

*I have 13 close family members. In those 13 people, I included some people I am not extremely close to, but someone I love tremendously loves them. I believe that is how love goes, and that is how family is defined.*

My mother raised me. Through rough financial times, I had jam-packed summers of free New York Parks and Recreation activities. When I was seven, my brother was born. We have been a trio for nearly 11 years. We sit at dinner tables, and joke about our past, present and future. We are very close. My mother has taken me around and exposed me to so much. She lights the fire under my belt to be “a mover and a shaker.” My mom has worked for parts of my life, but most of her time has been dedicated to raising us.

My father has been a crucial part of my life. I can remember going shopping, begging for toys, later to become jewelry and then clothes. I just “needed” so many things, and I always “needed” something. Our quality time was based on adventurous car rides, my music, and his constant purchases. My father and I frequented the movies, enjoyed countless meals together, and spent sedentary time together.

My mother’s side is filled with strong women. I was the fifth generation in the first four years of my life. Nana, my great-great-grandma, passed when I was four. She left Czechoslovakia and told her future husband to come if he chose. He ultimately followed her and they made a life for themselves in New York. She was a highly independent woman. Her predecessors followed suit. Nanny, my great-grandma, a widowed mother of three young girls, maintained a family and a career after being left with nothing. In her forties, she got a college degree, something she did not need for her job. She wanted it for herself. Mimi, my grandma, gave birth to my mother at 18. Mimi went on to be an Emergency Medicine physician. She is a distinguished researcher in her practice. My mother is a great woman. She has given all her energies to us. Her professional career has been put on hold for my brother and me. Every woman on my mother’s side divided themselves between motherhood and their profession, except my mother.

A popular story that has been told to me frequently is when I was baffled by the idea that male doctors existed. Mimi was a doctor and she had female doctor friends. I was exposed to only a single story. (Chimamanda Adichie) It happened to be the story of a minority group. Most children are raised unconsciously believing men are the only doctors. I was raised by strong fierce women and did not even recognize men as holding the same careers.

My grandpa, Tommy, and I were very close. He made my favorite meals—Kraft macaroni and cheese, and eggs and bacon. He told me stories throughout my childhood. I could count on his presence and support. Tommy and my father have many similarities; both men are very laid back. The women in my family are very hands-on and expressive. Tommy and I have a very comfortable relationship. I can count on him always.

My father and his mother, Lela, have always been very close. She passed away a few weeks ago. It has devastated the family. I am not sure what I will return to. She was what held together my father and his sister, Aida, whom Lela lived with. Lela came to the United States, and her husband died a few years later. My father has provided much of the financial support. Aida’s

daughter, Lety, and I had an intimate sibling relationship. When I was with my father, I was with Lela who lived with Aida and Lety is her daughter. Lety is a stunning woman, who played Barbie's with me. I idolized her my entire childhood. She is now married and gave birth about a month ago. I include her child, Mia, in my family of thirteen because I hope to be close with her. Whenever Lety and I were together, Louie was around. We were never particularly close, but I do love him dearly. My father also has a daughter, who now lives in Florida. She means so much to my father, but they have a distant relationship.

The diversity of my family scared me for much of my life. I felt I had no clear identity, and often still feel that way. I was not "mixed," but that word seems the most fitting. My mother is fair-skinned; she is Puerto Rican and Czechoslovakian. My brother is half-black. My grandmother is Czechoslovakian and my grandpa is a white man from Louisiana. I am brown. My father is just as dark as my brother. Our family portrait is not simple.

I am brown and white, the different cultures are very apparent in my life. The foods I eat, the behaviors, the interactions all change dramatically in each household and on each side of my family. Most clearly, I am a Latina woman, but it is something I do not truly embrace. My closest friends are black. I find myself outside of the Latino culture.

Until I was about 15, I loved shopping in malls. I loved shopping at *H&M* and *Forever 21*. I loved going to the movies. I could care less about the gas we wasted on going on highly consumerist escapades. When I was 15, I began buying into the thrift shopping culture. My father was unaccustomed to my leaving stores empty-handed. We, all of a sudden, had no purpose for driving to malls. We also had difficulty relating to one another.

A large blockade was put in between us. I did not want to spend his money, because he continually complained about the strains on his financial state. (My parents were simultaneously going through a child support case, followed by a divorce.) I was not interested in the shopping we did together. I also began reading about the food industry and I altered my eating habits. We frequently drank Pepsi, ate burgers, and ate chocolate together. It was a tense time in our relationship. I was growing up.

My mother, brother, and I lived with my grandparents for eight years. My grandparents moved back to Louisiana at the same time my parents were in and out of the courts. I was raised in the same house with the same people for most of my life. My father was welcome in that house, my friends came to that house and it quickly changed. My parents refused to speak to one another and my grandparents had moved very far. My physical home was changed dramatically and the people closest to me changed dramatically.

I have grown up in the Bronx, but do not feel connected to its culture. It is my place of residence, but not the place I feel safest. (Safety defined by comfort or hominess, not by security.) My parents fighting in the courts, my grandparents moving away and us moving to an apartment was quite a shock. Everything was in a state of change.

I was in a state of change. My father and I could no longer engage in material expenditure. I was growing up. I did not want to go to large retail stores. I did not want to go to the movies. I did not

want to eat meat. I wanted to lose weight. We could no longer communicate about things that we never needed to discuss. Almost as though nothing existed between my father and me.

Events were once held where all 13 people were housed in one roof. That no longer is a possibility. It makes me sad.

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Research path:

In an effort to understand my family challenges, I turn to powerful female artists.

Adrian Piper is a conceptual artist. Her early works deal heavily with race and identity. She speaks of injustice and racial discomfort. Piper is a light-skinned black woman. That experience is clearly expressed in her calling card piece:

*"Dear Friend,*

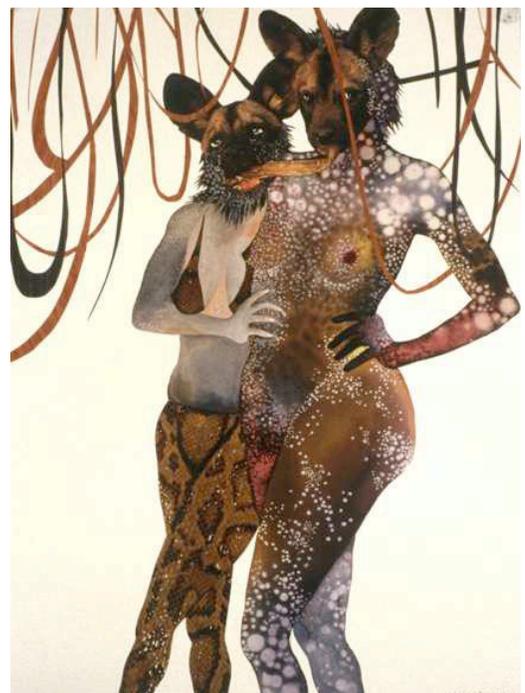
*I am black.*

*I am sure that you did not realize this when you made/laughed at/agreed with that racist remark. In the past, I have attempted to alert white people to my racial identity in advance. Unfortunately, this invariably causes them to react to me as pushy, manipulative, or socially inappropriate. Therefore, my policy is to assume that white people do not make these remarks, even when they believe there are no black people present, and to distribute this card when they do. I regret any discomfort my presence is causing you, just as I am sure you regret the discomfort your racism is causing me."*

People assumed they could speak openly about their prejudices around her, but they misconstrued her identity.

Kara Walker is a modern painter who explores race, gender, violence and sexuality. She often shows black women in compromising positions, in which they are forcibly relinquishing all power to white men. She is famous for her silhouettes. The subject matter is historically charged and poignant, leaving the viewer in a state of shock.

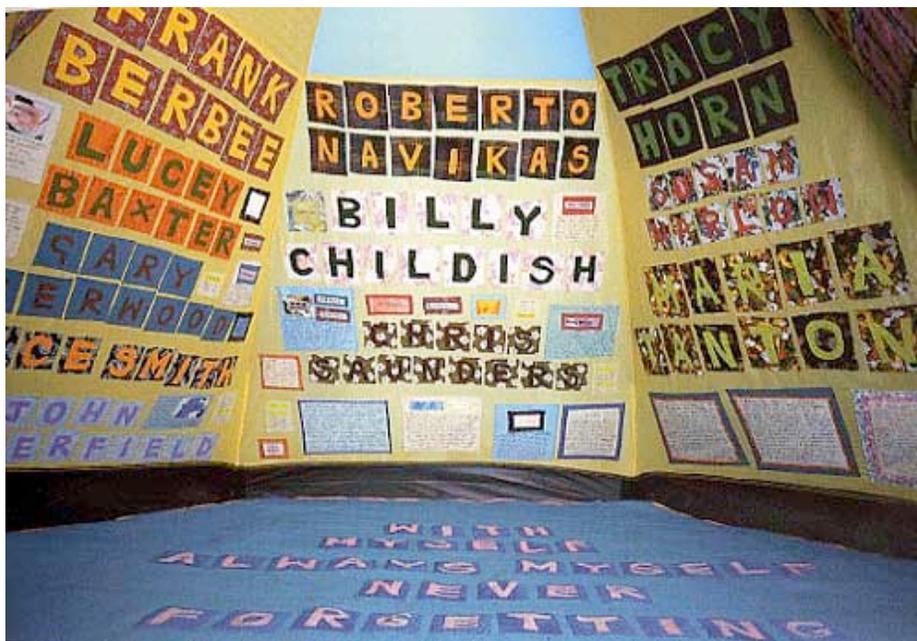
Wangechi Mutu explores similar topics of male inflicted pain on black women. She collages the lives of black women, featuring dependence, companionship and intricacies. Her work is layered, including femininity, war and molestation. Mutu touches on her own identity struggles in her work, including discussion of civil war and its effect on the women of her country, Kenya.



Wangechi Mutu, "Intertwined", 2003, 24 3/4 x 21 3/4 inches (framed)

The play, *For Colored Girls Who Have Considered Suicide When the Rainbow is Enuf* deals with gender, relationships and pain. Playwright Ntozake Shange writes about invisible scars of women (similar to Mutu), self-inflicted or inflicted by a partner. Shange's play forced me to think of my family, and strong women who have struggled. Shange's characters do not directly reflect the hardships of my family; however, there are identifiable commonalities.

Tracey Emin painted all the names of people she slept with on a tent. It included lovers, friends and family members. Emin's work excites me about the stages of a woman's life. It speaks of entering life dependent on family, later to become friends and then lovers.



*Everyone I Have Ever Slept With 1963–1995*, Tracey Emin

I also read the book *Like Water for Chocolate* by Laura Esquivel. The main character, Tita, is heartbroken and quilts as a way to find her sanity. This was my first experience of quilting as a healing practice.

A documentary *Quilts of Gee's Bend* discusses quilting in a small county of Alabama. The small community is peripheral. The 42 quilters can trace their ancestry to the same master, many still have his last name, Pettway. Quilting has been part of their history since slavery in Gee's Bend. The aging women make intricate patterns of quilts, celebrating the lives of lost ones, or purely from their imagination. Quilts are integral parts of their lives—fully functional, decorative and generating some income. They received world recognition after an art historian tracked them down after seeing a quilt.

I want to quilt to savor the family I had. I lost the unit I had counted on for my entire life. My largest heartbreak has been the separation of family. In an effort to heal, I elected to make a celebratory piece of the family I treasure. The shades of color and interconnectedness of us all. I knit the members of my family (past and present) as squares (13x13). I started with one straight line of them. Then the distinction into two distinct groups, followed by pairs and then them as individuals. I believe each person has taught me something, but the overall unit is most successful.

## Annotated Bibliography

"Chimamanda Adichie: The Danger of a Single Story." *TED: Ideas worth Spreading*. July 2009. Web. 06 May 2012. <<http://www.ted.com/talkschimamandaadichthedangerofasinglestory.html>>. Chimamanda is a revolutionary writer who speaks of the solitary nature of the world. The tremendous stretch of the media in reinforcing core and peripheral groups.

"Janine Antoni." PBS. PBS, 2003. Web. 06 May 2012. <<http://www.pbs.org/art21/artists/janine-antoni>>. Antoni is a renowned sculptor and performance artist. She challenges the status quo of the artist and the female.

"El Anatsui: Gawu." El Anatsui: Gawu | Artworks. NMAfA Exhibits. Web. 06 Mar. 2012. <<http://africa.si.edu/exhibits/gawu/artworks.html>>. Gawu creates traditional Ghanaian art out of found materials, most frequently alcoholic beverage material. His work is controversial in Ghana because it is as much a celebration as a critique.

Bourgeois, Louise. *The Fabric Works*. Skira Editore S.p.A., 2010. Bourgeois's work deals with the human body. The female body and its changes...its molds and folds, the covering and the universality of womanhood. She uses fabric to enhance this. She was a sculptor, and in my eyes, a performance artist. At the most basic level, fabric is a feminine object that involves hemming, sewing, and quilting.

"Elinor Carucci Photography Art Gallery - Index." Elinor Carucci Photography Art Gallery - Index. Web. 10 Apr. 2012. <<http://www.elinorcarucci.com/>>. A relational photographer, family is a large portion of her work. Some work is in the nude creating a very inviting and open environment for the subject and the viewer.

Esquivel, Laura. *Like Water for Chocolate*. First Anchor Books, 1989. This is a novel about a heartbroken woman who creates an endless quilt.

Emin, Tracey. *Everyone I Have Ever Slept With 1963–1995*. Destroyed in a fire, this multimedia piece is a tent with all the people Emin slept with on the inside.

"Wendy Ewald." Wendy Ewald. Literacy Through Photography. Web. 01 Apr. 2012. <<http://www.wendyewald.com/>>. Ewald is a photojournalist who gives her subject a voice. She quotes them and places their words on their photograph.

Francis, Carol. *Artistic Nude Photography*. Inspire Monkey, 2010. Francis is a photographer who compiled a list of stunning nude portraits. She pulled work from various artists, truly uncovering the human form. The scenes are traumatic, but in no way pornographic.

"Sally Mann." Sally Mann. Web. 06 May 2012. <<http://sallymann.com/>>.

A renowned photographer of family and self, Mann watched her children grow behind the lenses of a camera and documented those changes.

"Ingrid Mwangi." Home. Web. 20 Apr. 2012. <[http://www.ingridmwangi.de/\\_/home.html](http://www.ingridmwangi.de/_/home.html)>. Mwangi works with her body and body painting. Her most famous work is the spray tan of the African continent on her womb. She depicts art of home and hope, moving forward. She keeps a fluid and transparent conversation with the viewer.

"APRAF Berlin: Adrian Piper." APRAF Berlin: Adrian Piper. Foundation Berlin. Web. 07 May 2012. <[http://www.adrianpiper.com/adrian\\_piper.shtml](http://www.adrianpiper.com/adrian_piper.shtml)>. Piper is a conceptual artist whose work originated in a quest for identity.

"Lee Price: American Figurative Realist Oil Painter." Lee Price: American Figurative Realist Oil Painter. [www.websiteforartists.com](http://www.websiteforartists.com). Web. 28 April 2012. <<http://www.leepricestudio.com/>>. Price paints herself in fantastical situations. She is most frequently consuming food in an aggressive manner. She is famous for her work in bathtubs. It allows the viewership to delve into the romantic world of consumption.

"Faith Ringgold." Faith Ringgold. Art in Context Center for Communications, 01 Jan. 2002. Web. 06 Apr. 2012. <<http://www.faithringgold.com/>>. A Harlem-based story quilter, her designs are intricate and universal. She depicts black women as a source of tremendous power. She presents scenes that anyone can respond to. Her work is lively and filled with hope and light.

Shange, Ntozake. *For Colored Girls Who Have Considered Suicide When the Rainbow is Enuf*. Macmillan Publishing, 1975

This is an experimental play about the layers of the Black female experience.

Walker, Kara. *Narratives of a Young Negress*. M.I.T. Press, 2003

Walker is a painter. She depicts rape scenes that are embedded in racial tension. She includes written work for further description. She eloquently paints the idea of sexually advanced youth and the (white) man who has no control.

Wilson, Ernest III. *Wack! Art and Feminist Revolution*. M.I.T. Press, 2007

This is a compilation of influential female artists during the feminist revolution until present day.

Woodman, Francesca. *Francesca Woodman* (exhibition). SFMOMA, 2012

Woodman's photographic genius is inspiring. Art that compels me is the content. She places herself carefully in scenes that fit the picture. Each image is powerful.