Women of Color and Sexuality Identity

Week 7
Feminist Studies 60
Professor Miller-Young
The Aggressives

• What does it mean to be an “Aggressive”?  
• How do these women define their gender identities and their sexual identities? How do these intersect?  
• What structural challenges do they face?  
• How do they attempt to resist oppression?
Transgender

• An umbrella term to describe person who does not identify or conform to their biological or “assigned” sex.
• They may identify or express themselves as a particular gender, more than one gender (i.e. drag queen or drag king), or as another category of gender altogether (i.e. Genderqueer).
• Does not imply any specific sexual orientation; transgender people may be heterosexual, homosexual, bisexual, pansexual or asexual.
Transsexual

• A person who identifies and lives as the opposite sex that they were born with.
• Many transsexual choose to get medical procedures such as hormone therapy and surgery to physically become another sex.
• Female to Male Transsexual = FTM
• Male to Female Transsexual = MTF
Heteronormativity

- Posits all people fall into two distinct categories of sex (biological, male and female) and gender (social identification as a man or woman), and that these are innate and stable.
- Assumes sexual relations are normal only when between two people of different genders, and that monogamy and marriage are the ideal.
- Heteronormativity functions alongside Heterosexism (heterosexual and masculine dominance), to privilege heterosexuality and binary gender identities (male or female) over other gender and sexual identities and expressions.
Sexual Stereotypes

- Systemic forms of repression
- Legitimize exploitation
- Myth of “hypersexuality”
- Are what Patricia Hill Collins calls “controlling images”
- Influence women of color’s identities, desires, expressions, and experiences
- Function through political, economic, social, educational, and legal institutions
- WOC writers critique stereotypes, try to resist them
Sexuality--Process of Othering

- Sexual stereotypes of WOC as DEVIANTS reveal the racialization of sexuality and the sexualization of race.
- Stereotypes inform the ontologies (what we know) and epistemologies (how we know) about WOC.
- Stereotypes are linked to histories of conquest.
- WOC understand ‘Othering’ as a sexualized form of oppression.
Representing Difference

- Stereotypes represent ‘symbolic boundaries’ in our culture. They mark difference and define belonging: US v. Them
- Create a ‘spectacle’ or visual discourse that reproduces otherness through power/knowledge.
- Gain symbolic power as they are repeated again and again.
- Conscious and unconscious, linked to desire and disavowal (rejection).
WOC Negotiating Sexuality

- Racialized sexuality informed by histories of slavery, colonialism, imperialism, and segregation.
- Sexual silences and taboos
- Racial or ethnic community as a source of both empowerment and disempowerment, acceptance and exclusion
- Homophobia--including institutionalized discrimination and violence
Audre Lorde’s Erotic as Power

“In touch with the erotic, I become less willing to accept powerlessness, or those other supplied states of being which are not native to me, such as resignation, despair, self-effacement, depression, and self-denial…Recognizing the power of the erotic within our lives can give us the energy to pursue genuine change within our world, rather than merely settling for a shirt of characters in the same weary drama.” (58-9)