

Amy Marvin

Louise M. Olmsted Fellow at Lafayette College

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Assumptive Care and Futurebound Care in Trans Literature (Author Preprint)

Introduction: Different Voices, Trans Voices

Carol Gilligan's *In a Different Voice* critiques Lawrence Kohlberg's stages of moral development for universalizing the moral development of men and boys, arguing that Kohlberg casts women and girls as morally immature in comparison to a masculine telos toward justice (Gilligan 18). In contrast, Gilligan centers the moral development of women and girls on their own terms, defending an ethics of care. An ethic of care, Gilligan describes, involves "seeing a world comprised of relationships rather than of people standing alone, [and] a world that coheres through human connection rather than through systems of rules..." (29). Gilligan thus establishes a broad range for an ethics of care: "the vision that self and other will be treated as of equal worth, that despite differences in power, things will be fair; the vision that everyone will be responded to and included, that no one will be left alone or hurt" (63). This emphasis on connection rather than an ethics of disconnected individualism is part of the broad tapestry from which feminist care ethics has been woven. Feminist care ethics does not necessarily entail giving up justice and autonomy, but it does take seriously the challenge that a relational view of the self poses to traditional philosophical theories that solely focus on an individual, disconnected moral agent while bracketing out human dependency, interdependency, and social ties (Keller 153-154).

Though Gilligan's *In a Different Voice* strives to center ethical perspectives erased by traditional philosophical work, its project of care risks continuing to center some ethical voices over others. First, the project of care ethics risks circumscribing its understanding of care by ignoring differences among women including race and class that may result in different understandings and practices of care (Keller and Kittay 544). For example, in *Black Feminist Thought* Patricia Hill Collins critiques Gilligan's project for mainly centering the voices of white, middle-class women, thus participating in the historical suppression of black feminist ideas even while challenging traditional philosophy (Collins 8). Second, this bias within feminist care ethics risks obscuring the ways that rhetorics of care can be wielded as tools of oppression and imperialism. For example, Uma Narayan argues that rhetoric about care over dependents has functioned ideologically in combination with racism and imperialism to justify colonization, taking the form of "paternalistic caring" (Narayan 135). Despite Gilligan's emphasis on different

voices, it is thus important to pay attention to which voices continue to be excluded from the ethical fold, as well as how these exclusions might obscure insidious deployments of care.

Among the women not included by Gilligan's work are trans women, and I begin this essay focusing on Gilligan rather than other care ethicists to consider the broader history of trans women's exclusion from ethical knowledge. The same year that Gilligan published *In a Different Voice* to center women and girls as ethical knowers, psychologists still tended to link trans people with pathology, as 1982 introduced the misgendering dichotomy between categorizing trans women as "homosexual" or "heterosexual males" picked up by later theories of autogynephilia (Freund et. al).

Feminist philosophy fared little better with taking trans women seriously as knowers during this period, indicated by Marilyn Frye's afterthought describing trans women as mindless robots in her otherwise excellent 1983 book *The Politics of Reality*. Frye argues that under a phallogocentric scheme subordinating women to men, women are not considered to have an authoritative, distinct point of view or manner of perception, instead "assumed to be robots hooked up to the senses of men," ultimately lacking a distinct soul or the ability to see beyond their appointed task of service and submission (Frye 86-87, 88). Because women are in fact seers and authors of perception (86), technological advances in "male to female transsexual reconstruction" (85) aim to replace the threatening real women that men depend upon by "constructing actual robots" in the form of trans women (89, 92 fn. 6). While non-trans lesbians rise against this conceptual order as "women-seers" (92), trans women are framed by Frye as the true robotic replacement, internalizing male norms and continuing to serve men without wielding the potentially disruptive capabilities for perception, a point of view, and a soul beyond submission. Frye thus frames trans women as the realization of men's designs for women under patriarchy, mindless servile robots without ethical agency who do not question their subordination and are fundamentally questionable as knowers, let alone seers. During the time period Gilligan began to center the ethical lives of non-trans women and girls, trans women's ethical lives were largely obscured by discourses of pathology or placation, reduced to a figure of perversion, piteousness, or Stepfordism beyond ethical agency.

In this essay, I depart from this historical exclusion of trans women's ethical insights from care ethics by focusing on trans literature as a source of knowledge expressed by trans women about care. Specifically, I discuss short stories by Casey Plett and Ryka Aoki as sources of knowledge about assumptive and futurebound practices of care. I begin by arguing that the work of Maria Lugones considers the spatial dimensions of love, and that this suggests that care involves giving space to another on their own terms. I then turn to Plett's story "Other Women" to unpack assumptive care as a short-circuited form of caring in which a relationship to the other on their own terms is closed off by transphobic assumptions. I contrast this with Plett's story "Winning," which describes a futurebound care in which another's space is kept open, permitting action that allows them to flourish on their own terms. After this, I discuss Aoki's "To the New World" as an engagement with both racist assumptive care and futurebound care aimed at self-care. I conclude that these stories provide a rich space for considering trans ethical knowledge about care.

Love, Care, and Space

Before turning to stories in trans literature, I find it useful to philosophically justify the relationship between care and giving another space that I discuss throughout this essay.<1> In

“Playfulness, ‘World’-Travelling, and Loving Perception” Lugones suggests a relationship between love and space through her emphasis on “worlds” when contrasting arrogant perception and loving perception. Lugones begins by discussing arrogant perception as a failure of identification with another and a failure of love (Lugones 4). For Lugones, arrogant perception is not only directed towards women by men, but can also happen among women. Specifically, Lugones reflects on her arrogant perception towards her own mother after she was raised to treat her as a servant and “could not welcome her world,” as well as the arrogant perception directed by many white women towards women of color (6-7). Lugones writes, “...there is a complex failure of love in the failure to identify with another woman, the failure to see oneself in other women who are quite different from oneself” (7). This failure of arrogant, walled-off perception towards another is not always immediately obvious to the perceiver, even though it can result in abuse towards others (6).

Loving perception among women involves being aware of connection rather than the isolated, disconnected compartment of arrogant perception. Lugones emphasizes, “I am incomplete and unreal without other women. I am profoundly dependent on others without having to be their subordinate, their slave, their servant” (8). Loving another requires being able to perceive their world as distinct from one’s own but also as connected, including the ability to perceive one’s own actions and their meaning from the positionality of another person. Lugones argues, “We are fully dependent on each other for the possibility of being understood and without this understanding we are not intelligible, we do not make sense, we are not solid, visible, integrated; we are lacking” (8). Loving perception thus requires an awareness of a shared space across different positionalities, refusing to level over the other like one would a servant, but also acknowledging a space of connection across different “worlds,” defined as a multitude of situated positions one might inhabit, see from, or be seen from (9-10).

The vantage point of arrogant perception, which Lugones describes as a way of being taught to love that is not love (7), involves an inability to allocate any space to another outside the perspective from which they are seen. The other is locked into an arrogant perceiver’s perspective to the extent that Lugones associates this way of relating to another with abuse, with the example of “using, taking for granted, and demanding her [mother’s] services in a far reaching way that...left her little of herself to herself” (5). In this way arrogant perception may involve a restriction of space taken in both relational and material senses, denying the other a space to be seen or physically inhabit space on their own terms. In contrast, loving perception gives another more space to be understood from their distinct perspective. This way of viewing another does not constrict, but instead opens possibilities for difference, involving a practice of traveling to another’s world that allows someone to not only “understand *what it is to be them* [emphasis hers]” but also opens up a space for the traveler to consider themselves from a different perspective (17). Loving or arrogant perceptions are thus tied to the amount of space given to another on their own terms, acknowledging their distinct but connected living perspective and positionality.

Lugones’ discussion of perception and world-travelling, while not explicitly about care, nonetheless suggests that care may also have its own spatial character. Lugones’ work has been described as a reflection on the receptivity required for the “cared-for” to be heard by the “one-caring” (Dalmiya 42), and Maurice Hamington sees in Lugones’ “World-Travelling” essay a relationship between the openness of world-traveling, the expansion of understanding, and the cultivation of “caring performances” (Hamington 88). Lugones’ work also shares an affinity with Gilligan’s emphasis that an ethics of care focuses on connection, relationality, interdependence,

and inclusion in the context of relationships. Lugones' work is thus helpful for considering feminist care ethics in relation to the space taken away from or given to another. I will argue in the following sections that trans literature offers rich descriptions of assumptive and futurebound practices of care that emphasize this dynamic of taking away and giving the other space.

Assumptive Care

In *A Safe Girl to Love*, Casey Plett provides several stories about trans women protagonists that include rich topographies of care, including the opening story, "Other Women," where Plett provides insight into traumatic forms of care imposed by cis (non-trans) friends and relatives. "Other Women" follows the main character, Sophie, as she ventures home to Winnipeg for the holidays after transitioning. Focused on Sophie's perspective, the story highlights how Sophie's cis friends' and family's skewed vision renders their practices of care assumptive and damaging.

At the beginning of the story, Sophie's relationship with her mother and extended family may seem promising. The first family member Sophie interacts with is her mother, Lenora, who seems friendly towards Sophie, even though we are informed that their relationship was strained after Sophie came out as trans. Sophie recounts, "It was hard after that. She stopped signing her e-mails 'Love, Mom.' Stopped going out in public with me. Those were rough months," (Plett 11) and they only started talking again after Sophie moved away (11-12). Additionally, Sophie's grandparents seem jovial, offering handshakes, hugs, food, and coffee (13). After Sophie's initial visit with her grandparents, her mother is optimistic, saying, "It's nice they haven't called you by your old name, don't you think?" (14). It thus initially seems that Sophie may be able to maintain some bonds of care with her family.

Sophie's interactions with family quickly reveal their tenuousness. Already Lenora had asked Sophie what she would wear to church on Christmas, and seemed uneasy about Sophie's plan to wear a dress. When asked if this was okay, Sophie's mother responded, "Well, I don't think your clothes will be a problem, no" (20). Implicit in this response is the sense that it is Sophie herself as a trans woman wearing a dress to church who is the problem, and Sophie ends up sitting alone during the service at her mother's suggestion (13). Sophie's family may be "tolerant," but there is a rift between their worlds.

This rift is exposed during Christmas dinner. While Sophie's grandfather is dispensing blessings through prayer, he offers one to Sophie under her deadname, <2> saying, "We are especially thankful you saw fit to guide up from America our grandson, Leon -" (18). Instead of accepting this misgendering blessing, Sophie interrupts by saying "No," which is responded to by a sharp intake of breath by her grandmother and her mother stressing "hey now" in a quiet, angry voice. It is all downhill from here, with Sophie's apology to her grandfather met with a frown and a "well," and Sophie finds a note in her coat pocket from *Proverbs* 3:5-6 written in her grandmother's script: "*Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight* [emphasis hers]" (18).

Here, I suggest, the novel does show Sophie being responded to by a practice of care, highlighting specific forms of care that may emerge when cis people try to care for trans relatives. One might be tempted here to say that these moments are in fact *not* care for Sophie, and instead constitute an ethical failure due to an absence of care. Drawing from Lugones' understanding of love, care, and space discussed in the previous section, Sophie's family directs

a form of care towards her that is contrary to her own self-understanding, and the ways Sophie navigates her position in the world. In wanting to sit separately from Sophie during church, or praying for Sophie under her deadname, Sophie is *not* acknowledged as a complex person with a rich inner (and outer) life, except insofar as she is abjected or forced into silence about the ways she lives her life and understands herself. The letters and prayers offered to Sophie are thus only offered in ways that annihilate her life as a trans woman, denying her the space to live on her own terms due to a failure of maintaining fair, inclusive connections, and ultimately, care.

However, there is also reason to suggest that Plett's story provides knowledge not only about care's absence, but also about the transformation of care through the insidious nuances of transphobia as it conditions everyday relationships. For cis people living in a transphobic society, the horizon of caring practices may be restricted to the smallest gestures of accommodation. As evidenced by Lenore's optimism about Sophie not getting entirely reduced to her deadname, such a meager form of tolerance may be taken as indeed an attempt to care for Sophie, and for some cis people may even be experienced with difficulty and hence as an effort for inclusion. Lenore interprets moments when Sophie is not misgendered, deadnamed, or barred out of her grandparents' home altogether as *landmark* moments of care and inclusion, without recognizing the more insidious topography of care practiced in these cis familial spaces. This is care as mediocre tolerance, exhibiting a facile pride in its receptivity to a trans other while unknowingly stripping their world away. Likewise, Sophie's grandmother, given her religious background, may see her note as a crucial intervention to bring her child back into the fold of family life and its relationship to the sacred. This care is unable to grant or even fathom that Sophie might have her own world, restricting her space during the entire encounter through its transphobic terms. The problem may not be that Sophie's family isn't caring, but rather that their caring *sucks*. In this case, transphobia may restrict our relationships to others through their assumptions about who we are and should be, including loved ones privy to our most vulnerable moments. In a transphobic society, even well-intentioned people can obliterate us with their care.

Sophie's friend Megan, who she frequently turns to for support, provides another example of assumptive care. Initially, Megan seems like someone who cares about Sophie. We are informed that Megan is the first person Sophie came out to as trans, to which she responded with encouraging words: "One day everyone will call you Sophie. And I'm going to be so fucking proud of you when they do" (29). Additionally, Sophie often spends time at Megan's place as a moment of respite from uncomfortable scenes with her family (2, 19), and Megan seems accepting and open about Sophie's transition when they are reunited at the beginning of the story (2-3). Megan also portrays herself as supportive in relation to Sophie's friends who were angered upon hearing of Sophie's transition, reassuring Sophie with "I told [them] that if anybody gave you shit tonight that I would fucking murder them" (19). Megan thus seems like someone who might have a relationship of care with Sophie that does not involve projecting cis assumptions that restrict her vision of who Sophie might be and what caring for a trans woman friend might look like.

Megan's practice of assumptive care with Sophie is revealed in one of the worst violations of Sophie's autonomy and understanding of herself in the story. After attending a party where Sophie had to deal with a transphobic friend from her past, drank lots of alcohol, and fell over onto the sidewalk (21-23), Megan drives Sophie back to her place. Megan and Sophie become intimate (25), but Megan is distraught when Sophie's parts no longer behave the way they used to. Sophie explains, "...and then I didn't want her touching that part of me, I hated how she talked about it. Like if my dick didn't seem happy then I couldn't be...I wanted to lift her off

of me and say *my penis isn't me*" (26). Despite Sophie's forceful nos, Megan proceeds to give her oral sex, violating consent and causing Sophie to experience intense dysphoria about her body (27). After Sophie tells Megan to stop two more times, she finally ceases but also expresses anger at Sophie. Sophie recounts, "...she looked up, furious. No, she said. I'm sorry, don't *worry*, I won't *bother* you again tonight. She looked like she was about to cry" (27).

As Talia Bettcher emphasizes, denials of trans people's authenticity frequently share an affinity with sexual violence (Bettcher 114), and Megan's refusal to stop also signals a refusal to grant Sophie the space for authenticity over her body and what it means for her. The temporality of their sex is restricted to expectations about cis bodies, culminating in Megan's tears of frustration when she interprets Sophie's "NO" as a slight. While Megan may think of herself as trying to care for Sophie, the wounded anger she expresses indicates that Megan does not understand her care was actually a violation, and her warped care is used in the service of violence through assumptions about sex, trans women's bodies, and caring intimacy. Through this assumptive care, what began with Megan tenderly reassuring Sophie, "You're so soft...you're so fuckin' pretty" (25) escalates into a violation of consent and an angry silence. Megan's earlier "tough love" of telling Sophie to stop being a dick is not unrelated to her inability to see Sophie as other than a dick in the context of sex, combined with the violence of her unwillingness to listen and stop.

"Other Women" thus indicates that practices of care by cis relatives and friends can often be a trauma and a terror rather than a straightforwardly benign force of inclusion and attention to particularity. The assumptions that cis people have about their trans family, friends, and lovers may find their way into their practices of care, and this assumptive care constitutes a real ethical failure. Assumptive care takes up the other's space by refusing to grant them a world, instead practicing care from the totalizing perspective of the perceiver in a way that can cause harm and violence. Through assumptive care, encounters with the other are restricted to predetermined assumptions without creating an open space through which they can respond or change the situation to better fit their terms. Plett's story thus provides knowledge about care when it is circumscribed by the assumptions of the person practicing care, ultimately short-circuiting because it is unable to escape expectations and truly connect to the other with their complex, lived positionality and needs.

Futurebound Care

In addition to knowledge about ethical failures, trans literature also provides knowledge about rich ethical moments, such as those found in futurebound care. To draw out futurebound care, I will focus on Plett's story "Winning," which considers care between a trans mother and a trans daughter who returns to her hometown. The relationship between Zoe (daughter) and Sandy (mother) is frequently fraught, like many mother-daughter relationships. When Zoe came out to Sandy as trans on the phone, for example, Sandy responded with "oh no" and said she needed "a few weeks on this" (207), after which Zoe didn't hear from Sandy again for months (208). Sandy has also slapped Zoe before, and at one point digs her nails into Zoe's thighs to get her attention about trans women needing to dress cautiously (211). It turns out that a trans daughter having a trans mother is not always easy, much like cis daughters having cis mothers, and Sandy often seems to be coming from a place of trauma when caring for Zoe. At one point Zoe wonders "if it was possible to love so fully, as Sandy had, unless you had been cut off at some point from that love yourself" (201).

Nonetheless, Sandy also cares for Zoe, and Zoe cares for Sandy. Zoe was initially hesitant about staying with her mother again after living in New York City, but notes that they were able to generally “re-learn some good parent-kid relationship things” (188). Sandy also makes gestures of care towards Zoe, for example insisting that Zoe takes a nap to cure a hangover and take up time she could be using to help Sandy pack (205). The story may indicate tensions between mother and daughter, but it also emphasizes their attempts to maintain caring and attentive ties to each other.

This complex care allows Sandy’s care to become futurebound. Earlier in the story, Zoe hears that while she was away her friend from high school, Frankie, lost her father, became pregnant, adopted her kid out, and got into cocaine (191, 193-194). Frankie holds a special place for Zoe because she provided her care and help with planning to transition. Plett writes, “Frankie once had looked at Zoe and cupped her chin and said God, you’re beautiful. She was never exasperated with Zoe’s tics...She’d only taken care of Zoe, sisterly and lovingly” (195). Uncertain of Frankie’s fate, Zoe texts her twice to ask if she needs anything but receives no response (201). The subject of homelessness frequently appears in the text, including news of “student-bro types” shooting homeless people with BB guns (191) and the story takes place in the cold, dark part of the year (183-184, 189). At one point, Zoe spots a homeless woman who she thinks might be Frankie but she (unconvincingly) concludes “*it probably wasn’t her*” (212).

Towards the end of the story, Sandy expresses a moment of here-I-care-and-can-do-no-other in response to Frankie’s uncertain situation. When Sandy asks Zoe if she has seen Frankie yet, Zoe fills her in on what she had heard so far (222). Sandy responds, “So you’re telling me...that one of your old friends who no longer has parents and just had a baby who she had to give up is possibly on the streets right now and possibly has problems with serious fucking drugs and all you did was text her” (223). Zoe’s two text messages, Sandy suggests, are an inadequate attempt at care. In anger, Sandy calls for ethical commitment and action, as she continues, “None of you get it around here! You don’t know what friendship means! No, it could never mean life and death, could it? Humans aren’t fucking games where you just try your best!..why am I about to waste time yelling. Let’s get in the car” (223). Sandy calls for the kind of care that results in action, and seeks to help Frankie when she is most vulnerable and isolated instead leaving her to the fate of abstract text message requests. As Eva Kittay stresses, one does not truly care unless they act (Kittay).

Through Sandy’s call to action, taking the form of hopping in the car with Zoe and trying to find Frankie, care becomes futurebound. Already, Frankie had been a source of futurebound care, providing Zoe with the help she needed to eventually actualize transition. Sandy’s call to care, likewise, does not abandon Frankie to the rumors that she is alone and on the street, but instead cares *enough* for the situation to be otherwise. Futurebound care, as found in Plett’s story, is that which makes living with and for another possible in the most radical sense, both envisioning and ethically committing towards a better possible future world. The other is not only given room for their perspective to be centered on their own terms, but also the space they need is further opened such that the other’s perspective can be granted a possible future of survival and growth. In contrast, assumptive care might project a future for the other, but its ameliorative potential remains limited by the transphobic horizons influencing the person practicing care while its potential for abuse and violence is enhanced. Futurebound care, in contrast to the closed character of assumptive care, invites a structure of open, ethical world-making with others.

Returning to Lugones, futurebound care not only avoids the trap of walling oneself off from the other, but also goes beyond just giving another person space by taking real action so the other can live and grow on their own terms. Care becomes connected amelioration, realizing the other's needs by taking the actions required to bring them to a more empowered space, while also avoiding the potential trap of projecting distorted self-imposed goals onto the other and getting trapped in assumptive care. The story ends before Zoe and Sandy are able to reach Frankie, and active listening beyond Sandy's initial call to action would be required for her futurebound care to not lapse into assumptive care, as would happen if Sandy merely assumed she already knows everything Frankie needs. Nevertheless, Sandy's call to get in the car is itself a moment of futurebound care that, if sustained, could potentially result in a reconnection with Frankie and a better realization of her needs and goals.

Assumptive Care in its (Racist, Transphobic) Feminist Dimensions

Thus far I have looked at Plett's stories "Other Women" and "Winning" as sources for knowledge about care. Assumptive care, as seen in "Other Women," is bound by the closed structure of transphobia, and hence easily results in a leveling over of trans experience and a violent denial of consent. Futurebound care, in contrast, involves an ethical action that opens up a space for the other to have a future more on their own terms.

We might leave my initial analysis of care in trans literature with the false idea that assumptive care and futurebound care is primarily related to one's trans status and not also about intersections between trans status and other crucial aspects of trans people's lives such as class and race. Tethering insights about assumptive and futurebound care to trans status alone would be a mistake, and erase the experiences of trans people across difference. I will thus expand my analysis by centering ethical knowledge from Ryka Aoki's story "To the New World," arguing that her story highlights assumptive care and futurebound care as shaped by trans status, race, and immigration, while distinctly linking futurebound care with self-care.

Aoki's "To the New World" describes Millie Wong's visit to a farmer's market in Los Angeles to pick up food for her grandmother's birthday dinner (55). Though Millie's grandmother passed away, Millie sees the occasion as a way to maintain family ties after separating herself immediately after transitioning (Aoki 54). Here, Aoki focuses on race and gender in the context of Millie's everyday life as an Asian American trans woman. In the marketplace Millie relates her study of other women's patterns of walking and speech with her immigrant family studying the TV and radio to lose their accents (55). Studying the people around her also allows Millie to hear "snippets of conversation that convey gender, ethnicity, even social standing" (55). Millie is thus attentive to the social location of the people around her, and the way this informs even the smallest inflections in the language they use. The marketplace is a place where Millie both watches and is watched, and she soon runs into the other main living character of the story, who is the primary source of assumptive care.

The trap of assumptive care is set for Millie when she happens upon a loaf of sweet bread. Millie links the food back to her grandmother, with the narrator informing us, "Her grandmother had loved that sort of bread, especially towards the end when she couldn't chew very well...[Millie] remembered pulling off small bits of steamed bun and feeding them to her grandmother with fragrant, lukewarm tea" (Aoki 55-56). Based on memory, the bread thus seems like a clear choice for celebrating her grandmother's birthday, and Millie prepares to purchase it (55).

Here we meet Millie's feminist friend, Sierra. Millie is blocked by Sierra's booming voice from buying her bread, as Sierra scolds her for "supporting the dairy industry" (57). While standing against the dairy industry may seem generally principled, Sierra's stances on food often link to her racist assumptive care. The reader is informed that Millie met Sierra while she was loudly decrying Fuji apples as excessively sweet. When Sierra expressed intrigue for Sierra's powerful voice, Sierra responded with a generalization about Asian women, comparing them to "those little *beep beep* horns on a Prius" (56). Sierra's actions throughout the story indicate that she makes generalizations about Asian women and Asian cultures frequently (56-57). When Sierra reads Millie as a cis Asian American woman, Sierra's assumptions about Asian women fuels her "advocacy" towards Millie as she insists Millie needs to "sound like you *mean* it!" (56). Sierra is thus attempting to encourage Millie to find her voice even as she sweepingly casts the voices of Asian women as silent. Millie is skeptical of Sierra's generalizations, thinking that "she knew some pretty obnoxious Asian women," but stays silent nonetheless in the face of Sierra's call to loudness in an attempt to forge a friendship (56).

In this context, Sierra's words toward Millie take the form of care by one woman to another, as Sierra seems to genuinely believe that Millie as an Asian American woman could benefit from the (loud) stores of knowledge she has to offer. However, Sierra's care is also already assumptive, shaped by racist assumptions about Asian women as meek. Sierra is thus attempting to include Millie and foster a relationship with her, but only based on assumptions that harken back to controlling images of Asian women as passive (cf. *Espiritu* 107). Sierra's racist assumptions have restricted the horizon of care that she practices towards Millie, short-circuiting any relationship they might have via a racist white feminist perspective about what care towards Asian and Asian American women should look like.

Once Millie comes out to Sierra as a trans woman, Sierra's silencing call to speech transforms into an injunction that Millie find her subordinate place in relation to Sierra and her view of feminism or else risk an exhibition of male privilege (Aoki 56-57). This shifts Sierra's conceptualization of Millie from "possible dating material" to "younger brother-sister" (56-57). Though Sierra does not see Millie as having "male energy," the omnipresent specter of "male privilege" heightens Sierra's already racist patronizing care towards Millie, informing Sierra's attempts to instruct Millie on "what it meant to be a socially and politically responsible woman" (57).

In this context, though Sierra's care has shifted in response to Millie's trans status, it is also simultaneously based on (1) assuming that Millie has the same experience growing up as white cis men, (2) homogenizing Asian cultures, and (3) generally lacking a sense of awareness about race in conversations with Millie. For example, at one point Sierra 'helpfully' informs Millie, "You can't go out alone at night, or walk into any old sports bar without fear anymore, you know!" Sierra's patronizing tone strikes Millie as odd in the context of growing up as an Asian American person, as she remembers being taught to avoid spaces frequented by "large groups of white men" (57), indicating Sierra is oblivious of distinctions between Millie's experience and experiences of white men. Additionally, Sierra frequently homogenizes Asian cultures, and once responded to Millie by asserting, "men are men: Chinese men and Japanese men both abused women, like those women in World War II. Oh that was Korea? Whatever. It's all the same oppression" (58). This homogenizing move is also used to simultaneously exoticize Millie and dismiss her for being trans, showing Sierra's cluelessness about race and trans issues. When Sierra starts telling Millie of a Japanese Zen garden/spa that opened about 2 hours away, she clarifies that it is a space set up for cis women, saying, "You know, *women* women - but I

thought you might appreciate the Zen part, being Asian and all. Very feng shui” (58). Here Sierra, who decries the possibility of Millie ever taking up space, is more than willing to take up all the space and time she wants through her racist assumptions.

It is in this context that Sierra’s criticism of Millie’s bread choice stands out as particularly imposing. Sierra’s insistence that Millie not exhibit any male privilege and behave as a proper feminist is linked with her commitments to ways of eating food. Criticizing Millie’s choice of bread, Sierra brings together racism and non-sequiturs, explaining,

“Patriarchy is patriarchy. Do you know that dairy cows end up in McDonald’s hamburgers? They’re genetically engineered to produce milk...It’s worse than what happens to beef cattle...I mean, it’s like the Tibetan women - they have nothing but their stories and weaving, but the men in the Chinese government want to take that away from them too” (57).

Millie is aware that Sierra’s logical connections are baffling, but she holds back to avoid “accusations of male privilege, and, in this case, of possible connections with the Chinese government” (58). Generally, Sierra has impressed upon Millie that proper feminists are proper dieticians, and that eating properly could help Millie distance herself from her insurmountable sin of a vaguely defined “male privilege.” The narrator provides a window into Millie’s reflection on feminist dieting: “She really *was* sad that she had been born with male privilege, and maybe by being vegan, in some way she could be closer to the woman she wanted to be. A caring woman. A strong woman. A *vegan* woman” (57). Millie is aware of both Sierra’s wild connections and her racist assumptions, but Sierra has nonetheless influenced how Millie wants to be seen by others. However, this also entails that Millie must not purchase the bread for her grandmother to prove to Sierra that she is not tainted by male privilege, and Millie leaves the bread behind (59). It is thus an imposing white feminism that links Millie picking up bread for her grandmother with a risk of demonization and misgendering through Sierra’s racist, simplistic notion of male privilege. Sierra’s assumptive care, taking up the mantle of feminism, is ultimately informed by racism and transphobia.

Emi Koyama has argued that contentions between anti-trans feminists and trans feminists have often involved a centering of whiteness that displaces women of color (including trans women of color). In response to controversies over trans inclusion, Koyama asserts that the prioritization of women’s oppression above all other forms of oppression in radical feminism leads to the “assumption that the privilege transsexual women are perceived to have (i.e. male privilege) can be viewed as far more dangerous to others than any other privileges (i.e. being white, middle-class, etc.)” (Koyama 701). Koyama’s analysis thus parallels Sierra’s confusing insistence on homogenizing oppression into patriarchy and linking Millie with male privilege, even when these connections lack cogency.

Aoki’s story thus depicts a nuanced intersection between racism and transphobia in the context of assumptive care. Though Sierra may be attempting to care for Millie, her racist and transphobic brand of feminism short circuits all of her attempts, and she is effectively unable to interact with Millie on her own terms. Fittingly, Sierra is totally unaware of why Millie is at the marketplace to begin with, or even that Millie’s grandmother is not alive, brushing Millie off and exiting the conversation as abruptly as she entered (albeit by offering a hug) (Aoki 59). At this moment Millie refocuses on her grandmother, and it is here that the story transitions from knowledge of assumptive care to a vision of futurebound care as it intersects with Asian American experience, experiences of immigration, and trans experience.

Futurebound Care and Self-Care

Though Sierra is the main living non-protagonist in the story, Millie's grandmother persists through death as the key figure to whom Millie turns. Lamenting that she did not pick up the bread upon her return home, Millie's thoughts turn from Sierra's booming voice to thinking about her grandmother (60). Having abandoned the sweet bread, yet unconvinced that scrawny parsnips and tomatoes would do justice for her grandmother's birthday dinner, Millie digs around her freezer and finds two pork buns. This is coincidental because Millie had just thought about a time her grandmother reminisced about traveling to the US from Vietnam while she and Millie were in a grocery store searching for steamed pork buns, although the narrator assures us, "The two pork buns she found there weren't from providence; they were from being Asian and having a freezer full of ethnic food" (60). Now Millie's food dilemma escalates beyond sweet bread: should she honor her grandmother by eating meat and go against not only veganism but also vegetarianism? Here, Millie chooses her grandmother over Sierra: "She paused, full of trepidation about backsliding to meat, about oppression and male privilege and Sierra. But, with Grandma's picture looking right at her, she put the buns in the microwave" (60). The shadow of Sierra's assumptive white feminist care is temporarily dispersed by the more important meeting between magnetron and meat within the microwave.

The food having dispelled Sierra's hold on space, Millie reflects on an affinity she feels with her grandmother based on a shared lived experience between being an Asian American immigrant woman and being an Asian American trans woman. Eating the steaming pork bun, Millie recalls telling her grandmother she was brave to leave Vietnam for the United States, to which her grandmother responded with laughter. Her grandmother responded, "Brave? No, not brave. You do because you have to. Oh, you give things up, but maybe find new things, too" (61). Engaged by steamed meat and memory, Millie feels "a new connection" between herself, her grandmother, and her family, seeing "her own life and identity, for the first time, as an immigrant" (61-62). Connecting her own transition to her grandmother's immigration, Millie reflects on the unexpected aspects of her life as an Asian American trans woman: "She thought about Sierra, and about her other friends, too: gay, queer, trans, Goths, poets - friends who sometimes she just didn't understand, but who really meant well. *Oh, you give things up but maybe you find new things, too*" [emphasis hers] (62). The time Millie spends with her grandmother thus points her toward a shared trajectory of travel, immigration, and looking toward the future. It is here where Millie offers the toast that forms the title of the story: "*To the New World!*" (62).

Through these dynamics, Aoki provides knowledge about three aspects of futurebound care. First, futurebound care is present in Millie caring for her grandmother. In suspending Sierra's demand and preparing the kind of food that her grandmother would prefer, Millie conjures up vivid memories that create an open space for her grandmother to live on and engage with Millie's world. Second, in opening up this space of care, Millie is also allowing her grandmother to care for her. The memories of her grandmother provide Millie with an open outlook towards her future and the possibilities it might hold for her new world. Third, through these two dynamics, futurebound care also becomes a means of self-care. By maintaining a relationship to her grandmother, Millie is also providing the care she needs to continue onwards in light of her transition. Aoki thus not only highlights intersections between race, trans experience, and immigration in the context of futurebound care, but also elucidates a complex framework in which the care of another is entwined with self-care. Futurebound care, like

assumptive care, is inflected by our social position and our dynamic ties with others. This futurebound care even includes a place for Sierra. After offering the toast to the new world sustained by her grandmother, Millie thinks again of Sierra and the care Millie might offer to her, noting that “Sierra seemed like she needed to talk” and could use some education about trans men (62). Millie’s practice of futurebound care thus includes an open space for Sierra too, booming voice and all.

Conclusion: Trans Literature and Trans Knowledge

In this essay, I argued that looking at trans literature can provide knowledge about care ethics in its spatial dimensions. Specifically, I have drawn out insights about assumptive and futurebound care, which close or open another’s space, time, world, and future. To explain this, I looked at Casey Plett’s and Ryka Aoki’s short stories as a source of knowledge about care as it is short-circuited by transphobia and racism, or enabled by giving the other space beyond assumptions and taking action to help them flourish. I believe the rich discussions of care that I have been able to develop from just three stories in trans literature is evidence not only that trans women are complex ethical knowers, but also that trans literature is a helpful companion to trans philosophy and feminist philosophy more broadly. While I hope to revisit the field of trans literature more critically in future essays to discuss the political economy of its production, which itself can manifest in a short-circuited care, I appreciate that the reader cared enough to follow along as I explored some of the dimensions that has made trans literature vital for me over the past few years.

<1> Discussing assumptive care and futurebound care in the context of Lugones was suggested to me by Talia Bettcher.

<2> A “deadname” refers to a trans person’s previous name that is no longer used.

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