, convening space, a way to meet other people, gather and have conversations and learn from and other people and provide support and get support...

Jennifer, speaking from her own experience, notes that many women do not feel safe or comfortable in their everyday lives. She even states that not all women acknowledge that they “need” the stores even though they may not feel the same level of safety in the rest of the world. Yet, she believes *Charis* functions as a physical and emotional place for support. One of Jennifer's main concerns is clearly that the space is a place for safety concerning women and women's issues.

Even though Jennifer may believe not all women would know they need safety, Rose, an older lesbian of color also has been involved with in *Charis* in the past, counters by noting that it is a space for *all* to learn and grow. She states, the store serves as a “connection point, if you will. I think it's a space for people across the spectrum to...increase their knowledge and awareness and not just about feminism but about life, about people, about cultures, about genders, about race...” Contrary to Jennifer's focus on gender and womanhood, Rose makes larger societal and intersectional connections about the importance of the bookstore to cultivate connections. Rose argues *Charis* is a place to learn different everyday experiences and knowledges. Participants were especially proud that the organizers of the bookstores were able to foster open and honest conversations about difference, race, gender, sexualities, ability and much more, which were occurred out of necessity or even just curiosity.

The idea of intimate sharing and connection was cultivated in *Charis* and *Wild Iris* through support groups. Both bookstores hosted support groups concerning mental health, racism, sexuality, sexual abuse, and transgender issues. The transgender support groups in both bookstores drew some of the largest crowds. Trans and Friends at *Charis* is hosted by Albert, an older, white, queer transman, activist, and educator who has been active in the Atlanta feminist and queer communities for over two decades. Since Albert's background is in middle and high school education, Trans and Friends focuses on transgender youth, transgender young adults, family of transgender folks, friends of transgender folks, and partners of transgender folks. This program has been a staple of *Charis* for the past decade.

The transgender support group at *Wild Iris* has had a more difficult time maintaining participation. The current organizer of the program, Adrian, is a white, queer, trans\* student at University of Florida. Support for the program comes in waves in correlation with university semesters and graduation. Adrian worked for over three months to gain support for the "re-boot" of Trans Affairs at *Wild Iris*. I attended the "re-boot" of the Trans Affairs program at *Wild Iris*, below are my field notes.

It was a quiet and chilly night in Gainesville, Florida. I met up with Olivia at *Wild Iris* to catch up before the night's program: Trans Affairs. The program, as she described it, had been popular in previous years but had lapsed in leadership due to folks graduating and moving away from the University of Florida. The event purposefully starts after the store is closed in order to meet most people's schedules and to offer the most amount of confidentiality. We also made sure there were not signs outside designating a trans support group, put the blinds down, and locked the doors once the program began. I helped Olivia arrange the chairs into a circle while people began to shuffle into the cramped store space. Once most people filed in, we locked the doors and got started on the night's discussion about reinvigorating the program. We started the conversation by going around introducing our preferred names, pronouns, and what brought us to *Wild Iris* that night. Most people, myself included, were visibly nervous while they toyed with clothes, pens, or their hair. Out of the fifteen people who attended, most were college students from the University of Florida and a few were community members interested in understanding the needs of the trans community in Gainesville. When going around the circle to voice opinions on needs, fears of violence, and stories of discrimination,

multiple people identified *Wild Iris* as the meeting space for queer and trans activism in Gainesville. A number of people then directly addressed organizations, such as Gainesville NOW, who according to them, had been combative to the idea of housing a trans organization. By the end of the meeting (and after a few kale and quinoa potluck jokes), everyone was in agreement that the main reason the organization was needed was to create the atmosphere we experienced that night on a regular and as needed basis. More than that, everyone agreed they needed to create and maintain a space for connection that focuses on physical and emotional safety.

While it was clear at the beginning of the meeting most people did not know each other, by the end of our discussion people were becoming friends through social media, exchanging numbers, and offering advice on local trans-friendly doctors. The tense atmosphere at beginning of the meeting, however, is important to interrogate. Contributors to the discussion nervously shared horrific stories about harassment at the university and Gainesville as a whole. Adrian detailed an impassioned need for a space to organize that was supportive of and welcoming to transgender folks while maintaining feminist principles. Being able to hold this space itself was very important for participants' safety, mental health, and emotional support.

The feeling of physical safety, as described by participants at *Wild Iris*, is important in maintaining an inclusive space. Safety is vital for these organizations, not just in terms of support groups or connecting with one another, but to just exist safely. Elijah, a younger transman of color, discusses how people can visit *Charis* "as a date" and how he doesn't have to "buy shit, I can just hang out with my partner cause its safe in here." Because of constant fears of discrimination, harassment, or violence, queer and trans people's concern about safety is a critical to the bookstores' inclusive missions. However, scholars have noted that many in the trans and queer communities have found the Internet to be a productive and safe place to connect with other folks who are similar to themselves (Gray 2009). And while many of the folks at the event did connect online, they did so in an attempt to maintain the in person connections and friendships.

According to Sky, a middle-aged, African American lesbian who has volunteered with *Charis* over the past two decades, technology offers as some connection but not one that undermines physical connection. She argues “connecting to people in the way it [*Charis*] does continues to be important. And can’t really be done any other way. You know, it might be able to be enhanced by technology but it can’t be substituted with technology.” While Sky does admit the influence of technology and connection, and in particular within marginalized communities, she believes the bookstore offers a connection that is unlike any online. Connection and safety are clearly linked while emphasizing what Elijah, a younger Black queer transman, describes as a “consistency” that maintains those feelings and conceptions of the bookstores. As I will explore in chapter five, “consistency” does not always mean the bookstores are without dispute and actually many times it means in fighting. Yet, as described by my participants, contentious discourses allow for space where people can question feminism, racism, homophobia, and gender fluidity.

### **Contention**

Social movement scholars have previously discussed the importance of safe spaces for SMOs (Taylor and Whittier 1992; Coyle 2004; Bairstow 2007). While they discussed the spaces as home, they were careful to articulate that does not always necessitate comfort. As experienced by my participants, “home” is where you do the messy work, the work you do not want publicly discussed. Many people addressed moments of disgust or anger with the bookstores, yet they still saw that emotionality as productive. Violet, younger, cisgender, lesbian/bisexual/queer Black woman and a longtime employee of the bookstore says, “...so *Charis*, yeah, is a second home to me. Even when I’m like, *Charis* should do this, *Charis* should do that, I can’t believe [them]... It’s almost like; its like home is not like paradise. Home is a place of joy, a place of sorrow, a

place of all these different things. Emotions. Ups and downs.” Even though home and belonging have positive connotations, as mentioned by Violet, that does not limit the kind of discussions had in those spaces. If anything, Violet notes the feeling of “home” allows more leeway to question the organizational decisions, representations, and identities, be it critique or praise. “Home,” according to Violet creates a space to question, critique, and even argue.

Those contentious moments, as Violet mentions, can be based out of different places: “joy...sorrow...ups and downs.” Contentious moments are not relegated to certain power dynamics, such as between upper management and volunteers or between a worker and intern. I discussed contentious moments with Olivia, a middle-aged, cisgender, Black heterosexual woman who is currently in management at *Wild Iris*. After describing a few moments of outward hostility toward individual program organizers, Olivia proceeds to describe how the contentious generational discussions about the incorporation of transgender people and issues have altered since she initially joined the bookstore over six years ago.

I think it’s been...subtle...and it’s manifested in people staying away from different events or people not coming out to support the physical space as much. Um, and some pretty choice things have been said to me in this space that are really TERF-y and really like, “they’re always going to have a dick” and so it’s real, it’s a real thing. *That* is a real thing.

Olivia has mitigated some uncomfortable circumstances with women she terms “older white feminists,” who have a legacy of dominating the feminist movement in the Gainesville area. While she details discussions she has had with the community, folks at bookstore events, and with people concerning the bookstore inventory, she does not back away from addressing the divisive and angry conversations about regulating bodies, and therefore definitions of womanhood.

During her time in Gainesville, Olivia has felt as if she has had to remain on the defensive concerning issues of race because of her Blackness, sexuality because of her heterosexuality, and gender variance because of her support for the trans community. When we discussed her initially joining *Wild Iris*, she laughed while describing coming out as a heterosexual. She said many of the, "...second wave lesbian[s] would be shocked and repeat to Olivia, "'oh you're married to a man?'" She explained that there was always initially "*that* conversation, [because] he's like a big man, he's like manly man." Although she laughed while explaining this continuous uncomfortable conversation, she did admit later that "*that* conversation" where she came out as heterosexual hurt her legitimacy at the bookstore, as the older lesbians at *Wild Iris* were not happy to have a heterosexual woman in management at a historically lesbian feminist space.

Even though she has directly dealt with the pushback, she believes in the further development of *Wild Iris* as an inclusive space. She believes intersectionality is one of "the main places it's [feminism] evolved. And we've lost some of those older people but...I don't know, I think it's necessary. I stand behind it 100% like – the sign [in the window]—'my feminism will be intersectional or it will be bullshit.'" The narrative of progress Olivia points to here is in line with most of the current academic literature on feminism, where scholars have attempted to write and sometimes rewrite feminism as being historically and currently inclusive of gender and racial oppressions (Bailey 1997; Baumgardner and Richards 2004; Rushing 2017). However, what she is noting is that kind of representation and recognition is fairly new, and according to her, did not begin until she took over management—and as mentioned, came with losing some of their customer base.

The contentious moments at *Wild Iris* have not always been systematically addressed while contentious issues at *Charis* over the years have been directly and collectively addressed. While I will directly discuss more about these issues in chapter five, similar to *Wild Iris*, *Charis* has also experienced disputes over trans inclusion. In the early 2000's, *Charis* began including literature on and about transgender people. During this time, the *Charis* Circle Board of Directors were unsure about the move in focus from women to including gender variant folks. Ultimately, after many arguments, votes, and discussions, the bookstore was able to include a transgender section and even began hiring transgender employees. Elijah, a younger queer transman of color who currently works at *Charis*, discussed the importance of this collectivity in defining for whom the bookstore ultimately exists.

...when you talk about movements or why that movement makes sense or doesn't make sense, all that shit comes back to how we divide each other or amongst each other. So it's connected and I think because it's connected and *Charis* has been honest about that...And I think not shying away from that is smart.

Elijah argues the idea of not shying away from feminism's many contradictions, nuances, and shifts over time, allows *Charis* and movements in general a space to address the messy and complicated ways collective identity has been utilized and maintained. Both *Wild Iris* and *Charis* have rich histories of being lesbian-owned and operated, the turns in academic literature toward queer and postmodern theories, the increasing number of people identifying outside the binary of gender and sex, and the increased public awareness about transgender issues have forced the management and boards at the bookstores to reassess their focus from their historical focus on women to a more nuanced understanding of gender and intersectional feminism. While I address the messiness of feminist (and in particular white feminist) theories in chapters four and five, it is vital to note how and why these tensions are addressed and resolved at "home" and through safety.

## **Feminist Collective Identities As “Home Work”**

For feminist social movements, emotions such as pride and passion are major engines of the movement. Much of the research on feminist social movement organizations indicates solidarity occurs through these highly emotive organizational practices (Taylor and Whittier 1992; Whittier 1995, 1997; Polletta, Jasper, and Goodwin 1999; Reger 2001, 2002, 2004; Dugan and Reger 2006). As I have detailed, a major part of Feminist Bookstore social movement organization’s collective identity is the work of creating “home”, connection, and safety. And based on literature on the home, it is understood as a geographic location, material, created and sustained through the social, strong emotional connotations, either a “given” or chosen group of people, and a place of belonging (Gieryn 2000; Easthope 2004; Mallett 2004; Kusenbach and Paulson 2013). Participants found these ways of related and creating community as vital to their inclusion and belonging in the bookstores. Moreover, this emphasizes the ways collectivity of movement identities are curating feelings of closeness within the communities.

In 1989 Hochschild published her prolific monograph, *The Second Shift*, where she describes the feminized burden of housework in addition to the newly solidified female workforce. While Hochschild’s focus was on household labor, it has been famously extended to include globalization (Hochschild 2000; Ehrenreich and Hochschild 2003) and emotional labor and management (Hochschild 2003; Kusenbach and Loseke 2013). Her argument provides a unique entryway to explore the implications of “home” making in feminist bookstores—and in particular the addition of “home work” in SMOs. The goal of the feminist bookstores is to maintain the idea of home as the space in which social movement actors define collective identity, negotiate boundaries, and therefore, engage in “home work” itself. I term “home work” to notate the intimate, emotional, and insular work of social movement meaning making.

Following Hochschild, the work of the home is the responsibility of the woman as the caretaker and reproducer of the family, therefore the “home work” in feminist bookstores incorporate ideas of family and home while maintaining the functionality of a SMO.

Contrary to Gamson, who takes up the famous case of the Michigan Womyn’s festival’s policy excluding transsexuals from the woman’s- only music festival arguing “the importance of the symbolic aspect of *symbolic* boundaries” (1997:192, emphasis in original), “home work” at feminist bookstores allows for open discussions within the movement home space to foster insular meaning making. Researchers typically do not have access to in fighting over boundaries and collective identities, which makes this data unique. Participants argued that while home is certainly not always comfortable, it is still home. It is still where you can relax, problem solve, and discover yourself.

“Home work” combines the concept of family, work, labor, and emotion with creation, maintenance, and enforcement of collective identity boundaries. “Home work” reinforces how and where the feminist bookstores labor of boundary making and collective identity occurs and the focal outcome. The space of the bookstores created a space and atmosphere for serious problem solving because of the very definitions of home described by participants throughout this chapter.

### **“Home” For the Future of Social Movements**

Growing up, I was taught public argument and debate is inappropriate—especially if it surrounds a familial argument. The idiom of “not airing your dirty laundry,” echoes the idea of “home work” for feminist bookstores; they may not always agree, get along, or even be nice to each other, but the insular meaning making done through “home work” allows for these bookstores to create and maintain a unified message. As Grace, a middle-aged lesbian of color

who has worked at *Charis* for the past decade, describes, we can surmise the importance of these family and home connections.

[We are]...very family oriented. And sometimes, with families, they're dysfunctional and sometimes they're really functional but no matter what they're family and you can always depend on them to be there. And so I think that is how we operate at times and it's hard. Because in most businesses you have that aspect of being family but its also not as intense and as, you know, in all aspects of your world.

Grace describes the intensity of the family connotations of *Charis* as if the metaphorical family is an actual family. And, as she admits, the idea of a business being run like a family is not typical. Moreover, she acknowledges that families many times are dysfunctional. This is something I experienced at both bookstores. There were intense and intimate fights between friends, employees, and lovers where the bookstores united as if they were a family in order to solve the problem. The “family” concept described by Grace echo’s Mallett’s idea bout home being “...associated with feelings of comfort, ease intimacy, relaxation and security and/or oppression, tyranny and persecution” (2004: 84). And that while the family Grace discussed is not a biological one, it is a chosen one (Weston 1991). The concept of “home” includes the ability to be dysfunctional, to problem solve, to feel sorrow, and to grow—and under all of that is the integral sense of belonging (Kusenbach and Paulson 2013).

During my time in the field, I experienced the same feelings, emotions, and dysfunction. It was tumultuous. I went through a major breakup, my mother was diagnosed with and survived breast cancer, my parents divorced, I survived a sexual assault by a partner, and was temporarily disowned by my father. Yes, all in one year. Being in the field is already stressful and isolating. However, working these places—I was not alone. The owners, workers, and patrons of the bookstores became my support system. They became my home. Part of their goal as a SMO was to hold a comfortably contentious space, where I could go to do “home work,” to cry, to talk

things out, to write, and to laugh. The familiar Southern drawls, occasional Johnny Cash over the speakers, comfort food, and hospitable environments became part of my everyday experiences at the bookstores. The availability of the places was vital to my own happiness but also to current and past participants.

Although it is clear many of my participants were not excited by the idea of arguments or contentious discussions, they agreed that it was necessary in order to present a unified understanding of the bookstores. Perhaps one of the most important exemplars of this comes from my own methodological hiccup: I was not allowed to attend the *Charis* Circle board meetings. I naïvely believed that a feminist organization who allowed me unfettered access to the in-house (not curated) archives and prided itself on open discussions and transparency would be fine with a researcher attending their meetings. I was wrong. The board held a vote about my attendance and decided I could attend one meeting with a generous advance. They made this decision a month before I left for my next field site, *Wild Iris* in Gainesville. While waiting patiently for a few months to hear if I would be allowed to attend the meetings, I casually asked around regarding my presence in the meetings and why, if at all, it would make the board uncomfortable. Quite a few people told me that the board did not want to “misrepresent” themselves to a researcher. Instead, I was offered edited minutes from the meetings. Similar to what my participants discussed, the board was engaging in “home work” and I was clearly outside of the boundaries of that “home.” This instance, among others demonstrates the importance of feminist bookstores to address insular meaning making and boundaries regarding feminist ideals, needs, goals, and identities in a “safe” way, without the potential of outsiders being present.

The concept of home is not the only concept allowing for feminist bookstores to grow and change. In the next chapter, I focus on the South as further allowing space for home and “home work” while pushing the very boundaries of these concepts. The concept of hospitality surround mythologies of the South. And similar to the description above, the South provides definitions for the movements and therefore, I illustrate allows them to advance feminist politics.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### AN ANCHOR IN THE SOUTH: SURVIVING THE TERRAIN

“The South is one big drag show, honey.” – The Lady Chablis (Berendt 1994:102)

“The South blossoms with every kind of complication and contradiction.” – Flannery O’Connor (1987: 40)

“It was always so hot, and everyone was all surface but underneath it was like a bomb waiting to go off. I always felt that way about the South, that beneath the smiles and Southern hospitality and politeness were a lot of guns and liquor and secrets.” – James McBride (2006:111)

Scholars, queers, literary prodigies, and everyday folks have spent a good bit of time articulating definitions of the South. Minnie Bruce Pratt, longtime patron and friend of *Charis* stated in regards to the bookstore, “there’s the feeling that there’s always someplace to come back to, an anchor, whenever I was in the South.” My participants offered similarly disparate but thick descriptions in order to make sense of the bookstores in South and with Southern identity. According to my participants, the reason the store is open is because of Southern identity. Something generally neglected by studies on feminist bookstores (Hogan 2016), but prevalent in studies about social movement organizations is the complication of geographical place (Reger 2002; Reger and Staggenborg 2006). I explore this through oral histories, interviews, archives, and ethnography of both bookstores in Atlanta and Gainesville. I answer the following question: how has the culture of the South organizations influenced the collective identity of the feminist bookstores? The cultural understanding and histories of the South as a regional identity alter the way the participants, patrons, and employees of the bookstores conceptualize, present, and understand the collective identity of the feminist bookstores. Even while the mythology of Southern identity has historically been positioned as counterproductive for progressive

movements (Howard, Hogan 2017), I argue these bookstores find support within Southern identities, cultures, and histories to advance progressive politics.

I start by reviewing relevant literature on the South as a place, identity, culture, and region. I then move to relying on my participant's experiential knowledge and conceptions to understand the South. The three main themes present in their articulations are a culture of hospitality and interpersonal warmth, political conservatism, and a culture and history of racism. This chapter focuses on complex relationship between the first two themes: the positivity of culture of hospitality and interpersonal warmth and the negative aspects of political conservatism. I end with a discussion of re-articulations of the South through my data.

### **Defining the South**

Scholars have long argued about the definition of the South (Cash [1941]1991; Reed 1993; Smith 1995; Howard 1999; Powers, Sutor, Guerra, Shackelford, Mecom, and Gusman 2003; Lloyd 2011; Robinson 2014). Unfortunately, there is no consensus. Instead, scholars have created a list of defining features: late rates of urbanization in contrast with the rest of the U.S. (Lloyd 2011), the vital role in the Civil Rights Movement (Smith 1995; Lloyd 2011; Robinson 2014; Rushing 2017), the stereotype of the South as “backwards” or “anti-progression” (Sears 1991; Howard 1997; Gray 2009; Hubbs 2014; Robinson 2014), and the tendency to be more politically conservative than the rest of the U.S. (Cash [1941]1991; Reed 1993; Howard 1999; Lloyd 2011). It is not just scholars who argue the South is “different,” Southerners themselves also argue their difference (Smith 1995; Chesnut and Gabe 1997; Powers, et al. 2003; Gaddis 2011; Robinson 2014; Rushing 2017).

That still, however, leaves us without a particular definition. Literatures on identity construction, regional identity, and Southern identity help to understand the way I define the

South. Identity construction has consistently been a central focus of sociological thought.

Drawing from a social constructionist framework, identity construction is contingent on the way we relationally, historically, and systemically narrate identities (Cerulo 1997). Discussions focusing on regional identity tend to brush off differences as constructed and idealized. While that is a valid critique, the constructions are no less “real” by how they are constructed by “...in different ways to political, governmental, economic and cultural practices and discourses” (Passi 481). Data, literature, and my participants argue the particulars of Southern lived experiences are described as different than other regions in the US (Smith 1995; Lloyd 2011; Robinson 2014; Rushing 2017).

Regional identity, like home in the previous chapter, is about place. According to Gieryn, place has three distinctive parts: “geographic location... material form... and investment with meaning and value” (2000:464-465). The geographical location of the South is highly contested. Following Rushing, “perceptions of the South as a problem-ridden place, an American ‘other,’ and a regional suspect have dominated social science research for decades” (2017: 294). The way we study and define the South varies over time, region, and epistemology. Rushing argues, however, that the academic study of the South has remained problematic. Robinson also highlights this issue by highlighting the South is “discursive...[and] integral to people’s everyday negotiations of identities...” (2014: 194). Thanks to Robinson and Rushing’s understandings of the South, which float between macro and micro, I can delineate my own definition—one that falls outside of state lines, blurs cultural references, and questions histories. While there is a rich amount of data on regional identities and the South, my participants, the South is not a place, culture, or idea: it is all of the above because it is—by definition—a moving

target. It changes between different contexts and histories but the way my participants experience the South as an idea has not changed.

There are a few defining features that are important for my study. First, while racial tensions are present throughout the U.S., because of the historical and societal past of slavery, race, and racism in the South, frictions are heightened (Smith 1995; Lloyd 2011; Robinson 2014). Second, queer sexualities have suffered negative consequences in the South because of current and historical conservative ideologies (Cooper 2012; Gaddis 2011; Johnson 2008; Wright 2003). Third, even though the South as a whole has not always been a hotbed of progressive activism, it certainly has fostered radical movements, such as AIDs Atlanta in the mid-1980s (Raimondo 1996), the influx of Jewish Progressives during the Civil Rights Movement (Schultz 2001), Pagoda by the Sea, a lesbian village that has existed since 1997 in St. Augustine, Florida (Shewolf 2013), an influx of Baha'i after the 1970's (McMullen 2015), and grassroots feminist activism in the late 1960s (Keane 2009).

Fourth, academic terminologies are extremely important. Scholars of the South use two main categories: the Old South as a “backwards” and “conservative” place and the New South as industrialized and open to progress (Cooper and Knotts 2010). Rushing condemns these binaries by noting that they are “old explanations for the Problem South, and continuities between the past and present to explain twenty-first century phenomena fails to advance knowledge and misdirects efforts for change” (2017: 295). Breaking down these outdated academic designations allow for further interrogation about lived experiences of Southerners. Combined, these four defining features aid as a starting place to understand how the culture and ideologies of the South impact collective identity for these feminist bookstores.

## **The Dirty South: Atlanta**

From sweet iced tea to rocking chairs to backhanded compliments, there is no doubt Atlanta qualifies as the South. Rose, a middle-aged lesbian of color who has been active in the Atlanta lesbian and feminist communities for two decades, laughed and nodded her head in agreement when I asked her if Atlanta is the South. She went on to explain how exactly she believed Atlanta is Southern.

As much as it pretends it is not, of course it is. No doubt. I mean, there's still enough people who maintain the city as their residence who is Southern. I mean the ideology is Southern, the philosophy is Southern, the politics are Southern you know. It's just a Southern identity as much as it pretends it isn't [but] it's very Southern...I mean I think *Charis* is a reflection of the ownership. They're Southern I mean, I think perhaps unconsciously. I mean they're not setting out to be but they're still Southern. I mean, just in terms of something as simple as the greeting when you walk in the door...I mean, just this feeling that people are talking to you, I think it's permeated throughout the bookstore...I mean the fact that you can come on in and make yourself a cup of tea, ya know, that's Southern. I mean, it's the hospitality. It's the presentation. It's, you know, a little tattered around the edges you know you just pull up a chair- a rocking chair- and rock... Heck yeah, it's Southern.

Although Rose laughs her way through her justification for how Atlanta is the South, she skillfully summarizes the tensions of and embarrassment experienced by people in Atlanta because of the racist past of Southern identity. She mentions that Atlantans may “pretend” to not be Southern even though she describes the ideology, politics, and philosophy as distinctly Southern. She also noted that while Atlanta is “the city,” the metropolis does not negate the Southern cultural identifiers. Rose also argues *Charis* is Southern because of its location and ownership. Even though she asserts the owners are from the South, only the initial owner who opened *Charis* was Southern. The current owners are Southern transplants. She also describes specific parts of the bookstore that she identifies as Southern. For instance, at the front of the bookstore, there is free hot water, honey, and teabags to make a cup of tea while browsing. Rose also mentions when entering the bookstore, you are greeted by a bookseller, owner, or volunteer.

Lastly, she notes how *Charis* is “tattered” around the edges, which sounds reminiscent of grandma’s house while holding a clear lower-class designation. Together, she identifies the customs of free tea, conversation, and the aesthetic of *Charis* as a part of their hospitality, and their Southern identity. The moments of Southern identification, even though Rose notes they are not always something Atlantans were proud of, are very clearly a major part of the bookstore.

Other participants echoed Rose’s experience of the bookstores as Southern and warm. Jennifer, a middle-aged, straight, white woman, describes leaving her job in the Northeast to come work in Atlanta. She says that “...driving to the south, its just that... feeling of ‘oh, good, I don’t have to have as many walls up.’” Jennifer, who again is white, has no qualms about the past potential embarrassment of the racially charged South as Rose blatantly states. Gainesville, similar Atlanta to is squarely situated within Southern mythologies, identities, and even stereotypes. The conceptions of the South discussed above create a contradictory and, at times, oxymoronic relationship between the progressive and Southern communities.

### **The South In Florida: Gainesville**

Throughout my research journey, I have had more conversations that I can remember about how, why, and if Gainesville is part of the South. Culturally, when we think about Florida, we expect a “crazy Florida man” news story where someone’s face has been devoured or maybe Disney or beaches. Either way, the cultural narrative of Florida does not tend to include stereotypes about the South. According to Whitfield, “a smaller slice of...[Florida] residents think of themselves as Southern than any state that seceded from the union” (105: 2006). My time in the field, conferences, and the past seven years living in Florida I experienced similar confusion from colleagues, friends, and family about defining parts of Florida as the South. In order to flesh this out, I read research, conducted oral histories, and examined large data sets.

After engaging in some exhaustive and even frustrating arguments, I decided to follow my data, which illustrated that Gainesville is understood and experienced as a Southern city.

Before moving to Gainesville for my research, I visited friends and the University of Florida a handful of times in order to get a feel of the town. After moving there, I quickly realized Gainesville was not at all what I expected. I moved into a small apartment inside a house within biking distance of the *Wild Iris*. I assumed it would be extremely difficult to make friends or even just meet people to talk to about the town. Unbeknownst to me, the house that I moved into was a punk house that housed parties, house shows, and traveling bands regularly. My neighbors were extremely hospitable, by introducing me to people, sharing their PBRs, and letting our cats hang out while I was out of town. Aside from knowing that a large number of pop punk bands from the early 2000s that got their start in Gainesville and that the town still hosts one of the largest pop punk festivals, Fest, every year around Halloween, I did not expect a thriving anarcho-punk scene. The punks, activists, queers, and feminists I met at the shows my neighbors hosted were welcoming and hospitable with a variety of thick Southern accents. The town and communities became an increasingly familiar culmination of my hometown in middle Georgia and to my last six years in Tampa. The more I got to know people in town, the more I realized my feelings about Gainesville were very similar to my participant's understandings.

Similar to Atlanta, Gainesville operates as a progressive center within a conservative area. When asked to describe the overall feeling of Gainesville, Olivia, a middle-aged straight woman of color in a leadership role at *Wild Iris*, citing a common trope of the South as being the "bible belt", she argues it is "the oasis at the bottom of the belt buckle." I heard quite a few variations of this metaphor while in Gainesville. Surrounding Gainesville, as with many cities and college towns in the South, are farmlands, swamp, and conservatives. Olivia provides this

colloquial insight about the potentially undesirable space around Gainesville while indirectly referencing many of the stereotypes attributed to the South.

Southern stereotypes combined with traditional notions of Southern hospitality were common when describing Gainesville. Similar to my own experience, however, many participants felt the need to explain exactly how and why Gainesville is the South. Elle, a cisgender, straight woman of color who has lived in Gainesville for the past decade, agrees with Olivia in regards to her experience of Gainesville as a Southern space.

It's funny, because in pop culture, movies like *The Devil's Advocate* and shows like that reality show<sup>5</sup>, *Gainesville*, is portrayed as "hick town." But in a sense, the municipal entity Gainesville is a blue dot in a red island. There is an active and broad rural community. Many people in Gainesville are either entrenched at UF or Santa Fe or so used to their affluent spaces they don't see that. So, yes, I'd consider us part of the South as a kind of red-state bloc, and culture-wise: the Southern hospitality thing and some traditional social behavior/family/dating ideas really do permeate the area. Having lived up North and still having family up there, there's a remarkable difference.

Elle differentiates her experience in the North with her life in Gainesville through both politics and culture. She does, however, comment that the "affluent" and academic spaces are not aware or representative of the rural areas around Gainesville. Elle also focuses on media representations of Gainesville to further justify her classification of Gainesville as the South. She notes the now defunct reality television show, *Gainesville*, as a horrific representation of an otherwise culturally Southern, yet politically progressive town. Elle was not the only participant to provide a comparison of Gainesville to other places.

Madelia, an older, Mestiza lesbian who grew up outside of Gainesville, echoed other participants' explanations of Florida as the South. Although Madelia grew up in Gainesville and spent time as a child visiting Miami, upon coming out as a lesbian, she decided to move to Atlanta in hopes of enjoying a larger lesbian and gay community. While we ate brunch and

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<sup>5</sup> The TV show, *Gainesville*, Elle mentions began filming and airing in 2015 on Country Music Television.

discussed the lesbian politics of Atlanta versus Tampa, Madelia began explaining her feelings about growing up in Gainesville pausing for the occasional sentimental sigh or laughter followed by affirmation.

Gainesville itself is a college town but it's also the county seat for Alachua County, which embodies a lot of rural farming communities... And I grew up with people whose Southern accent was thicker than any others I'd heard in the South no matter where in the South I'd traveled. And I always considered the South kind of ending in Orlando... certainly once Disney came. Ya know, you get down to Ocala and its still very Southern. You might as well be in Southern Georgia and if you go into the panhandle, Redneck Riviera [indicating the coastal area south of Tallahassee also commonly called The Big Bend], that's all very very Southern. You have all the traditional cooking, the accents, the hunting ethic, all the things that are traditionally Southern, whereas once you got down...to South Florida that's just different, you know? When I was a kid and used to go to Miami—the sense of who the people were was just a very different vibe... Gainesville is a college town but even if I go to Gainesville in December and go to Oaks Mall, I have to like turn on my Southern ear because...you might as well be in Macon or in Columbus, Georgia. ...You see a lot more fried food, no attention to recycling, military, so you see all this and its like, oh my gosh... I'm in the South!

The picture Madelia paints is familiar. Similar to Olivia and Elle, she mentions some stereotypical Southern cultural exemplars such as the accents and food. Madelia is more blunt, and perhaps harsh, concerning her conceptions of the South as being focused on military, hunting, fried food, and no regard for recycling. While we both certainly laughed at her assertions during our chat, they are very similar to that of academic research, which argues the “backwards” conservative politics of the South (Cash [1941]1991; Reed 1993; Howard 1999; Powers, et al. 2003; Lloyd 2011). It is similar to my observations in my short time visiting Gainesville and mirrored impressions other participants voiced. Before entering the field, I was cautious to call Gainesville the South. I was very attached to the definition of the South as I was as a child: Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Tennessee. Florida just seemed like a magical vacation spot. That is, until I moved there. After living in

Gainesville, talking to locals, and interviewing people, the city is described as Southern with people who have a strong sense of Southern identity.

### **Why the South?**

Through literature, film, and common conceptions, the South is stereotyped as “backwards” or “anti-progression” (Howard 1997, Gray 2009, Hubbs 2014, Robinson 2014). One thing, however, that much of these stereotypes dismiss is the centrality of the social movement history in the South. Rose, a middle aged Black lesbian who grew up in the South, was heavily influenced by her activism during the Civil Rights Movement in Alabama. After explaining her introduction into the Civil Rights Movement, Rose discussed the misconceptions people have about the South as being anti-progress or against change.

...a lot of people prescribe the definition of Southern to non-progressive folk to non-literate folk, and I don't. That's not how I define Southern because certainly the people that I know—the way we move in the world, we would not identify ourselves as such. I think for me its more an attitude, more an intentionality more of a hospitality, it's more of a welcoming, you know, “Come if you will.” You know, *Charis*, and they might still have this- [but] when I first came into *Charis* they used to have a book and you can look in there and find a roommate, a doctor, you could find a barber, you could find somebody to go to the movies with... It was like, “Howdy, how you doing?” ...despite the issues we have in the South, I still don't believe there's not a more hospitable region...

Rose rejects many of the negative stereotypes relating to Southerners, such as being unintelligent and anti-progressive. Instead, she pinpoints quite a few reasons she believes that through Southern customs of hospitality, *Charis* has been able to sustain and thrive in the South. Rose does, however, mention “the issues” present in the South, which was her way to reference our earlier conversation about the Civil Rights Movement and racism in the South. She describes a level of comfort and community, which many participants echoed, because of the availability of connection through something as mundane as a book.

When I asked participants how they made sense of the long-term survival of a feminist bookstore in the South, many of them discussed historical legacies of progressive activism in the South. Alex, a younger, butch/transmasculine, white, queer person who has been involved with *Charis* for the past twenty years and currently works at *Charis*, echoed some of Rose's points about progressive politics.

I think it has to do with being in the South...if you think about the way the New Left formed in the 60's in this country, a lot of it was around universities and things in the North and Midwest and the West. In the South, a lot of the New Left came up in churches. I mean because of the Civil Rights Movement, because of so much of that was organized around Black churches but even in the South like...Jewish progressive movements, [and] the... Baha'i who did interracial social justice organizing in the 50's in the South. There's such a long history of organizing within churches and within sacred spaces in the South that I don't find it a contradiction for physical gathering places that are – I mean people talk about *Charis* as a sacred space even if they're not religious... I mean community spaces—we don't have very many models in this country for what loving community spaces look like outside of religious model and...for queer people and women...religious spaces have not been loving. So... we have this model that is like what a lot of people are raised in but feel alienated from and then there hasn't been anything to supplant it and so it makes sense to me that that would be one of sort of organizing shape that it might take.

Alex mentions multiple factors and movements within the South that created the past and current environments for activism. And while Atlanta is far from a rural setting, other scholars have argued that churches and religion give space for marginalized identities (Johnson 2008; Gray 2009). Alex mentions the centrality of religion and churches to organizing in the South for the rise of the New Left during the 1960s. They mention both Jewish progressive movements and the prevalence of Baha'i within Atlanta during this time. In agreement with Alex's assertions, scholars found that Jewish progressives, women in particular, began migrating to the South in the early 1960s to join the growing Civil Rights Movement (Schultz 2001). According to Schultz (2001), this migration created Jewish substantial progressive communities all over the South.

Also because of the unique position in the South and previous Civil Rights activism, Alex argues that the South fosters counter movements because it is necessary. Alex references the Civil Rights Movement, as being organized through the churches. As Morris (1981) has articulated the Civil Rights Movement was fostered through Black communities, and in particular, Black churches (Morris 1981).

Alex links the history of movement activity within religious centers in the South to the way people have explained *Charis* to them, as if it is “a sacred space,” just without the religious overtones. They explain that while many people who frequent *Charis* may have been “raised in” religion, they “feel alienated from” and therefore create an alternative, yet familiar, organization using similar structures. Alex argues religious movements have created models and opportunities for progressive organizing within the South; and while Alex mentions that religious movements “have not been loving” toward “queer people and women,” they believe religious organizations have had a positive affect on the lives of queer people and women as they have created a space for progressivism in the South. Inevitably, what Alex is maintaining, is about why people feel the need to believe in *Charis* as part of a smaller part of the greater understanding of the South and Southern ideologies. As I have detailed, both Rose and Alex believe there is a uniquely Southern reasoning behind the ways *Charis* has continued to stay open over the past forty years.

### **Surviving in the South**

As noted in the start of the chapter, the South has not always been an easy place for feminists, queers, or people of color. Rita, again, agreed with many of the other participants about the misconceptions of the South. She argues these ideas about the South, including Atlanta, actually are helpful in keeping the store afloat.

I think historically people think of the South as conservative the fact that Atlanta—people are always like, Atlanta has a feminist bookstore? People are always surprised that out of

all places Atlanta would have a feminist bookstore why doesn't San Francisco, New York City, Boston...because those places are all so much more progressive than Atlanta but I think that's one of the reasons why we still exist, certainly.

Rita articulates that the assumed backwardness of the South makes people feel as if they need to continue to support the bookstore because it maintains a space for progressive activism and politics. She was not alone in making this point. Alice, a retired, older, white, queer lesbian who grew up in the North, posits the following while we sip green tea in her well-maintained upper-middle class house in a liberal borough of Atlanta.

It's just outstanding to me that this could last this long—in the South. I mean, knowing that I'm not a Southerner and...I've always seen it as very difficult here in the way people think about things. The conservatism is extreme...both in Atlanta and outside, not my neighborhood, not here. So, it is it represents an icon for me for feminism and must be good business practices too but to have lasted this long, somebody is doing it right.

Alice asserted that since the South is intertwined with conservative ideologies, it is predisposed to hostility toward progressive and feminist causes. While she points to the difficulties of the South, she mentions the business practices by saying that someone is “doing it right” by being able to maintain the bookstore for over forty years. What she mentions but does not expand on is the way that progressive academic communities have been necessary to change ideologies within the South. Participants commonly asserted that conservatism within the South as a deterrent to social movement activity.

As expressed by Alex, a younger, butch/transmasculine, white, queer person earlier, many other participants mentioned the prevalence of activist groups organize through or out of religious groups. Emma, a white upper-class lesbian who is a recent northern transplant to Atlanta, describes her uneasiness about moving to the South and doing social justice outreach with religious groups.

Our first impression was very much the New South, and that was there and then there's also a lot of the Old South...also, we do a lot of social justice work like, with folks...who

do outreach with sex workers former street-level sex workers. [It is] really righteous work, but they're so religious in a way that is... really shocking...I mean...I'd heard recordings of Martin Luther King, I was familiar with this particular trope but... it was still a surprise, so I think that's a bit alienating but...the activist community is so great because its much less segregated than it is in Boston... you can see these cross-class connections, multiracial coalition building... all of these things that are really cool [but it is] also like, okay that's not our community.

The organizing point of her argument focuses on the concepts of the Old and New South, which according to Rushing (2017) only serves to further “other” and disenfranchise Southerners.

Throughout her explanation, she focuses on her own conceptions about what it means to be Southern. To begin, Emma mentioned her previous misconceptions about the South and religion, having believed the religious South was just a trope linked to Martin Luther King. In our conversation she described being distraught by these organizations, which she deemed “so religious” who do outreach with “former street-level sex workers.” She discussed her pleasant surprise that religious organizations would engage in outreach that stereotypically do not line up with their beliefs. Emma goes onto describe the experience as both “alienating” and “really cool” because of racially integrated and multi-class participation. Yet, Emma still designated the outreach as outside of her ability and experience because she is a non-religious lesbian. Even though Emma clearly believed in the goals of the organizations she began working with upon moving to Atlanta, the idea of working with a religious organization made her very uncomfortable. Her argument reiterates what Alex mentioned above; the idea that within the South “we don’t have very many models...for what loving community spaces look like outside of religious model.” Part of what made Emma so uncomfortable with the idea of working with this social justice organization is because of the religious aspect and her identity as a lesbian. Again, as previously mentioned Alex notes “queer people and women...religious spaces have not been loving.” The contradictory notion that a social justice organization who does street level

sex worker outreach in a sex-positive way could also be religious is what Emma has difficulties with understanding. Emma's points draw on associations of the South as backwards and as religiously and conservative (Smith 1995; Lloyd 2011; Robinson 2014). Alex, however, makes these linkages between Southern misconceptions (Smith 1995; Lloyd 2011; Robinson 2014.) and the necessary progressive movements to occur in the South to combat those very misconceptions (Morris 1981; Raimondo 1996; Schultz 2001; Keane 2009). It is this contradiction within the South that provides an entryway to for activists, progressives, and scholars to re-narrate the identity of the South.

### **“Despite the Issues We Have”: Re-Narrating the South**

When discussing identities and practices of the feminist spaces, participants in both spaces discussed the South *as* a positive attribute to organizing and sustaining feminist communities. Robinson highlights the narrative of authentic South as a “strategic accomplishment... [that] is integral to people’s everyday negotiations of identities...”(2014: 194-195). Incorporating academic literature, experiential knowledge, emotions, and personal identifications, participants articulated their own understanding of the South as contradictory. For instance, pictured in Figure 7, Southern lesbian feminist author Dorothy Allison has been a longtime patron of *Charis*. Allison who is best-known work is *Bastard out of Carolina*, which focuses on class, gender, sexuality, abuse, and race in the South, also is well known as lesbian author focuses on sex and sexuality. Allison described herself as “perverse...[and] belong[ing] to the tradition of iconoclastic, queer, Southern writer” (Megan 1994:81). Allison and her proximity to lesbian, queer, and feminist movements in the South is a living contradiction similar to those participants articulated during interviews and found in the archives.



**Figure 7.** *Charis* Staff and owner, Linda Bryant (far right) with Dorothy Allison (second from the right) after a book reading in the early 2000s. Photo used by permission of Duke University Archives.

As I have noted, scholars have noted and critiqued the trend of past literature conflating conservatism with the South (Smith 1995; Lloyd 2011; Robinson 2014; Rushing 2017) and authors such as Allison are living reverberations of the contradiction of lived and assumed Southern identity, culture, and politics. It is through my participant's lived experiences, academic literature, and the archive where I locate the definition of the South: it is a feeling, idea, culture, and nostalgia associated with an authentic regional place. It is unique in demographics and histories, but most importantly, in my participant's understandings *of* and *about* the contradictory definitions of the South. Those understandings, as detailed by my participants, are what creates and sustains the need for feminist community spaces. As previously explored by Howard (1997), through feminist practices and activism my participants re-imagined the South as progressive against the stereotype of blanket conservatism.

## Conclusion

According to data, the bookstores are and have historically been organized, operated, and understood in the context of the South, and therefore as Southern spaces. Participants cited their anxieties about defining the bookstores within the Southern ideologies because of well-documented misconceptions of and historical legacies racism in the South (Smith 1995; Lloyd 2011; Robinson 2014; Rushing 2017). Ultimately, these negative connotations about the South force the bookstores to be very intentional about what aspects of Southern identity they incorporate into the bookstores. For instance, participants mentioned small things like free tea upon entry at *Charis* or the welcoming conversations at *Wild Iris*. Additionally, the histories of progressive organizing in the South have been societally and academically overlooked, yet the bookstores pride themselves on these transgressive histories as part of their past.

I have shown through data and literature, the South is still associated with negative, racist, and conservative ideologies. These conceptions are critical to the present and necessary conversations within the bookstores—especially within progressive communities in regions that have flagrant legacies of racism. Because of that conception about the South, the bookstores have been able to address difficult issues in the comfortable space of home that are vital for the context of the South, namely racism. In the next chapter, I draw this notion even further by arguing that white feminism as a historical site within the South that necessitates a direct conversation about racism within feminist communities. In particular, I focus on the ways these spaces address blatant and color-blind racism within their communities.

**CHAPTER SIX**  
**“A WELCOMING PLACE THAT WASN’T MEANT FOR US”:  
CHALLENGING “WHITE” FEMINISM AND COLOR-BLIND RACIAL POLITICS IN  
THE SOUTH**

Research on feminist spaces have focused too little on race (e.g. Taylor and Rupp 1993; Reger 1994; Whittier 1997; Staggenborg 1998). After discussing this very research on race and feminism with famous, older feminist sociologists at the 2015 Sociologists for Women in Society Winter Conference, it is clear race is expected to be neglected within older feminist academic circles. Often when feminist scholars from decades past have discussed race, it was in passing or in addition to gender. As explained by Yuval-Davis (2006) the practice of “add-and-stir” identities does not allow for a fully realized intersectional analysis because it is denying the complexity of intersecting identities. Among my generation of junior critical feminist sociologists, neglecting the centrality of race not acceptable or rigorous. Following a long legacy of intersectional feminists (Moraga and Anzaldua 1981; Lorde 1982; Anzaldúa 1987; Connell 1987; Crenshaw 1989; Brodtkin 1992; Schippers 2000; Bettie 2000; Collins, 2000, 2004; Nagel, 2000, 2001, 2003; McIntosh 2003; Pascoe 2005; Yuval-Davis 2006), race must be a central issue within feminism. Subsequent to the Combahee River Collective Statement in 1974, Black Feminist Thought has solicited feminist organizations to be cognizant of racism and racial difference. We know this is not always the case. Feminist organizations and ideological communities have been responsible for directly and indirectly utilizing color-blind racial rhetoric (Bonilla-Silva 2002, 2006, 2007; Ferber 2007, 2012). Because feminism has historically

been written by white women and some men (Crenshaw 1989; Collins, 2000, 2004), it is vital for feminist organizations to interrogate color-blindness. However, the concept of post-racialism, or idea that many Americans believe there is no longer racial inequalities because of the advancement of people of color to prominent roles in society (Gallagher 2003), creates difficulty for organizations dedicated to bluntly interrogating inequalities (Ferber 2007, 2012). How do feminist bookstores, which are historically white, simultaneously address misconceptions about “post-racialism,” dismiss color-blind rhetoric and racism, and be attentive to historic, institutional, and systematic racial inequalities?

Using interview, archival, and ethnographic data I investigate the intersections of race and feminism. They offer different trajectories concerning race in their respective communities. However, both stores have historically been white-owned. Currently, both have one woman of color as a partial owner. As previously detailed, the large metropolitan city of the South, Atlanta was a key site of the Civil Rights movement of the 1960s. The city that dedicates a large portion of downtown spaces to the memory and name of Martin Luther King, Jr. is still rife with racial tensions, and because of the large numbers of feminist and queer movements within Atlanta, many of these tensions are negotiated within feminist and queer communities. While Gainesville was not nationally visible as a central part of the 1960s Civil Rights movement, it has historically been a hub of feminist activism. Paradigmatic as a big university in a small, rural town, the city currently has active anti-capitalist, socialist, and punk activist communities. I ask the following: How has race and racism shaped feminist communities in the South? Is there something particular to the place of the South that allows for an open discussion of racism? How does the history of the South alter the ways feminism is understood through the lens of race? I argue, because of the racist histories of the South and the bookstores themselves, the bookstores had to

directly address racism and color-blind racism and thereby have historically and consistently incorporated intersectional feminist practices even before the term was coined academically.

First, I start by examining the contradictions of feminisms and racial or ethnic identities. Next, I focus on how both organizations use interconnected techniques to address color-blind racism: tackling the problematics of the South, using community building as a way to address racism, and fore-fronting practices of intersectionality. Overall, I find that because of the blunt conversations about race and racism that have occurred throughout the histories of the stores, the people in these communities are quick to name, fix, and even apologize for racism, intentional or otherwise.

### **Placing Feminist W(h)iteness**

One major obstacle these organizations face currently (and throughout their past) is how to address and fight against post-racial discourse and color-blind racism within the current moment through a historically white feminism. Although Black feminist thought has been widely circulated, feminism is still stereotyped as a white woman's movement and community. And while feminists began to problematize racial and class assumptions within second wave feminism (hooks 1982; Walker 1983; Frye 1983; Lorde 1984; hooks 1984; Collins 1986; Collins 1989; Crenshaw 1989), that does not mean the conception of feminism has shifted.

Reger's (2002) study of NOW shows us just that. She found that social movement organizations have a difficult time representing a "diverse" membership. While NOW is a large and historically relevant feminist social movement organization, they have a reputation for representing one particular brand of feminism: a white and privileged one who are focused on rights discourses. This historical narrative is often applied to feminist bookstore movement

(Hogan 2015), which is further highlighted by the demographics, histories, and narratives about the South.

Many scholars have argued that because of the historical and societal past of slavery, race, and racism in the South, the awareness of race and racial tensions is amplified (Smith 1995; Lloyd 2011; Robinson 2014). Like other regions, class and gender are persistent issues; yet the visibility of racial tensions and awareness of racism are heightened in the South. Feminist organizations, which focus on social justice and often take anti-racist ideologies, are fertile places to study racial tensions in interaction.

Scholars, activists, and folks active in the community have argued feminism has historically had a race problem—within and outside of the South. I met up with Sky, a middle-aged, African American lesbian and a past board member of *Charis*, in a small café across the street from the bookstore. She is very active in feminist and lesbian circles in the South and having just arriving home from the Michigan Womyn's Festival, she was excited to share her experiences of feminism/s. After making a few jokes about multiple opportunities she has had to hang out with naked lesbians in the woods over the past twenty years, she quickly moved toward reminiscing about passing *Charis* in the early 1980's. She says, she "...wouldn't go in because...I don't know, it's to me- feminist meant white women." After stating this, she laughs, looks up at me—a white researcher—smiles, and shifts to discussing the racial politics of Atlanta during the same timeframe. The women of color I interviewed—to a variety of extents—all shared this sentiment about feminism. Women of color expressed feelings that they were outsiders to the feminist community and store. Even though the stores hired people of color and stocked literature by people of color, public narratives of what feminism was and pervaded the local communities.

The politics of naming has been a concern within feminist thought for the past three decades. Birthed out of Black feminist thought, Lorde (1984) argues being able to name yourself and, perhaps, reject how others see you is empowering. Naming, however, became a concern as well because not all participants agreed upon. Many saw bookstores as an oasis for literature, while others viewed them as a safe space outside of patriarchy. One of the most controversial ideas was that *Charis* was not a “lesbian” bookstore, even though it was and is lesbian owned and operated<sup>6</sup>. As I quietly recovered from conference travel with doses of espresso, I sat in an uncomfortable office chair of Rose, a middle-aged lesbian of color, who has been a part of *Charis* for over twenty-five years. After offering tea to her clearly exhausted guest, she warmly describes her past experiences of being involved in Civil Rights, Black lesbian, and Black aging movements. During the hour and a half we spent together, she thoughtfully articulated how her experiences as a Black person, woman, feminist, and lesbian intersect to allow a nuanced understanding of feminism in the South as it relates to lesbianism. She details her own apprehension about the naming of feminism versus lesbianism.

I always wondered and I understood it, but *Charis* always called itself a feminist bookstore opposed to a lesbian bookstore--- because I think it was a lesbian bookstore. I think it would have been more aptly named a lesbian feminist bookstore but um I think the feminists...kind of put off some black women who did not identify as feminists who, perhaps, would have been more open to that space and that place if I were lesbian-identified opposed to feminist-identified. So I think in that regard, it did not allow folk to come in who conscious would have been expanded had they been in the space. So, yeah, I think that was probably one of the things that was a sticking point in terms of—I don’t think *Charis* has ever had the kind of support for lesbians of color, queer women of color, that it could have because... I think of its perception. I think that – then and now—you know, I think people will always perceive *Charis* as a white bookstore. Even if it did have a sprinkling of women of color working there or queer people...

Purposefully, she does not blame the organization and focuses on the unintentional exclusionary byproducts of naming the bookstore as feminist. Instead, she emphasizes how the historical

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<sup>6</sup> I will detail the decision about naming the store “feminist” and not “lesbian” or radical, etc., in another chapter. Here, what is important is the part race plays into sexuality and feminism.

naming of *Charis*, and other spaces like bookstore as feminist, alters the clientele. Although Rose is not a current part of the *Charis* organization, she is still active in the feminist, lesbian, and racial justice communities. The practices of naming as discussed by Rose, mirror those voiced by many lesbians of color (Lorde 1984; Smith 1983), the term feminist never felt like a proper identifier as a Black woman but that lesbian did because it did not hold the same racial baggage. Rose discusses create and sustain boundaries that are steeped in histories of feminism and the space where that feminist action is occurring.

Echoing Sky's earlier argument about white feminism, Rose articulates the past conception of *Charis* as one where "...people always perceive it as a white bookstore even if it did have a sprinkling of women of color volunteering or working there even if it had queer people." This may feel like a problem of the past—a problem that has since been erased by third wave feminisms. That is not the case. Second-wave feminism/s provided the foundation for the feminist bookstore movement in the mid- 1970s. During this time, feminists began to question and problematize racial assumptions within second wave feminism (hooks 1982; Walker 1983; Frye 1983; Lorde 1984; hooks 1984; Collins 1986; Collins 1989; Crenshaw 1989). Black feminist thought originated as a direct challenge to and critique of second wave feminism (hooks 1984; Collins 1986; Collins 1989; Crenshaw 1989). Maintaining that feminism had been a study for and about middle-class, white, heterosexual woman, some women of color chose to distance themselves from this narrow focus of second wave feminism by creating a new, third wave (Moraga and Anzaldua 1981; Walker 1983). Their goal was not to dismiss feminism, but to introduce racial, sexual, and class marginalization in to the conversation (Moraga and Anzaldua 1981). Feminist paradigms shifted towards exploring and reflecting on these intersections (Anzaldúa 1987; Brodtkin 1992; McIntosh 2003).

The historically negative narratives about feminism being dismissive of race are inescapable. Rose follows up her description of the past with an explanation of *Charis* currently, saying, that there is “still little tingle that it is white woman space- and other people and other demographics may get to use it. But ownership feels very white woman feminist. And right now, its older white woman, so that’s pretty much the feeling I had when I first walked into it.” Rose articulates that the past of feminism is not erasable; that the problems of second wave feminism are still engrained (even if not blatant) in the ideologies, naming, and assumptions about the communities themselves. Rather than backing away from this problem, both bookstore communities are attentive to how they address racism, post-racial rhetoric, and color-blind racism. In addition to addressing the problematics of (white) feminism, these feminist communities and organizations offer three interconnected ways to combat and name color-blind racism within a society that is rich with racial denial: addressing racist histories of the South, using race as a community building tactics, and focusing on the centrality of intersectionality.

### **Significance of the South**

Even though the distinctions between Gainesville, Atlanta, and the South are important, the way they were characterized by participants was strikingly similar with their hallmarks of historical racial tension, gentrification, and activist work. And as I have detailed in the previous chapter, participants comfortably define both places within the ideological and geographical realm of the South.

As a much larger city, Atlanta had a more varied conception from my participants. A few women of color described it as a Black and queer oasis outside of the “rest” of the South. Violet, younger cisgender lesbian/bisexual/queer Black woman, who grew up in Tampa, Florida offered a comparison of Atlanta to Tampa.

Tampa ...when you went into a space if its not a certain type of space you'll be the only person of color and it was sort of annoying...I came to Atlanta...I was amazed at the beautiful Blackness in the city. Um, it was everywhere you walked into no matter where you are or where you walked into, you weren't the only one.

As previously stated, the 2010 US Census noted 54% of Atlanta identifies as Black or African American. In contrast, the 2010 US Census found that 26% of Tampa identifies as Black or African, whereas 62.9% identify as white. Many participants touted these demographics and culture of Atlanta as a safe haven in the racially combative South. The racial and cultural makeup of Atlanta also became a point of contention, as some folks did not feel that the racial makeup of the feminist communities was accurately represented within the organization; meaning, they noted the organization was too white. That was not always thought to be a bad thing. There are favorable outcomes of the bookstore being historically and currently owned and operated primarily by white women. Sky, a middle-aged African American lesbian, explains, "...I think only white women could have this store. That's the only way it can exist in the south.... So, um, only white women could continue to maintain this store. It would have been gone if it was any other demographic." Sky is skeptical that Black women in the South would be able to open and maintain a feminist bookstore for over forty years. Echoing similar feelings about feminism, Sky locates the South—and Atlanta—as a place that has been forced to embrace and celebrate difference *because of* the histories, conceptions, and realities of racism, white feminism, and white folks in the South.

The South, for many, was central to defining their feminist communities. I interviewed Jennifer, a middle-aged, straight, white woman and past employee of *Charis*, in her office at work. After asking about her feelings about race in the South, she shifted in her chair and nodded her head with a slight smile. In a thick Southern accent, she argued the place of the South creates more opportunity to begin a conversation about race and feminism.

Southern culture, I would say, the efforts of *Charis* to be racially inclusive and to promote racial—um —understanding as well. I mean that's a Southern thing because we have because of our history and because of our demographics. So, it's both. Yeah, we have a horrible history but we also have a whole lot more opportunity for it—Blacks and white particularly to interact because we have large populations say in Atlanta. So I think it I would say that's a Southern thing.

Although Jennifer had a difficult time naming what the “horrible history” of the South is, she uses color-blind rhetoric, such as the “Southern thing,” to name the racist history of Atlanta without having to directly address racism. Jennifer offers an example of what several white folks I interviewed had difficulties with: naming and expressing problems about race. Many of my white participants used metaphors and even humor to deflect from their discomfort while shifting in their chairs and avoiding eye contact. Instead, they used short-hand to describe racism while neglecting to engage with the harsh experiences of racism in the South. Most people of color I talked to, found an importance in and ease with addressing histories of slavery, gentrification, or mass incarceration (just to name a few) within the South. While most of these conversations happened at an individual level, discussing and building community around racial tensions became central parts of both bookstores' main missions.

### **Tensions**

According to participants, tensions were tempered by utilizing classic the feminist technique of consciousness-raising. Since the mid-1960s, consciousness-raising groups have been a central social movement tactic employed by feminist social movements (Taylor and Rupp 1993; Reger 1994; Whittier 1997; Staggenborg 1998). This tactic has been declining since the peak of second wave feminism (Whittier 1997). On the contrary, I find that both organizations use consciousness-raising groups, similar to those of the 1960s, as ways to begin building community, trust, and knowledge around issues of racism.

Rita, a white, middle-aged, femme dyke who has been a central part of *Charis* for over twenty years and a person I became close with, was much more comfortable and direct with me in her discussion the importance of race. While sipping on a locally brewed iced coffee, she explained the centrality of conversations concerning race at the public level at the bookstores, as well as within the communities.

Because of Atlanta's civil rights history has made a big difference and I think as we were talking earlier off the machine, because Atlanta is so racially diverse, particularly African American. It has made *Charis* have to be intentional um and has chosen to be intentional. We're still not doing as good of a job as we [*Charis* management and board] wish we had but historically I think it has been one of the most racially diverse feminist bookstores that there is because it has to be. Atlanta is half black. It has to be. And it should be. And I think Linda [the initial owner of *Charis*] in particular was very intentional about it in the earlier years.

Rita, who is currently in management at *Charis*, offers a unique perspective on the emphasis on race in the bookstore. She referenced the demographics of Atlanta as "racially diverse," and in particular, with a large African American population. She also mentioned how *Charis* has worked to be intentional about programing about and for, representation of, and visibility surrounding race and racial issues in the bookstore. Rita also apologetically noted the bookstore could do "better," but argues *Charis* is "one of the most racially diverse feminist bookstores" because of the racial demographics of Atlanta. The intentionality Rita mentioned came up for a number of participants and was a trend in archival data.

Over the years, *Charis* has worked to find solutions in order to bring in a more diverse customer base. In 2004, *Charis* hired an outside consultant in order to better run the bookstore and non-profit. The report from that consultant is stored in the in the in-house archives. The consultant found that the average customer is "a 42-year old, white lesbian in a committed relationship with no children...highly educated with a graduate degree and works full time...her household income is between \$45,000 and \$100,000." Additionally, 78% of the customers

surveyed identified as white. While different events attracted different folks, the average customer base has not drastically shifted. Although these demographics are fifteen years old, they still hold relevance in the practices, perceptions, and intentions of the bookstores. Intentions, however, do not “fix” conceptions of feminism, whiteness, and the South.

As previously discussed, Black communities have persistently distrusted feminism and feminist organizations. In addition to conceptions of feminism, historical legacies of racism are embedded in Southern communities. These legacies, that many progressive organizations and communities attempt to distance themselves from through post-racial and color-blind racist rhetoric, the organizers at the bookstores use them to incite moments of learning, expression, and change. A younger, queer, transman of color who is an activist and community organizer, Elijah, pointed out the centrality of race and racism in the South and Atlanta. In doing so, he argued that emphasizing how racial tensions create opportunities to build communities.

It's never not the elephant in the room to think about race in the southeast. And I think about Atlanta in particular, much like Mobile, much like Jackson, Mississippi. There's a history beyond the history that we're currently living and sometimes people want to talk about it and sometimes they don't, but it influences the answer....so how honest I'm going to be with you about whatever—comes in part by a relationship building opportunity.

Elijah argued that because the South is a place of racial tension, it offers a critical opportunity to initiate conversation; that no matter the place or time, the history of the South is always a part of the context. Instead of viewing this as an uncomfortable or unwanted situation, Elijah believed that that “elephant” forced people to address the unpleasant histories in order to move forward and build relationships across and through difference. The necessity of addressing racism, and color-blind racism in particular, became a major part of community building tactics in feminist Gainesville and Atlanta.

That does not mean building community through uncomfortable racial politics is easy. People are not perfect. Sky, a middle-aged African American lesbian and a past employee of *Charis*, discussed attending a fundraising party at a house of an older, now retired, feminist organizer in the bookstore. She explained the following:

[since it was a] fundraising party...it was a lot [of]...older women, but it was also a board appreciation party so a lot of board members, which is where you...get more of the women of color...[and] ....somebody was complimenting her [the host] on her garden and she said, "Oh my man Charles is just wonderful with upkeep around here." And it just went...*Gone With The Wind* on that comment...That's the Southern woman thing. Ya know, "I have a man who takes care of my, ya know." The subtle... racism...

In this conversation, Sky cautiously explained an instance of racism couched within stereotypes of the South and racial and class differences. First, she designated the board members as the women of color, whereas she juxtaposes them with "older women," who she is implicitly implying to be white and wealthy. And when a guest who she implies is an older wealthy white woman compliments her garden, she calls her gardener, "my man." Sky connected that language to Civil War era discussions about race, as if the host owns the man. She dismissed that as just part of "the Southern woman thing" opposed to directly unpacking the conversation to directly address the racial and racist implications. Since the host of the party was some who, according to Sky, she respected, she said she wrote off the situation as just part of Southern women's behavior.

Community conversations concerning race, however, did have to start at a crossroads: one that was difficult for the owners, participants, workers, and patrons who were primarily white. As early as 1982, fighting racism was detailed as a "main goal" of *Charis*. While it certainly was an intention of the store and community, Eloise, an older white lesbian who is active in anti-racist and feminist movements, recalls the early 1990's as being particularly troublesome for racial politics in Atlanta. She noted that after a number of discussions

surrounding the sex wars (Tong 2009), which was still a major national topic at the time, members of the organization became invested in “looking at sexuality in new ways.” Mirroring issues of second (and perhaps third) wave feminist thought, even though some feminists were open to expanding their ideas about sexuality that did not mean they felt the same way about race.

During that same time, *Charis* was embracing a variety of sexualities and even genders, which was still a debate nationally; Eloise notes there continued to be “challenging times around race.” Rather than assuming these problems were not worth addressing, Rose, a middle-aged lesbian of color, who was a board member in the mid 2000s, recalled owners and board members organized “quite a few sessions that were moderated with the white women who owned and ran *Charis* and the Black women who kind of felt like we were on the periphery.” These sessions were focused on starting a dialogue about race in feminism. Eloise vividly remembers how the were “really trying to address white privilege and racism and we did have a workshop or two—we tried... but it was something that we struggled with...we had a trainer come in to deal, do the processing about being predominantly white women.” To Rose and Eloise, who were both heavily involved with *Charis* at the time, the workshop was designed to address white privilege and guilt with the white feminists who were in the leadership positions in the organization.

After discussing this he program with Rose and Eloise, I turned to my archival data to find more details. I located the program information in the in-house archives at Charis. The program happened in June of 2006 and was titled “Undoing Racism in Queer Communities: The Politics of Whiteness & the Power of Change.” According to the flyer for the event, it focused on “recognizing this issue is real and providing the space to hear people’s voices,” “to start/be part of the dialogue on the issue—recognizing this is only one conversation in a long term process,”

and finally “seeing that we can create tools.” Many of the materials were borrowed from a workshop offered by The People’s Institute titled, “Undoing Racism Workshop: Anti-Racism Training,” which was attended by one of the program organizers for *Charis*, Chloe. After Chloe attended the initial workshop, the two program organizers at *Charis*, Chloe and Katherine, both younger white women, put together a specialized workshop focusing on the queer community. The internal agenda for the program did not directly mention any sort of problems or issues within the feminist community that preempted this conversation. Instead, the conversations during the workshop framed the conversation about racism and white supremacy as an issue specific to the queer community that *Charis*, and other organizations, have garnered “heat” from. Although neither Rose nor Eloise were apprised to these internal documents, they were perceptive in noting the “struggle” was about the “periphery” because the workshop was focused on assuaging the feelings of white women in the movement.

I also found the only official program evaluations in the *Charis* in-house archives. The existing evaluations from “Undoing Racism in Queer Communities: The Politics of Whiteness & the Power of Change” were filled out directly after the event. Yet, there were clearly people unhappy with the event. In the in-house *Charis* archives, I came across an email exchange between Denali, an active member of the feminist, Black, and queer communities in Atlanta, and a white board member, Nicole, concerning the “Undoing Racism in Queer Communities: The Politics of Whiteness & the Power of Change” event. After Nicole reached out to her, Denali responded by addressing her concerns with the programming, stating that she had “a lot of questions about *Charis*’ intentions if conversations about racism in the queer community were started without a significant number of queer Black people involved.” Denali brought up multiple points about the history of the bookstore being predominantly white-owned and

operated while those same white folks did not address that it is that very circumstance of ownership is an implicit part of white supremacy itself. Even after critique, Denali maintained solidarity with the bookstore community in hopes to further “establish trust” because she was “interested in helping *Charis* address white supremacy in the broader community.” This moment of tension highlights exactly what I discussed earlier, that race is uncomfortable for white feminists but always part of the conversation in the South, feminist, and queer communities. I asked around about the aftermath of Denali’s concerns and if the bookstore resolved some of the issues. Alex, amongst others, replied that, the leadership at *Charis* took this email to heart by initiating further introspection into the pervasiveness of white women in control of the store. Community building tactic of consciousness-raising, as many scholars have pointed out the past (Whittier 1995), is not easy. But it allows space for communities to question and be questioned—to be kept accountable regarding racism, racial politics, and color-blind rhetoric.

The struggles that Eloise, Rose, Elijah, and Denali explained were widely felt throughout the feminist, Black, and queer communities in both places. Instead of the organizations playing into color-blind racial politics through embracing ideas of a post-racial community, they work to incorporate intersections of identities as a vital part of feminist discourse. They do so by naming intersectionality and actively incorporating it into programming.

### **Highlighting Intersectionality**

Gainesville and Atlanta are plagued with histories and current issues of social practices that resist integration related to white flight, gentrification, and redlining (Colburn 2013; Lu Vickers and Wilson-Graham 2015; Kruse 2007). And because of these specific histories, naming difference and inequalities has been an important part of both organizations. The bookstore communities worked to challenge ideologies and paradigms of color-blind racism by directly

providing a place to live, learn, and enjoy complex intersectionalities. The bookstores have been successful with this by consistently featuring events relating to intersectionality, (such as racism workshops, aging and sexuality, racism and non-monogamy), featuring authors of color since their perspective beginnings, incorporating community outreach focused on people of color, and fundraising for causes that specifically address racism (such as SisterSong and Books to Prisoners programming focusing on sending authors of color), and consistently dedicating at least half of their programming to focus on issues concerning race.

Sky, a middle-aged, African American lesbian, described her experience at *Charis* as one where she consistently learned from others about intersectional issues. She said the bookstore “..wasn’t just white women and the white women didn’t just hang with white women. Ya know, it was an opportunity for me to see white women differently than I had before and its not- it was a lack of exposure to white women as anything other than teachers.” Sky discusses the historical, systematic, and currently pervasive residential segregation of Atlanta (Kruse 2007) in order to provides a contrast with the gatherings of the bookstore. Since Sky is an African American in Atlanta, the opportunity to interact with very few white folks on an intimate basis is rare because of residential segregation; yet, she experienced the space of the bookstore as one that required that exposure. The potential of a space where intersectional differences are named is clearly different from Sky’s previous experiences.

Similarly, intersectionality is named as an organizing principle of the programs the bookstores organize and the authors they hosted. Programming at *Wild Iris* has purposefully varied its focuses on and intersections of poverty, race, gender, and sexuality. Since the change in ownership I detailed in the first chapter, the owners have firmly focused more on maintaining ties with the activist communities in Gainesville that focus specifically on poverty and race.

Olivia, a middle-aged, cisgender, heterosexual woman of color in a leadership position, argues *Wild Iris* is open to whatever the community needs. She said, “there’s lots of people doing good work and we should plug into that wherever we can. If it’s the environment you love, great, if it’s domestic violence you want to fight for, I mean all of this shit is so big that we need all of these people. I would rather be a space where all of these people move in and out.” Programming scheduled out of the bookstore reiterates this by ranging from lesbian separatist discussions, to collecting books for prisoners, to academic discussions of racism in Florida, or to holding a sexual violence support group.

The programming at *Wild Iris*, while it ranged in topic, many times became insulating for identities and issues. Elle, a younger, cisgender, heterosexual woman of color who I was close with, discussed her time spent at *Wild Iris*.

...a lot of my time at *Wild Iris* was talking about abuse and recovery and male privilege, so no, we didn’t talk much about race, but I can’t speak as to how it’s discussed in their other events. [And the *Wild Iris* Project is on hiatus.] In Gainesville at large, though, yes, we have a major problem with white feminism, white liberalism, yuppie liberalism, etc. There is a lot of wealth in Gainesville, but it’s definitely not equitable, and POC do not have representation like they should. It’s almost harder to address because many white feminists and liberals like to feel like that’s “solved.”

Elle, was active with *Wild Iris* but also has a history of participating in feminist activism in Gainesville. Above, she speaks experientially that she believes many white folks in Gainesville view the work of anti-racism as done or over. While making a bold claim, Elle focuses on post-racial discourses and color-blind rhetoric, which purport that racism is not a central issue. She pinpoints this within what she deems “white feminists and liberals.” Elle’s assertion is at odds with opposed to the incorporation of intersectional identities and theories, which is a goal of *Wild Iris*.

The programs supported by and authors invited to the bookstores are conscious and collective decisions made by management and board of directors. Additionally, the bookstore's board of directors is a direct reflection of what the organization views as community needs and representative of community demographics. Even though *Wild Iris*' board of directors, Friends of *Wild Iris*, is currently on hiatus, Olivia, who is in management, explained that board members apply and are voted on by either the current board or owners. *Charis* Circle has a similar application process, which is voted on by the board.

Perhaps the most public representations of intersectionality at the bookstores occur at programs and events. Rose, a middle-aged lesbian of color who has been active in the *Charis* community since the mid-1990s, discusses her past experiences serving on the board of directors. She argues that because of the introspective and collective practices of the bookstore, *Charis* consciously addresses intersectionality.

I mean it's hard not to deal with these intersectionalities... I mean in the titles that they have in the store, to the programming—the programming is very intentional. There is nothing accidental about the program to the communities that meet there that have programming there I mean its all very intentional. And it's all about intersectionality.

From books on the shelves, to what authors they have visit, Rose is very clear that *Charis* is thoughtful in their organization. She illustrates that it is no mistake that intersectionality is a core part of programming, that in practice, the board purposefully contacts authors and organizes events around intersectional issues. Actually, both bookstores have consistently and historically incorporated programming concerning race throughout their tenures. During the last decade at *Charis*, however, there has been a drastic increase in programming focusing on race. Almost half of all programming at *Charis* in the past five years has focused specifically on race. For instance, *Charis* has hosted events such as Black Polyamorous Monthly Meetup, Trans Affairs Support Groups, Anti-Racist Parenting Groups, and Coding Workshops for young women. They also

have invited authors such as Roxanne Gay, Alice Walker, bell hooks, and Pearl Cleage. The focus on intersectional feminism is not new to either bookstore.



**Figure 8:** bell hooks at *Charis* in 1985. Photo used by permission of Duke University Archives.

Above is a picture featuring bell hooks, who is a long time supporter and friend of *Charis*. This is one of the oldest pictures from the archives at Duke. In it, hooks is at a signing *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center* after her book talk in 1985. While that was an innovative argument at the time, it was a conversation that the bookstores tried to promote through their consistent focus on intersectional feminist inclusion.

Even though there is a legacy of *Charis* incorporating women of color and intersectional feminism, it has not always been effective. Ava, a younger, white, heterosexual woman who grew up in Atlanta and is active in the local activist and feminist communities, experienced *Charis* as a teenager and young adult. She explained that even though the store has actively incorporated women of color, they still have an image problem.

...for the longest time was viewed as a white ladies group, and you know that's not unique to *Charis* that's kind of a feminist movement problem is that a lot of these institutions whether they were women's credit unions or bookstores or writing groups,

reading groups, or even movements like the...NOW. So I think those groups were founded by white women so I think for a long time they felt kind of inaccessible to both communities especially for people of color. And I think it took *Charis* a long time and it took a lot of relationship building and making sure programs from those other groups were welcome in the space physically, to kind of foster that to make it more diverse. And I know [the] ...board [is] sustainable and diverse. But at the same time you wanna make sure the people how are coming into the store that we're drawing in a diverse cross section of our community. And I think we've been doing a great job of that the past five to ten years but at the same time I think before that it was viewed very much as a white ladies thing.

Ava distanced herself and the current reiteration of *Charis* from the “inaccessible” kinds of feminism many cite in disregarding *Charis*. Using her personal history of being involved with feminist movements for the past two decades, she reflected on the changes in framing over time. The store has attempted to get past the “white ladies thing” by fore-fronting intersectionality, and as shown above it certainly has not always been effective, it has ignited a conversation about racism within the white Southern feminist communities that are dedicated to changing their feminist narrative.

*Wild Iris* also has experienced these related to incorporating discussions and programming about race. Olivia, a middle aged cisgender heterosexual woman of color in a leadership position, explained the bookstore's programming related to intersectionality and the importance of challenging white feminism is *because* of the feminist identity of *Wild Iris*. For instance, *Wild Iris* hosts a monthly Women of Color book club, invites authors of color, and hosts a monthly Free Store, which focuses on providing clothing and necessities to the impoverished and homeless communities in Gainesville. Olivia argues that in order to fully honor their community as a feminist bookstore, *Wild Iris* must “recommit to intersectionality and you have to talk about these ways that poor people, women of color, trans people, queer people are being double, quadruple affected by these systems than you are. We have to have those conversations.” Olivia is arguing that just by offering programs and books featuring

intersectionality, the organizations are involved in a direct critique of past feminisms. Olivia is arguing that *Wild Iris* addresses color-blind racism, racist politics, and rhetoric by naming, incorporating, and interrogating pasts, spaces, and tactics of feminist organizations, including *Wild Iris* itself.

As I have argued throughout this chapter, the South requires blunt conversations about race, racism, and intersectionality. Alex, a younger, butch/transmasculine, white queer person who currently works at *Charis* and is a multi-generational Southern, expands on this further. They talk about how important they feel it is to be able to be comfortable and empowered where you live.

the right to stay in place- the right to be your whole self in your hometown and what it means to stay in your neighborhood or your home church... I think Southerners get that intrinsically in a lot of ways like, or they at least get how painful it is to not be themselves. I think the South has always been more intersectional than the North. Because the North has more codified and patriarchal organizing systems so things like labor unions that have been primarily male driven um so things that are center of the left that have been lead more like socialist kind of stuff a lot of stuff around economic justice that have been more male drive and I think because of that there is a little bit more room for intersectionality in the South, cause we've been meeting in kitchens and its been church ladies organizing shit. I mean, people look at the Black Lives Matter movement and its queer black women who are running it who are like twenty-three and if anybody is surprised by that, they're not paying attention.

Race, racism, and the South clearly overlap through Alex's argument. They connect the North with what they deem masculine and patriarchal social movements, such as economic or social movements. Instead of, Alex locates Southern organizing as having to address intersectionality because of the history of "kitchen meetings" and "church ladies" who have worked to organize social movements. Alex's discussion above bolsters my argument as well as other participant's voices. I now revisit the issues discussed in this chapter.

## Discussion and Conclusion

While the wave metaphor of feminism has certainly proven to be useful, it falters in the context of the South because racial politics have been consistently relevant. The narrative of second-wave feminism is clear: it was not attentive to race. While that assumption is prevalent within feminist academic literature—and therefore in perceptions of feminist movements—it was not a reality of the women in the bookstores in the South. Race was always present; it was and still is a central part of Southern feminisms. Yet, many times it was present as a head nod, such as hosting hooks in 1985. That is not to say the bookstores did not address or change dynamics of privilege within their communities.

That also does not alter conceptions many folks outside the bookstores have about feminist spaces as only for white women; and the current owners of both organizations are aware of this problem. Instead of participating in color-blind racism, the organizers at the bookstore opt to deconstruct conceptions of whiteness through events such as “Unpacking Racism.” Participants address race within the historical and current conceptions of feminism and the South that, therefore leads me to question the interconnectedness of racism in the South with feminism, feminist tactics, and intersectional frameworks. Similar to Crenshaw’s recent call to rethink intersectionality at the 2016 ASA meetings, these organizations use “intersectionality as a tool, a device” (2016) and not just as a “grand” theory in order for scholars to further explore the ways feminism can speak to oppressive politics.

These organizations have persisted for over decades. And while Jennifer, a middle aged white heterosexual woman, had a difficult time naming what the “horrible history” of the South is, she uses color-blind rhetoric, such as the “Southern thing,” to name the racist history of Atlanta without having to directly address racism. Although individuals use this kind of rhetoric,

it is not representative of the bookstore organizations themselves. Instead, they directly combat and address color-blind racism within their communities; these organizations have centralized voices of those typically at the margins. Even though the goal for these organizations may be to question and change the narrative or practice of feminism to be inclusive of race, the bookstores are cognizant of the negative stereotypes associated with feminism and the South. And since white lesbians founded not just these two feminist bookstores but also feminist bookstores across the nation, sexuality has consistently been a major strain of conversation. In contrast, that conversation rarely included race as a central issue. These places—and because of the place and region, have worked to recognize privilege and celebrate difference opposed to simply touting assimilationist politics.

Much of the discussion surrounding these spaces is about the prevalence of the old guard (second wave) versus new guard (third wave), the conception of feminist identity, and racial politics. These conceptions, and therefore movement organizing spaces, are embedded the histories of the South. What I found is contrary to conceptions of the South and feminism. Even the idea that feminism “happens” in the South, which is stereotyped as not being an epicenter of culture, is outside the purview for many scholars of feminist social movements. These findings point to the intersections of the history of the South and white feminism. The South becomes a vital part of the story, providing support and distinctiveness to these organizations.

In the next chapter, I argue these conversations and contentions never went away—instead, how scholars, feminists, and activists framed the historical mythologies has changed. Discussions about gender and inclusion have become increasingly important in mainstream media yet; as mentioned in chapter two, in order for “progressive” movements and organizations to affect change they must start these conversations at their home bases. Additionally and

similarly to Gamson, I urge scholars to be careful when thinking about linear progress within activist and “progressive” communities and how we as academics define progress concerning gender.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### THE MYTH OF PROGRESS: DISPUTING FEMINISMS

How come you think you're so smart, an' I'm the weaker sex?  
There ain't a man alive can match a woman, trick for trick.  
We've come a long way, baby.  
-Loretta Lynn "We've Come a Long Way, Baby" (1979)

Invoking a dialectical understanding of identity construction, social movement scholars have explored the ways social movement organizations create and draw boundaries. Gamson (1997) takes up the famous case of the Michigan Womyn's festival's policy excluding transsexuals from the woman's- only music festival. Based on second wave lesbian feminist separatist politics, the festival had a man-free policy. After much deliberation, they decided transsexuals broke that policy, as the festival argued transsexual women could not be defined as women because they were born male. Gamson argued this story points "to the importance of the symbolic aspect of *symbolic* boundaries" (1997:192, emphasis in original). In this well-known article, Gamson asked scholars of sexuality and gender to question linear narratives of historical movement progress. In this chapter, I argue these conversations and contentions about transgender and queer inclusion within feminist movements never went away— instead, how scholars, feminists, and activists framed the historical mythologies has changed. Have trends in feminist theory, such as queer theory, altered the language, programming, and activism of these organizations? Discussions about gender and inclusion have become increasingly important in mainstream media yet; as mentioned in chapter two, in order for "progressive" movements and organizations to affect change they must start these conversations at the administrative level.

Additionally and similarly to Gamson, I am careful when thinking about progress within activist and “progressive” communities and how, we as academics, define progress concerning gender.

Twenty years after Gamson, I ask similar questions. Have SMOs adapted to changes in movement definitions? How intervening intellectual movements affect activist work? Are these organizations still participating in in-fighting regarding the feminist, queer, and LGBT inclusion? If so, what kinds of fights are happening twenty years later? Are these fights generational? Have trends in feminist theory (such as queer theory) altered the language, programming, and activism of these organizations? In order to answer these complex questions, I pay special attention on the lived experiences of those in the stores, the archival materials, and the kinds of programming supported by the stores. I detail the move from historical definitions of feminist bookstores as lesbian separatist spaces, to feminist bookstore spaces who incorporate trends in feminist theories, queer theories in particular, which have challenged the language, programming, and activism related to the initial lesbian foundations of the organizations.

Feminist bookstores as organizations are the very nexus of academic discourse and community activism. Hogan (2008, 2016) has been the only scholar to emphasize the importance of academic theories in feminist bookstores. My goal here is to document two contentious moments. I begin by detailing the ways gender ideologies have changed in tandem with the waves of feminism. I then use two case studies from my data to illustrate how disputes over gender theory play out in feminist bookstores as a result. For the first dispute, I focus on a private ongoing conversation in the early to mid 2000’s over the inclusion of trans people, voices, and literature in *Charis*. The second dispute concerns a public Facebook event at *Wild Iris* in 2015, titled Viva La Vulva, where participants were solicited to allow their vulvas to become art in the art show. I use these two disputes to discuss and deconstruct the linear mythology of gender

progress as following academic trends to work toward gender include within feminist and progressive communities. Following the introduction of queer theories into the bookstores, which are traditionally lesbian and women's only spaces, I argue that even though feminist bookstores are assumed to no longer have "problems" with transgender inclusion, there are major disconnects between online and insular conversations and generational differences.

### **Naming the Audience: Woman, Womyn, and People**

As addressed in my introductory chapter, I outlined the linear waves of feminism and the contentious inclusion of queer and postmodern theories. A major part of that discussion is how those theoretical inclusions translate into practice. Both stores and feminist communities experienced similar transitions in naming themselves, stocking products, and changes in programming. These changes occurred as reactions to feminist theories and activism over the past forty years—especially in regards to trans\* inclusion. To fully deconstruct these, I turn the following literatures: critiques of second wave, cultural feminism, lesbian separatism, the start of LGB studies, the influence of queer theories, and transfeminisms.

Around the early 1970s and late 1980s, feminists began to problematize racial and class assumptions within second wave feminism (hooks, 1982; Walker, 1983; Frye, 1983; Lorde, 1984; hooks, 1984; Collins, 1986; Collins, 1989; Crenshaw, 1989). These arguments sparked Black feminist thought, cultural feminism, and lesbian separatism. Cultural feminists and lesbian separatists sought to enact theories put forth by radical feminists (Taylor and Whittier, 1992; Taylor and Rupp, 1993). Some feminists believed political lesbianism, where women were to reject heterosexual relationships and focus on women-only spaces, was necessary to challenge patriarchy (Tong, 2009). Many others argued lesbian separatism was a viable and necessary way to enact both feminist change and deconstruct patriarchy (Radicalesbians, 1970; Frye, 1983).

While this community quickly became fractured, there have been quite a few empirical studies locating the practical and theoretical importance of the cultural feminist community (Krieger, 1983; Taylor and Whittier, 1992; Taylor and Rupp, 1993; Stein, 1997).

Around the same time in the mid to late 1970s, the gay liberation movement had begun to gain traction in the U.S. (Jagose 1996). This movement, of course, affected academia. By the 1980's, LGB people were outing themselves within and outside of academia. Alongside the feminist movement's Women's Studies departments, LGB Studies became a facet of many universities. LGB Studies, however, was still thought to engage in assimilationist politics while neglecting transgender folks (Stone 2009)

The newest academic study of Transfeminism, which began in the early 2000s, has historically on the margins of lesbian feminism, political feminism, and histories of gay liberation. Quite a few scholars have studied the histories of transgender inclusion in LGBT and feminist movements (Broad 2002; Stone 2004, 2009; Connell 2012; Williams 2016). A major critique of queer theory is that although it was attempted to deconstruct categories, it ended up reifying them, which reinforced this divide of trans/non-trans while at the same time neglecting the physical bodies of those participating in theories (Heyes 2003). Adding to queer theory, the addition of transgender studies to feminism has aided in the development of critical areas to explore the ways transfeminism can help to better conceptualize identities than queer or feminist studies alone (Enke 2012) through looking at policy implications (Spade 2012) and the "woman question" (Noble 2012; Watson 2016). The number of queer scholars studying transfeminisms and transgender inclusion in the feminist movement has drastically increased in the past decade. Watson (2016), for instance, offered an open letter urging radical feminists to see trans women as concrete women who they can work with toward a common goal. Similarly,

scholars have argued the history of transgender inclusion within feminism movements have conflated radical feminism with Trans Exclusive Radical Feminism (TERFs) or RadFems (Williams 2016) and that the lineage of epistemologies of trans\*feminism is already intersectional (Simpkins 2016).

Overall feminists, academic and activist alike, are not in agreement about the inclusion of queer theory within mainstream feminism, but what it has done is actively question the idea of a singular “feminist” definition. Although they have both had a history of being “women’s” spaces, both bookstores currently pride themselves on inclusion beyond a women-only space. This is important historically and contextually in terms of the store trajectories and, as I will discuss later, the problematic linear narrative of progress.

No matter the “wave,” a mainstay of feminist theorizing is the power of naming (Lorde 1982). Scholars and activists alike have debated the importance and relevance of certain names over others. A major debate within the national feminist community is the name and definition of “woman.” As highlighted by Gamson (1997), this has been a long-standing debate couched within ideologies of second wave feminists as concerned with bodily experiences of birth and girlhood as a qualifier for womanhood. And while this may sound like a trite argument in 2017, I will illustrate this argument still very present.

Moving away from simply resting on definitions of womanhood, lesbian separatists, radicals, and lesbian feminists took up the concept of “womyn.” These womyn found empowerment in drawing a boundary between women, which included men and therefore patriarchal ideologies. They saw this new spelling and therefore definition as a valid way of participating in separatist politics (Taylor and Whittier 1992; Whittier 2010).

As with many things in academia, postmodernism and queer theory to throw a theoretical wrench in previously stable definitions. Queer theory added to the already prevalent radical second wave feminists who had been searching for more inclusive definitions (Williams 2016) and third wave feminists who began to question gender and sexuality as binaries allowed feminists to question assumptions about womanhood (Williams 2016). These questions about the stability of biology and womanhood created a space for feminists and feminist organizations to further include trans voices.

These two separate events provide different contexts to these conversations about inclusion and feminism. They are examples of how discussions rooted in academic theories, such as queer theory, are translated into lived experiences and practice. That translation is not easy or comfortable. *Charis* and *Wild Iris* offer two different geographical, temporal, and mediums to understand the ways organizations frame themselves, manage in-fighting, and ultimately manage their images.

### ***Charis* in the 1990s and 2000s: Questioning Trans Inclusion**

*Charis* never had an open or public discussion about trans inclusion. Instead, they had a number of insular conversations about the appropriateness of women's spaces and transgender spaces. As stated by an employee of *Charis*, Rita, they have always been intentional about the store focusing on "trans inclusion not just a lesbian or women only space, but a feminist space." As I have previously argued, that feminism, unlike others over time and in different contexts, has been intentional. The first time trans inclusion became a point of contention was in 1993 when Leslie Feinberg visited *Charis* upon her release of *Stone Butch Blues*. According to Rita, alongside Leslie was his current partner, Minnie Bruce Pratt, famous lesbian feminist author and close friend of then owner Linda Bryant. The store was packed and tensions were high as Leslie

was introduced using male pronouns. During the question and answer portion of the talk, an audience member asked bluntly, “what do you have in your pants?” To which, according to Rita, Leslie replied, “None of your business.” The moment Rita goes remembers is one of defiance, where the guest clearly articulated trans inclusion. While she was remembering this story, we both burst into laughter. Leslie and Pratt, prolific and well-respected authors, shut down an audience member’s potential transphobia in 1994 was astounding. I followed up our laughter by asking if there was fallout because of that interaction. Rita, still laughing, said that moment was “a major shifting point for *Charis*” to actively including more trans voices. By having two famous feminist queer authors fighting transphobia, the bookstore was, by proxy, given permission to publicly include trans folks, events, and representation.

Disputes about trans inclusion, however, did not end there. In the early 2000s, the board of *Charis* began questioning the validity of including trans men in women’s open mic nights. In an interview in her office at work, Jennifer, a middle-aged, straight, white woman, who was on the board at the time, discussed the conflict as being “...about trans folks inclusion, particular trans men participating in the women’s—you know—and whether we were saying women and what terminology we’re using...” First, she notes that the contention was not about trans inclusion per se, but the inclusion of trans men. While explaining this to me, she cocked her head toward me to say “you know” in a dismissive voice. Trans inclusion, while her inflections and body language implied it was a unimportant conversation, she was uncomfortable in defining if the bookstore should be a women’s only space, as if she were assuming that was the ultimate goal. Later in our conversation, she discussed how the moment of contention came to a resolution: dropping “women” from the title of events. Even though there was no outward dissent from the patrons, Jennifer believed the feminist community was not pleased with the

change. While she did not outwardly voice this, based off of her terminologies, body language, inflection, and awkwardness, she was one of those community members. Later in the discussion, Jennifer described how the store functions in 2017 in contrast to the late 1990's and early 2000's. Even though the store was opened and maintained by lesbians, she argues that now it is "sort of a lesbian and queer and transgender space than it originally was [and that] its younger management now so that kind of comes with a little bit of culture change" Here, Jennifer expressed her lack of comfort with the inclusion of "lesbian and queer and transgender" folks. After doing so, Jennifer laughs, smiles, and waits for me to shake my head in agreement. Even though I am certainly not heterosexual, Jennifer read me as such, which made her feel empowered to voice her opinion about queer inclusion. Above, Jennifer's identity as straight is central to her articulation of the bookstores, nothing that the difference is "younger." Her explanation of the bookstore, while it is based in memories, is one where cisgendered heterosexuality was the norm. She relates the change of inclusion of transgender folks, and men in particular, to younger generations, which is a common argument about feminist generations and the feminist movements (Whittier 2010).

As Jennifer articulated, generations did alter the way participants experienced the bookstores and how they felt about trans inclusion. Alex is a younger, butch/transmasculine, white, queer person, who is a long time customer and currently employed by the store. Since they were active at *Charis* during this shift, Alex provides a detailed understanding of how transgender inclusion occurred within the programming and content at the bookstore. According to Alex, this conversation about inclusion began around 1995 and concluded just a few years later.

When I first started coming to *Charis*, there was still a women-only program once a month, there was still a women's only sign in the erotica and sex section...[and] when

there started being more trans men in the community—as people had greater access to technologies of transition and language—folks started to debate all that. So what *Charis* started to do was say, “women and trans folks welcome” because what we didn't want was cisgendered men, cisgendered straight men really, [and] well gay men too. But then...trans women said, well essentially, “aint’ I a woman? So when you say women and trans folks that feels exclusionary to me.” So then it was “women and trans men” but then trans men were like, “for real though? I'm not man enough to warrant being kicked out of your club?” So... then it was like what are we really afraid of? And it came down to a question of: we’ve never been a women’s bookstore, we’ve never been a women’s only space, not really, we’ve been a feminist space. We’ve always said that men, cisgendered men, all men could be feminists [or] could be allies in the fight for women’s liberation. What are we really afraid of? Are we afraid of discomfort in conversation? Are we afraid of violence? Are we afraid of someone taking up space in a scary way? And if that's the case isn't it true that there have been lesbians who have done all of that in this space? So, why are we – feminists—who believe in the disassociation of traits from inborn sex characteristics saying that these things are natural corollaries? That's ridiculous. And so we basically said we need to develop better tools to deal with problematic behaviors and problematic people and *not* categories of people. And so we [the management] slowly and quietly took down all the signs and stopped using gender exclusionary language and just sort of phased it out. And slowly made it more and more of a point to use gender inclusive language more forcefully, so stop saying women and girls in all our stuff.

Alex provides a very detailed and thoughtful timeline of trans inclusion at *Charis*. First, they begin by deconstructing categorical gender terms. He notes that once the bookstore began making these changes from women-only toward gender inclusive programming, they received critiques from both trans men and trans women. Alex laughed while they explain the contradictory nature of attempting to include folks who then feel as if your inclusion is exclusionary. Even though inclusion was the ultimate goal, Alex noted that the language used was problematic even if the intention was not. The critiques Alex mentions began a conversation within the bookstore and non-profit board, forcing *Charis* to define who and what they are. In doing that, Alex mentions they’ve “never been a women’s bookstore, we’ve never been a women’s only space.” After stating that, however, Alex, follows up that *Charis* has “not really” been a women’s only space and instead, argues its just been feminist. That contention that Alex highlights above is a well-known one within feminist theorizing. Is feminism ultimately about

and for women? And, who gets to count? Moreover, does the history of women's only spaces in feminist organizing have a place in current organizations? Eventually, Alex argues that no. The only reason feminism has been slow to embrace gender neutrality and trans inclusion is because of fear. While Alex breaks down the contradictory assumptions within the feminist communities that were prevalent at *Charis* during the mid to late 1990s, what they conclude is that the feminist community and *Charis* needs to rely less on language and more on understanding problematic behavior, beliefs, and people, regardless of their identifies. Alex goes onto explain that rather than upsetting those who may identify as transgender, those in support of gender inclusion, or those against gender inclusion, the employees and board of directors slowing and “quietly” made the transition into the gender inclusive programming they have today.

From other interviews I conducted, observations in *Charis*, multiple conversations, and archival data, not everyone involved in the bookstore agreed that the exclusion of everyone who was not cisgender women was problematic. Quite a few participants from *Charis*, in fact, were against the inclusion of transgender folks within the feminist bookstore. Even though they voiced opposition, the bookstore moved forward with trans inclusion as a central part of their political ideologies. This dispute, while it quietly happened around twenty years ago, illustrates the changes in gender and sexualities over time (Krieger, 1983; Taylor and Whittier, 1992; Taylor and Rupp, 1993; Stein, 1997; Stone 2009; Connell 2012; Williams 2016).

### ***Wild Iris* 2015: Questioning Modes of Trans Inclusion**

The event Viva La Vulva happened in April 2015 at *Wild Iris Books*. The event was proposed by a local artist to the bookstore as an event designed to celebrate women's bodies through music, art, and poetry. Multiple musicians and poets to take part in the event contacted *Wild Iris*. Viva La Vulva was scheduled to be one of the largest in the past few years of *Wild Iris*.

After the event was posted on the *Wild Iris* Facebook page on March 17<sup>th</sup>, 2015, an artist for the event solicited volunteers to be vulva models, without designating a definition of vulvas. The artist, who was a recent graduate of the University of Florida's Journalism school was planning to use clay molds, paint, and pencil to illustrate participant's vulvas. Below is the text from a flyer that provides a detailed explanation of the event goals that was posted on the Viva La Vulva Facebook event page.

On April 18th *Wild Iris* Books will be unveiling "Viva La Vulva", an art collaboration presenting interviews and images from the community. The exhibit will display 30 black and white photographs of uncensored vulvas representing people from diverse backgrounds and genders along with audio recordings from the volunteers participating in the project. Our aim is to celebrate sexual diversity and body positivity and challenge patriarchal, homogenized representations of vulvas and false notions of normalcy. All the models are people in our community who allowed themselves to be vulnerable and open in hopes of continuing to change the dialogue we are given to navigate.

The goals, as described by the flyer for the event, seemed mundane and open-ended. The artist calls for people to volunteer to be featured in pictures and potentially audio. The call does address gender, by asking for a variety of volunteers from "diverse backgrounds and genders." Although the artist does not directly say transgender, their usage of the plural genders, nods to an open-ended designation of gender. Even further, the artist notes the aim is to "celebrate sexual diversity and body positivity and challenge patriarchal, homogenized representations of vulvas and false notions of normalcy," which is a clear attempt to deconstruct binary notions of gender and sex. However, the lack of direct language including transgender and queer bodies becomes the main focus of the event.

As the event grew closer, it garnered more conversation about inclusion than initially expected. The public Facebook event page became a major place of contention, wherein the feminist Gainesville community discussed the issues of an event concentrating on body parts. After some public discussion about inclusion, the event artist posted a call specifically for non-

cisgender participants saying, “Hey, we are looking for AMAB [assigned male at birth] trans ppl who identify their genitalia as a vulva. We would really like to celebrate trans ppl in our event. Please let us know how/what we can do to make this safe and respectful for u.” After a backlash on the Facebook page, *Wild Iris* quickly removed the post. That deletion did not end the uproar. In order to continue the discussion about the problems of exclusionary “vulva” centric events, a college-aged commenter named Scout reposted the call above on the event Facebook page, after it had been taken down. Scout responded to the re-post of the artist’s call for models saying, “also, trans ppl are not ‘engaging in a learning process’ when it comes to cissexism and the erasure of trans ppl.” Here, Scout addressed a common expectation of trans folks within the feminist and queer communities: to be learning tools. Scout argued against the assumption that trans bodies should be available for teaching cisgender people about difference. Moreover, Scout linked this expectation to cissexism, which seeks to normalize cisgender bodies while maintaining the “novelty” of trans bodies. Finally, Scout asserted that this event is participating in the “erasure of trans” people because of the usage of body specific language, such as vulva. Scout’s comment initiated a conversation that happened over two weeks leading up to the event. Community activists, college students, teenagers, feminists, and queer folks publicly argued on the Facebook event page about the appropriateness of the Viva La Vulva call for models and event.



**Figure 9: Viva La Vulva Poster**

While there were people on each side of the argument, the actions taken by people involved in the event and the response from the bookstore, illustrated that most people who commented on the Facebook page deemed the event transmisogynistic. Another commenter, Carolina, who appeared college aged, explained the complicated issues with the event.

...how about we talk about transmisogyny and how trans womyn and AMAB non binary folks are constantly excluded, degendered, and dehumanized in our own community (frequently because of their genitals) before we have more of the same vagina "feminism" events where we continue to prioritize genitals over WOMANHOOD!

Carolina brings up the many of the same issues discussed by feminists in the early 1970s, such as exclusionary and essentialist biological language (Stone 2009). First, Carolina identified the language of genitals to be the problem with the event. They linked the exclusionary naming of vulva to how trans folks feel outside of their community, that is the feminist community.

Carolina argued that kind of feminism, "vagina 'feminism'" is not welcome in the community because it privileges genitals over gender. Moreover, Carolina's usage of quotations around the term feminism illustrates they do not believe it is a legitimate form of feminism. The commenters who take issue with the transphobic event focus on the ways feminism and queer communities have privileged of bodies as a biological truism.

Glynis, another commenter who appeared college-aged with bright green and red hair, pointed out an issue with the people who were central to the event. Glynis argues *Wild Iris* had planned to “have a band play ur event, who's member is a known TERF... That’s just a slap in the face.” Although Glynis does not name the member or band, they assert this person is “a known TERF,” in which the reader is to assume they are known by the feminist, queer, or trans communities. Not only do they make that assumption about this person being “known,” they saw the inclusion of this band as a violent act, like a “slap in the face.” In addition to this comment, the people I talked to about this event did not want to “out” the band that Glynis believed to be a TERF. Instead, I was told the band in question simply had a bad reputation because of a relationship falling out and nothing more. However, these comments did a good bit of damage to the event. A few days before the event occurred, multiple bands and businesses withdrew from because of this controversy.

After the discussions that began on March 17<sup>th</sup>, on March 19<sup>th</sup> *Wild Iris Books* released an official statement on the Facebook event page regarding allegations of transmisogyny.

We have taken a few days to process and internalize your comments in an attempt not to react out of defensiveness and operate from a place of love.

In planning the event, we reached out to leaders in the trans\*/non gender conforming community to gather feedback on how to disassociate vulvas with cis-women and our call to models invited people with vulvas to volunteer to participate with no limitations, definitions or requirements for what vulva meant.

In a second follow-up meeting, we further discussed ways to loosen the medically defined boundaries and continue exploring ways to be trans\* affirmative. The idea of the suggestion box was offered by these community leaders as a direct response to our questions about how to move forward with programming that continues to grow in inclusivity. Our intention was not to provide a lip-service box with no real action, but rather to allow non cis- people to dictate and determine what programming was viable, relevant and empowering for their community. There was much collective groaning about “panel events” that provided words with no action or substance.

After these discussions, we did not make another formal call for models and missed the opportunity to take inclusion to the next level by clarifying who could participate. We would like to correct that mistake now and invite AMAB trans people

who identify their genitalia as a vulva (language we learned through your conversations and comments) to help us increase the scope of images and who is included. If you are interested, please contact VivaLaVulva@gmail.com.

*Wild Iris* has existed as a feminist space the early 90's and the current leadership of the store has sincerely worked at changing the landscape of "feminist" spaces, aligning ourselves with voices and communities that have often been neglected and silenced by the remaining residue of exclusionary second wave feminism and this event dialogue has only solidified why that is so necessary.

No one gets everything right all the time, and we as a space and as individuals are no different. Our hearts are committed to creating safe space, empowerment and societal evolution. Our sole intentions were to take a piece of anatomy that we cherish and create an event that lifted it up with music, art and solidarity.

First, as mentioned at the start of the post, *Wild Iris* took two days to articulate their feelings and response, noting they had been internalizing and processing. After the amount of arguments publicly available on the Facebook event page, the owners needed to take their time in addressing the situation. Second, they mention that they reached out to leaders in the trans community to help with their event and to learn from their mistakes. They do not apologize for their mistakes, but instead call for more open conversations. Third, not only did they not apologize, but they also defended the initial call for models, stating the category of vulva had no limitations. Fourth, the statement did not mention trans inclusivity but, instead, used the terminology of trans affirmative. In the same portion, the statement made fun of academic conversations about trans issues by stating that while having these conversations, there was "collective groaning about panel events" where words get used freely but there is no "action" or follow-through. It is this point in the statement where Wild Iris is using boundary work to distinguish themselves from academic panels that provide "lip-service" with no "real action." Fifth, and again showing their ability to learn, instead of rewording the call for models by themselves, the owners reflected on the monolithic "your" conversations and comments from Facebook and conversations with community "leaders." Again, the statement turns to more boundary making where Wild Iris distinguishes itself from feminism of the "early 90s" and

second wave “exclusionary” feminist politics. In doing that, they are implicitly arguing they are a “good” kind of feminism that is inclusionary, unlike how they view the feminist past. The statement ends with a hint at an apology, noting they aren’t perfect or “right all the time” and that people are fallible. Even though the event dealt with much scrutiny, Wild Iris asserted, perhaps in a misstep of words, the event was meant to be a way for anatomy to be “lifted up.” And while they end the post with, “in constantly evolving solidarity,” the owners and management at *Wild Iris* did not directly apologize. Instead, the owners, management, and volunteers argued the event served as an opportunity to grow in solidarity and learn from one another.

They positioned the “real” problem with the dispute is with feminists left over from the second wave who were active in the community during the early 1990’s and not the current reiteration of the feminist community in Gainesville. In doing so, the organization of *Wild Iris* is able to distance themselves from the “bad” part of feminism that people are critiquing. Even though they release this statement, the fights about transgender inclusion within the bookstore are intergenerational. In fact, the only people to be involved in the organizing of the event (in any way other than ownership) were under the age of thirty-five. People of all age ranges, and younger college-aged feminists in particular, were part of this “problem.” For instance, Glynis who commented on the Facebook event suggested that there are well known TERFs who are part of the larger feminist community in Gainesville. After that comment, however, most people defensively called out other names while saving themselves from the crossfire.

I attempted to address this dispute in a conversation with one of the current owners. Although she laughed and mentioned she was aware of the problem with the event, she did not want to discuss it at all. According to her, the fall out from the event and subsequent backlash by

college students, in particular, has hurt the bookstore. Although the Viva La Vulva dispute happened twenty years after the trans dispute at *Charis*, they are striking similarities.

### **Gender “Progress” Over Time**

Atlanta and Gainesville have different contexts and histories. Their goals, while they are similar, are operating on a different contextual time frame. Following other research (Ferree and Hess 2000; Whittier 2010), I argue the goals are different because of the generational differences of the bookstore patrons. *Charis* tends to have people from a variety of generations, whereas *Wild Iris* tends to be both college aged and retired. These generations—and in particular their generational goals—matter. Seeing two different, yet similar, disputes occurring within ten years of each other should illustrate the importance of generational priority. However, the instance at *Wild Iris* was intragenerational. These arguments were occurring between a younger generations of feminists who were under thirty-five years old. That is not the narrative we know about feminism (Taylor 1989; Staggenborg 1998; Ferree and Hess 2000; Whittier 2010). What we have assumed based on previous research, is that the “waves” of feminism fight with each other. That, however, is not the current case.

Moments such as the 1974 release of the Combahee River Collective’s statement urged mainstream feminists have been critical of grand theories, overgeneralizations, and intersections of identities. As illustrated in Figure 10, *Charis* has used both second wave feminism, which the bookstore was founded on, and queer theory, such as phrases “Beyond the Binary,” to echo critiques provided by academic literatures concerning notions of womanhood and biology. The trajectories of these critical conversations vary by community.



**Figure 10:** *Charis* Float, Pride 2014

In Figure 10, we see a Pride Festival float from *Charis* in 2014. On the float, the audience can clearly see the statement “beyond the binary.” Given that *Charis* had the conversation about trans inclusion over twenty years ago, it is not surprising their Pride float proudly questions the binary of gender and sex. However, twenty years ago when they were disputing trans inclusion, the conversation was insular and quiet, whereas the Pride float demonstrates the opposite. In contrast, *Wild Iris* did not have the luxury of a “quiet” insular introduction of transgender inclusion; they had a public forum where people felt empowered to share their opinions.

### **The Mythology of Gender Progress**

Similar to the mythology surrounding Stonewall (Armstrong and Cragg 2006), academics, archivists, and journalists mythologize history. Academics commonly use shorthand to notate moments in time in order to elevate a theory. Parallel to my other findings about SMO goals, the South, and racism, the context of feminism matters. And what these findings discussed

in this chapter show is scholars should be disputing narratives of gender progress, such as the paradigm shifts from woman, womyn, or person.

These kinds of gendered disputes are not atypical. They happen all the time; the only thing that changes about them is their context. Ideas about gender and sexuality are messy, and my participants did not shy away from discussing their discomfort with rapid changes in these categories. Madelia, an older Mestiza lesbian who has been involved in *Charis* and *Wild Iris*, explains her lack of ease with identities.

I have at times been uncomfortable and I still you know watching the transgender movement evolve has been real interesting just to observe its out there...but it also confuses me because sometimes its different and not specific to *Charis*. It just to be the gay and lesbian movement then the LGBT—whatever—then it is LGBTQXYZ and its like ...they all get lumped together in this huge big pot and sometimes that's sometimes like does it even mean anything anymore, you kind of loose that distinctiveness.

First, Madelia openly admits her unease about “new” identity categories. She is open about how the trans movement confuses her—within and outside of *Charis*. As she began her list of the queer acronym, she started laughing and simply added the end of the alphabet. In doing so, she is being dismissive of the intricacies of these identities. That is not because she dislikes or disapproves of these addition to the queer lexicon, instead she is uncomfortable with the loss of distinctive identity. Her noticeable apprehension about inclusion relates to her own identity as a lesbian, and perhaps, the fear of loosing her own identity she felt like she struggled to claim. She is not alone in her unease with the growing queer lexicon. Eloise, an older white activist lesbian who volunteered with *Charis*, voiced a similar opinion. In our conversation, she discussed how her discomfort actually pushed her to adapt and grow with the movement.

...as ALL feminists had to adapt, there's more transgender...I got a lecture on LGBTQUI—or what are all those-- (laughs) So a woman looks at me and she said, “Queer! That's what it is, queer!” And I said, “well, I didn't grow up with queer!” So, yeah, it's been a good place for me, in that way. Always learning!

First, and in contrast to Madelia, Eloise argued that feminism is about adaptation and change. She saw that as a necessity to be a feminist. Second, she noted, “there’s more transgender people.” She didn’t follow up with this point instead she changed the subject. In this section, Eloise argued there has been an increase in trans visibility and identification, which is something Madelia and others voiced as a concern. Instead of being concerned about this, Eloise saw it as an opportunity to learn from the community at *Charis*. She then mentioned an interaction she had at the bookstore where a woman was attempting to explain the term queer to her. She laughed while reenacting this conversation noting the generational difference in terminologies. Again, even though she is uncomfortable with new and changing identity categories, Eloise believes the bookstore is a productive place to learn about and grow from them. She uses the bookstore is a site to engage these discussions in order to can keep current with identifications and “LGBTQUI” movement goals. However, this apprehension, confusion, and excitement about inclusion does not always happen.

As illustrated in my data, it is not just individual feminists who question inclusion and expansion of identities. The organizations themselves must make a conscious decision about inclusion. Emma, an upper class younger white lesbian and current board member, discusses the contradiction of welcoming second wave feminists who she argues are stereotypically not interested in trans inclusion and trans folk in the same space.

...as those women the community that founded [the bookstores]...dispersed, got older, had different priorities...there was nobody to take their place. And somehow *Charis* has had women cross generations who will...use the space.... And somehow they've managed to create this thing where both women ...feel like they can go there. ...It doesn't feel like... one or the other one felt kicked out...like oh, “we lost that space.” So either the... radical women of the 70’s style felt like that could no longer go, or young people thought, “those are those retrograde people who don't accept us” so they felt like they couldn't go. And I don't know how *Charis* felt like they could do that but I do think that that is a huge part of how it’s been able to survive compared to the other feminist bookstores.

Emma, who just came back to the feminist community in Atlanta after a decade, explained how impressed she was that *Charis* was able to manage conflicting ideologies in the same space. First, she noted the way aging alters priorities and, therefore, who uses the space. She clearly designated boundaries between “radical women of the 70s” as not accepting of trans inclusion and “younger” folks who were. Third, Emma ultimately argued that because neither of these parts of the bookstore was kicked out, their relevance has one of the reasons *Charis* has survived. As Emma points out, since *Charis* has been able to satisfy both “sides” of trans inclusion within feminism without disenfranchising anyone regardless of generation or “side” of the argument. The way *Charis* has maintained a large amount of people on either side of the debate is not a mystery; the organization has had the luxury to make decisions about inclusion on an insular case-by-case basis. As the owners of *Wild Iris* can attest, not every organization has that freedom.

Even with the potentially “all inclusive” *Charis* Emma narrates, politics of inclusion within feminism are much more complex than separating and maintaining two sides of an argument. Hannah, a white bisexual professional woman who has experience with feminist organizing, discussed the challenges of introducing inclusive programing.

...its almost as if its inevitable that you're going to screw it up sometimes and also inevitable that you actually have to sit down and have these outlandish conversations—making sure that you have enough color and queerness and transness and .... you want it and you believe it should be there. But then you start thinking...is this the right trans voice?

Speaking from her experience as a feminist organizer, Hannah first mentioned the inevitability of making mistakes. She posed questions about having enough representation, the kinds of representations, and if it is enough. The conundrum she highlighted is where the bookstores find themselves: how do they please everyone within in the community? As these two disputes

emphasized, that is a difficult and maybe an impossible ambition.

## **Conclusion**

With the ultimate closing of the Michigan Womyn's Festival, the public emergence of trans models, and political discussions about bathroom availability for trans people, we have culturally begun including discussions about gender variance. As a member of feminist, activist, queer, and academic communities, it is easy to naïvely mythologize the idea that feminists are consistently in agreement about trans\* inclusion. These two disputes exemplify issues within feminist social movements while highlighting the ways access to queer identities (and subsequently theories) and public modes of technology have altered activist conceptions of inclusive feminism. Academics and activists alike, myself included, need to be careful when theorizing progress within feminist or "progressive" communities. Gamson's focus on sexuality, queer inclusion, boundary work, and framing still offers fascinating and complex understandings of social movements. These two disputes offer more complexity within a current context by including issues of virtual fights, generational ideas about feminism, and the relevance of trans\* voices. Even though the bookstores work to define themselves as inclusive, that framing does not always translate into individual practices. In actuality, most of the folks I talked to were not in agreement about definitions of feminism at all.

## CHAPTER EIGHT CONCLUSIONS

“...we try to respond to what the community says they need. If we don't evolve, you're not moving and that's not good.” Olivia, a heterosexual woman of color in a leadership position at *Wild Iris*

In the June 2017 issue of *Gender & Society*, Wanda Rushing wrote an impassioned call for scholars to further interrogate region, and the South in particular, as an aspect of intersectionality within feminist movements and theories. This call for research happened to coincide with my timeline of final edits for my defense on this dissertation. I am excited about the future of sociological scholarship concerning feminism, progressive movements, and intersectionality within the South. And, I just happen to have a decent place to start.

My argument sits at the intersections of theories about social movements, feminisms, race, and the South. Drawing from archival data, a year worth of field notes and ethnographic data, interview data, and oral histories, my data allows for in-depth study about feminist subjectivities over time, cultural geographies of the South, way trends in academic theories have altered SMOs, and how feminist bookstores rely on physical space.

In my first data chapter, I explored the relevancy of feminist bookstores and communities to social movement scholarship. Social movement scholars point to feminist bookstores as important organizing spaces (Taylor and Rupp 1993; Reger 1994; Whittier 1997; Staggenborg 1998; Haenfler 2004). None of these scholars, however, have completed a study on feminist bookstores. I find that the bookstores organizers, as SMOs, see the *existence* of a tangible space to allow for contestation about collective identities and “home work” as a successful social

movement outcome. This finding will help scholars understand how many SMOs function as tight-knit groups, which mimic homes.

My second data chapter focuses on how participants make sense of Southern feminist identities. Something neglected by all studies on feminist bookstores, but prevalent in studies about social movement organizations is the problem of geographies (Reger 2002; Reger and Staggenborg 2006). Even though the South has been hegemonically positioned as counterproductive for progressive movements, these bookstores find support within identities and cultures of the South. I find that participants believe that Southern identity, which is steeped in understands of the past, which is steeped in understands of radicalized and politicized histories of the South, have created a need for the bookstore's longevities and for communities. This finding will help bring sociologies of the South into a more critical place than it has been in the past.

My third data chapter is on white feminism and color-blind racial politics. Much research done on feminist spaces (Taylor and Rupp 1993; Reger 1994; Whittier 1997; Staggenborg 1998; Haenfler 2004) have neglected race altogether. Currently, feminist organizations – as well as other progressive organizations—are cast as (and many times believe they are) understanding and cognizant of racism. We know this is not always the case. These organizations or ideological communities are responsible for (knowingly and unknowingly) using color-blind racist politics (Bonilla-Silva 2002). I find that because of the unique positioning of the histories of racism and slavery in the South, these feminist organizations believe a central problem of feminism is to actively name and confront racism within *both* the South and feminism. This finding will help feminists and scholars parse apart the intricate relationships between race, racism, color-blind rhetoric, the South, and feminisms.

My final data chapter focuses on two gender disputes, 2005 and 2015, about transgender inclusion within the feminist bookstores. These disputes rose out of the supposed shift from lesbian separatism to the incorporation of queer theories and activism. By using these two gender disputes a decade apart, I argue that the narrative of gender progress touted by scholars (Whittier 1995, Armstrong and Crag 2006) inaccurately represents the intricacies within definitions of feminism. When it comes to feminist identities, politics, and civil rights discourses, our current political climate has illustrated that there is not room for linear narratives of progress—within movements or individual identities. This finding helps disrupt the feminist and LGBT narrative of progress by highlighting the contentions still present in regard to trans inclusion.

Throughout this dissertation I have focused on ways these organizations make sense of their identities, movements, and histories. My interviews, participant observations, and archival data collection illustrated the importance of geography, “home work,” frank discussions about race, and disputes over gender progress. There are, however, limitations to my study. My focus as a qualitative constructionist is still not meant to be representative of all experiences, identities, and places. Instead, I focus on how meaning is constructed through my data. Another limitation is the lack of data I was able to procure from Wild Iris. That is because of the fractured history of the bookstore and lack of archives.



**Figure 11:** MC (third from the left) with *Charis Books and More* Staff, 2015

There are quite a few larger implications for this study. First, there is a clear need to discuss and explore regional identity within sociology. While we are an increasingly connected world with the ability to make global connections and relationships, my data suggests we still rely on place as a baseline for understanding ourselves and our worlds. Especially with regards to the study of social movements, scholars need to attend to identity as regionally situated. For instance, the way my participants made sense of their chosen “home” through familiar understandings of place.

Second, not only do we need to attend to regional identity, but we also need to complicate our understandings of place. I have done just that. Even though my participants noted the many problems with the South, they still happily held onto that regional identity. They simultaneously welcomed stereotypes of the welcoming South while distancing their identities from conservative Southern politics. Similarly, their understandings of the South were intimately

intertwined with the historical legacy and culture of racism, thereby forcing a conversation about addressing that racism.

Third, scholars must continue to complicate feminisms. As Rushing (2017) noted, feminism exists throughout the country, even in the South. Through the narrative of conservative politics, Southern feminisms sound impossible. Yet, I have clearly illustrated they are quite possible. Their oxymoronic existence pushes scholars to continue to interrogate linear narratives about feminism and progress—especially in terms of racial and gendered inclusions.

Between reflections on white feminism, TERFs, the South, and conservatism, I made sense of the feminist bookstore movement communities as consistently reflexive. There is a great deal of scholarship and even more data left to this project. Moving forward, I plan to revamp this dissertation into a legible monograph that can substantially add to the lacking literature on progressive movements in the U.S. South. I also would like to add the Austin, Texas bookstore to offer a comparison between a variety of “souths.” I believe my work will meet Rushing’s call for a greater focus on and critique of the South as an intersectional and feminist place. Future research should attend to the South and region as an identity, analytic, and intersection within progressive movements. Additionally, future research should work toward deconstructing the concept of home as a physical place and explore the emotional and fluid aspects to home.

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## **APPENDICES**

### **Interview Guide**

Semi-structured in-depth interviews will be conducted with the staff, volunteers, owners, and, non-profit workers at the bookstores. The following are some of the guiding questions for the lower-level workers or volunteer interviews.

1. Do you live in Atlanta/Gainesville? If so, for how long?
2. Tell me about your typical week.
3. What do you do as a profession?
4. When did you get involved with the store? What does it mean to you?
5. Tell me about Charis/Wild Iris.
6. Has the store changed since you have known about it?
7. Tell me about how you feel about the purpose of the bookstore. Is there anything you would alter or change?
8. What does the store do for the local community?
9. Are there any other communities or movements you were/are active in before here?
10. What does feminism mean to you?
11. What is your favorite feminist book/text?

## Oral History Interview Guide

Oral histories will be conducted with current and previous owners of the bookstore. The following are some of the guiding questions for the oral history.

Do you live in Atlanta/Gainesville currently?

Are you from here? When did you move to Atlanta/Gainesville?

What did you do for work when you first moved here?

Did/do you go to college?

Tell me about your typical week.

Tell me about Charis/Wild Iris. Tell me about how you got involved in Charis/Wild Iris.

What does the bookstore mean to you?

Are there any other communities or social movements you were active in?

Were you involved in any social movements in your youth?

What does the store do for the local community?

Tell me about how you feel about the purpose of the bookstore. Is there anything you would alter or change?

Has the store changed since you have known about it? If so, how?

What does the concept of feminism mean to you?

What is your favorite feminist book/text?

This demographic sheet will be used for both Interviews and Oral Histories.  
Demographic Information

Please fill out the following questions. If you have any questions, please feel free to ask.

Year of birth:

How do you identify your race/ethnicity?

How do you define your gender identity?

How do you define your sexual identity?

Who lives in your household besides you?

What do/did your parents do for a living?

What do you do for a living?

What are your hobbies?



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February 17, 2015

Mary Whitlock  
Women's & Gender Studies  
Tampa, FL 33607

RE: **Expedited Approval for Initial Review**

IRB#: Pro00020171

Title: Examining Forty Years of the Social Organization of Feminisms: Ethnography of Two Women's Bookstores in the US South

**Study Approval Period: 2/17/2015 to 2/17/2016**

Dear Ms. Whitlock:

On 2/17/2015, the Institutional Review Board (IRB) reviewed and **APPROVED** the above application and all documents outlined below.

**Approved Item(s):**

**Protocol Document(s):**

[STUDY PROTOCOL.IRB.docx](#)

**Consent/Assent Document(s)\*:**

[MCWhitlock.SB Adult Minimal Risk.docx.pdf](#)

\*Please use only the official IRB stamped informed consent/assent document(s) found under the "Attachments" tab. Please note, these consent/assent document(s) are only valid during the approval period indicated at the top of the form(s).

It was the determination of the IRB that your study qualified for expedited review which includes activities that (1) present no more than minimal risk to human subjects, and (2) involve only procedures listed in one or more of the categories outlined below. The IRB may review research through the expedited review procedure authorized by 45CFR46.110 and 21 CFR 56.110. The research proposed in this study is categorized under the following expedited review category:

(6) Collection of data from voice, video, digital, or image recordings made for research purposes.

(7) Research on individual or group characteristics or behavior (including, but not limited to, research on perception, cognition, motivation, identity, language, communication, cultural beliefs or practices, and social behavior) or research employing survey, interview, oral history, focus group, program evaluation, human factors evaluation, or quality assurance methodologies.

As the principal investigator of this study, it is your responsibility to conduct this study in accordance with IRB policies and procedures and as approved by the IRB. Any changes to the approved research must be submitted to the IRB for review and approval by an amendment.

We appreciate your dedication to the ethical conduct of human subject research at the University of South Florida and your continued commitment to human research protections. If you have any questions regarding this matter, please call 813-974-5638.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "John A. Schinka, Ph.D." The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

John Schinka, Ph.D., Chairperson  
USF Institutional Review Board