Sexual Violence Against the Outsiders of Society in *The Round House, Bitter in the Mouth,* and *The Color Purple*

by

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This thesis will examine why the outsiders to society are more susceptible to violence, particularly sexual violence. America has been led predominantly by white males, white males who have oppressed individuals who do not fit into the white male majority for years. It is my argument that when women of color are born, they are automatically labeled as outsiders due to their race and gender. An outsider is simply one who does not fit into a particular group, the group in this case being white males. While some white women experience sexual violence, their socioeconomic status and race often allows them to receive justice, especially if their perpetrator is a man of color. I will also examine other factors that lead to sexual violence, particularly rape for these outsiders, such as social class and age. This thesis analyzes three primary texts: the 2010 novel *Bitter in the Mouth* by Monique Truong, the 2012 novel *The Round House* by Louise Erdrich, and the 1982 novel *The Color Purple* by Alice Walker. The women in these novels, Linda, Geraldine, and Celie, respectively are sexually assaulted. It is my argument that women of color's race/ethnicity make them more susceptible to violence, both physical and sexual, from others. These texts showcase how women are labelled as outsiders because of their races and their gender, creating a dual outsider status in the white male dominated America; thus, making them more vulnerable to sexual assault and less likely to receive justice.

Sexual Violence Against the Outsiders of Society in *The Round House, Bitter in the Mouth,* and *The Color Purple*

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In memory of my mother, Helen. Thank you for always loving me and encouraging me to better myself.

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Chapter One

An Introduction to Outsider Status in America

The ultimate desire of all humans is to belong. Everyone wants to feel part of a group, and this is why people are quick to follow the trends others are adopting, whether it is something insignificant like a fashion trend, or something more serious, such as a political movement. Members of society will remain silent when injustices occur in order to keep their status of belonging, which is why institutions such as slavery, colonialism, and segregation lasted for several hundreds of years. An unfortunate result of these institutions lasting for centuries was the labeling of certain groups of individuals as outsiders. An outsider is simply one who does not belong to a particular group. There is always a reason why someone is an outsider to a group. That reason could be because of different hobbies or interests, such as high school cliques that are often formed. Another reason could be because the person is born different. Different can mean different things; some people are born with physical or mental disabilities. With the dominant culture in America being white males, people of color find themselves outsiders to that group and will often face racism throughout their lives. A woman of color will not only face the ostracism and racism a man of color will face, but she will also face degradation and even experience sexual violence from others.

In America, the dominant culture has historically been controlled by white males. People of color have dealt with colonialism and racism from these dominant white cultures for centuries, the effects of which can still be seen today. Racism has kept, and still keeps, people of color from being accepted by the majority of society. When Europe began their explorations of the world in the fifteenth century, they expected to find many uninhabited lands. What they found instead were races of people they had never seen before. In this time period pale white skin was desired, as it showed a person's status in society. Darker skin showed that a person was of a lower social class and had to work in the sun, which tanned their skin. When European explorers discovered African, they assumed the dark skin of the Africans meant they could be

ruled over. Soon after the “discovery” of Africa the transatlantic slave trade began, which lasted until the end of the nineteenth century. Europeans “began to kidnap people from the west coast of Africa and to take those they enslaved back to Europe” (Adi). The Africans that were taken by Europeans and forced to work as slaves, and soon the slave trade expanded to the Americas as well. Slavery lasted until 1865 in America, and it was only stopped because the north won the Civil War. Rather than introduce a more welcoming society, segregation began and the Jim Crow Laws were created to keep people of color from having any status or power in America. While these practices have since ended, the effects can still be seen in the lives of people of color, and racism, while not as obvious as before, is still a rampant force in America.

Sexism is another way to keep power in the hands of white males. America has had a long history of sexism. From the founding of the nation until as late as the twentieth century men could beat and rape their wives. At the time there were no laws to hold them accountable for their actions, for “in 1910, the United States Supreme Court denied wives the right to prosecute their husbands for assault (Campbell). Women were not even granted the right to vote until 1920, and it came at the cost of many women jailed and force fed when they went on hunger strikes. The Feminist Movement took hold in the 1960s and continued into the 1970s, which allowed birth control and abortions to become legal and accesible to women. Even with those important events sexism is still a current issue in America. Today, women still have to fight for respect in traditionally male dominated fields and are often discredited in their jobs; and, despite performing at the same level as their male peers, women still receive lesser pay. A white woman earns $0.79 for every dollar a white man makes. When a white man makes a dollar, a black woman makes $.62, while a Native American woman makes $0.57, and a Latino female makes $0.54 (Bleiweis). By not being able to earn as much money as white males, women of color continue to find themselves in generational poverty. This forces them into neighborhoods with higher crime rates because the price of housing is often lower there, which makes them more susceptible to sexual violence.

When non-white male and females are born, an outsider status is assigned to them. Historically, there has always been a group or multiple groups that lingered on the outside of society. When “each age and society [re-create] its ‘Others,’” it often leads to horrific acts of violence (Said 329). In America, regardless of the year, people of color are the “others,” who then become the outsiders to white culture. When a person is an outsider to a particular group they are seen as less than those who are in the group. Being on the outside of a group leaves a person vulnerable to violence. Women of color, who are given dual outsider status because of both their gender and race, become easier targets for sexual violence and abuse due to their dual outsider status. They are seen as unequals by white patriarchal society, and even amongst the men in their cultures they are unequal because they are females. For example, according to the Department of Justice, more than half of Native American and Indigenous women will be raped in their lifetime (Machles). In the National Violence Against Women Survey, it was revealed that “approximately 1 in 5 African American women reported that they had been raped at some point in their lifetime.” (West). Also, according to a survey conducted on sexual assault in Asian American communities, over twenty-two percent of Vietnamese women experienced sexual violence in their lifetime (Yoshihama). Based on these statistics, it is clear that women of color are extremely likely to experience sexual violence in their lifetimes.

Not only do the women in *The Color Purple, The Round House,* and *Bitter in the Mouth* face sexual abuse, they also are subjected to other forms of violence. Violence can include many things, such as “the direct results of poor medical care, economic inferiority, oppressive legislation, and cultural invisibility. By broadening our definition of violence, we combat the minimization of our experiences as women of color by the dominant culture” (Carraway 1302). While sexual violence is something no woman should ever face, other issues plague women of color that are also serious. As literature is often a reflection of real life, the rapes and abuse the women in the novels face is minimized due to their outsider role in society. Geraldine in the

2012 novel *The Round House* by Louise Erdrich, Linda in the 2010 novel *Bitter in the Mouth* by Monique Truong, and Celie in the 1982 novel *The Color Purple* by Alice Walker are all women of color, which makes them more susceptible to violence from others.

Each novel showcases multiple forms of outsiderness. In the novel *The Round House,* Geraldine is an Ojibwe woman living on the Objibwe reservation, and her rape occurs on the reservation land by a white man named Linden Lark, whose family own a store on the reservation. In the novel *Bitter in the Mouth,* Linda's rape occurs in her own home, and Bobby, her rapist, who is a white male, is able to take control away from her because she is an outsider. In the novel *The Color Purple,* Celie's mother falls into a state of depression after the murder of her husband and marries another man. Despite being an outsider to the home, the man begins to take charge of the household and begins to rape Celie, the oldest child. Even though the man is black, as a male he is able to do what he wants, as long as he does it to women of his own race. The effects these women face due to their outsider status are great, as they all face stages of brokenness after their sexual assaults; and, without justice, the process of healing is more difficult for them. The individual chapters in my thesis will highlight how each woman is an outsider, and I will explain how their outsider statuses led to their rapes.

Chapter Two will focus on Louise Erdrich's novel *The Round House.* This novel analyzes the effect rape and abuse have on a woman and her family, particularly a woman of color's family. Readers follow Joe, a thirteen year old boy, who has to experience the effects his mother's rape has on both her and the entire family. Joe should be allowed to play with his friends like other boys do, but he is forced to take justice into his own hands when he discovers that Linden Lark will not be held accountable for his crimes. Geraldine is an Ojibwe woman living on the tribe's reservation, and it is on the reservation where she is raped by a white man named Linden Lark. Linden's status as a white man prevents him from being charged with the crime. The Ojibwe police cannot charge anyone other than Ojibwe people with crimes, and the police off the reservation cannot charge him because the crime was committed on the

reservation, which sadly happens to a lot of Native American women who are raped. According to the Indian Law Resource Center, “More than 4 in 5 American Indian and Alaska Native women have experienced violence, and more than 1 in 2 have experienced sexual violence” (Ending Violence Against Native Women). Along with Geraldine, there are three other women in *The Round House* who are considered outsiders. Myla Wolskin is considered an outsider due to her Ojibwe heritage and gender. Linda Larken Wishkob is a white woman living on the Ojibwe reservation in *The Round House.* Even though she is white, her outsider status comes from being physically deformed and abandoned for those deformities by her biological family. The final outsider in Sonja, who is the girlfriend of Whitey, one of the Ojibwe men on the reservation. Her race and socioeconmic status before she met Whitey make her an outsider.

Chapter Three will center on Monique Truong’s novel *Bitter in the Mouth.* Linda Hammerick is the novel’s protagonist, and the novel highlights her synesthesia. Synesthesia is an “extraordinary sensory condition” that causes some people affected by it to “hear, smell, taste or feel pain in color” (Carpenter). Linda’s synesthesia causes her to taste colors and the novel takes readers on Linda’s journey with synesthesia, which contributes to her outsider status. *Bitter in the Mouth* argues that despite Linda’s adoption into a white family, her Vietnamese heritage still makes her an outsider in the eyes of her peers, thus making her more susceptible to being raped by her neighbor. In fact, her status as an adopted child makes her an outsider to even her own culture because she is taken away from it, even though Linda is removed from her birthplace and is never exposed to her Vietnamese roots. Ironically, stripping Linda of her culture does not help her become fully accepted by the family she is adopted into. Thus, she is placed in an in-between state of belonging, not exclusively part of one group or the other. Linda also suffers from synesthesia, a neurotic condition that heightens one’s senses. In her case, she has heightened taste and can “taste” her surroundings, which adds yet another level to her role as an outsider because of the way she sees the world as opposed to “normal” members of society. Also, Baby Harper, Linda’s adoptive great-uncle is a homosexual man in

the southern United States. His sexuality does not conform to traditional family values, and his flamboyance goes against traditional male behaviors, making him an outsider, despite being part of the dominant race. Linda's best friend Kelly is also an outsider to society. Kelly is overweight, which goes against traditional forms of beauty, and her weight prevents Kelly's mother from fully accepting her.

Chapter Four focuses on Alice Walker's novel *The Color Purple.* The novel is a series of letters that Celie writes to God and her sister Nettie. Time passes through the letters, which take readers from Celie's childhood to her as a middle aged woman. Through the eyes of Celie readers see what the life of a black woman living the early twentieth century was like. *The Color Purple* argues that people of the same racial or ethnic background have outsiders within their own group of outsiders. Celie is a black woman, which makes her lower than the black men who rape and abuse her. Her stepfather begins raping her at fourteen, and he lies to Celie's husband about her being "ruined." Once Celie is married, her husband Albert beats her and mistreats her because of the belief that she is "damaged goods." The actions of the stepfather reflect the gaslighting that many rapists attempt in order to make people believe women are lying about their rape, which is yet another reason rape victims do not report their rapes. Gaslighting is a "tactic in which a person or entity, in order to gain more power, makes a victim question their reality" (Sarkis). There are eleven different ways a person can gaslight someone else; one of those ways is when the manipulator tries to align people against their victim. Alphonso, Celie's stepfather, does this when he tells Albert all the bad things Celie does and has done. Sofia, Celie's daughter-in-law, is also an outsider in the novel not only because of her race and gender, but also because she is outspoken and has the strength of a man. The other female outsider in *The Color Purple* is Shug Avery. Shug is an outsider because she does not conform to traditional female behavior, and because she is a Jazz singer who also has three illegitimate children.

Being that each of the three novels includes women of color being raped, I began questioning the reasonings why these women would be raped. Were the rapes solely racially motivated, or did the rapes occur because the victims are in a lower social class than their rapists? Rape occurs because the perpatrators believe they can get away with it. In order to believe this, the perpetrator must hold some sort of power in the situation, which could be because he is white, while his victim is not. It could also be because the perpetrator, as a male, believes women are beneath him and do not have the right to say no. Both of these beliefs occur in *The Round House, Bitter in the Mouth,* and *The Color Purple.* Geraldine and Linda's rapes are committed by white males, which are in part racially motivated, but they are also motivated by the rapists belief that they have a certain amount of power over them. Celie is the only one who is raped by a man of her own race, and this demonstrates the power struggle between men and women in society, with women losing the battle because of their outsider status.

My thesis demonstrates the multi-faceted effects that being labelled as an outsider has on women, both positive and negative. I aim to expose several types of outsiders in the three novels I use, while also examining how their outsider status contributes to the abuse they face from other members of society. My thesis centers on the literary representations of outsiders, and with each novel taking place in a different time period and setting, I will be able to explain the shifting view of what contributes to the outsider label. My knowledge of outsider sexual violence is then applied to the progression of the effects of being outsiders to the majority of society and how those effects contribute to violence and abuse.

Chapter Two

Disrupting Homes in *The Round House* (2012)

America's founding principles - freedom, justice, and equality - have been a struggle for many marginalized groups to obtain, both past and present. One particular group that continues to face prejudices is Native Americans. When settlers first arrived in America, they classified each Native tribe "in the matrix...of antagonistic separations" (Sider 182). In the eyes of European settlers, the lifestyles and cultures of Native Americans were barbaric, or "savage." This gave the settlers the belief that they would need to take the land away from Natives by force. By asserting dominance over the Native Americans, the settlers could affect "Indian social life from political economy to culture and ceremony" (Sider 183). Smallpox and other diseases Europeans brought to America led to the deaths of many Native Americans. Wars between the Natives and white people over land decreased the number of Native Americans in the nation even further. Not only were Native Americans stripped of their land, but they were also forced into new territories. With their diminished numbers, Native Americans are now outsiders in the land they inhabited before anyone else.

Once reservations were created and enforced, and Native Americans began living on reservation lands, the federal government made treaties with those tribes. According to those treaties, even though Native Americans would have their own local government and police force, "the federal government [had] a treaty obligation to help protect the lives of tribal members. This legal doctrine, called the "trust responsibility," goes back to the...18th and 19th centuries" (Machles). Unfortunately, many laws and ordinances created after those original treaties "resulted in a complicated legal arrangement among federal, state and tribal jurisdictions, making it difficult for survivors of sexual assault to find justice" (Machles). The result is a large number of sexual assaults on Native American women with a small number of their rapists receiving punishment for their actions. These real life stories are fictionalized in the 2012 novel *The Round House* by Louise Erdrich. This novel features four women who have

been labeled as outsiders in different ways; Geradline, Joe's mother; Sonja, a white woman married to Joe's Uncle Whitey; Linda, a white woman who was adopted by one of the Ojibwe families; and Myla, the Ojibwe woman who disappears in the novel. Readers see society from the outside as these women find themselves kept away from others due to reasons beyond their control.

Readers of this novel follow Joe, a member of the Ojibwe tribe, whose mother, Geraldine, is raped by a white man named Link Larken. "While Erdrich does depict survival and love in the midst of violence and displacement, the circumstances are not inevitable. She challenges the reader to rise as a witness for tribal justice. As Tharp argues, while rooted in legal and cultural realities, Erdrich's narrative voice and style shift to proclaim the urgency of her crusade" (Tharp 39). The crime against Geraldine is not just tragic because it is a crime against a woman's body, but also because it is a crime motivated by racism. "According to the U.S. Census Bureau, the current total population of Native Americans in the United States is 6.79 million, which is about 2.09% of the entire population" (Native American Population 2020). Despite their small numbers, Native American women are more likely to be raped than other races and ethnicities. According to statistics. "1 in 3 Native women will be raped in her lifetime" (Carden 94). Of those rapes, "86 percent..are perpetrated by non-Native men" (Carden 94). This is significant because Geraldine is raped by a white man. "Violence against Native North American women by indigenous and non-indigenous men is not countered due to the absorption of colonial patriarchal thinking into tribal communities" (Bowers 50). In other words, Native American men have adopted patriarchal thinking in their tribes, which is evident in the way Whitey treats Sonja. The probability of a Native American woman experiencing sexual assault is so high that it no longer comes as a shock to them. According to Sarah Deer, a citizen of the Muscogee (Creek) Nation of Oklahoma, she "can't think of anyone, any woman....who hasn't been victimized in this way" (Machles). Those statistics are an important, yet tragic, part of Native American culture. Equally tragic is the fact that the Ojibwe people cannot do anything

about Geraldine's rape, due to the fact that Linden is a white man. This affects Geraldine's role as both a wife and a mother.

A mother, or a mother figure, plays a pivotal role in the life of a child, for both the good and the bad. Skenandore argues that "Geraldine's influence and vital presence shapes Joe's adolescent world, and herein Erdrich establishes the centrality of women in the novel, presenting them as significant human beings who hold the world together and whose wellness measures the health of the world. Yet this role is challenged when Bazil and Joe, depicted working together at the beginning of the novel in the family garden, realize the peculiarity of Geraldine's absence" (Skenandore 5). On the day she is raped, Geraldine leaves home to pick up some files from her office. When she finally returns, Joe and his father can sense something is wrong with Geraldine by the "set of her body--something fixed, rigid, wrong….There was vomit down the front of her dress, and, soaking her skirt and soaking the gray cloth of the car seat, her dark blood" (Erdrich 6-7). After taking her to the hospital, Joe sees the full effects of his mother. She was "puffed with welts and distorted to an ugly shape. She peered through slits in the swollen flesh of her lids….Tears leaked from the corner of her eyes…There were scrapes of blows and the awful lopsidedness. Her skin had lost its normal warm color. It was gray as ash" (Erdrich 10). Not only does Geraldine's body reflect the crime, but so does her declining spirit. Patriarchal authorities expect women to be sexually pure until marriage, and then remain with the man they marry until "death do us part." Women who have sex before marriage receives a bad reputation, which can force them into an outsider role. A woman who has lost her purity or strays from her marriage is now "damaged goods" in the eyes of the patriarchy.

When Geraldine is released from the hospital she becomes a shell of her former self. One day Joe takes food to her room, noting that "the air was heavy with her breath, as if she'd sucked out the oxygen. She kept the shades pulled….[he]could see her spine clearly through the thin gown, each vertebra jutted, and her shoulders were knobs. Her arms had wasted to

sticks." (Erdrich 87). The effects of the rape can not just be seen in her body, but in her spirit as well. Tharp explains that "the attack on her silences her, renders her voiceless. Even if she could regain her voice, she would make a poor narrator at this point, and perhaps there is little political ground to be gained by going through the emotional agony with her. The reader must experience her injury, her horror, instead as a sympathetic, close observer" (Tharp 29-30). Though her story is not told from her perpsective, readers can still see the effect the rape and assault has on Geradline and her family. As Bowers argues, "more significantly, this objectification of the victim forces the reader to acknowledge the traumatised body as emblematic of a systemic violence that is not directed towards individuals but towards Native North American women as the focal point of violent colonial control" (Bowers 48). Due to the laws set in place, Geraldine cannot receive justice for the crimes against her, which "testifies to the loss of tribal jurisdiction, which has directly affected the ability to protect Native women from sexual and domestic violence" (Tharp 26). While colonialism ended in America several hundred years ago, the impact of colonialism can still be seen in the lives of Native Americans.

It is obvious to readers that Linden Lark is racist, and his actions are racially motivated. When Geraldine is discussing her sexual assault, she recalls that Lark says, "I suppose I am one of those people who just hates Indians" (Erdrich 161). He has no reason to hurt Geraldine, but his racism controls his actions, and he rapes her. Lark does not care that he rapes Geraldine or kills Myla because he knows that "[he] won't get caught" (Erdrich 161). In Linden's eyes Geraldine and Myla, two Native women, are weak, and he believes that "the strong should rule the weak" (Erdrich 161). His words not only echo feelings of racism, but they sound eerily similar to the idea of colonizing nations that had the idea to rule over what they deemed as weaker countries. As Skenandore argues, "Linden is not ashamed to admit that he hates Indigenous people and Indigenous women to the extent that he studies the law so he can rape, colonize, and destroy with impunity both her body and her tribe's body and their humanity.

Geraldine's case goes unprosecuted, and Linden ultimately evades punishment because of these judicial and moral failings" (Skenandore 6). Linden's twin sister Linda, who resides on the reservation, even tells Joe that in the past her brother "did things….Things he should have got caught for" (Erdrich 127). Despite his outsider role as a white man on an Ojibwe reservation, his race still allows him to avoid atoning for racially and sexually motivated crimes. In fact, before the events of this novel began, several laws and acts were created to strip as many rights away from Native Americans as possible. As Crane observes, "In 1978, the Supreme Court case *Oliphant v. Suquamish* stripped tribes of the right to arrest and prosecute non-Indians who commit crimes on Indian land" (Crane). With this law in effect, Linden cannot be prosecuted for his crimes, despite the entire reservation's knowledge of his guilt. Several men on the reservation even go as far as to beat Linden up for the crime (Erdrich). Linden's outsider status on the reservation is actually a good thing for him, as it saves him from being persecuted for raping Geraldine. Even though Linden grew up on the Ojibwe reservation with his parents operating a grocery store, he is still an outsider in the small Ojibwe community because he is a white man. However, the people of the Ojibwe Tribe are outsiders to the white dominated American society. As outsiders the Ojibwe do not have the same rights and protections that white Americans have, and despite having their own land, continue to experience racism. Erdrich shows us the problems that plague families on the reservations, such as alcoholism, rape, and poverty. *The Round House* is a crusade to open readers' eyes to the conditions Native Americans face today. While most people already know about the centuries long "abuse of Native Americans" (Matchie 353), most people do not realize that there are laws in place that still affect Native Americans today.

By reading this novel critically, readers can understand the desperation Joe feels when he learns of the laws preventing his people from trying his mother's rapist. *The Round House* "[unveils] the legacies of injustices against Indigenous women, that threaten the Indigenous

female existence, bringing light to issues, limitations, and frustrations between federal and tribal legal entities in exercising a tribe's sovereignty, power of jurisdiction, and ability to protect tribal members" (Skenandore 6). When a crime is committed, it is natural to want justice to be served to the person who committed the crime, especially if the crime is as violent as the assault against Geraldine. For Geraldine to not be able to receive justice because of laws that are grounded in taking control from Native Americans is a crime in and of itself. "Such injustices further demonstrate how the sadisms of settler colonialism and colonial heteropatriarchy humiliate, dehumanize, and harm entire generations. Beyond this sudden overwhelming awareness of rape, Joe is ruthlessly catapulted into the world of gendered violence as the rape of Geraldine opens his eyes to the multiple violences against other women in his family and community" (Skenandore 6). While Joe, as a thirteen year old boy, was no longer a little boy, Geraldine's rape forces him out of his childhood as his home is disrupted, and he begins to see people not through the eyes of childhood innocence, but through the eyes of adulthood awareness.

In a conversation between Joe and his father, Joe learns of his tribe's past with the white controlled government. Joe's father tells him that, "from the government's view, the only way you can tell an Indian is an Indian is to look at that person's history. There must be ancestors from way back….And then after that you have to look at a person's blood quantum, how much Indian blood they've got that belongs to one tribe….But that tribe has also got to be federally recognized" (Erdrich 30). Joe's father is referring to The Indian Reorganization Act of 1934, which declared that anyone who had a "blood-quantum of one-half or more" of Indian DNA (Maynor 165) would be granted federal recognition by the government and receive the benefits of federally recognized Native Americans. This idea of "blood quantum" has been around since the days of colonialism, when colonists initially created blood quantum laws "to prevent mixed race people from holding public office or intermarrying with Europeans" (Miller 323). These

blood quantum laws and testing were edited and picked up movement during the “Allotment Era” (Miller 324).

The Allotment Era of America consisted of “the federal government’s goal...to dissolve reservations and apportion the reservation lands among tribal members in the form of ‘allotments’” (Miller 324). The federal government gave free land to federally recognized Indians whose blood quantum tests revealed them to be at least “half-Indian” (Maynor 166). While this idea “seemed objective on the surface, the prevailing racism of the day corrupted their concept of ‘Indian Blood’ and enabled science to support racism” (Maynor 165). By preventing people from registering as Native American until a blood quantum test was taken, the federal government could stall the time it took to grant certain tribes full federal recognition. The blood-quantum tests also serve as a way to keep the number of federally recognized Native Americans down, which keeps them growing in number and affecting the federal government.

The “crisis in sexual violence on reservations...and...the effects of sexual violence” (Tharp 25) would be lost on readers not trying to learn from this novel. By critically reading and analyzing the novel, readers understand that Joe, a young boy, being forced to kill Linden to achieve any sort justice for his mother’s rape is unacceptable. It allows readers to better understand Native American culture and the setbacks they continue to face, even now in the twenty-first century. Due to the government's refusal to treat Natives Americans as full citizens, “the complications arising from combined sexism and racism make it even less likely that crimes against Native women will be tried” (Tharp 26). While the American government tries to pretend they are inclusive to all people, the Native American reservations are proof that inclusivity has its limits. The reservations serve as a daily reminder that Native people have been disregarded and ignored after being forced off their land.

In *The Round House*, “there are three victims of violent racist, sexualized attack...: Geraldine, who is able to reveal some aspects of the attack and Myla and her baby who actually

disappear” (Bowers 50). While Geraldine is able to overcome her PTSD and move on with her life, Myla’s story does not have a happy ending. It is later revealed in the novel that she was murdered to hide her affair and resulting pregnancy with Curtis Yeltow, the fictional governor of South Dakota. Myla Wolfskin was a high school student on the Ojibwe reservation in North Dakota who became an intern for Governor Yeltow. While she is among fellow Ojibwe people, being from another state still makes her an outsider. Her story has to be pieced together by other characters in the novel because of her disappearance. As Skenandore explains, “the fact we are denied Mayla’s voice to tell her own story describes a disturbing, violent reality particular to Indigenous women: being missing and being murdered” (Skenandore 12). Readers learn that Myla is Linden Lark’s girlfriend who was avoiding him before the events of the novel took place “because a certain highly placed government official has started paying her to be with him. Offering compensation for her favors" (Erdrich 124). Once Myla becomes pregnant with his child, Yeltow pays her to remain silent about his fathering of the baby” (Erdrich 299). Not only is Myla a woman of color, but now she is a woman of color with a bastard child. Having a child out of wedlock indicates that a woman is “loose,” according to patriarchal society. Linden wanted to “run away with [Myla] on that money,” but Myla sought out Geraldine, the tribal record keeper, for help (Erdrich 299). These events lead to the two of them meeting at the round house, where Geraldine is raped, and where Myla disappears. Skenandore argues that “the systemic violence of missing and murdered Indigenous women haunts the novel as Mayla never speaks to Joe or Linda or Bazil or anyone except for Geraldine before her death. Mayla does not survive to tell her story. But her story is still told by those that remember her, including Linda and Geraldine. Therefore, though Mayla has tragically passed and been denied a voice, her story is still remembered and spoken by others, keeping her memory alive” (Skenandore 12). While it is a nice sentiment that her memory will remain alive, Myla herself should still be alive.

Governor Yeltow’s actions “clearly [illustrate] the identification of colonial control of Native American populations by gendered sexual violence as, in Myla’s case, it is used to

silence any damaging revelations that could be used against the U.S. authorities" (Bowers 51). Yeltow was already "well known for his bigoted treatment of Indians—an image he is trying in his own way to mitigate. By hiring Myla, a Native American woman, the public, and more importantly, the voters, see someone who appears to represent inclusivity. In reality, Myla was just "an Indian intern making the administration look good" (Erdrich 125). Yeltow then gets Myla pregnant, which he tries to cover up. His character represents how people in power can mistreat the outsiders of society and face no repercussions.

Another character in *The Round House* who is subjected to domestic violence and objectification and fetisization is Sonja. Skenandore argues that "Erdrich broadens her gender justice concerns with the creation of Sonja's character, herself a non-Indigenous woman and girlfriend of Joe's uncle Whitey, and her story, which voices the harsh truths about domestic abuse and its cyclic violence and entrapment" (Skenandore 9). In the past scholars have ignored Sonja's character and the abuse she experiences, but her story is just as important as the others. The reader's first description of Sonja is that she is "a tall, blonde weather-beaten ex-stripper" (Erdrich 30). As a white woman, Sonja would have had access to more opportunities than Geraldine, a woman of color. However, when Erdrich tells Sonja's story, it is revealed that Sonja "never met her dad" and her mother "got beat up a lot. She took drugs too" (Erdrich 279). Sonja's mother, who could not provide her with any opportunities, also encouraged her to become a stripper.

While Sonja was a stripper she experienced abuse at the hands of her manager, who cut her with a razor and left "a thin white scar...up the side and around the nipple of her left breast" (Erdrich 279). Female strippers are often seen on the same level of disgust by society as prostitutes. When a woman starts working as a stripper she is leaving the protection of being an insider to the patriarchal society. Once a woman no longer has that protection, no one cares what happens to her. As a stripper Sonja would have been subjected to objectification from every male she stripped for, which would explain why Whitey seems to have no problem

physically abusing her. When Joe, Geraldine's son, stays with Sonja and Whitey one night, he is a witness to Whitey accusing Sonja of cheating on him. While Sonja declares that "There's no he. It's just you, baby," Joe still hears "the crack of a slap" and "a cry" (Erdrich 175). Later in the novel, Joe is a witness to Whitey's abuse again, hearing "a crash" and the "steady grating of Whitey's voice. A heavy thud," which turns out to be Sonja (Erdrich 220). The first time Joe witnesses the abuse, he comes to Sonja's rescue and punches his uncle, but he ignores Whitey's second attempt. Joe's loss of innocence in dealing with his mother's assault turns him into a man, and he begins to demonstrate the toxic behaviors other men in the novel display. Even though Joe is, in many ways, the hero of this story, he "consciously rejects the casual domestic violence of his uncle when he quits the gas station job and moves out of his house" (Tharp 32). Sonja is aware of the way men objectify her, going as far as to tell Joe that, "I thought of you like my son. But you just turned into another piece of shit guy. Another gimme-gimme asshole, Joe. That's all you are" (Erdrich 223). Fortunately Joe "begins to reject his own objectification and abuse of Sonja after her story" and starts to reflect on his behavior (Tharp 32). "The significance of Sonja's character and her story is that she teaches us that destructive, harmful attitudes that devalue women can be broken, as seen in Joe's realization and promise to be better" (Skenandore 11). While readers do not know if Joe changes his behavior towards certain women as an adult, Joe's acknowledgement of his treatment of Sonja is a step in the right direction, a step that hopefully breaks the cycle of abusive men around him. Sonja eventually leaves Whitey and the reservation behind; and while her fate is unknown to readers after that, the ability to leave a toxic situation or an abusive relationship is a sign of courage and resilience. Maybe the abusive cycle will not be broken on the reservation, but maybe it did in Sonja's life.

The last woman in *The Round House* who finds herself an outsider to every group in society is Linda Lark Wishkob, the twin sister of Linden Lark. When Linda and Linden were born, Linda was born with physical deformities that made her, in the eyes of her parents,

“magnetically ugly” (Erdrich 110). “Let it die,” says Grace when asked by the doctor “if he should use extraordinary means” to save Linda when she is born (Erdrich 115). A nurse at the hospital kept Linda from dying that day, “[clearing] [Linda’s] mouth with her finger, [shaking] [her] upside down, and [swaddling] [her] tight in another blanket. Her biological parents dumped her at the reservation hospital, where Betty Wishkob, a janitor, took her home and made her a part of the Wishkob family. The Larkins did not want her because of her appearance, and that makes her an outsider to her biological family.

Despite not being born into the Ojibwe tribe, “Linda is an appreciated community member of the North Dakota Ojibwe reservation, adopted by the Wishkob family, and respected and recognized by Bazil as well as many others” (Skenandore 6). Linda has no communication with her biological family until her brother Linden needs a kidney transplant. At first, Linden refuses to take a kidney from Linda, going as far as to say, “I don’t want your kidney...I have an aversion to ugly people. I don’t want a piece of you inside me. I’d rather get on a list. Frankly, you’re kind of a disgusting woman” (Erdrich 125). The United States Department of Health and Human Services Office on Women’s Health (OWH) names emotional manipulation and verbal abuse as a violence against women (Skenandore 7). While Linda is never sexually assaulted, Linden emotionally abuses and verbally abuses Linda for her outsiderness. Linden continues to verbally abuse Linda, despite him needing her for survival, specifically focusing on her physical appearance. He tells her that “you probably have a cat… Cats pretend to love whoever feeds them. I doubt you could get a husband, or whatever, unless you put a bag on your head. And even then it would have to come off at night (Erdrich 125). Once his condition worsens, Linden begins to be nice to Linda and bribes her with gifts, which he does to emotionally manipulate her into giving him one of her kidneys, despite his harsh treatment of her earlier. Linden’s manipulation on Linda works, and she gives him one of her kidneys.

When Linda tells her story to Joe, she tells him that, “By the time the whole procedure was settled, I abhorred Linden--that’s the word. Abhorred! But he cozied up to me. Plus, it was

ridiculous because now I felt guilty about hating him… he gave me presents, flowers, fancy scarves, soaps, sentimental cards. He told me how sorry he was when he was mean, temporarily charmed me, made me laugh" (Erdrich 126). For Linden, a man who believes that "the strong should rule the weak," verbally abusing and emotionally manipulating a physically deformed woman who he would consider to be weak, is easy for him. "The gifts from Linden to Linda are his way of controlling the situation and further subverting her because she is manipulated into thinking that she is at fault and he is innocent" (Skenandore 8). Even though Linda is a white woman, Erdrich demonstrated that a person's physical appearance can often keep them from being a part of society, which adds another layer to otherness or outsiderness. "Linda's words help us understand the dehumanizing and devaluing effects said patriarchy has on not only Indigenous women, but on non-Indigenous women as well. The ramifications of colonial heteropatriarchal attitudes sicken these women" (Skenandore 8). The way the Ojibwe treat Linda and include her in their society allows her to "[reject] [Linden's] relation to her because he abandoned and abused her and instead chooses to help her adopted reservation community and its members" (Skenandore 13). Linda finds acceptance with the Ojibwe people because she was raised by the Wishkob family, and because her actions in the novel display her loyalty to them. When Joe and his friend Cappy shoot and kill Linden Lark, they hide the gun on Linda's property where Linda's dog finds the gun, and she gets rid of it to protect Joe. Even though Linda is not a member of the Ojibwe tribe, she shows herself to be a friend to them. Not only that, but by helping Joe cover up Linden's murder, she also is able to remove the regret she feels from giving Linden one of her kidneys and also finally stand up to him.

In the Afterword of *The Round House,* it states that the novel "was also inspired by real-life events, and in particular a need to address gaps in the legal protection of Native American women from sexual violence" (Bowers 51). In 1994 The Violence Against Women Act was created and seemed to be a solution to the constant rapes of Native American women, "but the act does not yet provide the ideal solution" (Tharp 36). "Tribes may now exercise jurisdiction

over non- Indians in cases of domestic violence, dating violence, and violation of protection orders. The non- Indian must, however, be either living in Indian country, employed in Indian country, or the intimate partner of a member of the prosecuting tribe" (Tharp 37). In other words, the act is merely a facade to pretend the federal government cares about the sexual assault of Native American women, but they do not want to do anything to give tribes jurisdiction to prosecute these crimes on their land. To give them this power would be to relinquish some of their own, and people in power rarely give it up willingly.

The Round House shows us the negative and positive effects being an outsider will do to people. Geraldine's rape and Myla's disappearance occur because of the racist and sexist nature of their attacker. Without the ability to prosecute Linden Lark for his crimes, Joe, a thirteen year old boy, is forced to give his mother justice. Sonja, a white woman who grew up poor, is an outsider because of her past as a stripper, and she is abused by Whitey until she is able to leave him. Linda, a physically deformed white woman, was not wanted by her biological family, and was made to be an outsider before she knew anything. Fortunately for Linda, she was able to be adopted by a caring family and able to live a happy life with them. While there are many dangers that come with being labeled an outsider, Myla's fate represents the ultimate danger: death. In death the outsiders' voice is forever silenced.

Chapter Three

Bitterness in *Bitter in the Mouth* (2010)

The novel *Bitter in the Mouth* by Monique Truong has several different cultures represented, though not all of them deal with race or ethnicity. Similarly to the way the Ojibwe people are outsiders to the white dominated America, Linda Hammerick, the novel's protagonist, is an outsider in her southern home. The author of *Bitter in the Mouth* "initially presents Linda as an outcast because she has synesthesia, a condition in which she experiences words as tastes whenever she hears or speaks them" (Cruz 717); and in the novel, synesthesia is defined as "a neurological condition that [causes] the involuntary mixing of the senses" (Truong 218). "Although [Truong] does not reveal her ethnic origins until halfway through the novel, Linda's narration of her childhood emphasizes her status as an outsider; she is unable to speak of her synesthesia without fear of being thought "crazy," while her closest relationship is with her gay great- uncle Baby Harper" (Mellette 124). Linda is raised by Thomas and DeAnne Hammerick, a white couple, who had no biological children and adopted Linda when she was seven years old. Linda does not remember anything from the first six years of her life, which is why she never questions her parentage or wonders why she does not look like anyone else in her family. The fact that she is even a different race at all does not even cross readers' minds, though a few subtle hints are dropped along the way. It is not until readers are halfway through the novel that they learn that Linda is the daughter of Vietnamese immigrants who died in a trailer fire, adding more layers to the already complex Linda (Truong).

The adoption of Linda, a Vietnamese girl, by white parents, particularly in the southern United States, stands out to someone reading *Bitter in the Mouth* due to the fact that most people adopt children of their own racial background. America's first recorded "transracial adoption didn't occur until 1948, when white parents adopted an African American child" (American Adoptions Inc,). While the percentage of people today who adopt interracially has

increased by fifty percent, it was not common to do so in the 1970s, especially if the adoption was transracial and transnational (American Adoptions Inc.) Linda experiences difficult relations with both DeAnne and Iris. Even though Iris, Linda's grandmother, and DeAnne do not necessarily mistreat Linda, they both are "indifferent to [her] because [she looks] nothing like [them]" (Truong 133). Even when Linda tries to form a bond with DeAnne by telling her about her synesthesia, DeAnne rejects her, a day that Linda never forgets. "But her words—I won't have it in my family—were reverberating inside the car, like the notes of a skipping record. They were getting more insistent with each repetition, drowning out the radio entirely. I knew what my mom meant. If you want to be one of us, Linda, hush your mouth" (Truong 108). On her deathbed, the last words Iris says to Linda are, "What I know about you, little girl, would break you in two" (Truong 5). The actions of Iris and DeAnne, combined with the early death of Thomas, force Linda into a close relationship with her great-uncle, whom everyone calls Baby Harper, and who is homosexual.

Throughout the course of *Bitter in the Mouth,* "Linda struggles to break free from the racial marginalization she experiences growing up Vietnamese within the confines of the rural South" (Brandt 40). Truong's *Bitter in the Mouth* uses Asian, queer, and feminist culture to develop critical readers' understanding of the south, "an alternative to the dominance of black–white racial paradigms once used to examine the South" (Cruz 719). Linda grew up in the 1970s, right after the Civil Right Movement gained momentum where most white people, particularly in the south, were just beginning to live in an integrated society with black people. "As a Vietnamese girl in North Carolina, Linda embodies...a "discrepancy in Dixie," where, "the figure of the Asian American disrupts popular discourses about the South in multiple ways: the Asian American demonstrates the shifting meaning of Black and White in a region in which this binary is writ large" (Brandt 40).As an adopted child, Linda was already an outsider in her traditional, southern, middle-class family, who probably valued having biological children over

adoptive children. Being the only person of Asian heritage in a small southern town in the United States further made her an outsider in her community. Linda's classmates "pull up the corners of their eyes for 'Chink' and pull down the corners for 'Jap'" to make fun of her, a constant reminder that she is not one of them (Truong 172). The apathetic nature of her adoptive mother and grandmother in her home, combined with the racial slurs she is forced to hear at school make Linda a girl that stays to herself.

While Linda is met with indifference and apathy at home, her white classmates are not as generous. Instead, they "silently [mouth] Chink or Jap or Gook at [her] so that [their] teacher [won't] hear" (Truong 171). The only students who do not make racist remarks to Linda are the black girls, who only refer to Linda by her name because "they knew that the other names were meant to insult [Linda], to punch holes into [her], and make [her] fall down" (Truong 172). The black girls are the only people to know the pain of being outsiders, and they also experience the taunting of racist classmates, which makes them the only ones to understand Linda's plight of being in a minority position. While they do not become friends, they share a common bond - their non-whiteness. In a small town like Boiling Springs Linda is "in plain sight" of everyone (Truong 171). Being the only Vietnamese, and also the only Asian in Boiling Springs makes her outsider role even more evident, especially when she only has one friend. Together they decide that Kelly will lose weight the summer before high school to become more popular, and Linda will become the smart girl, which pays off, as she is accepted into Yale, a prestigious Ivy League school.

It is during Linda's time at Yale that Linda discovers another thing that adds to her outsiderness. While at Yale she meets and begins dating a man named Leo, and they eventually become engaged. Before they announce their engagement, Leo, a doctor, wants both of them to have full medical checkups. When Linda goes for an exam, it is discovered that "there was a mass on one of [her] ovaries," and when she is in surgery to remove the mass, the

doctor finds “an abnormality...on the other ovary as well” (Truong 168). This forced the surgeon to remove both ovaries, which makes Linda unable to have children. Leo tells Linda that he only wants biological children and leaves her. He “[saves] [her] life,” by making her get a health exam, but then he “judged it useless to him” (Truong 169). “Men do that. They replace broken women with whole ones” (Truong 167). Once again, Linda is an outsider for reasons outsider of her control. As an infertile woman she cannot have children, and a woman’s worth is often determined by how many children she has.

When readers first meet Kelly, it is revealed that she was “awkward, fat, and shy” (Truong 17). As a woman that does not fit into the traditional standards of beauty, Kelly would have been ignored and overlooked by her peers as both a suitable friend and girlfriend. Kelly and Linda’s bond is clear, as Kelly is the “only person whom [Linda] had shared [her] secret sense with” (Truong 25). Linda does not even share this secret with Baby Harper until she is an adult. Kelly and Linda’s bond is also strong because they were both molested by Kelly’s cousin Bobby, who is several years older than them, and who their parents hired to cut their grass during the summer. When Kelly and Linda are both eleven Bobby “made [Kelly] touch his privates” (Truong 36). They cope with the molestation by not talking about it, going as far as to claim that they are virgins. Losing one’s virginity is a choice one should have the freedom to make. As outsiders Kelly and Linda’s choice was taken away from them. “As Kelly spoke the words I dare you, I double-dare you...to lose your virginity before the end of the year, she knew that I had already lost mine, by force and not by choice. Yet she said the words anyway, banishing from my experience and hers all the hidden dangers of our shared girlhood” (Truong 73). As outsiders Kelly and Linda keep the secret to themselves because they cannot afford to alienate themselves further from society.

After Kelly loses weight she begins to be noticed by many boys, and she begins having sex with them. Kelly “[assumes] a role that [calls] for her to be on display, to be chased like prey,

to flirt and to tease" (Truong 134). Once Kelly becomes pregnant, she becomes ostracized from the town more so than when she was fat; and, Kelly is sent to Rock Hill, South Carolina, "to go live with her pregnancy and her aunt" (Truong 130). Having a child out of wedlock goes against tradition in any society or culture, so Kelly is sent not just to another city, but to another state to hide in shame for her sins. This causes her to be an outsider not only in her hometown, but also in Rock Hill, South Carolina where she is forced to relocate. It is also significant that Kelly's aunt "had never been close to [Kelly's] family" because Kelly's aunt refused to conform to their ideals (Truong 137). In other words, Kelly's aunt was the family outsider. "When Kelly's aunt became Luke's legal mother, she ceased all contact with their extended family, who were frankly relieved, as the family embarrassment was now harboring another family embarrassment" (Truong 138). Without the illegitimate child and the disobedient sister around, the Powell family can keep up appearances as the ideal white, southern, middle class, American family.

The only two people Linda has a long-lasting close relationship with are her great-uncle, who Linda describes as "[her] first love" and her friend Kelly, both of whom happen to be outsiders (Truong 3). Baby Harper and Kelly are the "most affective and intimate connections" Linda has, and it is not surprising that her closest bonds "are with the white queer and Southern others in her community, especially her great-uncle "Baby" Harper, whose secret life in drag is only disclosed after his death, and her best friend, Kelly, a white woman who is exiled from their small community because of her teen pregnancy" (Cruz 717). Baby Harper, as he is called by everyone, "was a sixty-two-year-old, never- married male librarian with a velvet divan, which he pointed out to me was the same color as the curtains that Scarlett O'Hara had made into a gown. These weren't clues; they were flashing signs. I loved him more because of them" (Truong 44). Baby Harper, as a gay man in the 1970s, would have already been an outsider due to his homosexuality and flamboyance. While homosexuality cerainly existed before the Gay Luberation Movement, people did not "come out of the closet" and often hid their homosexuality.

The Gay Liberation Movement of the 1960s and 1970s was the first time LGBTQ rights were made a topic of discussion. Before then it was not something people talked about, and most people did not come out as part of the LGBTQ community back then. Living in the southern United States, which is also known as the Bible Belt, would have added to his outsider status even more. For Baby Harper to live as a homosexual in the 1970s in North Carolina is hard to understand. His role as an outsider is what allows him to connect with Linda and form a tight bond with her. “In spite of their obvious differences in age, gender, and ethnicity, Baby Harper is Linda’s strongest ally, their respective status as outsiders helping to unite them” (Mellette 126). It is his death that also allows her and DeAnne to grow closer and make amends from the things that happened in the past, such as the lack of acceptance of Linda’s synesthesia and failure to protect Linda from Bobby.

Bitter in the Mouth demonstrates how people are treated when they are labelled outsiders. Baby Harper is a white man that is homosexual and does drag, two things that go against patriarchal society’s idea of how a man should act. For Baby Harper, he is simply ignored by the people around him; his status as a wealthy white man allows him to endure the simple punishment. Kelly’s size originally makes her an outsider because she does not have a slender figure. When she loses weight and has an unplanned teenage pregnancy, her parents send her away until the baby is born. Even though Kelly is a white woman, her story demonstrates the struggles women face in a patriarchal society. They are expected to keep a small body that will be desired by men, but they are also expected to ignore a man’s advances and their own sexuality. Failure to conform to those behaviors will remove them from the inside and make them an outsider. Linda, a Vietnamese woman, cannot escape her outsider status. As a Vietnamese adoptee, she is ignored by DeAnne, who does not truly accept Linda until she is an adult. DeAnne’s indifference to Linda is how Bobby is able to rape Linda, whose rape is

much more violent than Kelly's because Linda is Vietnamese. Linda, as a woman of color, cannot hide her race, which will continuously keep her on the outside.

Chapter Four

Black and Blue in *The Color Purple* (1982)

The novel *The Color Purple* by Alice Walker follows the life of Celie, a black woman living in the early twentieth century. Celie writes letters to first God, and then her sister Nettie about the major events of her life, such as her pregnancies and marriage. Celie's letters serve as the lens through which readers meet the other characters in the novel. When she is a young child, Celie's father is murdered, which catapults her mother into depression. Her mother remarries a man named Alphonso, but Celie spends most of her life believing he is her biological father. When she is fourteen he begins raping her, which highlights her "own limited understanding, her technical insecurity, and her plain sense of powerlessness" (Berlant 837). Celie does not know what is happening as it occurs, which gives Alphonso power. As a child Celie cannot physically fight off Alphonso, a fact he knows and uses to his advantage. He also emotionally manipulates her when he rapes her, telling her in the process that she better "never tell nobody but God" because it would "kill [her] mammy" (Walker 1). "This unsigned, double-negative message marks the contested ground on which Celie's negative relation to discourse is established" (Berlant 838). By telling Celie that her words will harm her mother, Alphonso is not just keeping Celie silent when he rapes her, but he effectively keeps her from speaking out against mistreatment for most of her life. Celie's oppression leads to her outsider status "in the novel, [circulating] around the vulnerabilities that grow from her gender, as constructed within the social space which her "Pa" respectably occupies" (Berlant 839).

Celie gives us the details of her rape, explaining how she was giving Alphonso a haircut when he first raped her. "While I trim his hair he look at me funny. He a little nervous too, but I don't know why, till he grab hold of me and cram me up tween his legs...I was just going on fourteen...After he through, I say, he make me finish trimming his hair"(Walker 111). Not only is Celie subjected to sexual abuse at the hands of Alphonso, but she also experiences verbal abuse from him. "First he put his thing up against my hip and sort of wiggle it around. Then he

grab hold my titties. Then he push his thing inside my pussy. When that hurt, I cry. He start to choke me, saying You better shut up and git used to it" (Walker 1). "The perversion that marked Celie's entry into consciousness [circumscribes] her understanding of the world: fundamentally negated by father and husband, in the church and in the marketplace she [stays] as invisible as possible to avoid provoking further violation" (Berlant 840). As a fourteen year old girl living in the early 1900s, Celie did not know the nuances of sex, but her innocence, both physical and emotional is ripped from her by Alphonso.

Several years, and two pregnancies later, Celie is married to a man named Albert, who she refers to as Mister throughout most of the novel. Mister, a widower looking for someone to take care of his children, originally wanted to marry Celie's younger sister Nettie, but Alphonso would not allow him to. Alphonso, who wants to be rid of Celie, offers her to Mister. In demonstrating his verbal abuse of Celie, Alphonso tells Mister that "[Celie] a bad influence on my other girls….She ugly….She ain't smart either" (Walker 7). He also tells Mister that "[Celie] ain't fresh tho, but I spect you know that. She spoiled. Twice," but he conveniently leaves out his role in "spoiling" her (Walker 7). By doing this he is hiding his crimes against Celie and further creating negative feelings in Mister towards Celie. To further absolve himself of his rape of Celie, and to make sure Mister never trusts her, he tells Mister that "[Celie] lies too" (Walker 8). Raping her, impregnating her, and then giving away her children was not good enough for Alphonso; he also had to ruin her relationship with Mister before it even began. As a black man Alphonso does not hold much power in society; the only thing he can rule over is a house of women. In Celie he sees a weakling and does everything within his power to further weaken her, which keeps her from rising above her situation as an outsider.

Celie never willingly has sex with Mister, which ahould classify as rape, but many people do not believe that a husband can rape his wife. Even now "thirty-six states make it legal for a husband to rape his wife in many situations" (Carraway 1301-1302). Even in their own women women are outsiders as long as their husbands are there as well. As she is used to being

raped, Celie “[doesn’t] fight, [she] [stays] where [she’s] told,” which she does in order to stay alive and avoid extra abuse (Walker 21). The abuse she suffers is not just physical, as Mister is verbally abusive, calling her “poor…ugly…nothing at all (Walker 206). Throughout their marriage Mister “[beats] [Celie] like he [beats] the children” (Walker 22). When Celie eventually finds herself and leaves Mister to live with Shug Avery, he even says that he “probably didn’t whup [her] ass enough” (Walker 206). Mister beats, rapes, and verbally abuses Celie. According to The United States Department of Health and Human Services Office on Women’s Health (OWH) “emotional manipulation and verbal abuse” are considered “[violences] against women” (Skenandore 7). Mister emotionally manipulates Celie by hiding her sister Nettie’s letters from her, which makes her believe that no one loves her and that she is alone. When Celie and Mister are first married, Nettie runs away from home and stays with Celie and Mister for a while. Nettie was who Mister wanted to marry originally, and he tries to flirt with Nettie, who does not return his advances. Soon he tells Celie that “[they] done help Nettie all [they] can,” but now she has to leave” (Walker 17). His anger at Nettie for refusing him leads him to hide all of Nettie’s letters for years, despite him knowing that “Nettie [means] everything in the world to [Celie]” (Walker 119). By hiding Nettie’s letters he keeps Celie in a state of limbo of not knowing where Nettie is, or if she is even alive. Celie will not return to Alphonso, and she believes the babies she had were murdered, which makes Nettie her only family. It allows Mister to keep Celie in his home as both a work horse and a sex slave for him.

All of the black men in *The Color Purple* are outsiders because they are not white. One man who suffers from his race is Celie’s biological father. Celie’s father was a good and hardworking man, and he had a farm that was bounteous. He “did so well farming and everything he turned his hand to prospered, he decided to open a store, and try his luck selling dry goods as well. Well, his store did so well that he talked his two brothers into helping him run it.... Then the white merchants began to get together and complain that this store was taking all the black business away from them” (Walker 160). “The store the black men owned took

business away from the white men, who then interfered with the free market by lynching their black competitors. Thus class relations, in this instance, are shown to motivate lynching" (Berlant 841). Lynching was a racially motivated crime and was meant to "to invoke the context of black inferiority and subhumanity" in the victim, specifically black men (Berlant 841). The murder of Celie's father creates a domino effect that allows the unfortunate events in Celie's life to take place.

Other than Celie and her father, Sofia Butler, Shug Avery, and Squeak are people who face outsider status. When readers are first introduced to Sofia, she is already "seven or eight months pregnant" with Harpo's child, and while she is not as tall as he is, she is "much bigger, and strong and ruddy looking" (Walker 30). Sofia marries Harpo, Mister's son and they have five children in immediate succession. Not only is Sofia physically stronger than Harpo, but she is also not the stereotypical housewife. She "never [does] what [Harpo] say" and "always backtalk" (Walker 35). Sofia "refuses to accede to both the patriarchal and the racist demand that the black woman demonstrate her abjection to her oppressors" (Belrant 843). Though she knows that submissive behavior is expected from black women, Sofia refuses to submit to anyone and fights Harpo when he tries to hit her. Sadly, Sofia's fighting spirit is something she has culminated since she was a child. When she finds out that Celie told Harpo to beat her, she confronts Celie. Sofia tells Celie that ""All my life I had to fight. I had to fight my daddy. I had to fight my uncles. I had to fight my brothers. A girl child ain't safe in a family of men, but I ain't never thought I'd have to fight in my own house…I loves Harpo…God knows I do. But I'll kill him dead before I let him beat me" (Walker 40). Her fighting spirit, while admirable, unfortunately comes at a cost for her.

One day Sofia goes into town and she sees the mayor's wife, who asks Sofia to become her maid. Sofia, ever the fighter, says "Hell no," which makes the mayor slap her (Walker 85). As a black woman, Sofia was expected to say "yes ma'am" and "yes sir" to white people, and by not doing so she is challenging their authority. The mayor's slap earns a punch from Sofia,

which leads to her brutal beating and arrest. Despite being a woman, the policemen, “crack her skull, they crack her ribs. They tear her nose loose on one side. They blind her in one eye. She swole from head to foot. Her tongue the size of [Celie’s] arm, it stick out tween her teef like a piece of rubber” (Walker 86-87). After the beating she is sent to work in the prison laundry, and she can only see her family twice a month. The conditions of the prison soon overtake her, turning her “face yellow and sickly” and her hands looking “like fatty sausage” (Walker 88). For her unwillingness to submit to others, including white people, “Sofia gains incarceration in a set of penal institutions that work by a logic similar to that of lynching: to racialize the scene of class struggle in the public sphere and to deploy prejudice against "woman" once behind the walls of the prison and the household” (Berlant 843). Black people were often denied jobs that would help them move out of poverty, and black women often worked as maids to white families. To punish Sofia by working in the prison laundry is ironic because the mayor’s wife originally wanted Sofia for a maid, and now Sofia’s punishment is to be a maid for white prisoners. Not only does Sofia’s body wear down in the prison, but her spirit does too. When Sofia tells Celie about her stay in the prison, she says that “"Every time they ast me to do something, Miss Celie, I act like I'm you. I jump up and do just what they say” (Walker 88). The family hatches a plan to get Sofia out of the prison by tricking the warden into believing that Sofia would rather work in the prison than be someone’s maid. Soon after she becomes the maid to the mayor’s wife, but it takes three years for her to become the woman she once was.

Before Sofia is arrested for punching the mayor, she and Harpo separate and begin living with other people. The woman whom Harpo begins dating is called Squeak; her real name is Mary Agnes. She is described in the novel as “a nice girl, friendly, and everything, but she like [Celie]. She do anything Harpo say” (Walker 82). “Squeak's telltale name, in its expression of her distorted, subvocalized voice, describes her original purpose in this text: she enters the narrative as Harpo's dutiful replacement for Sofia, who had refused to allow Harpo to dominate and to beat her” (Berlant 843). One thing that separates Squeak from the other women in the

novel is that she is the only character to be multiracial, having both black and white ancestry. While her mixed heritage makes her an object of desire to men, she is an outsider because of it. She is not part of white society because she has black ancestry, and readers can also assume that she is a bastard child due to the illegality of people of different races being able to marry in the twentieth century.

After Sofia's arrest, it is revealed that the prison warden is Squeak's "cousin," but he is actually the illegitimate father of three of her siblings. The other women dress her up "like she a white woman," she can go see the prison warden and potentially help Sofia get out of the laundry job (Walker 93). Squeak returns home "with a limp. Her dress rip. Her hat missing and one of the heels come off her shoe" (Walker 95). She relays her story, telling everyone that the warden "took her hat off…Told [her] to undo [her] dress" (Walker 96). The warden justifies his actions, saying that "if he was [Squeak's] uncle he wouldn't do it to [her]. That be a sin. But this just little fornication. Everybody guilty of that" (Walker 96). While her rape is tragic and is a result of her outsider status, the assault gives her inner strength and she begins going by her real name: Mary Agnes. She no longer speaks like a child, but as a grown woman who is ready to take her place in the world.

The last outsider in *The Color Purple* is Shug Avery. "Shug is the novel's professor of desire and self-fulfillment" (Berlant 838). Prior to the events of the novel Shug and Mister are lovers. Despite having a wife at home, Mister keeps chasing her, and gets her pregnant three times (Walker 20). Not only does Shug have illegitimate children, but she leaves them "with they grandma" (Walker 50). In this time period women were expected to be homemakers and stay at home with their children. Typically only spinsters (unmarried women) worked outside the home, so for Shug to abandon hers to not just work, but to be a Jazz singer, would have been quite scandalous back then. While Mister loved her, he did not marry her because his father did not like her. Mister's father represents the rumors spread about Shug and the disgust a lot of people

feel for her. Shug's unwillingness to do what is expected of her as a woman makes her an outsider to their community as a whole, though she does form a tight bond with Celie later.

The women in *The Color Purple* form tight bonds with each other. Shug and Celi even form a romantic relationship for a short period of time. As black women they fight abuse from both white men and black men because of their gender. This leads black women into finding solace with each other; they can find this solace because they, as outsiders, do not have others to rely on. The sexual violence they experience further links them together; as rape survivors they can lean on one another. Not only do they lean on one another, but they also help and protect each other. Celie protects Nettie from being raped by Alphonso; Shug helps Celie by not letting Albert beat her; Squeak's interference allows Sofia to be released from prison. While they may be outsiders to the rest of society, their unbreakable bond with each other allows them to navigate their outsiderness together.

Chapter Five

Negating an Outsider Identity

In each of these chapters, the effect of labeling someone as an outsider is evident. The characters in *The Round House, Bitter in the Mouth,* and *The Color Purple* share a sense of otherness and being excluded from society. Whether that exclusion comes from being born different or just acting different is irrelevant. All of the outsiders in the novels face more than just exclusion from society; some of them face abuse, and even death. Those who face sexual violence as a result of their outsiderness have to live in a world that already does not want them because of their race, but by being rape victims that adds to their outsiderness.

Through each of the novels covered in this thesis, people can be labeled as outsiders for multiple reasons.

People cannot choose their race at birth, just like a person cannot change their genetics. In *The Round House,* the women in the novel were outsiders due to things beyond their control. Geraldine Coutts and Myla Wolfskin were born Native American and raised on Ojibwe reservations. Those are things outside of their control. What can be controlled and fixed are the laws in place that prevent Native American women from receiving justice for their rapes. The government can give jurisdiction to tribes when crimes are committed on their land, regardless of what race the perpetrator is. Linda Larken Wishkob did not choose to be born physically deformed or to have her biological family leave her for dead at a hospital. Sonja could not choose to be born in a wealthy family. Linda and Sonja's suffering comes from not fitting into what patriarchal society says is what a woman should look like and act like. Removing this way of thinking will allow women like Linda and Sonja to have a fighting chance in the world. The suffering they face due to their outsider status is tragic, and even if three of the women grow from it, should not happen at all.

Monique Truong shows us in *Bitter in the Mouth* that family or loved ones can exclude someone just as easily as society will. Linda, Kelly and Baby Harper are essentially the black

sheep of their families. Linda because she is a Vietnamese adoptee, Kelly because of her size and then pregnancy, and Baby Harper because he is gay and secretly performs in drag shows. While Linda, Kelly, and Baby Harper are outsiders for different reasons, Truong shows us that outsiders can find solace in other outsiders, which is what Linda, Kelly, and Baby Harper do. When someone does something that does not align with others' views, whether it can be helped or not, people will begin to ostracize them, and that includes family. America is known for being "the land of the free," and people should be free to live their own lifestyles. As long as someone is not hurting others, no one has the right to judge them.

In *The Color Purple* readers see people who become outsiders within their own race. Celie and Squeak are raped due to their outsider status, even though they do what society tells them to do. Sofia and Shug give into their desires and fight for themselves, but that ends with Sofia being beaten and jailed, and Shug denied a place to call home. This novel shows readers that sometimes one's actions cannot save them from their outsider status. To do everything right and to still suffer is hard to imagine, but it ultimately shows that people cannot escape what they were born as. While a person cannot change what they were born into, if society changes its way of thinking women can do what men do. No one should suffer domestic abuse, and to justify it is inhumane. If society begins to treat women as humans then the fates of Sofia and Celie, and so many more, will change.

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