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## **“She Ain’t No Diva!”: Reflections on In/Hospitable Guests/Hosts, Reciprocity, and Desire**

Bernadette Marie Calafell

*“I’ll make you hot. Make you rock. I’ll leave the world in shock. I’m your tease. I’m your fuel.  
I just wanna see you drool. On your knees. Pretty Please. You wish you were my main squeeze  
...Fuck me I’m a celebrity.”  
– Jeffree Star, “Lollipop Luxury”*

They squeal. They make their collective presence known. They rarely tip. They think they’re doing us a favor by being here. They flaunt their various privileges. They wear penises on their heads. They annoy the fuck out of me. They are everything I never wanted to be when people read me as a straight girl. My annoyance is not only from the fact that they embody the sorority girl type I have come to hate, but because they have no problem flaunting their heterosexual white middle class privilege in a queer space where they like to let us all know they’re slumming. Drove of them come every Saturday night for their last hurrah...the bachelorette party.

Are these women unruly guests? Are they parasites? In their controlling of the affect of the space do they become (inhospitable) hosts reasserting dominance? These are the questions I ponder as I offer glimpses of my journey into Manzone and the resulting encounters with the bachelorettes.

It was not that long ago that I entered the space. I had been invited by friends and was excited to join them. We set a date that would honor a friend’s successful defense of a dissertation, another’s completion of his master’s, as well as a birthday. I was ready to go with them as I had heard about it often. In May of 2009 I first ventured to Manzone. Fresh off an amicable separation from a partner who had needed to return to his family in a time of need, I was once again in flux. As a Chicana feminist being in this middle or borderland space was nothing new; in fact I relished the ambiguity and possibilities it offered. When I first came to Manzone I had no idea

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*"She Ain't No Diva!"*

that I would soon become a regular. But something about the space intrigued me as did the people, and I became for better or worse invested. I was invited into a space that would make me consider the ways that privilege can be connected to the roles that we enact as we are guests (both desired and undesired), (unwanted and unwanted) hosts, and how privilege can create inhospitable and violent spaces.

I offer my reflections, ruminations, what have you, on performances of hospitality, reciprocity, incivility, and privilege. Throughout this piece I intertwine song lyrics from the music that is played at Manzone as a way to allude to the affect of the space and the performances of the men who work there. In doing so, I borrow this technique from Moreman and McIntosh in their reading of Latina drag performances. I make no overarching claims or grand theorizations. Rather I hope to offer a glimpse of a different kind of performance of hospitality, as well as those performances that create inhospitable spaces. As I will acknowledge, my place in this space is not uncomplicated and not without its own questions, but still I write. I have to write. When asked to consider the theme of hospitality, my mind was taken to this place and the performances I have witnessed there.

*"I won't tell you that I love you. Kiss or hug you, 'cause I'm bluffing... Just like a chick in a casino take your bank before I pay you out."*  
---Lady Gaga, "Poker Face"

[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ngf5Oo\\_XrjI](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ngf5Oo_XrjI)

Manzone is, to put it simply, a gay strip club. It is a queer club, frequented by all types of patrons. Both the regular patrons and the dancers are a racially and ethnically diverse lot. Manzone is filled with different kinds of bodies. It is a space that has come to feel familiar to me. In a clichéd sort of way, everyone knows my name (but honey, this ain't no *Cheers*). People ask where you have been if you have been gone for a while. Though for some of the guys it might be more appropriate for them to ask, "Where has your money been?" as this is a job and providing a hospitable environment that cultivates relationships and open wallets is part of it.

The sounds of [Benny Benassi](#) and [Lady Gaga](#) are ever present, vibrating off the walls. Patrons come to associate certain artists and songs with certain dancers. Dancers happily take requests from their repertoire and have even incorporated musical selections from regulars. Spatially, the club consists of a front room with an L-shaped stage across the wall that spans three fourths of the room. Mirrors adorn the wall against the stage and a pole stands in the center. Across from the stage is the main bar with a mirror lined wall. The dancers often watch themselves in these mirrors as they perform. Tables with two to three seats line the stage as do individual chairs on the side. Following this main room there is a small hallway that leads to the bathrooms and the DJ booth. The bathroom for men is large consisting of both urinals and stalls, while the women's room is just that – one room. It is easy to tell

the regulars from those who are new to the club as they struggle to open the locked bathroom door not realizing that there is, in fact, only one toilet.

Though I should probably not admit it, this confusion in fact led to a fight once between me and another woman who had come to the club for the first time. I share this story not because I am particularly proud of this fight, but because it reflects the ways that relationships are cultivated and cared for with regulars. In the middle of the fight, Robbie, one of the dancers told me to get the bouncer to kick the woman out. Before I even knew what happened, both the woman and her friends, including one who had performed in the amateur contest, were escorted out. Moments later the owner came over to make sure I was okay and to assure me that they would never be let in again. I was not completely innocent in this fight, but that didn't matter because I was a regular customer who normally performed the role of guest quite well in this space. Some might even say I was the desired guest or even a host who was informing the woman of the norms and etiquette of the space. Regardless, it was more important to continue to cultivate the relationship with a known quantity. But I digress...

Returning to the layout of the club, stage two and another bar make up the next room. Stage two can best be described as a small platform where dancers awkwardly dance for customers in transit and the occasional fan who decides to pull up a stool next to it. As one proceeds through this room there is the back entrance and the patio. Like stage two, the patio consists of an awkward space for the guys to dance on. In this space and in stage two the songs are not their choices; they must dance to whatever songs are being played on the main stage. Here and on stage two the dancers do not strip; rather, they dance in their boxer briefs or boy shorts and chat with customers. I note the lack of song choice because many times one of the guys has asked me to come to the patio stage and talk with him because he doesn't know how to dance to a certain song or does not want to. While it's a big taboo for a dancer to dance to another guy's song on the main stage, here it is expected. I have come to know this place, the rules, and the men quite well.

Some basics: each dancer dances a two song set, stripping down to his [designer underwear](#) and shoes and socks, though occasionally some dancers will strip barefoot. Some dancers take great effort with their costumes and choreography. Sometimes you will see a dancer dressed as a police officer, a football player, or dressed for an elaborate choreography of a Michael Jackson song. Each dancer usually dances to two to three sets a night depending on how many are working. Before the show starts customers are advised by the DJ of the rules. You may only tip from the side and no picture taking is allowed (that is unless you are getting a lap dance on the main stage). When customers break these rules they are quickly admonished by the DJ and often shown the door. Most commonly these customers attempt to tip the dancers from the front or back, try to cop a feel, or pull down a dancer's underwear. On one particular night a patron who attempts to pull down Johnny's shorts receives a slap across the back of the head from Johnny and is later escorted from the club.

Typically after a set, a dancer starts to work the room, moving from table to table and crowd to crowd. Those patrons that don't tip receive little attention. After all, tips are the only pay these guys receive. Dancers and staff welcome the regulars with hugs and sometimes shared shots of Tequila or other drinks. Amidst conversation a dancer might be called to stage two or the patio stage and pleasantries are cut short. The guys know the routine, working to establish what they might consider a hospitable environment that cultivates return clientele. Intimate conversations, not just gyrating hips are shared at Manzone. The type of labor that the men perform in their role as hosts is typically feminized: the emotional labor of establishing intimacy, the physical and emotional labor of tantalizing with the body or seduction, and flirting. They perform invitation queerly. Customers pay for all types of intimacy and the men have got each of the regulars' numbers down pat. Being able to have an intelligent conversation seems to be a requirement for this job. For instance, one dancer Mark was frequently made fun of by both regulars and other dancers because his conversation repertoire was limited to variations of the same question; "Are you having a good time?" One regular even told Mark that he needed to work on his conversational skills if he wanted to make more money. All of this is a performance both the regulars and the dancers willingly engage in. It is work and it never stops.

As evidenced by the regular who gave Mark advice, regulars who are the desired guests, also function in many ways as hosts. As the dancers stop at each table, regulars must perform enticing and hospitable roles that encourage the men to stay longer. This includes not only the exchange of money, but also the exchange of pleasantries, and the buying of shots. In some cases the regulars also provide emotional support to a dancer as he may unload his latest series of problems or simply complain about another customer who is clearly not a regular. While the rules of the club are known, the regulars, as hosts, may set or negotiate the norms of the relationship with each dancer. In these performances the line between guest and host once again blurs, as we are never sure who is playing what role.

I consider the ways I have performed the role of host in the club with others who were clearly voyeurs, entering the space for the first time. For example, on the night described earlier when a patron tried to pull down Johnny's underwear, I became protective and enraged. My voice mixed with the announcer's as we both told the men to leave. Only my words were laced with obscenities. I obnoxiously waved my hands in the air as I screamed at them to leave. I was irate that the men were not following the rules and disrespecting Johnny. I saw myself not as a guest or customer, but as someone who was actually a part of the establishment and had a stake in it because of my relationship to the place and especially to Johnny. The men didn't appreciate my words to them, calling me a "cunt" as they were escorted out.

One other occasion makes me reflect on a time when I clearly was the host and set the agenda for the place by musical selections, dress, and affect. For Justin's birthday we had a weeklong celebration which included a Lady Gaga themed party at my place and then a journey in costume to Manzone. I had mentioned this would be the case to several of the dancers. When we arrived in full dress, several of the

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dancers excitedly came over to greet us and to let us know that they would be dancing to songs by Lady Gaga in honor of our celebration. Robbie came over to let me know he would be performing in a costume. He was North Carolina rapper Petey Pablo. He instructed that when I tipped him on stage, I should lift my arm up as if I was holding a microphone to mimic a famous Lady Gaga pose. I happily obliged during his set, which began with [Ciara](#), whose song included a guest appearance by Petey Pablo. Our desires directly informed what was being performed and played on the main stage.

### **My Place in the Space**

Six nights of the week this performance happens with one night open to amateurs who hope to secure a job at Manzone. However, everyone knows that Saturday night is the night that the bachelorettes come to call, disrupting the performances, the ebb and flow of the club, and the queer affect of the space. I am well aware of my own politics in this space. This is something I continue to negotiate. I am well aware of the way I have used heterosexual privilege in the past, primarily to secure the citizenship of my then Egyptian partner (Calafell “Performing the Responsible Sponsor”). But as I have written before, that relationship was quite queer and in some ways subversive, and *I am queer* (Calafell “When Will We All Matter?”). Now that he’s not here for people to define me by, as politically incorrect as this sounds, it’s easier for me to say that without feeling like a hypocrite.

Post break-up, I’ve made Manzone one of my regular stops, coming with my faithful friend Justin sometimes two or three times a week. It is one of several queer spaces I routinely inhabit during the week as I continue to look for some place to call home. I look for a place of possibility. I look for a place of ambiguity as ambiguity has always seemed to bring me pleasure. Gloria Anzaldúa writes that the borderlands are “in a constant state of transition” (25). This is the kind of place I long for. A place I can call home, at least for the moment. A place that promises intimacy through a shared affect of Otherness. I desire this feeling so much that the music of Manzone fills the walls of my car and has its own playlist on my mp3 player. I crave this affect even when I am not in the space.

In this quest for home I have come to know the staff and dancers quite well. Knowing the backstories and histories, I’m always just a little bit sad when one of the dancers disappears. We wonder if he will come back. Sometimes they do and sometimes they don’t. The dancers are always in flux at Manzone, but there are a few that have been there for some time. These are the ones I have come to know best and look forward to seeing every time I enter the space. I have various levels of relation to all. Some I know outside of the club. Some I know only in the club.

*“Excuse me a gay person would like to tip now.”*

It’s a beautiful fall Saturday night and we decide to venture out to Manzone after taking a short hiatus. My companion Justin and I enter the club greeted by several of

the guys including the bartender who has grown quite fond of us and the bouncer who Justin has a playfully-flirty relationship with. Taking our seats at our usual table Johnny comes over to chat with me letting me know what has been happening in his world since I have last seen him. Before the show starts dancers may play a game, have a smoke, or talk together. It is not the norm for the dancers to fraternize with the customers before the show starts. This is their time to unwind before the show. Furthermore, they receive no tips until the show officially begins. Therefore, in many ways a dancer making contact and initiating conversation before the start of the show is a sign of a different level of relation. Additionally, the tenor and tone of the conversation one might have with a dancer before the start of the show and during the show is different. Certainly, the fact that the dancer before the show is fully clothed affects the situation; however, once the guys start working, their focus shifts to pleasing customers, whether it is through a shift in proximity, bodily contact, or intimate conversation. Desire, and its performance, becomes the central frame for the interactions that happen during the show. Artificial desire is performed by the dancers toward customers and desire is performed by the customers who gladly tip more and more for it.

Johnny, like many of the other guys, is a student who works at Manzone to supplement his income. Johnny is one of a handful of self-described straight guys at Manzone. While many of the men might tell heterosexual women that come to the bar that they are straight or perform heterosexual desire as a way to garner more tips, Johnny's performance is a little different. He recently remarked to me, referring to his stage name and real name, "Johnny is gay and Steve is straight." Onstage and in the bar he performs desire for both men and women, but that desire is always mitigated by another performance that reasserts his heterosexuality. As Yep writes, "Heteronormativity impels heterosexual men into a lifelong labor of 'proving' their manhood and concealing, if not banishing, a range of sexual possibilities, gender performances, and pleasures" (21). I have come to know Johnny quite well; hearing stories from his past, about his family, and some of his most recent troubles. He also always makes it a point to tell me how things are going with school as he knows I'm a professor. I listen intently, soaking in every word as Johnny details the happenings of his week. My mood shifts accordingly with his story. I wonder if he will ever have a story to tell that won't be tinged with melancholy. I continue to be invested and pulled in. I continue to want a connection that is not possible. I am probably a bad imitation of [Sheryl Crow singing, "All your friends are sorry for me they watch you pretend to adore me."](#) as everyone in the place recognizes my attachment. During one instance, Robbie comes over to me sensing that I'm unhappy after my most recent conversation with Johnny. Looking at me he asks, "What's that on your sleeve? Oh, it's your heart."

As the night goes on our other friend Tom arrives. It is an unexpected treat as we did not know he would be coming. We see that three fourths of what we have termed the "Queer Nation Manzone Chapter" is present. This is particularly fitting on a Saturday night when *they* will be present....the fucking bachelorettes. We came up

with this idea one night when we and other patrons were particularly annoyed. That night, as a bachelorette made her way up to the stage to get a lap dance, one angry patron yelled, "It must be nice to be able to get married." That same night Justin grabbed a black felt tip marker writing "RADICAL QUEER" across my chest. On this night, as the bachelorettes and company roll in, we know what is going to happen. The routine rarely differs even if the bachelorettes and their friends do. Their performances are pretty much the same. The repetition reinforces the heteronormative affect they work so hard to establish. The squealing, the flaunting, the lap dance on stage, the no tipping, and finally the leaving. *That* doesn't come soon enough for us. They make the place inhospitable and in some ways uninhabitable with their performances of privilege, disrupting a queer centered affect, throwing a lack of rights and privileges in everyone's faces. In an Other space, in an affect that is centered in queerness, their performances of privilege serve as acts of violence that re-center heteronormativity and make queerness the Other by which it is defined (Yep). As Ferber writes, "Privilege and oppression go hand in hand" (319). This is certainly the case with the performances of the bachelorettes in Manzone. We must ask then, are the women (inhospitable) guests? Or do they now become hosts who redirect and dictate the norms, etiquette, and affect of the space in ways that serve their (and dominant) needs and desires?

One night I overhear one of the dancers telling a regular that he can always tell if the marriage is going to last based upon the way the bachelorettes respond to him during the lap dance. He hates doing the lap dances on stage. Sometimes on the same night a bachelorette takes the stage for her lap dance, another patron may get a lap dance to commemorate his or her anniversary of coming out. These performances, these juxtapositions, fight for affective control of the space. As the meeting of the Queer Nation Manzone Chapter begins, we laugh about slogans we would put on t-shirts if we were to make them for the cause. Justin's reads, "Fuck heteronormativity." Tom's reads, "Suck it up straights," and mine reads, "I hate breeder bitches." One night we are joined by two friends, a couple, Jennifer and Angela, who joke that they would like to corrupt the bachelorettes and friends by making out with them. Jennifer and Angela, hug, laugh, and begin to kiss. Later we notice that the table with a bachelorette and friends that was directly behind us is gone. Angela remarks, "I bet being around real lesbians scared them away."

In the past when Justin updated his Facebook status to reflect his frustration with the bachelorettes and company he was reprimanded by friends who suggested that these women could be allies to us while others were just as enraged by their behavior. In response, Justin took a photo of one of the bachelorettes in full glory with tiny penises lining her lily white veil asking if this is what an ally looks like, wondering if she would be an ally to us outside the club, or to someone who did not look like one of the dancers, or who was not male.

On this particular night, Robbie decides to join us in our disdain. Robbie, for whom we have developed quite an affection, an affection that I believe is genuinely reciprocated, is tired of having to play to the bachelorettes in the queer club. This



makes us love him more. I should note that some of the other dancers don't even bother to work the parts of the room that the bachelorette and friends reside in. They know the bachelorettes will not tip. They also don't appreciate the attitude of women that lets the dancers know they're slumming it by being in this club. They are unruly party crashers and in many ways the cops who stop in to restore heteronormativity and bust up the party. Like these dancers, Robbie is just as fed up. I feel an attachment to Robbie because he is another queer Latino, because he is sassy, and because he has no problem sharing whatever is on his mind. For example, one night I observed him giving this overly made up thirtysomething redheaded woman the once over. Moments later he turned to a regular and said, "Who invited Reba McEntire?" When the regular laughed, he replied, "What? I'll tell that bitch to her face." Like Johnny, Robbie is a student at one of the local universities. This is one of his two jobs.

As the night progresses, Tony, another dancer whom Don the DJ has referred to as a "hot chili pepper," stereotypically coding his Latino identity<sup>1</sup> chooses "He Wasn't Man Enough For Me" by Toni Braxton during his second song of his set.

*"What are you thinking? Do you know about us back then? Do you know about your husband, girlfriend? I'm not thinking 'bout him. But you married him. Do you know I made him leave? Do you know he begged to stay with me? He wasn't man enough for me Listen girl didn't he tell you the truth? If not, then why don't you ask him?"*  
--Toni Braxton, "He Wasn't Man Enough For Me"

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F-w0-agVE8g>

I wonder if the women get the irony of the lyrics and Tony's performance of the song for them. His performance marks the unstable nature of heterosexuality. Again I wonder if this is a resistive move in an effort to reclaim the space from the undesired guests/unwanted hosts.

When his set is over, Don instructs Tony to take a chair up to the stage so he can perform a lap dance for a bachelorette. After surveying each of the dancers she has decided that he is the one she wants. He performs his dance to Color Me Badd's "[I Wanna Sex You Up](#)," as the bachelorette's friends scream and wildly take photos. When the dance is over Don announces, "Thanks Tony, you are the best straight acting gay guy I know. You could take him on the honeymoon. He'd probably do you and your husband."

Usually when a bachelorette decides to tip a dollar it often comes in the form of spectacle. For instance, one night [Johnny, on the patio stage](#), is called over by a group

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<sup>1</sup> Interestingly, Don does not racially code Jim this way. Jim is a Chicano dancer who is light skinned and can pass, while Tony is darker skinned and born outside of the United States. On a different night, another darker skinned Latino dancer, Fred, was racially coded in the same way as the announcer welcomed him on stage as "Fred Fiesta."

of women who want to tip him a dollar. As he begins to move his body and perform desire, they are not pleased and ask him to “work for it,” shaking the dollar in his face. Frustrated, Johnny throws the dollar back at the woman and begins a misogynistic tirade as he exits the patio. He is reprimanded by the manager when one of the women complains and he returns to dance for her and take her money. Johnny elaborates that he is not upset that he has been objectified; rather it is the dollar amount for that objectification that is offensive to him. It is not unheard for some of his regulars to tip him twenties at a time, sometimes up to \$60.00 a night.

The heterosexual privilege of the bachelorettes facilitates a performance of entitlement that shifts the entire power dynamic of the space. This entitlement, and its resulting spectacle, seizes the room. It overrides their poor tipping and generally obnoxious behavior. The force of it re-centers heterosexuality in the queer space as the dancers and the owner surrender to it, despite the women’s lack of etiquette. The force and violence of heteronormativity changes all of the rules in the space. The women become not simply unwanted guests, but unwanted hosts who must reassert heteronormativity through repeated performances that index heterosexuality. While heterosexuality itself is unstable and unfixed, in this particular place it is so even more, thus, it becomes “caught up in an anxious and unending cycle of repetition compulsion” (Yep 29)

Sometimes the bachelorette or one of her friends decides to play shy or demure leaving the dollar on the stage daring not to come into direct contact with the dancer, quickly retreating back to her table. A regular might laugh, pick up the dollar before the dancer sees it and take it over to tip acting as if she or he was the one who originally offered the dollar. However, more often than not the dollar is placed between the breasts for the dancer to take out with his mouth or the dollar is placed in the mouth to be taken from it. These performances, along with the lap dances, re-center heterosexual desire on the main stage of the club. The women shake their breasts and perform desire for the dancers not only re-centering their heterosexuality, but also making it into a spectacle. Furthermore, I often wonder if these women realize that the dollars they receive from behind the bar when they trade in their twenties are the same dollars that the dancers have held in their underwear all night and cash out at the end of the night? Regardless, their spectacle calls our attention to their bodies and their sexualities.

*“Pigeon take your friend’s shoes off. Take your fake jewels off. To hell with that crazy bit. You all make me sick... Oh yes girl we’re talking to you.”*  
---Brighten, “No Pigeons”

We sit watching the spectacle being performed over and over again as Justin decides he wants to tip [Robbie who has now made his way to the stage](#). As a bachelorette and her friends crowd the stage, Justin greets them with, “Excuse me a

gay person would like to tip now." His statement is thoroughly appreciated at the table as Tom notes that he would like to add this to his favorite quotes on Facebook. The night proceeds and Justin grows more frustrated by the displays of these women. Eventually, I see him walk up to the stage with a dollar coming out of his collar, imitating the dollar out of the cleavage that the bachelorettes do. As he walks to the stage, Robbie screams in glee with his hands on the side of his face imitating the bachelorettes and company. I'm pulled into the performance and decide to replicate Justin's gesture. Robbie knows me. He knows I'm queer and he's in on the joke. I walk to the stage, dollar in between my breasts. He grabs it quickly and squeals like a bachelorette. Our eyes lock in a moment of knowing and a second later we are both laughing aloud. Later one of the self-proclaimed twink, Andy, struts his stuff on stage to Beyonce's "[Diva](#)." He's a favorite with the all the bachelorettes every time. As they begin to sing along with Beyonce, Robbie looks over his shoulder and screams to them, "She ain't no diva"; a line from the song he appropriates for his own purposes. He wants to discipline and ridicule the women, reminding them that they are bad or unwanted guests in this space. Perhaps he wants them to feel like the Other. Maybe he's rebelling against the changing affect in the room that is re-centering heterosexual desire. The night continues on and Don marks the presence of the bachelorettes in a queer space by saying, "Wow we have a lot of lesbians in here tonight. 'Cause you know when you step into Manzone you're a lesbian. This is a gay club." This sentiment is expressed in other ways by other staff members including Frank, one of the bartenders, who, when one of the bachelorettes asks him to make her a screaming orgasm replies, "Honey, this is a gay bar. I'm not gonna make that."

At times I wonder how much of these performances of resistance, and my own participation in them, are motivated by not only an adverse reaction to the women's performances of heterosexual privilege, but also by misogyny as it intersects with those performances. I feel a similar misogyny, for example, when I go with Justin to the local bear bar. There, it is much more pronounced and palatable, so much so that a lot of other queer women will not go, especially during the beer bust for which women are not allowed to participate. In Manzone, however, these women loudly make their presence known through performances that create an inhospitable and violent affect that makes them comfortable. Their whiteness and class statuses work together to magnify their heterosexual privilege while simultaneously re-Othering those of us who don't share those identifications. The fact that they act on, and *openly embrace* that privilege, within a queer space fosters a climate in which misogyny can thrive. I highlight their whiteness because as a queer woman of color I *feel* it. They perform a white middle class femininity which is so hegemonically oppressive and abrasive that I feel it in my body. It makes me ill with the anger that is driven by a history of oppression of women and men of color based on these performances. It is the same kind of white middle class femininity which has passively and aggressively worked against me in the academy as it is regarded as civil, while my actions and ways of being are perceived as overly aggressive (Calafell "Mentoring and Love"; Hill Collins). Here in a space that centers Other affects and gender performances, no one

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is buying it. Only once did I see a bachelorette and friends who were not white. A group of African American women came on a Sunday night, not a Saturday. There was a veil, but no penises on it. The women were respectful of the dancers. They did not imagine that they were the center of the universe. The affect was completely different. I am not trying to valorize them, but I did not *feel* their presences the same way I felt the presences of white women. Perhaps because they were also women of color I was more receptive to them, but then again I don't have a long history of being oppressed by other women of color. Cathy Cohen reminds us of the political possibilities that might emerge if we seriously engage intersectionality with queer politics, particularly for people of color. She writes

I emphasize here the marginalized position of some who embrace heterosexual identities not because I want to lead any great crusade to understand more fully the plight of "the heterosexual." Rather, I recognize the potential for shared resistance with such individuals. This potential is especially relevant not only for coalitional work but for a shared analysis, from my vantage point, to "queer" people of color. (Cohen 36)

Perhaps it was this potential that underlies my feeling toward this group of women.

### **Negotiating My Relationship With Hospitality or Something More**

"To write vulnerably is to open a Pandora's box. Who can say what will come flying out?" (Behar 19)

*"Tell me who I have to be to get some reciprocity."  
--Lauryn Hill, "Ex-Factor"*

[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VSQq\\_mU7jUg](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VSQq_mU7jUg)

I have to write about this relationship because not to do so would leave this narrative of hospitality incomplete. I am reluctant because I know I run the risk of ridicule. In writing about this relationship it is not my intention to re-center heterosexual desire. Rather this is a space where I want to explore my desires as they intersected with my performances of hospitality that extended beyond the norms of the club in hopes of establishing some kind of connection and community. I've been alone and in transition for a while. Perhaps these performances were about finding a way through those transitions.

In the past, I've written about the relationship between loss and pleasure (Calafell "Pro(re-)claiming Loss"; Calafell *Latina/o Communication Studies*). I've written about displacement, and the way community can be formed in the space between two bodies (Calafell "Disrupting the Dichotomy; Calafell *Latina/o Communication Studies*). Years ago I offered, "Cherrie Moraga writes about being in love with the unrequited or simply being in love with the feeling of desire. Wanting to stay in that place of limbo, yet not quite limbo, that feeling of possibility, can give a sense of extreme

pleasure. Anticipation can be everything" (*Latina/o Communication Studies* 64). This desire and what was later explored as queer temporality can be described in the following way: "this space of what is unrequited exists as a space of nostalgia, a space that longs for what never was and will never be. Longing for a space that will never be, but enjoying the desire, 'the exile is a person who having lost a loved one, keeps searching for the face he loves in every new face, and, forever deceiving himself, thinks he has found it' (Arenas, qtd. In Herrera xxiv)" (Calafell *Latina/o Communication Studies* 65). Reflecting on all of this now, I see the ways I have attempted to recuperate my loss once again. I've tried to turn loss into a site of pleasure again, but this time it doesn't seem so productive or particularly political. At least not yet...

How do I begin to talk about the attachment to Johnny? I am conflicted. He is unlike any other man I have kept in my company. A former athlete, he's very invested in his performance of hegemonic masculinity, particularly as it intersects with his whiteness and his heterosexuality (All those things I have become accustomed to recognizing and critiquing as an academic). Time passed and I was drawn in by his charisma and his stories about his past and his life outside of the club. His good looks did not hurt either. I became invested in what was happening in his world and in his problems. Problems I wanted to help solve. Problems too serious for me to help with. Problems that would later resurface, hurt me, and almost entirely end the relationship. Problems that I don't know if even he wanted to resolve. [Invested; perhaps too invested.](#) hooks writes about an aspect of love known as a soul connection that is about seeing and loving a person not simply for who they are, but also "who they could be, and who we could become under their influence" (182). I don't intend to romanticize or sentimentalize this relationship, but the kind of love hooks addresses as a soul connection goes beyond our typical notions of romantic love. Thus, this is not just about desire. I would be a hypocrite to say that it wasn't part of it, but that's not all of it. I found myself opening up to him, as well, telling him about my recent split, whoever I happened to be dating that week, and life in general. This connection is what drove the performances of hospitality I would engage in both in and outside of the walls of Manzone. Johnny must have felt some sort of connection too because several times he would make a point to tell me, "You know, I don't talk to everyone the way I talk to you." Looking around the club, at times I wondered who he would tell these things to. Would sharing the details and problems of his life with other regulars be less desirable and less of a fantasy?

I thought a lot about Johnny's rare performances of vulnerability and after re-reading bell hooks' *All About Love: New Visions* for my graduate seminar I started to recognize him in her words. I quote her at length:

When someone has not known love it is difficult for him to trust that mutual satisfaction and growth can be the primary foundation in a coupling relationship. He may only understand and believe in the dynamics of power, of one-up and one-down, of a sadomasochistic struggle for domination, and, ironically, he may feel "safer" when he is operating from within these paradigms. Intimate with betrayal, he may have a phobic fear of trust. At least when you hold to the dynamics of

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power you never have to fear the unknown, the outcome can be predicted. The practice of love offers no place of safety. We risk loss, hurt, pain. We risk being acted upon by forces outside of our control. When individuals are wounded in the space where they would know love during childhood, that wounding may be so traumatic that any attempt to reinhabit that space feels utterly unsafe, and, at times, seemingly life threatening. (hooks 153)

In talking about his relationships with family and friends Johnny had made a point to tell me that he didn't let people in. He said he was always pushing them away and at times shared his frustrations about times when he had let people in only to not have the love and care reciprocated. I could see these kinds of tensions in the relationship we were developing, even as I felt closer to him.

*"Told you I'd be here forever. Said I'd always be a friend. Took an oath I'ma stick it out 'til the end. Now it's raining more than ever. Know that we'll still have each other. You can stand under my umbrella."  
--Rihanna, "Umbrella"*

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-5jdA9Tdg-k>

### **Food is Love: Performing Hospitality and Vulnerability**

In the space of trying to start over, part of my summer was spent cooking. It brought me a great deal of pleasure and seemed like a release and escape from everything else. I frequently cooked for Justin or Mike, our other friend. As a friend told me, "Food is love." This was certainly the case for me growing up, as in my family food was an important part of our celebrations as well as our everyday. My nana<sup>2</sup> who did not work outside of the home, invested her time in making our home warm and hospitable. A large part of that were the meals she prepared for us. Carefully cooking all my favorites like Albondiga soup, Spanish rice, and barbecued beef. This was how she showed love.

As I got older I started to wonder what glory there was in women's preparation of food. I became disappointed in my cousin who I had been close to when I perceived that she had settled by getting married, having children, and enacting these same traditions that squarely placed her in the kitchen and sometimes at the service of men. This is not to say she did not deviate a bit or challenge certain norms, but I remained disappointed feeling she had settled. I was determined not to become one of these women. I prided myself on the fact that I did not cook or serve others. Some might sarcastically and stereotypically say I was as useless as a man in a kitchen. I had a partner that cooked and served me.

This all changed however, when I was alone again. Cooking brought me solace. Cooking brought me pleasure. Cooking helped me create community. And even

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<sup>2</sup> Grandmother

though I was a bit jaded, I still had a lot of love to give. I wondered if perhaps I had viewed the situation too simply. Recently rereading Cherríe Moraga I believe she explicates the cultural expectations of Chicanas and how many times it is not as easy for us as it is for white women to draw those lines because of the ways that culture is intimately connected to gender. Moraga shares her own experiences of engaging in practices that might seem to others to be demeaning, but she does so in honor of her mother and her mother's wishes. Milczarek-Desai, writing of an experience similar to mine, shares,

And then I began to see that the contradictions I found in Indian women (including my mother and grandmother) highlighted the very difference between western feminism and what I have come to think of as "Third World" feminism. While western feminism creates the illusion that I must either choose to be a strong, independent woman or play a role in my family and community, Third World feminism allows us to embrace and express several identities. (131)

Alone again, I reverted to the familiar to bring comfort and community. It gave me pleasure to play the role of host to a few friends I held to dearly. I wanted to cultivate an environment that was hospitable as a way to perhaps establish a connection and community at a time when all of that felt particularly fragile.

One night Justin mentioned to Johnny that I had cooked quite a feast, which had included deviled eggs. Johnny casually mentioned to Justin that in the past customers had brought him food and that he loved deviled eggs. From that point on I brought him comfort food at least once a week. hooks writes, "Giving is healing to the spirit. We are admonished by spiritual tradition to give gifts to those who would know love. Love is an action a participatory emotion" (165). This was something I did because I cared about him, not because I was trying to fulfill or perform some stereotype of a dutiful self-sacrificing Latina. At this point I already knew a great deal about Johnny and this seemed like a natural progression in our relationship and normal within the context of the interchangeable roles we played as guest and host. The desire that had originally been present had started to shift to a place of friendship and care.

Deviled eggs. Pot Roast. BBQ. Scalloped Potatoes. Macaroni and Cheese. Tuna Casserole. Chicken Wings. Chocolate Pecan Pie. Banana Nut Muffins. After everything I had been through, I had a lot of excess emotion, care, and love to give. The food also became a sort of badge of honor for Johnny, as he would frequently make a point to eat some of it in the front room before the show started so that the other dancers and staff could see him. It added another dimension to the careful negotiations we had as we determined not only the nature of the relationship, but also who was enacting the role of host and guest, sometimes simultaneously. When he took a week off for vacation Johnny commented, "I hope I don't hear that you're bringing food for somebody else, because if I do I'm gonna think, 'Oh that bitch!'" I laughed all the while receiving requests from others to bring them food accompanied by, "Oh, you're the one that made those chicken wings?! You need to bring me some!" or "You can make me some cookies." Word of my reciprocal performance of hospitality had spread throughout the club and others wondered why they were not a

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party to it. Some of the guys even came up to me with orders of what they hoped I would cook for them and bring to the club. They wondered why I wasn't acting as a host in this way to them. What was it about Johnny's performance that made me act in this way? Had he let me in?

The relationship was complicated. Especially when Johnny would make statements that continued to display his white and heterosexual privilege. For example, he had expressed interest in a graduate program at my university, but explained that it was too expensive for him to attend. We joked and flirted as I told him, that he needed to hook up with an employee so he could take classes at a reduced cost. His response floored me when he said, "Oh like a Mexican." I reminded him that he was talking to a Mexican and that his comment was offensive. He remarked that he did not mean it to be. As a Chicana and someone who had sponsored someone for permanent residency his words stung on several different levels again forcing me to question my investment and attachment to him. My Chicana feminist impulses continued to make me feel conflicted about the relationship.

*"A guy like you should wear a warning."  
--Britney Spears, "Toxic"*

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TkIytHD5v9c>

During one weekend my mother had come to visit. A series of events unfolded and the weekend ended badly. *We still are not talking.* The desk she had bought for my home office remained in its box. I attempted to put it together, but gave up halfway, frustrated, and still upset by the argument. That Sunday at 10:00 p.m., I could only think of one person that could help me with this.

I drive to Manzone pretty flustered. I enter the club disheveled and sweaty and I quickly survey the room. Johnny and I make eye contact and he comes over to me. He's surprised to see me knowing that my mom is visiting from out of town. He sees I'm upset and begins asking me what's wrong. I begin to tell him about the argument and about the desk. He immediately offers to come over the next morning to put it together. I knew he would, and I am grateful.

The next morning at 10:00 a.m. my phone rings and it's him asking for directions. He arrives and I give him a tour of my place. We head to the office where I show him the mess I made from the night before. My greyhound, Redd Walker, watches shyly from the corner wondering who this strange man is. As time passes Redd slowly makes his way closer to us. I watch Johnny work and we talk. I come to find out that we have even more in common than we realized. We share similar relationships with our mothers, fathers, and grandparents. He tells me more about his life. Things I had no clue about and I open up as well about my past and my hopes for the future. Sometimes I wonder if he's trying to shock me, warn me, or see if I will still stick around.



When he's finished he makes himself comfortable in the living room and changes the channel on my television to ESPN without my prompting. I had cooked for him in appreciation for his help. Like a good host, I put together some food on a plate and bring it over to him. We talk some more and watch ESPN. I wonder what he thinks about the Chicana/o art that hangs throughout my place. All he asks is who is in one of prints. I wonder what crosses his mind as he sees Yolanda Lopez's poster that reads, "Who's the immigrant, pilgrim?" I wonder these things because at the club we have talked about me being Chicana, and in that space he sometimes makes remarks that make me cringe, call him out, or consider if he has listened to a word I have said. In my home, he can't escape or avoid it. We talk a lot about race that day as we share stories about friendships, families, and our upbringings. I tell him about a woman I have started talking to in hopes that something more will progress. I mention another who came to the club for the first time and he remembers her well, as she totally rebuked his performance of desire telling him she was not interested because she's a lesbian.

When he leaves I find myself appreciative on multiple levels thinking about the ways people come in and out of your life when you need them the most. I relish this moment of reciprocity. We've got the song and dance of hospitality – host – and guest down pat at the club. But what we have done today has extended our performances. I had clearly extended my performances as host by bringing him food. However, his reciprocity was a very unexpected performance that in many ways shifted the landscape of possibilities for both of our performances as guest and host. These extended performances were not just about the time spent outside of the club, but the vulnerability displayed outside as well. A vulnerability that would not be permitted in the walls of Manzone. I don't pretend to imagine that I had such great insight to work toward vulnerability when I started my own performances of hospitality by bringing food. But I do wonder if my vulnerability unwittingly drove me to want a connection with someone else who would also be vulnerable. I also now see that I was invested in my performances as host in a variety of settings, whether it was to my friends in my home or to the dancers at the club. Yes, these performances were driven by connection and desire, but they also provided pleasure in multiple ways. In the past my pleasure and desire was fueled by a futile chase for the unrequited. In this case, this desire was set in a new context and a new role, that of a host. The pleasure garnered from these performances was tinged differently, especially when on this occasion my performances were reciprocated. We had broken the boundaries that dictated the initial rules that we had to conform to and this was taboo. Bell asks about putting pleasure at the center of performance, and in examining this narrative with Johnny I put pleasure at the center of my performance as host.

### **Some Final Thoughts on Hospitality**

I've attempted to paint two pictures that relate to hospitality. The first picture deals with instability, incivility, violence, and disruption by bachelorettes asserting their

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heterosexual privilege in a queer space creating an inhospitable environment that makes them hosts who perform heteronormativity. The second deals with performances of hospitality that progress and grow in the desire for pleasure, intimacy and vulnerability. Again, I do not seek to romanticize the second narrative. Nor do I want to pretend that there aren't issues that still need to be problematized in the first. Rather it is my hope that these two pictures can elicit some new ways to consider performances of hospitality, inhospitable space, and how we enact our roles as guest and host as they intersect with privileges and oppression. These performances are complex and intersectional, as power, history, and privilege set the stage for various possibilities. Identities are not static, nor are all privileges. Cathy Cohen argues, "The inability of queer politics to effectively challenge heteronormativity rests, in part, on the fact that despite a surrounding discourse that highlights the destabilization and even deconstruction of sexual categories, queer politics has often been built around a simple dichotomy between those deemed queer and those deemed heterosexual" (24). Cohen continues, "Thus, while the politics of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgendered activists of color might recognize heteronormativity as a primary system of power structuring our lives, it understands that heteronormativity interacts with institutional racism, patriarchy, and class exploitation to define us in numerous ways as marginalized and oppressed subjects" (31). Following Cohen's lead I've tried to read these performances of hospitality and inhospitable actions through an intersectional perspective that emanates from my own positionality as a queer woman of color looking for a space that offers possibilities for my multiplicities. And so it ends as I hear the [last song of the night](#).

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