

## Looking to the Margins: The “Outsider Within” Journalistic Fiction<sup>1</sup>

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Living as we did – on the edge – we developed a particular way  
 of seeing reality. We looked both from the outside in and from  
 the inside out. We focused our attention on the center  
 as well as the margin. We understood both.  
 – bell hooks, *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center*<sup>2</sup>

When former journalists Lisa Haddock and Kim McLarin sat down to write their fictional novels featuring minority female reporters as protagonists, they successfully used their own statuses as female minorities to create realistic characters and scenarios that mirrored their own lives. Haddock’s *Edited Out* (1994) and *Final Cut* (1995) and McLarin’s *Taming It Down* (1998) strike an important balance between the real and unreal, blurring the lines between the fiction of their creation and the realities of their own experiences as working reporters. Using Haddock’s Carmen Ramirez (a Puerto Rican lesbian) and McLarin’s Hope Robinson (a single African American woman), this paper seeks to shed light on journalism’s battle with issues of race and gender, while also commenting on the struggles many minority women must overcome in order to accurately report about their communities and simultaneously please their editors. These novels open up an academic space to explore the virtue and value of fictional accounts of real women’s experiences as minority journalists in a less-than-friendly 1990s newsroom culture that resisted diversity rather than embraced it.

### **Interpretive Framework**

Though complex by its very nature, one of the most basic aspects of journalism requires reporters to be aloof observers, neutral participants in the surrounding world. The job seeks people *willing* to be outsiders – reporters who are prepared to enter an environment, collect the facts, and write an interesting but detached story. This “outsider” mentality, however, has created a double bind for minority reporters who unwillingly carry this label with them from their work in the field into homogenous newsrooms that continue to treat them as “outsiders within.” Through the process of working and shifting between newsrooms and communities minority reporters are categorized. Marjan de Bruin writes, “People may take on multiple social identities to serve different functions. These identities may change priority in everyday life according to circumstances and interests; they are subject to negotiation, they overlap, they flow or spill over.”<sup>3</sup> The same is true for the journalist who is an “outsider within,” a person who must go through what de Bruin describes as “processes of identification”: “the claiming of identities; the handling of what seemed to be imposed identities; the coping with conflicting identities; the shifting of identities; the preference for certain identities; the assertion, rejection, or denial of others.”<sup>4</sup>

The result of these identity negotiations, says Patricia Hill Collins, is that minorities become “outsiders within,” where they occupy two worlds – a world of power and privilege where they only seem to be “insiders,” and a world that consists of their own community (e.g., race, class, sexual orientation, etc.) where they are truly insiders.<sup>5</sup> Collins’ primary example of the “outsider within” is illustrated through African American women who have become “insiders” to white society as a result of their presence in white homes as housekeepers and nannies. Black women, Collins argues, have not only cared for the children of white families, but also have become “honorary members” of these families. Yet, as she

points out, “these same Black women knew they could never belong to their white ‘families.’ In spite of their involvement, they remain ‘outsiders.’”<sup>6</sup>

Collins’ work portrays people who exist in the space of power, but who are marginalized in such ways that they have no access to that power. This unique positioning provides a framework for interrogating the power structure that comprises the profession of journalism – one of the nation’s most privileged and powerful institutions – and its employees, who include, in growing numbers, women, racial minorities, gays, and lesbians. Joe Saltzman’s “Sob Sisters: The Image of the Female Journalist in Popular Culture,” Howard Good’s *Girl Reporter: Gender, Journalism, and the Movies*, and Jean Marie Lutes’ *Front Page Girls: Women Journalists in American Culture and Fiction* all represent previous work done on the female journalist in popular culture.<sup>7</sup> Lutes suggests that “the journalism profession, like other symbol creators, has benefited from its ability to classify the world in terms of biological dualisms that pit maleness against femaleness,”<sup>8</sup> white against black, and heterosexuality against homosexuality. These dualities oppress minorities and force them into positions of powerlessness in the face of white, male leadership and patriarchal ideology.

The dualities and powerlessness described above are not far-reaching hypotheses. Data collected in a 1997 survey conducted by the American Society of News Editors (ASNE) found that gender parity and minority representation in newsrooms were problematic issues for journalists during the 1990s. The focus in this article is specifically on the 1990s because the data sets the stage for the journalistic climate the two characters – Ramirez and Robinson – must work within at their respective jobs. (More up-to-date data is available through the ASNE.<sup>9</sup>) In the 1997 study, the newspaper journalist was a “liberal, college-educated, white, male baby boomer” and minority representation on the local level lagged far behind their

proportions in the national population.<sup>10</sup> ASNE also discovered in 1997 that “the distribution of sexual orientation (about 96 percent heterosexual overall) hardly varies by ethnic group”, and only 4 percent of the total journalists polled identified as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transsexual.<sup>11</sup> Coverage of minority groups by newspapers was equally as poor:

While 27 percent of the whites in the sample rate their paper’s coverage of minorities as poor, 46 percent of blacks, 41 percent of Hispanics and 38 percent of Asian Americans give that assessment. As for their paper’s coverage of gays and lesbians, the top choice for every ethnic group is poor ...<sup>12</sup>

Although participants clearly believed that their paper’s commitment to covering diverse communities needed work, they also believed that community diversity needed to be better represented in the newsroom. The study reported, “Whereas most white journalists consider their paper’s commitment to ethnic diversity to be ‘appropriate,’ 75 percent of blacks (and 66 percent of Hispanics and 65 percent of Asian Americans) say it is ‘inadequate.’”<sup>13</sup> Clearly, there was an imbalance in not only the types of stories newspapers at all circulations covered during the 1990s, but also the types of people sent out to cover these stories.

Under-representation is a common theme in not only these survey results, but also in fiction that showcases female journalists as the protagonists. Because art reflects life, it is no surprise that some novels depicting minority female reporters render visible the “outsider within” image to readers. Authors Lisa Haddock and Kim McLarin are, in fact, former minority journalists themselves. Like her character Carmen Ramirez, Haddock is a lesbian who, after nearly 18 years of journalism experience, is now an adjunct professor at William Paterson University in New Jersey. Haddock also shares her character’s Puerto Rican and Irish descent. McLarin is an African American journalist who has worked for the Associated Press, *New York Times*, *Philadelphia Inquirer*, and *Greensboro News & Record*. Author of

three books since *Taking It Down*, the award-winning McLarin is currently a writer-in-residence at Emerson College in Boston, Massachusetts. Like her character Hope Robinson, McLarin has a prestigious educational background, graduating from Phillips Exeter Academy and later Duke University. As a result of their personal experiences, Haddock and McLarin wrote fiction that critiqued newsroom oppression and its construction of an “outsider within” status for its minority female reporters. This paper focuses exclusively on Robinson’s race and Ramirez’s gender identity; though issues of class present themselves from time to time in each novel (and are certainly mentioned in King’s and Collins’ work), most of the opposition originates in racialized and gendered encounters.

Ramirez and Robinson tell their stories through first-person narratives, focusing on their personal and professional struggles as minority women working at newspapers in the late 1990s. Haddock’s Carmen Ramirez (*Edited Out* and *Final Cut*) is a half-Puerto Rican, lesbian copy editor working for a newspaper in a conservative city in Oklahoma. After a homophobic article is printed<sup>14</sup> in the newspaper and her former love interest is murdered in a gay-bashing fraternity ritual,<sup>15</sup> she stands up to her editors in order to rid the paper of its biased, homophobic reporting in the first novel, and solves the mystery of her friend’s death while preventing future hate crimes in the second novel. However, Ramirez is “outed” at the expense of her search for journalistic objectivity, and her new status in the newsroom affects her relationships with co-workers.

McLarin’s *Taming It Down* tells the story of Hope Robinson, an African American general assignment reporter for the *Philadelphia Record*. Throughout the novel, Robinson spends a great deal of time reconciling her white prep school past and her current position in a “whitewashed” newsroom with a search for her authentic “black” self.<sup>16</sup> When she is

assigned to cover an all-black North Philadelphia neighborhood, Robinson takes it upon herself to paint more positive images of African Americans in a medium whose history is steeped in villainizing and criminalizing the black community. While she gains respect among her colleagues for her well-written articles and impressive interviews, her skills are undermined by the racial tension created by a recent affirmative action policy that has the newsroom divided along racial lines.

When Ramirez and Robinson advocate for themselves and their respective marginalized communities through their journalism, stand up to dominating power structures (e.g., male editors, racism, homophobia), and use their position as “outsider(s) within” the newsroom to struggle for personal and political liberation, they convert their oppression into a public voice and create a standpoint of their own. By “reading against the grain,” a term coined by Dana Polan, one can discover “an alternative narrative or series of narratives within a narrative that has previously claimed exclusive representation of a particular situation.”<sup>17</sup> Turning away from mainstream journalistic fiction to the margins of the genre results in narratives counter to the “journalistic culture” of the 1990s, the decade in which these novels are set. “Journalistic culture,” as defined by Margareta Melin-Higgins, refers to a “shared worldview – reality – for a group of journalists, which of course comprises a set of ideals, values, and rules of how to handle things (like news) and how to enact that perspective.”<sup>18</sup> This notion not only serves as a critical framework for the analysis of the three novels, but also proves crucial to the characters’ development of a unique standpoint established through their various newsrooms and “otherness.”

Nancy C. Hartsock uses feminist directives in an effort to turn scholars’ attention to the margins for access to more objective accounts of society.<sup>19</sup> Hartsock writes, “Like the

lives of the proletarians in Marxist theory, women's lives also contain possibilities for developing critiques of domination and visions of alternative social arrangements."<sup>20</sup> Both Robinson and Ramirez possess a vision for a better alternative to misogyny, racism, and homophobia, which materializes through their work, their relationships, and in their self-valuation. Depicted almost as detectives, Robinson and Ramirez embark on a quest for social justice revolving around what author Judith A. Markowitz calls "the triad of wealth, power, and corruption, [which] is a natural object of interest for journalists."<sup>21</sup>

Although the quest for justice these protagonists embark on is quite real, it is difficult to gauge the impact these novels had at the time of publication (or continue to have) on real female reporters or the genre itself. *Taming It Down* was published in 1999 by Warner Books (now Grand Central Publishing), an industry giant that has featured titles by authors with mass appeal like Janet Evanovich and Nicholas Sparks. McLarin's novel was reviewed by the *New York Times*, *Library Journal*, *Essence*, and *Publishers Weekly*. The publications' praises helped to push Hope Robinson's – and African American female reporters' – image into the minds of a larger group of readers. The two Carmen Ramirez novels were published in 1994 and 1995 by Naiad Press, which held the title of world's oldest and largest lesbian publishing house<sup>22</sup> for more than 30 years (1973-2003). However, Naiad Press was never able to compete with big mainstream publishers in terms of advertising, distribution, sales, or circulation. The limited number of stories and images of lesbian reporters like Carmen Ramirez is both paramount and detrimental, making Ramirez – and all she represents – a needle in the haystack of old stereotypes that give a voice only to white heterosexual female reporters and their formulaic dilemmas. Yet despite their differences in publication background, Robinson and Ramirez represent realistic images of the female reporter, and

their stories depict in detail the complexities of not only being women, but also of being racial and sexual minorities in a hostile newsroom environment.

In analyzing the novels, which portray Robinson and Ramirez in three distinctive professional and personal environments, three separate, but interrelated theories comprise the majority of this critique: (1) Collins' notion of the "outsider within" will be used to analyze the politics of the newsroom; (2) Collins' "either/or dualistic thinking" will guide in an examination of the characters' relationship with the communities where they conduct their reporting, (3) and, finally, Deborah K. King's "both/or orientation"<sup>23</sup> and her notion of "triple jeopardy"<sup>24</sup> will help to evaluate how the characters are received by family and friends as they attempt to navigate their differences. Ultimately, the study of Robinson's and Ramirez's unique journeys of yearning for a more just world and working environment create a new standpoint achieved through the struggles portrayed in each novel. In the end, the characters' newfound standpoint proves to be potentially liberating and professionally advantageous.

### **The "Outsider Within": Struggles for Privilege and Power in the Newsroom**

In the newsroom, "the status of being 'other' implies being 'other than' or different from the assumed norm of white male behavior."<sup>25</sup> It is no secret that the most powerful positions in news organizations have been held by white, heterosexual men, and this patriarchal privilege not only affects news coverage<sup>26</sup> but also newsroom hierarchy. The undesirable effect is the creation of a new category of journalist (the "outsider within") who exists on the fringes of the newsroom community. As a result, the newsroom is a site where options of privilege and belonging can be questioned.

On Hope Robinson's first day at the *Philadelphia Record*, Betty Simmons, the



newspaper's recruiting editor, introduces Robinson to a few white male co-workers where she receives a less-than-friendly welcome:

**Hope:** I got funny vibes from those guys you introduced me to.

**Betty:** Things have been a little tense.

**Hope:** Tense.

**Betty:** It's not a reflection on you.

**Hope:** Why would it be a reflection on me?

**Betty:** Look, it doesn't matter. Whenever there's change, people resist it.<sup>27</sup>

Later, Robinson discovers that a recent affirmative action plan<sup>28</sup> has the newsroom questioning not only her position in the newsroom, but also her skills as a reporter. The "change" that people are resisting and which Simmons mentions so casually is not simply adapting and adjusting to having new personnel in the newsroom. It is, rather, the discomfort and fear that comes with *integrating* the newsroom with "others." In this case, the male reporters' misogynistic and racist resistance acts as a physical barrier to Robinson, making it difficult for her to create allies in the newsroom and feel comfortable in her new environment.

Indeed, Robinson does experience discomfort. She says, "Being black in a predominantly white business was like being a foreigner somewhere, living among strangers for years and years until you speak the language perfectly and wear the local dress."<sup>29</sup> Alfred Schuetz writes about "the stranger" in terms that can be used to understand Robinson's initial feelings upon entering the newsroom and being introduced to the in-group (in this case, white men): "The stranger, therefore, approaches the other group as a newcomer in the true meaning of the term. At best he may be willing and able to share the present and future with

the approached group in vivid and immediate experience; under all circumstances, however, he remains excluded from such experiences of its past.”<sup>30</sup> As a “stranger,” Robinson is able to relate to her co-workers in an immediate sense. She is there to report the news just as they are. However, their shared past (whether it be the sexist, misogynistic control of women by men or simply the past occurrences of this particular newsroom) is foreign to her and always will be.

Robinson is also a foreigner in Philadelphia, the city of “brotherly love” that bears stark contrasts to her Memphis hometown. McLarin writes, “Philadelphia was big on ethnicity ... everybody was something and clearly marked ... Philly likes to call itself a city of neighborhoods, which sounds pleasant enough until you realize that what people really mean is that here are certain neighborhoods where certain people are allowed and certain other people are not.”<sup>31</sup> Immediately, Robinson’s race marks her as a member of a certain community and as an outsider to others when she ventures outside of her racially designated space. These community expectations also translate to newsroom scenarios and self-segregation. In a sense, the newsroom is a microcosm of its surrounding community and its expectations: *You stick with your people, and I’ll stick with mine.*

King’s theory of “triple jeopardy” is best applied to the character of Carmen Ramirez, an “outsider within” whose race, womanhood, and sexual orientation combine with her relatively poor economic status to produce a character rife with oppression. King warns against simplifying “triple jeopardy” to be a series of additive discriminations; rather, she suggests multiplying racism, sexism, classism (and/or homophobia) to produce a more accurate experience for women in society.<sup>32</sup> Ramirez’s race plays a part in her oppression both in the newsroom and community; however, Haddock focuses mainly on her identity as a

lesbian, which is not a marker of “difference” on her physical body (like Robinson’s race) but is made apparent through her masculine clothing and appearance – short hair, Levi’s, button-down shirts, and Converse high-tops. Although Ramirez dresses in stereotypically “butch” attire for the time,<sup>33</sup> she is not officially “outed” to her colleagues until the end of the first novel. While it is often the burden of women to choose a group (race or sex) to which they give their alliance, Haddock takes the liberty of lifting Ramirez’s lesbianism above all other discriminatory factors, thus making her sexual orientation the main focus of the character’s struggle throughout the two novels. This move works well to highlight the struggles Ramirez must face as an outsider, especially considering the homophobic environment in which the novels take place. In an interview with Markowitz, who also believes the novels’ greatest tension is linked to Ramirez’s sexuality, Haddock says:

Oklahoma is very conservative and Christian. That’s a much more oppressive environment for gays. The Baptist church condemns homosexuality. It’s a fixation of theirs ... It was actually sanctioned to be homophobic. There was no penalty or price to be paid.<sup>34</sup>

While it is important for readers not to ignore Ramirez’s race, it is hard not to place her sexuality at the starting point for a deeper analysis of her oppression.

While Ramirez’s status as a lesbian is explicit to readers from very early on, it is also her biggest kept secret in each novel. Yet, keeping her sexuality a secret does not keep Ramirez from feeling isolated and alone in the newsroom. Ramirez says, “I didn’t have one real friend in the newsroom, somebody who knew me for who I was.”<sup>35</sup> Until she stands up to her editor, asking him to pull a story from the newspaper that falsely accused a lesbian teacher of killing a little girl and then killing herself, no one assumes Ramirez is a lesbian. The story’s initial headline painted the teacher, Diane Bartlett, as “A Monster In Disguise,”

and the story (written by a white male reporter) portrays Bartlett in an unfair light. Ramirez, after reading a draft of the story, finds the courage to write her editor a note expressing her concerns:

It seems to me that we're drawing a lot of conclusions based on very little evidence... We're calling her a lesbian because one woman says that others avoided her in the shower and because a janitor at the school had a funny feeling about her. We're accusing her of molesting any number of children when it's never been proven in court that she molested Rebecca Metcalf [the victim]. And no other children have come forward to accuse her. I'm not saying she's innocent, but she was never proven guilty in a court of law. And by using "monster" in the headline, we are labeling her as wicked, depraved, evil ... We should rethink this coverage. It is sensationalistic and possibly inaccurate.<sup>36</sup>

Ramirez takes a big risk, both professionally and personally, by working to clear Bartlett's name. She is not only forced to go face-to-face with the writer, who sees no bias in his story, and her editor, who automatically assumes the reporter is correct and impartial, but she also is forced to go against a newsroom culture that is unaffected by labeling lesbians as "monsters." The way the story was handled by Ramirez's colleagues was indicative of the way they would have handled *her* if she had been openly out as a gay woman.

Despite the risks, Ramirez shows great courage in seeing that Bartlett is fairly portrayed in her paper's coverage, and she even starts investigating the case during the time spent away from work. Nevertheless, she is taken off the case by her editor and outed without consent to the entire newsroom:

I had taken a visible stand against a homophobic series the paper was set to run. Ultimately, I was vindicated, but my position had brought me into direct conflict with Sargent and other high-ranking editors. More importantly, it had outed me in a less-than-queer-friendly newsroom. Many of my co-workers avoided me; others, hoping to convert me, invited me to church; still others preferred to ignore my sexual orientation.<sup>37</sup>

After she is outed and a new editor, Jerry Newman, takes a leadership role at the paper in the

second novel, she is further “otherized” during a confrontation in which he accuses her of having a gay agenda:

**Jerry:** I want good, solid copy editors who don’t have an agenda.

**Carmen:** What kind of agenda?

**Jerry:** You know what I’m referring to.

**Carmen:** If you have something to say to me, say it flat out. *Did Newman have the guts to say that he didn’t want an out dyke on the copy desk. ...My only agenda is to come in here and do a professional job. I stand up for what I think is right.*<sup>38</sup>

Even as Ramirez fights Newman for her integrity as a woman and a journalist, she is still seen as an unruly lesbian who uses her privilege as a newspaper employee to subvert journalism’s noble cause and replace it with a gay “agenda.”

These newsroom situations point to a few confrontations experienced by each character that clearly illustrate their “outsider within” status. They rarely receive support or confirmation from colleagues or editors, their skills as reporters are never trusted, and they certainly never fit into the white, heterosexual, male-dominated spaces. Ramirez and Robinson are left to negotiate their status as “outsiders within” their own professional communities alone.

### **Race and Sex Alliances and Allegiances in the Newsroom and Community**

When Robinson and Ramirez are not in their newsrooms, they are reporting in their assigned communities and are seen as ambassadors for their newspapers. It is in this public space that they are often required to *choose* which part of their identity they want to express – a journalist *or* an African American/Puerto Rican/lesbian – and to whom they shall entrust their allegiance – to “the man” (seen as the media) or “the home” (or, rather, the unique

minority community to which they belong). Collins describes this mentality as “either/or dualistic thinking,” or the construct of dichotomous oppositional difference. Either/or thinking categorizes people, things, and ideas in terms of their differences (e.g., black/white, gay/straight, female/male, opinion/fact, etc.), thereby creating an unstable relationship that subordinates one of the terms in the dichotomy. The terms in each of these dichotomies gain their meaning “only in relation to their difference from their oppositional counterparts.”<sup>39</sup> An oppositional relationship between terms in each dichotomy becomes evident in the lives of Robinson and Ramirez as they seek to impress their editors while staying true to themselves and their communities.

Robinson first begins to realize the power of either/or thinking in college while working on her university’s newspaper. After writing a story damaging to an African American student, she is labeled a traitor<sup>40</sup> to the black community and is ostracized by her black friends and acquaintances. In this moment, Robinson is first confronted with dichotomous oppositional difference in a journalism setting: “I really understood how serious it was to be a journalist, how the stories I wrote could be used or misused, how my words could affect people’s lives and also mine.”<sup>41</sup> At the *Philadelphia Record*, Robinson brings this collegiate journalism experience with her while trying to break the cycle of feeling like a foreigner within the black community. Robinson wonders, “Maybe I could just start off right, right from the start, signaling that I was one of the black-blacks, a true member of the race.”<sup>42</sup> She is concerned with the way she depicts a historically all-black North Philadelphia community that distrusts the media for its unfair coverage. North Philly, a place full of “outsiders,” has a reputation for being a “black Wild West, lawless and ruinous, streets out of control. That was exaggerated, but it was true that there was very little reason for an outsider

to ever go to North Philadelphia. Very little reason at all.”<sup>43</sup> It is clear to Robinson from the beginning that she has been assigned the “urban” beat at the paper because of her race. Her editors know that being an African American will provide her with access to the North Philly community that a white reporter would not likely get.<sup>44</sup>

The editors also count on Robinson’s race to earn her the trust of North Philly’s residents who look to black reporters as allies in a white media world. The editors’ intentions for Robinson apply professional pressure to her already weary double-consciousness as a diligent journalist and a member of the black community. Where she wants to write hard-hitting, compassionate stories that shed a new light on this often objectified sector of the city, Robinson’s editor, Tom, “want[s] bang-’em-up stories, drugs and death in the Black Badlands, teenagers gone wrong, women selling their six-month-old babies for crack.”<sup>45</sup> Robinson must negotiate her editor’s requests with her fear of being labeled a traitor once again: “The position seemed distressingly familiar. I was being asked to choose between my people, who weren’t really my people except in some intangible way, and my would-be people – my professional, establishment people, to whom I owed some kind of allegiance, didn’t I?”<sup>46</sup>

The dichotomy Collins writes about is very clear in the Robinson’s mind. She is forced to pit her “establishment” people against her “people” people, the black community with which she shares the same history and positioning in a post-civil rights America. Pamela Newkirk, a journalist and professor at New York University, says it best in her book *Within the Veil: Black Journalist, White Media*: “The black journalist is often torn between a devotion to the ideal of journalism to uncover truth, and to the knowledge that uncovering some truths in the black community will have devastating consequences given the already

routine negative portrayals of blacks in the media. So the dilemma for black journalists is to determine to what end they are practicing their craft.<sup>47</sup>

The delicate balance Newkirk writes about is not only prevalent in Robinson's psyche throughout the novel, but it also is a reality for journalists like Jill Nelson, whose book *Volunteer Slavery* recounts her search for "an authentic Negro experience" at the *Washington Post*. Recruited to work on the *Washington Post Magazine*, Nelson is shocked when the first issue comes off the presses fresh with many racist angles. The cover, featuring a young black man, reads "Murder, Drugs, and the Rap Star." When her editor, a white woman, asks Nelson what she thinks of the issue, Nelson thinks:

... she'll never be a race woman, never understand what it is to be compulsively, irrevocably, painfully responsible not only for herself, but for her race. By virtue of my skin color, I'm going to take the weight for this if the shit hits the fan [which, it later does]. Black folks are going to look at me and ask, 'Why didn't you do something?'<sup>48</sup>

Clearly, Newkirk, Nelson, and McLarin's fictional Robinson share similar experiences as both black women and journalists who must traverse the fine line between commitment and community, responsibility and profession.

When Robinson refuses to solidify a cultural pathology of African Americans as social deviants and criminals through her journalism, her efforts are fruitless, but she keeps her pride (the same is true for Nelson, who, after being moved to the Metro desk [read: "inner city"] finally resigns from her position at the *Post*.<sup>49</sup>). Yet, when Robinson gives in to editorial pressures and produces stories about criminal behavior, drug use, and violent crime emanating from North Philly, she fulfills her professional expectations, but fails herself by committing black-on-black reporting crime – the notion that negative words written, here, by



an African American reporter and printed by her reputable news organization are just as harmful and violent to the black community as gun or gang violence:

After I'd written them and spilled someone's wretched life onto the page for public consumption, nothing substantial would change. People's attention drifted away for a few days, and the only thing that happened was that white people were confirmed in their belief that the black part of town was a godless dangerous place.<sup>50</sup>

At the heart of Robinson's struggle is the choice she is forced to make between two identities: her work as a journalist or her life as a black woman. She is constantly contemplating damage control, how she can make both ends of her identity meet, and even make them succeed<sup>51</sup> without destruction or self-annihilation. The fact that this predicament exists at all reconfirms Robinson's "outsider within" status, which now extends from a mere newsroom label to a reality in her own racial community.

Ramirez's "either/or" struggle differs from Robinson's because she has no vibrant, present lesbian community, or Puerto Rican community, in Frontier City, the conservative Oklahoma town where she lives (the closest women's bar is 90 miles away). As a copy editor, Ramirez is shown going beyond her duties to investigate lesbian-related stories on her own. Like Robinson, Ramirez is invested in the images of lesbians that are propagated by her employer. But her appearance as a lesbian, which is implied by her attire, her demeanor, and her personal associations, begins to work against her while reporting. Ramirez, like Robinson, is the subordinate half of one of Collins' dichotomies of oppositional difference. Ramirez's sexuality, seen as deviant, is pitted against the normative heterosexuality of her interview subjects.

For example, in the second novel, Ramirez goes to a fraternity house at a nearby college campus to interview the brother of a murder victim, who happens to be Ramirez's

ex-love interest. But when she enters the house, the fraternity brothers make her feel uncomfortable. Ramirez says, “When I walked through the living room, I confronted more staring and muttering from the two pool players and the boy who let me in ... why were they acting this way? Because I was an outsider? A woman? ... Because my short hair and jeans identified me as a dyke?”<sup>52</sup> Her identity as a lesbian must be inferred, and the uncertainty over whether people in her community will read her body correctly is a constant fear. While working on the same case, Ramirez is called a “fucking dyke” on multiple occasions in an attempt to put her back in her place.<sup>53</sup> Rather than backing down, Ramirez threatens to call the police the next time the insult is hurled in her direction. Yet when the word “lesbian” is used as an insult while Ramirez is conducting an interview with the parents of her murdered friend, Toni Stewart, she does not call the police, despite her previous threat. When Ramirez tells Toni’s parents that she believes Bradley, a jealous ex-boyfriend, is to blame for Toni’s murder, Mr. Stewart uses Ramirez’s sexuality to personally attack her journalistic judgment:

**Mr. Stewart:** I don’t know what on earth you’re alluding to. Perhaps your unnatural fixation on Toni has led you to hallucinate that Bradley is a criminal.

**Carmen:** Unnatural fixation? I’m interested in the truth and seeing that justice is done. That’s all.

**Mr. Stewart:** Must I spell it out? I am fully aware that you and my daughter had a lesbian attachment. *He spat out the word lesbian as if he had swallowed battery acid. My face stinging with humiliation, I said nothing.*<sup>54</sup>

In these scenarios, Ramirez cannot choose between two identities because, for the people in her conservative community, her lesbian identity trumps any other identity she might possess. As hooks writes, “Being oppressed means the *absence of choices*.”<sup>55</sup> This *lack* is revealed through Ramirez’s oppression by a homophobic society. Unlike Robinson, the community that Ramirez seeks to vindicate through responsible journalism is a small,

secretive one, but she treats it with the same dignity and respect with which Robinson treats the black community.

Although the characters have disparate community ties, they concurrently exude an “ethic of caring” for their subject matter. Collins writes:

The ethic of caring suggests that personal expressiveness, emotions, and empathy are central to the knowledge-validation process ... Not only must individuals develop their knowledge claims through dialogue and present those knowledge claims in a style proving their concern for their ideas, people are expected to be accountable for their knowledge claims.<sup>56</sup>

Both Robinson<sup>57</sup> and Ramirez care about the subjects of their reporting and they have a personal stake in the way these communities and people are represented in the media.

Coming full circle, journalistic ethics hold reporters accountable for their knowledge claims based on their ethic of caring. The irony presents itself when journalism expects reporters to possess a certain level of self-interest, while simultaneously being neutral “outsiders.” This burden proves to be too great for Robinson and Ramirez, who can neither afford to sacrifice their minority groups or themselves at the altar of media objectivity.

### **The Burden of Mediating Personal and Professional Lives**

A final analysis of how Robinson and Ramirez mediate their personal and professional lives with those around them includes King’s theory of “both/or orientation.” King, in an interview, describes “both/or orientation [as] the act of being simultaneously a member of a group and yet standing apart from it.”<sup>58</sup> Although King is speaking specifically about African American women, the idea of “both/or orientation” applies to Ramirez’s character as well. This simultaneous act of “belong and not belonging” to a particular group plays a major role in each character’s struggle to liberate herself from newsroom oppression and its “outsider within” expectations.

This “both/or orientation” is best expressed in *Taming It Down* during Robinson’s interactions with Malcolm Blackwell, a black reporter who identifies with the Black Nationalist movement, which reasserted itself in the 1960s when many African Americans became “disappointed and disillusioned” with the results of the Civil Rights Movement.<sup>59</sup> Malcolm’s identity as a member of the Black Power Movement is critical to Robinson’s examination of herself as both a black woman and a member of the black community. Cheney points out that “for many black nationalists, racial identity has been shaped by conventional gender norms, roles, and expectations, and the African American experience has been interpreted through gendered language.”<sup>60</sup> Black women were subject to myth – they were either matriarchs of households or castrators of black men in a time when the politics of Black Nationalism was “obsessed with (and therefore limited by) the reclamation of black manhood.”<sup>61</sup> Malcolm’s language resurrects this myth and makes Robinson question her responsibility as a black woman and a journalist.

For example, while looking into a press conference in the North Philadelphia neighborhood for a future story opportunity, Robinson runs into Malcolm (whom she affectionately calls “Malcolm X”). The following dialogue exemplifies King’s “both/or orientation:

**Malcolm:** You doing a story?

**Hope:** On this? Nah. You?

**Malcolm:** Of course. You should too.

**Hope:** You don’t write stories about programs that haven’t even begun yet.

**Malcolm:** You do if you’re trying to build up your community instead of tear it down.

**Hope:** I’m trying to do my job. Maybe after the program is up and running.

**Malcolm:** It might not get up if it doesn't get enough support. Publicity brings support.

**Hope:** I'm not a publicist. I'm a journalist.

**Malcolm:** A black journalist.

**Hope:** Or a journalist who is black.

**Malcolm:** Those aren't the same thing ...<sup>62</sup>

This scene in the novel shows a black man not only questioning Robinson's commitment to the black community, *her* community, but also accusing her of "tearing it down" because she refuses to be a "black journalist" instead of a "journalist who is black." Robinson is in a state of "belonging yet not belonging" as she strives to reconcile her journalistic responsibility and her personal connection to the black community. The relationship with Malcolm serves as a constant foil to Robinson throughout the course of the novel. Every time the two meet, there is a discussion about Robinson's failure to "build up" the black community. The following passage is another example:

When we met, Malcolm would smile slyly and ask what I was doing. If it was a "good" story, like one about a little girl from an amazingly dysfunctional home who was nevertheless an honor student at school, he'd shake my hand [and say], "We need to use our talents to build up our people. I don't know how you got that story past the man, but I'm impressed." But if it was a 'bad' story, a story that showed someone black in a less than flattering light, Malcolm would turn his thin lips down in disappointment and give me grief.<sup>63</sup>

McLarin uses Malcolm as Robinson's (and the reader's) constant reminder that minority journalists often feel the pressure of possessing a "both/or orientation" in their daily lives. Robinson, and her fellow black reporters, never can forget about their race as their white counterparts can. Instead, race and belonging are constant considerations and negotiations.

Ramirez must reconcile her “both/or orientation” not within the bounds of her occupation as a journalist, but on a personal level with the family member she is closest to: her grandmother. After her mother died when she was only a year old and her estranged father moved to New York City, Grandma – as she is referred to throughout the novels – has a heavy stake in raising Ramirez. Grandma, who is an enthusiastic and devoted member of the Southern Baptist Church (and thus extremely homophobic), tries to “save” Ramirez using apocalyptic tactics:

**Grandma:** Do you know what the Bible says about your lifestyle? Says it’s an abomination. Says you’re going to burn in hell. That’s God talking. Not me. Lord knows, I tried to raise you right. I should have never let you stop going to church ...

**Carmen:** I would not go back to the Baptist Church if you had a gun to my head. Do you understand? I’ll never go back. Ever. And if you think I’m going to burn in hell for the way I am, then so be it.

**Grandma:** The Bible says there will be mockers in the last time, who will walk after their own ungodly lusts.

**Carmen:** Stop. Please.

**Grandma:** Look it up if you don’t believe me. It’s in Jude.

**Carmen:** I’ve read the Bible.

**Grandma:** The devils in hell can quote the scriptures.

**Carmen:** I’m not a devil. I am just a lesbian.<sup>64</sup>

The interactions between Ramirez and Grandma, with the above example comprising a small fraction of similar conversations, place her in a “both/or” scenario: Ramirez must choose to renounce her devious “lifestyle” and become an accepted member of her family or continue to be the object of her grandmother’s homophobic wrath. Ramirez experiences a state of “belonging yet not belonging” – she is at once a lesbian damned to hell and an “outsider” to

the one remaining family member she has left, yet she is still undeniably family. Grandma is presented in these texts as the oppressor, while Ramirez is depicted as transcending her grandmother's judgment and taking on an "I'm a lesbian, get over it" attitude. Still, there is power and affect in Grandma's language that, as Maurine H. Beasley and Sheila J. Gibbons write, "subtly confers acceptance on people; [language] can empower them or diminish them, depending on how it is used. It can also render them invisible."<sup>65</sup> While Ramirez will never become invisible to her grandmother, a large part of her life is censured by her grandmother's pious condemnations.

### **Standpoints and Intersections on the Margin and at the Center**

Through a textual analysis of McLarin and Haddock's novels, the characters' creation of a unique standpoint through struggle becomes visible. Collins writes that some approaches to standpoint theory "suggest that oppression can be quantified and compared and that adding layers of oppression produces a potentially clearer standpoint."<sup>66</sup> In essence, the more oppressed a person is, the purer her standpoint – or worldview – will be. Both Robinson and Ramirez benefit from their oppression in unique ways. Collins writes, "Outsiders within occupy a special place – they become different people, and their difference sensitizes them to patterns that may be more difficult for established sociological insiders to see."<sup>67</sup>

This fresh outlook on society provides a professional advantage. Robinson and Ramirez can see stories where their colleagues (mostly white men) cannot. In her re-visioning of standpoint theory, Sandra Harding argues that theorists should look to the lives of marginalized people as a "starting off point" for knowledge gains.<sup>68</sup> Harding writes, "Beginning in those determinate, objective locations in any social order will generate illuminating critical questions that do not arise in thought that begins from dominant group

lives.”<sup>69</sup> Both characters do, indeed, offer up a new perspective to readers about the profession of journalism as a consideration of the personal, the political, *and* the newsworthy.

It is important to note that these novels are not purely about *female* journalists, but rather about the various intersections Robinson and Ramirez find themselves straddling – race, sex, class, and/or sexual orientation. Rather than simply ignoring all but one site of difference, authors McLarin and Haddock produce creative works that honor diversity. Like King’s theory of “triple jeopardy,” the race, sex, class, and gender differences of these characters are *multiplied* by each other as well as by the professional and community atmospheres where they find themselves challenged most frequently. These challenges, as expressed in these works of fiction, can be used to produce change. Audre Lorde writes about what is stopping people from forming a coalition of difference:

Certainly there are very real differences between us of race, age, and sex. But it is not those differences between us that are separating us. It is rather our refusal to recognize those differences, and to examine the distortions which result from our misnaming them and their effects upon human behavior and expectation.<sup>70</sup>

The secondary characters in each novel refuse to recognize the differences Lorde writes about, thereby creating distortions and mis-namings of Robinson’s and Ramirez’s womanhood, sexuality, and race. These misidentifications create a host of other problems including misguided expectations, stereotypes, and a suppression of the women’s true selves. Indeed, Robinson and Ramirez battle against numerous forces to prevent themselves from being marked with the pejorative stereotypes attached to their minority identities. The journey to break free from oppressive markers therefore structures a substantial portion of each novel while simultaneously creating each character’s vision for the future. Hartsock writes that “a feminist standpoint is ... rooted in yearning,”<sup>71</sup> and it is clear that these women



do in fact yearn for a more just world, a place where racism and homophobia do not exist and certainly not within the profession of journalism.

Using Robinson's and Ramirez's "marginality as a site of transformation,"<sup>72</sup> a term coined by bell hooks, authors McLarin and Haddock use hooks' ideas to show readers that "assimilation, imitation, or assuming the role of the rebellious exotic other are not the only available options and never have been. This is why it is crucial to radically revise notions of identity politics, to explore marginal locations as spaces where we can best become whatever we want to be."<sup>73</sup> Certainly, as hooks suggests, readers can come to a greater understanding of their own possibilities despite their differences through fiction and nonfiction of journalists like Nelson, Newkirk, McLarin, and Haddock. Undoubtedly, new knowledge can be gleaned from examining how both Robinson's oppression as an African American woman and Ramirez's subjugation as a lesbian are handled by their newsroom colleagues, their family and friends, and, ultimately, themselves. The standpoints of Robinson and Ramirez place them at the center rather than on the margins, despite the fact that they establish different worldviews based on their oppressions. Their individual standpoints represent different feminisms that "inform each other."<sup>74</sup> Through the reckoning of new standpoints that validate marginalized lives, there is power and hope in difference and the conversations and narratives surrounding it.

The disparities between the two characters not only represent attempts at giving power to marginalized standpoints, but also signify a diversification – albeit a small one – of literature featuring female reporters. Both Robinson and Ramirez stand apart from traditional stereotypes of female reporters as sob sisters,<sup>75</sup> stunt girls,<sup>76</sup> detectives,<sup>77</sup> and bearers of "soft news."<sup>78</sup> Instead, McLarin and Haddock create women who tackle important, moving

subjects that affect cities rather than knitting circles. In his analysis of female journalists, Saltzman writes, “Female reporters are supposed to be smart and tough and stubborn.”<sup>79</sup> And, indeed, readers do see these qualities in Robinson’s and Ramirez’s demeanor. Yet, these characters continue to add to the literature of the image of the female journalist in popular culture by refusing to succumb to the two things that have taken female reporters out of their careers in journalism in previous novels – marriage<sup>80</sup> and motherhood<sup>81</sup> – while replacing these traditional images of femininity with post-feminist accounts of modern womanhood.

Finally, because of these denials of traditional (read: straight, white, and middle class) depictions of femininity, Robinson and Ramirez are also “outsiders within” their own genre. The novels bring to light an often-ignored sector of journalism by getting inside the heads of reporters on the margin who tell the stories of those living on the fringes of society – and often themselves. Although fictional, these characters provoke thought, challenge stereotypes, and promote a greater understanding of the profession that transcends the literature itself and as the potential to transform. The type of literary activism that McLarin and Haddock engage in is not simply piggybacking off of the civil rights or gay and lesbian movements of the past (although without these movements this literature would cease to exist). Rather, these authors’ works emanate from an autobiographical place, and this type of literature serves a function within communities, no matter how small, that cannot be overlooked or downplayed simply because it is “fiction.”

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> The author researched and wrote this paper while completing her Master of Arts in Journalism degree at the University of Southern California Annenberg School for Communication; she graduated in May 2009.

<sup>2</sup> bell hooks, *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center* (Cambridge, MA: South End Press, 2000), xvi.

<sup>3</sup> Marjan de Bruin, "Organizational, Professional, and Gender Identities – Overlapping, Coinciding and Contradicting Realities in Caribbean Media Practices." In *Gender and Newsroom Cultures: Identities at Work*, eds. Marjan de Bruin and Karen Ross (Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press, 2004), 2.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 9.

<sup>5</sup> Patricia Hill Collins, "Learning from the Outsider Within," *Social Problems* 33: 6 (1986): 35.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Joe Saltzman. "Sob Sisters: The Image of the Female Journalist in Popular Culture" (Image of the Journalist in Popular Culture Project, paper, 2003), <<http://ijpc.org/sobsmaster.htm>>; Howard Good, *Girl Reporter: Gender, Journalism, and the Movies* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 1998); and Jean Marie Lutes, *Front Page Girls: Women Journalists in American Culture and Fiction, 1880-1930* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2006).

<sup>8</sup> Lutes, 19.

<sup>9</sup> American Society of News Editor's 2009 census shows that little has changed in terms of minorities in the newsroom since the 1997 survey. Based on the annual employment census, ASNE reports the following: (1) In 1997, minority employment at daily newspapers was 11.35%, jumping only to 13.41% in 2009; (2) Whites still significantly outnumber minorities as reporters at daily newspapers. In 2009, newspapers hired 17,343 whites compared with 2,847 minorities; in 1998, 22,349 whites were hired compared with 3,202 minorities. Lesbian, gay, transsexual, or bisexual reporters were not included in any of these analyses, and frankly, were not mentioned at all. For more information, visit <<http://www.asne.org/index.cfm?id=1138>>.

<sup>10</sup> American Society of News Editors, "The Journalists." ASNE, July 07, 1997. <<http://www.asne.org/kiosk/reports/97reports/journalists90s>> (accessed March 28, 2009).

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Lisa Haddock, *Edited Out* (Tallahassee, FL: Naiad Press, Inc., 1994).

<sup>15</sup> Lisa Haddock, *Final Cut* (Tallahassee, FL: Naiad Press, Inc., 1995).

<sup>16</sup> “Tanya was one of the few black-black friends I had. Black-black meaning she grew up in Newark and talked black and belonged to the Black Student Union and had pledged Delta and pretty much associated with white people only in class. There were other blacks like me at Dray [University], blacks who walked around dipping our fingers in both worlds, and I was friends with some of them. But I treasured Tanya. She was like my guide back to a place I couldn’t quite find on my own anymore.” Kim McLarin, *Taming It Down: A Novel* (New York, NY: Warner Books, 1999), 29.

<sup>17</sup> Dana Polan quoted in Howard Good, *Girl Reporter: Gender, Journalism, and the Movies* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 1998), 115.

<sup>18</sup> Margareta Melin-Higgins, “Coping with Journalism: Gendered Newsroom Culture.” In *Gender and Newsroom Cultures: Identities at Work*, edited by Marjan de Bruin and Karen Ross, (Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press, 2004), 196.

<sup>19</sup> The five major tenets of a standpoint theory in Hartsock’s essay are: “(1) Material life ... not only structures but also sets limits on understandings of social relations; (2) If material life is structured in fundamentally opposing ways for two different groups, one can expect that the understanding of each will represent an inversion of the other; (3) The vision of the ruling group can be expected to structure the material relations in which all people are forced to participate and therefore cannot be dismissed as simply false consciousness; (4) In consequence, the vision available to an oppressed group must be struggled for and represents achievement that requires both systematic analysis and the education that can only grow from political struggle to change these relations; (5) As an engaged vision, the potential understanding of the oppressed, the adoption of a standpoint makes visible the inhumanity of relations among human beings and carries a historically liberatory role.” Nancy C. Hartsock, “The Feminist Standpoint Revisited.” In *The Feminist Standpoint Revisited and Other Essays* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1998), 229.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid, 228.

<sup>21</sup> Judith A. Markowitz, *The Gay Detective Novel: Lesbian and Gay Main Characters and Themes in Mystery Fiction* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, 2004), 115.

<sup>22</sup> “Naiad Co-founders at Gerber/Hart,” *Windy City Times*, July 2008, 4.

<sup>23</sup> Deborah K. King’s “both/or orientation” comes from an interview quoted in Patricia Hill Collins, “The Social Construction of Black Feminist Thought,” *Signs* 14:4 (1989): 745-773.

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<sup>24</sup> Deborah K. King, "Multiple Jeopardy, Multiple Consciousness: The Context of a Black Feminist Ideology," *Signs* 14:1 (1988): 42-72.

<sup>25</sup> Collins, "Learning from the Outsider Within," 39.

<sup>26</sup> "Because so few blacks and other people of color are at the helm of major news organizations, much of the news coverage reflects the views of people who are typically white and male." Pamela Newkirk, *Within the Veil: Black Journalists, White Media* (New York, NY: New York University Press, 2000), 3.

<sup>27</sup> McLarin, *Taming It Down*, 24.

<sup>28</sup> About the affirmative action plan established by the *Philadelphia Record*: "The *Record* had done a dismal job of hiring and promoting blacks and other minorities. Colored folks of all kinds made up less than eight percent of the staff, which was triply embarrassing for a news operation in a city like Philadelphia, where fewer and fewer white people cared to live. That paper would have to do better, the report said. The same was true to a lesser extent with women. To make sure, every department should be required to set hiring goals. Fairly tame and predictable stuff, like fertilizer piled in a basement, waiting to be made into a bomb." *Ibid.*, 51.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 36.

<sup>30</sup> Alfred Schuetz, "The Stranger: An Essay in Social Psychology", *The American Journal of Sociology* 49: 6 (1944): 502.

<sup>31</sup> McLarin, *Taming It Down*, 26-27.

<sup>32</sup> King, "Multiple Jeopardy, Multiple Consciousness," 47.

<sup>33</sup> Haddock's novels describe Ramirez's "butch" physical appearance in the following ways: (1) "I kept my thick black hair short, so there was little need to fuss, except for a little hairspray." *Edited Out*, 18; (2) "I pulled on some Levi's, a blue, button-down oxford shirt, and a pair of black cloth Converse high-tops." *Ibid.*, 17-18; and (3) "And now, to a matter of clothing. By this point, I was ready to mince around in high heels and a tight mini skirt, but fortunately, I didn't own that type of gear. I opted for some pleated light gray cotton slacks, a white oxford shirt, and ox-blood penny loafers. Uncharacteristically, I pressed my slacks and shirt. By the time I finished dolling up (I even used a hair dryer), I looked like a young Republican Hispanic dyke ... ." *Ibid.*, 50.

<sup>34</sup> Markowitz, *The Gay Detective Novel*, 133.

<sup>35</sup> Haddock, *Edited Out*, 13.

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 36-37.

<sup>37</sup> Haddock, *Final Cut*, 60.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 62.

<sup>39</sup> Patricia Hill Collins, "Learning From the Outsider Within," 42.

<sup>40</sup> The image of Robinson being a traitor to her race is etched in her memory from a young age. Robinson's friend Lola says (concerning the story she wrote for the student newspaper): "It's racist propaganda ... Don't you see these white folks are using you? They put you up to it because they think we can't protest if a black reporter wrote it. But we're going to protest anyway. We don't need to be airing our dirty laundry in front of them. It just gives them an excuse to say how barbaric we are. They want to make us look like animals, and you helped them! How could you do that?" McLarin, *Taming It Down*, 32.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 31.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 34.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 71.

<sup>44</sup> Even though her editors believed Robinson would smoothly transition from the newsroom into the black community, Robinson herself was not so certain: "Sometimes, walking the streets of North Philadelphia, I felt like a spy; only I wasn't a very good spy. I didn't really fit in, didn't speak the language. My black English was southern black English, softer, rounder, more liquid than the hard urban slang of the Northeast ... My only true cover was my skin ... I met eyes, but not for too long. I strolled with purpose, but not with fear. I exuded comfort but vigilance and – surprise! – I blended in." Ibid., 74.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 109.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 119.

<sup>47</sup> Newkirk, *Within the Veil*, 144.

<sup>48</sup> Jill Nelson, *Volunteer Slavery: My Authentic Negro Experience* (Chicago, IL: Noble Press, 1993), 54.

<sup>49</sup> For those interested in learning more about the *Post* and Jill Nelson's story, I highly recommend *Volunteer Slavery*. Not only is it useful for a more complete understanding of how race and journalism compete and co-exist, but it would also be a very helpful comparison to Hope Robinson's character. Both Nelson and Robinson come from very similar backgrounds, share similar experiences, and their insights contribute to a breadth of literature (both fiction and nonfiction) on the subject.

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<sup>50</sup> McLarin, *Taming It Down*, 109.

<sup>51</sup> Newkirk examines the idea of succeeding as a black journalist yet keeping racial loyalty further: “To be a journalist in the mainstream press, and to succeed, thus often requires the surrendering of racial loyalty – which for African Americans has been an obliged kinship in a hostile environment – because of the ways in which it restricts the reporter’s ability to report critically about an already downtrodden group. The challenge for the black journalist, then, is to maintain the high ideals of journalism while maintaining a semblance of credibility with black people; or, as Du Bois said, to merge being black and American ‘without being cursed and spit upon by his fellows, [and] without having the doors of Opportunity closed roughly in his face.’” *Within the Veil*, 150.

<sup>52</sup> Haddock, *Final Cut*, 148.

<sup>53</sup> “As long as the label ‘dyke’ can be used to frighten a woman into a less militant stand, keep her separate from her sisters, keep her from giving primacy to anything other than men and family – then to that extent she is controlled by the male culture.” Radicalesbians, “The Woman-Identified Woman” in *Feminist Theory: A Reader*, eds. W.K. Kolmar and F. Bartkowski (New York, NY: McGraw-Hill), 241.

<sup>54</sup> Haddock, *Final Cut*, 125. (My emphasis added.)

<sup>55</sup> hooks, *Feminist Theory*, 5.

<sup>56</sup> Collins, “The Social Construction of Black Feminist Thought,” 766-768.

<sup>57</sup> An example of Robinson’s “ethic of caring” can be found in the following passage: “The beat got me up there, and that was good, because part of me felt like I needed to go, should go. Like it was my home, although of course it wasn’t. Like ignoring it was turning my back on something central to myself. Guilt. And I recognized Memphis in North Philadelphia, in bits and pieces ... I recognized resignation when I saw it. And I saw a lot in North Philly.” McLarin, *Taming It Down*, 71.

<sup>58</sup> King quoted in Collins, “The Social Construction of Black Feminist Thought,” 757.

<sup>59</sup> Charise L. Cheney, *Brothers Gonna Work It Out: Sexual Politics in the Golden Age of Rap Nationalism* (New York, NY: New York University Press, 2005), 22.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 25.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 31.

<sup>62</sup> McLarin, *Taming It Down*, 81-82.

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<sup>63</sup> Ibid., 110.

<sup>64</sup> Haddock, *Edited Out*, 92-93.

<sup>65</sup> Maurine H. Beasley and Sheila J. Gibbons, *Taking Their Place: A Documentary History of Women and Journalism* (Washington, D.C.: American University Press, 1993), 289.

<sup>66</sup> Collins, "The Social Construction of Black Feminist Thought," 757.

<sup>67</sup> Collins, "Learning from the Outsider Within," 53.

<sup>68</sup> Sandra Harding, "Rethinking Standpoint Epistemology: What Is 'Strong Objectivity'?" in *Feminist Epistemologies*, eds. L. Alcoff and E. Potter (New York, NY: Routledge, 1993), 56.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., 59.

<sup>70</sup> Audre Lorde, "Age, Race, Class, and Sex: Women Redefining Difference," in *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches by Audre Lorde* (Berkeley, CA: Crossing Press, 1984), 115.

<sup>71</sup> Hartsock, "The Feminist Standpoint Revisited," 236.

<sup>72</sup> bell hooks, *Yearning: Race, Gender, and Cultural Politics* (Boston, MA: South End Press, 1990), 22.

<sup>73</sup> hooks, *Yearning*, 20.

<sup>74</sup> Harding, "Rethinkin Standpoint Epistemology," 60.

<sup>75</sup> "In real life, few ever heard the words *sob sister* until the movies popularized the term. It sums up the dichotomy of the female reporter – she is considered an equal by doing a man's job, a career woman drinking and arguing toe-to-toe with any male in the shop, holding her own against everyone and everything, yet often showing her soft side and crying long and hard when the man she loves treats her like a sister instead of a lover." Joe Saltzman, "Analyzing the Images of the Journalist in Popular Culture: A Unique Method of Studying the Public's Perception of Its Journalists and the News Media," (Image of the Journalist in Popular Culture Project, paper, 2005) <http://ijpc.org/AEJMC%20Paper%20San%20Antonio%20Saltzman%202005.pdf>, 39-40.

Also helpful in understanding the role of "sob sisters": "Nicknamed 'sob sisters,' they were assigned to provide so-called woman's angle by reporting on their own sympathetic reactions to news events. Their reports were expected to express the sympathetic reactions to news events." Lutes, *Front Page Girls*, 3.

<sup>76</sup> Stunt reporters inserted themselves directly into the situation for which they wanted to report. "Stunt reporters visited opium dens, joined workers who rolled tobacco for cigarettes, went begging on the streets in rags, sought illegal abortions, and fainted on the street to gain



admittance to public hospitals ... Characterized as a fad that quickly subsided, the stunt reporters have been viewed as an awkward, even embarrassing phase of sensation journalism, out of sync with the professionalization that was transforming news writing in the final decades of the twentieth century ... As a hybrid of emotional 'soft news' and tough-minded 'hard news,' stunt reporting gave women journalists a way to profit from the attention so frequently focused on their bodies. Acting, in effect, as the sensation heroines of their own stories, they redefined reporting and used their bodies not just as a means of acquiring the news but as the very source of it." Lutes, *Front Page Girls*, 13-14.

<sup>77</sup> "The reporter as detective is probably one of the most popular categories, since both the journalist and the detective are curious inquirers trying to solve a mystery, whether it be a crime or a complex unknown story." Joe Saltzman, *Frank Capra and the Image of the Journalist in American Film* (Los Angeles, CA: University of Southern California, 2002), 181. While Ramirez's character does engage in detective behavior, her actions are minimal compared to other types of fiction in which female reporters are seen as newsroom renegades who choose their own beats, stories, and reporting methods that resemble police questioning rather than typical journalistic interviews. For examples of this type of character, see Sherryl Woods' series about reporter-detective Amanda Roberts and Sarah Shankman's series about Samantha Adams, another similar character.

<sup>78</sup> The category of "soft news" includes fluff pieces about small-scale community events (bake-offs, knitting group meetings, etc.), emotional features, and other stories that fall outside of the realm of general daily news (fires, robberies, court rulings, press conferences, etc.), business stories, science pieces, war reporting, and financial news.

<sup>79</sup> Saltzman, *Frank Capra and the Image of the Journalist in American Film*, 68.

<sup>80</sup> Ramirez's situation is different when it comes to marriage because same sex marriage was not legal in any state during the book's publication.

<sup>81</sup> "Most sob sisters, no matter how tough or independent, would give up anything and everything for marriage, children, and a life at home." Saltzman, *Frank Capra and the Image of the Journalist in American Film*, 187).