parts and pieces (for example, what part has replaced or might be understood as a stand-in for another?) and to begin asking questions about “how and in what configuration” bodies/body parts have been accumulated and (re)mediated (120).

To be sure, the way the text itself has been designed and produced encourages a traditional linear, front-to-back, held-between-hands, cover-to-cover read, but it’s tempting, and I think especially fitting given the theoretical emphasis placed on media here, and the inclusion of, to my count, 50 black and white still images, to imagine high-tech alternatives to that design, alternatives that could allow more room for play, both with various forms of media as well as with readers’ reception of or experience with the text. What if, for instance, in keeping with Bolter and Grusin’s Remediation, Getting Under the Skin provided readers with printed equivalents to hyperlinks, a move that would facilitate, if not explicitly encourage, a more dispersed, nonlinear engagement with the rich assortment of “theoretical insights and practical examples,” or to my way of thinking, the “interacting accumulations” Wegenstein offers readers? Going still further, it’s tempting to imagine the potentials associated with a colorized, multiply-media-rich hypertextual version of Getting Under the Skin, something that would afford a different kind of engagement (or different kinds of engagement) with the interrelating, interacting parts and pieces Wegenstein provides us here.


Reviewed by Maggie Werner, University of Arizona

For the past four years, I have been running around proclaiming that my research interest is sexual rhetorics. Generally, people meet my declaration with serious looks, an understanding nod, and a change of subject. It occurred to me last semester when I was doing research into the commer-
cial sex industry that I don’t really have any idea what studying “sexual rhetorics” means, and I’ve found a serious dearth of information about the rhetoric of sexuality in the literature of our field. “Sexuality” is code for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender issues, although I suspect that my straight friends embody sexuality as well. This situation speaks to the act of “othering” that liberal academics are so conscious and guilty of. Gender is about women, race is about minority status, class is about the proletariat, and sexuality is about “the gays.” So when I speak of sexual rhetorics, my colleagues automatically assume that I am speaking of queer theory and LGBT studies, and I am: to a degree.

However, I find it woefully inadequate and limiting to my research to claim that the rhetoric of sexuality can only be, or even best be, examined through studying LGBT history, politics, and cultures. Still, sexuality studies focuses on this population most often. As of late, I’ve found that a good way to figure out what I mean by sexual rhetorics is to step outside of rhetorical studies and, following queer theory and feminist theory, take an interdisciplinary approach. I’ve found sociology and anthropology particularly useful in studying the rhetoric of sexuality in contemporary American culture. Sociologist Arlene Stein’s new book, Shameless: Sexual Dissidence in American Culture, blends sociological theory and rhetorical analysis to examine the state of shame in regards to Americans’ views on sexuality; however, like almost everything else I read on sexuality, it’s about “the gays” more than it is about shame or sexual dissidence broadly conceived.

Conversations about sexuality focus on LGBT issues because we are a population that has had a spotlight shined on our sexual lives since Richard von Krafft-Ebbing defined us as inverts in Psychopathia Sexualis in 1886. Stein’s collection argues that LGBT people’s positions as subjects of pathologizing, demonizing, and shaming reflect American ambivalence towards sexuality in a culture that is “a curious mix of the shameless and the shamers, a seemingly endless parade of Pamela Andersons and Jerry Falwells strutting their stuff and wagging their fingers” (1). In the past three decades, debates over sexual liberation and expression focused particularly on the lives and rights of gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender people. Consequently, morality and sexuality blatantly converge in the subject of gay rights. Shameless presents a series
of essays in two parts: the first serves to establish the instability of collective LGBT identities, and the second recounts attacks on those identities by the Christian right.

Stein sets shame up as the fulcrum between liberal and conservative ideologies, arguing that “progressive social movements have tried to sever the link between sexuality and shame, [while] conservatives, in contrast, use shame as a weapon against liberalization” (3). In part one, “Up from Shame,” she demonstrates the ways that gays and lesbians (with her focus primarily on lesbians) fought through the ’60s, ’70s, and ’80s to set the shame of their sexuality aside and forge new personal, political, and social identities that eschewed shame and brought the phrase “gay pride” to the forefront of the movement. However, presenting a unified LGBT front was a “messy process,” and the fight for pride was often complicated by the fact that “constructing a collective identity around something as fluid and indeterminate as desire was tricky at best” (17). The essays in part one illustrate such instability of identity. The “tendencies toward political fragmentation” of LGBT identities have now met a “formidable enemy: the Christian right” in a battle of morality and sanctity that Stein focuses on in the second half of Shameless (107). Part two, “Shamed Again,” examines ways the Christian right employs shame as a rhetorical strategy to stymie the gay rights movement and move middle America to distrust homosexuality by casting LGBT people as threatening to the sacred institutions of marriage and family.

The essays date back to the early ’90s and much of the book has a reflective/reflexive feel. By looking back, Stein crafts a fairly coherent picture of the major trends in identity politics in LGBT communities over the past twenty years. It’s easy to see why we are at this current political moment still facing attacks from the Christian right and still struggling to establish what being gay in America “means” from examining Stein’s selection of historical moments in LGBT cultures. Part one, “Up from Shame,” showcases essays that establish tensions over sexual identity (by way of dissent among lesbians over who and what a lesbian actually is) and shows the ways that debates over sexual identity function not only on a large-scale liberal versus conservative level but within minority communities as well. Stein’s essays track lesbian identity through sexual and cultural issues. Because lesbians, by way of feminism, were particularly
invested in forging a unified front, we have tended to engage in debates about whether it is okay for lesbians to like "cock rock" or if we all should support "women's music" by listening to independent, angst-filled, female folk singers, as well as whether lesbian porn and sex toys are liberatory or oppressive. In the '80s, the feminist "sex wars" (think "culture wars" but on a smaller scale) erupted, deeply affecting lesbian-feminist identities. The sex wars focused on sexuality and gender and attempted to define both appropriate, egalitarian, feminist forms of sexuality (monogamy, commitment, mutual support) and inappropriate male-identified forms (everything else: S/M, pornography, polyamory, sex work). Lesbian-feminist women debated whether it was radically feminist to be a sexual libertine, rescuing women from repression, or to champion for the essential differences between male and female sexuality. Although each side argued that its position was more feminist than the other, in many ways, it is the same basic debate that causes hand-wringing over homo and bisexuality today, and the uniting feature was and continues to be shame.

A seminal essay in part one, "Shapes of Desire," tracks the coming-out stories of three women. Each of these women views her lesbian identity differently. One sees it as innate, one views it as a choice that aligns her with feminism, and one resides somewhere in the middle, being sexually attracted to men, but emotionally drawn to women. The differences these women embody showcase the tensions in coming out, a personal and social move with "two distinct but overlapping processes: the development of a personal identity as lesbian, or individuation, and the development of a social identity as lesbian, or disclosure" (38). Clearly, some women can (and did and still do) choose to be lesbian; sexual desire for women does not always drive coming out. Such fluidity of identity provides one way for the Christian right and neoconservatives to attack LGBT people: even if seemingly innate desire motivates one to come out, one always has the choice to "just say no" to same-sex behavior. This provides the foundation for so-called "conversion therapy" that seeks to change only homosexual behavior, not desire. Much of Christian doctrine is built upon the denial of desire, and the fact that LGB people can always choose abstinence provides a potent way to invoke shame by defining us as slaves to our wonton passions.
In part two, "Shamed Again," Stein brings readers into the ’90s, when social conservatives stepped up efforts to “rein in” free sexual expression by pushing shame and setting LGBT rights in opposition to “family values” and morality. Where earlier cultural homophobia focused on the pathology of homosexuality, neoconservatism marks it as an immoral choice, thereby invoking shame. This issue of choice led LGBT activists to promote the idea of homosexuality as an innate characteristic; however, as Stein demonstrates in the first half of the book, identity is more complicated than that, and for women who “came out through feminism,” their lesbianism was chosen as an alternative to the heteropatriarchal system that had been so oppressive to women. So in order to fight shame, gay pride became about accepting who one “really is” and formed the foundation for the pro-gay marriage arguments that began to dominate cultural conversations regarding LGBT rights in the mid-1990s. If people do not choose their sexual orientation, then to deny gay marriage is akin to denying interracial marriage: it effectively punishes citizens for something about which they have no choice. Although Stein’s book is not about marriage per se, she uses the debate as one way to illustrate the competing ideologies of the US “culture wars,” a convenient, yet simplistic, militaristic metaphor to describe the complex of competing ideologies in America in regards to sex, marriage, and family.

The most powerful essays in the collection are in part two and focus specifically on the conservative versus liberal ideology debate that Stein claims as her central thesis: liberals liberate, conservatives shame. The chapter “Revenge of the Shamed” should be of particular interest to rhetoricians; in it, Stein rhetorically analyzes efforts by the Oregon Citizens Alliance (OCA) to pass anti-gay ballot measures that would deny homosexuality as a protected class in the early to mid-1990s. Through her ethnographic study, Stein demonstrates that the push by the OCA to shame LGBT peoples arises out of conservative activists’ “own shame and their desire to hide from it. . . . Antigay campaigns play on the fear of dependence and vulnerability, offering up false promises of control, self-restraint, and social segregation as the answer” (106). Stein’s readings of the rhetoric of the OCA adeptly support her claim that “sometimes the shameless and the shamers are the same people” (1). With a focus on interviews with OCA members, her analysis of the situation is particu-
larly potent because she shows individual arguments against homosexuality, allowing certain OCA members the chance to represent themselves (through an ethnographer's editing) in their own words, and what they value and fear.

Stein follows this thread of rhetorical analysis through in the subsequent chapter, "Whose Memories? Whose Victimhood?" which presents a comparative analysis of the frames of victimization that both gay and Christian activists tie themselves to. Since the second half of the twentieth century, the Holocaust has functioned as a dominant metaphor in most social movements. In our everyday parlance, oppressors are "Nazis," and the oppressed are one step away from being herded into concentration camps. One of the most fascinating parts of this chapter shows how the rhetoric of the Christian right (which has a startling good grasp of metaphorical manipulation) unfolds into an alignment with Jewish victims of the Holocaust. While Stein criticizes this co-opting of the Holocaust, she points out that it is inevitable for social movements to craft standpoints based on major events in human history, particularly when those events are replete with suffering, victimhood, and survival.

Overall, the collection suffers a bit from the difficulties of presenting diverse essays under a unified theme that an author creates after the fact. The connections to shame that Stein draws are somewhat weak in part one: while it adequately demonstrates the instability of forging collective identities, it does not directly engage the issue of shame. The section introductions help to contextualize the essays in the first half of the book and show ambivalence in LGBT communities about whether we present a queer challenge to sexual normativity or whether we're "just like everybody else." Such ambivalence can be seen in the labeling of our identities. "Queer" speaks to transgression, to boldly asserting our difference and taking pride in it. Critical theorist Michael Warner's 1999 book *The Trouble with Normal* argues that the drive to marry, to become a part of the bourgeois middle class, undercuts the power of queer identities to challenge hegemonic conceptions of "normal" human behavior. Opposing queerness are those individuals who embrace the LGBT label, a label that focuses on homosexuality as a quasi-ethnicity, one that strives to secure our rights as citizens, one that is not so "in your face." Although the drive to marry is antithetical to many queer activists' desire
to transgress, the "attacks of the right have done more to unify gays and lesbians around the shared goal of lesbian and gay civil rights than any other development ever could" (107). However, in what ways does the drive to marry reinforce the issue of shame? What if some people aren't like everybody else? Will securing the right to marry only serve to valorize middle-class monogamy more? Queer theorists such as Warner and Gayle S. Rubin argue that the more normalized homosexuality becomes, the more those who have more "queer" sexualities will be further shamed.

As shame continues to permeate the American consciousness in regards to sexuality, struggles over the position of LGBT people will persist. In November 2006, citizens of Arizona voted on Proposition 107, known as the "Protect Marriage Arizona" amendment, which defines marriage as the union between a man and a woman and strips domestic partnership benefits for all unmarried couples, gay and straight. Shameless shows the ways that such initiatives reflect ambivalence toward sexuality. Since the '90s, gay marriage has been a convenient trope for conservative Americans, and its emergence as a political tool of the right served its purpose in impeding the forward motion of the LGBT rights movement. Many Americans now favor basic civil rights protections for LGBT peoples and believe that sexual orientation and gender identity should not be the cause for losing one's job or residence; however, the marriage debate changed the character of gay rights discussions in America. Examining the rhetoric of sexual shame allows critical theorists and rhetoricians a way to contextualize the ongoing battle over who should have access to the legal and social benefits of marriage. Although an "us versus them" attitude saturates all aspects of the US culture wars, both sides suffer from a legacy of sexual shame. Therefore, it remains necessary for political activists seeking change to acknowledge the ways that such a legacy motivates both the Christian right and the liberal left, by accounting for the reasons why homosexuality represents the ongoing fight over all manner of sexual liberation. Perhaps if we could all "acknowledge our common frailty," the factions in the culture wars could negotiate a treaty (178).

Studying sexuality requires an interdisciplinary approach precisely because it belongs to everyone and to no one. Reading sociological
studies such as *Shameless* allows rhetoricians to appreciate the ways that other fields engage sexuality and gender studies and to see that rhetorical analysis can be useful in dissecting many cultural debates. Seeing the intersections of queer, feminist, rhetorical, and sociological theories enlivens the inquiry in all of those fields. I'm still not quite sure what "sexual rhetorics" means; however, I do appreciate that it relies on a multifaceted approach to analysis.

Reading *Shameless* helped me to see the broader context of my own academic interest and allowed me new ways to hypothesize why studying sexuality remains difficult. I have a biased and completely unsubstantiated theory that academics, particularly rhetoricians, are rather prudish. Perhaps this reflects the shame that many of us feel in regards to sexuality, making it easier to talk about politics than the down and dirty realities of sex-driven humans. As long as shame controls desire on a national level, conversations about sexuality are likely to stay focused on LGBT people, which is okay because I quite enjoy talking about myself. Still, I have to admit that I remain curious about "the straights" and their places in American culture in relation to sexuality, morality, desire, and shame: what do they do in bed anyway?