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# **The Politics of Inside/Out: Queer Theory, Poststructuralism, and a Sociological Approach to Sexuality**

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*This paper outlines the main tenets of poststructuralism and considers how they are applied by practitioners of queer theory. Drawing on both Michel Foucault and Jacques Derrida, queer theory explores the ways in which homosexual subjectivity is at once produced and excluded within culture, both inside and outside its borders. This approach is contrasted with more sociological studies of sexuality (labeling theory, social constructionism). Whereas queer theory investigates the relations between heterosexuality and homosexuality, sociologists tend to examine homosexual identities and communities, paradoxically ignoring the social construction of heterosexuality. Poststructuralism can inform a sociological approach to sexuality by emphasizing the generative character of all sexual identities.*

*A sociological study of sexuality which is informed by poststructuralism would examine the exclusions implicit in a heterosexual/homosexual opposition. In this process, bisexual and transgender identities can become viable cultural possibilities, and a broad-based political coalition established. Whereas mainstream sociology focuses on the ways in which homosexuals are outside social norms, and whereas queer theory exploits the ways in which this outside is already inside, this perspective suggests that a critical sexual politics seeks to move beyond an inside/outside model.*

The domain of knowledge known as “queer theory” has developed at an astonishing pace over the past decade. Yet for social scientists and historians, much of this research may seem to be of questionable import. Most of queer theory is firmly located in the humanities—in departments of literature, film, and cultural studies.<sup>1</sup> At the same time, this research is heavily influenced by poststructuralism, an area of inquiry considered to be textualist, theoretically elite, and politically suspect by many Anglo-American social scientists (Anderson 1983; Dews 1987; Palmer 1990). Against the grain of such objections, I hope to demonstrate how these theories can be useful for both social research and politics.

The paper is divided into several sections. I begin with an overview of poststructuralist thought, outlining its approach to the human sciences and its political ramifications. I then consider the ways in which queer theory has been influenced by poststructuralism. I conclude with a discussion of the implications of poststructuralist queer theory for sociological studies of nonheterosexuality.

## **POSTSTRUCTURALISM: FRAMING SUBJECTS**

*Poststructuralism* is a term associated with the writings of French theorists Michel Foucault and Jacques Derrida.<sup>2</sup> It refers to a manner of interpreting selves and the social which

<sup>1</sup> See, for example, Warner (1991) and Piontek (1992). As Escoffier (1990) points out, the disciplines of history and sociology have been central in the historical development of American lesbian and gay studies.

<sup>2</sup> The labels *poststructuralism* and *postmodernism* are frequently used interchangeably within Anglo-American

breaks with traditional epistemologies. In the context in which Foucault and Derrida first began publishing their work, the dominant understanding of agency and structure ascribed intentionality to the subject.<sup>3</sup> This idea has been influential throughout modern Western thought, and gained a stronghold with the advent of Cartesian philosophy. Descartes (1963) argued that the rational, independent subject is the ground of both ontology (being) and epistemology (theories of knowledge). In other words, individuals as free-thinking subjects are the basis on which one conceives political and moral action. In philosophical terms, this approach is known as foundationalist.

Poststructuralism challenges this assumption. It argues that subjects are not the autonomous creators of themselves or their social worlds. Rather, subjects are embedded in a complex network of social relations. These relations in turn determine which subjects can appear where, and in what capacity. The subject is not something prior to politics or social structures, but is precisely constituted in and through specific sociopolitical arrangements. Poststructuralism contends that a focus on the individual as an autonomous agent needs to be “deconstructed,” contested, and troubled.<sup>4</sup> Foundationalism obscures the historical arrangements which engender the very appearance of independent subjects. Whereas “modern” theories posit agents as the source of knowledge and action, poststructuralists maintain that they are effects of a specific social and cultural logic. The challenge, then, is to make sense of the ways in which subjectivities are at once framed and concealed. How is this achieved, and to what political end? A brief consideration of Foucault and Derrida will help to answer this question.

In *The History of Sexuality*, Foucault ([1976] 1980) examines the organization of sexuality in the West. He begins his analysis with a powerful critique of what he terms “the repressive hypothesis” (1980:15). Conventional understandings of Western sexuality appeal to the repressive nature of Victorian society. Sexuality is a taboo, something about which nothing can be said. Silence and censorship are the law. In contrast to this view, Foucault suggests that sexuality is talked about all the time in Victorian society. From the rise of sexology to judicial institutions, sexuality is a profusely discussed and regulated entity. It is something which is produced through discourse, not repressed through censorship. If this is so, the question of silence itself must be reconsidered.

One of the most significant aspects of Foucault’s research centers around the production of the homosexual. The proliferation of discourses on sexuality gave rise to the category “homosexual.” Originally a taxonomic device employed within sexology, the term subsequently gained currency in judicial and psychiatric fields of knowledge. By demonstrating that “homosexuals” did not exist before this classification (although homosexual practices certainly did), Foucault shows us that social identities are effects of the ways in

social sciences. They have some things in common (most especially an antifoundationalist approach), but there are also significant variances between these approaches. Foucault and Derrida are habitually associated with poststructuralism. Whereas Jean-François Lyotard (1979) and Jean Baudrillard (1981) perhaps best exemplify a specifically postmodern method. It is important not to conflate these two perspectives. Judith Butler raises this issue in asking the rhetorical question “Is the effort to colonize and domesticate these theories [Lyotard and Derrida] under the sign of the same, to group them synthetically and masterfully under a single rubric, a simple refusal to grant the specificity of these positions, an excuse not to read, and not to read closely?” (1992:5).

This paper will address only the field loosely known as poststructuralism in relation to queer theory.

<sup>3</sup> Both Foucault and Derrida have extensive training in phenomenology, particularly through the work of the German philosophers Martin Heidegger ([1927] 1962) and Edmund Husserl ([1939] 1962).

<sup>4</sup> “To deconstruct” is employed in a variety of ways: the most common loosely designates some sort of critical thinking. This use of *deconstruct* (conjugated as a verb) is premised on an understanding of the exercise as some exposure of error. Thus we often hear phrases such as “deconstructing postmodernism and gender relations,” “deconstructing nationalism,” and “deconstructing sociology.” In Derrida’s use of the term, however, deconstruction refers to an analysis which examines the production of truths. (For more on this distinction, see Derrida 1967.) Leitch (1983) discusses how a reduction of deconstruction to the exposure of error engenders formulaic applications of deconstructivist methods.

which knowledge is organized. He observes the politically ambiguous characters of the discursive formation of "the homosexual":

There is no question that the appearance in nineteenth-century psychiatry, jurisprudence, and literature of a whole series of discourses on the species and subspecies of homosexuality, inversion, pederasty, and "psychic hermaphroditism" made possible a strong advance of social controls into this area of "perversity"; but it also made possible the formation of a "reverse" discourse: homosexuality began to speak in its own behalf, to demand that its legitimacy or "naturalness" be acknowledged, often in the same vocabulary, using the same categories by which it was medically disqualified (1980:101).

Foucault offers an account of the social production of identities which are assumed to be natural in current dominant knowledges.<sup>5</sup>

Jacques Derrida offers a somewhat different perspective on poststructuralism, through his concept of supplementarity.<sup>6</sup> This refers to a way of thinking about how meanings are established. "Supplement" suggests that meanings are organized through difference, in a dynamic play of presence and absence. Derrida elaborates on the notion:

[S]upplementarity, which is *nothing*, neither a presence nor an absence, is neither a substance nor an essence of man [sic]. It is precisely the play or presence and absence, the opening of this play that no metaphysical or ontological concept can comprehend (1976:244).

Derrida maintains that a focus on this play is useful because it reveals that what appears to be outside a given system is always already fully inside it; that which seems to be natural is historical. We can better understand the workings of supplementarity if we consider the opposition of heterosexuality to homosexuality. A Derridean perspective would argue that heterosexuality needs homosexuality for its own definition: a macho homophobic male can define himself as "straight" only in opposition to that which he is not—an effeminate gay man. Homosexuality is not excluded from such homophobia; it is integral to its very assertion.

Consider Derrida's (1967) criticisms of the manner in which Lévi-Strauss (1955) juxtaposes nature and culture. In a discussion of the Nambikwara culture of South America, Lévi-Strauss states that the Nambikwara could not write; they communicated through the medium of speech. Writing, should it enter into this society, would be post-speech. Derrida, however, employs the term *writing* in an extended sense to refer not merely to the inscription of graphematic elements on a page, but also to broader processes of inscription—taxonomy, classification, arrangement. He thus maintains (1967:158) that members of the Nambikwara culture are distinguished through the use of proper names. Vincent Leitch provides a useful summary of the differences between Lévi-Strauss's narrow concept of writing and Derrida's extended employment of the term:

That writing is present in Nambikwara culture goes without saying. Everyone in the community, for instance, has a proper name; that is to say, everyone is differentiated in a classification system. Lévi-Strauss knows this, but his ethnocentric concept of writing blinds him to such pervasive writing. He is naive (1983:35).

<sup>5</sup> Researchers interested in discourse analysis might wish to consult Foucault's (1972) text on methodology, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*.

<sup>6</sup> Supplementarity is only one concept advanced by Derrida to make his point. There are many others, including *pharmakon*, *dissémination*, *grammatology*, *arche-écriture*, and *trace*. I will focus on the idea of the supplement because it has been instrumental in the development of queer theory.

Derrida goes on to relate a speech/writing opposition to one of nature/culture.<sup>7</sup> By figuring speech as a self-present, “original” process, Lévi-Strauss aligns it with the axis of nature. “Writing,” in contrast, is a derivative, cultural element and thus one which could be imposed on a more primordial, natural state of being (i.e., speech). Derrida locates in these binaries a nostalgic longing for nature, a Rousseauistic desire for a community unfettered by the violence of cultural systems such as writing. Yet it is only in first privileging speech as “natural” that Lévi-Strauss can make this claim. For Derrida, this represents one of the most dangerous moves anthropology could make: the imposition of ethnocentric interpretive categories in an analysis ostensibly claiming to be anti-ethnocentric:

Now, ethnology—like any science—comes about within the element of discourse. And it is primarily a European science employing traditional concepts, however much it may struggle against them. Consequently, whether he likes it or not—and this does not depend on a decision on his part—the ethnologist accepts into his discourse the premises of ethnocentrism at the very moment he denounces them ([1967] 1978:287).

Like Foucault, Derrida is drawing attention to the conditions of possibility for interpretation. The distinction Lévi-Strauss makes between nature and culture rests on a particular understanding of “writing,” one inflected with specific historical and cultural biases. Derrida demonstrates that the opposition breaks down. He emphasizes that the term Lévi-Strauss claims to be “present”—i.e., speech—is possible only given its relation to what we do not see—i.e., writing. “Writing” is not exterior to the Nambikwara, but fully inside its taxonomic arrangements. The notion of supplementarity is employed to explain these workings between inside and out.

In contemporary theory, this analysis is known as “deconstruction”—the illustration of the implicit underpinnings of a particular binary opposition. Deconstruction seeks to make sense of how these relations are at once the condition and the effect of all interpretation. The play between presence and absence is the *condition* of interpretation, insofar as each term depends on the other for its meaning. Supplementarity is the *effect* of interpretation because binary oppositions, such as that of speech and writing, are actualized and reinforced in every act of meaning-making. Derrida points out this double bind: we are always within a binary logic, and whenever we try to break out of its stranglehold, we reinscribe its very basis.

## QUEER THEORY: THE POLITICS OF INSIDE/OUT

Poststructuralism has had an important influence on the development of queer theory.<sup>8</sup> For example, Derrida’s notion of supplementarity figures centrally in these debates. One of the landmark texts in queer theory is titled *Inside/Out: Lesbian Theories, Gay Theories* (Fuss 1991a). As Diana Fuss explains in her introduction, the supplement is invoked to make sense of the relations between heterosexuality and homosexuality:

<sup>7</sup> Here Derrida continues his critique of a speech/writing binary in the work of the Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure (1972).

<sup>8</sup> The collocation “queer theory” refers to American, humanities-based knowledge. As several critics have pointed out (Escoffier 1990; Piontek 1992; Warner 1991), this naming has tended to obscure social scientific contributions to the debates. In the United States, the works of Esther Newton (1972) and Johnathon Ned Katz (1976) have been formative in the development of lesbian and gay studies. In English Canada, lesbian and gay studies is located primarily in the social sciences. For a representative selection of English Canadian research, see Adam (1985, 1987), Kinsman (1987), Valverde (1985), and Valverde and Weir (1985).

The philosophical opposition between “heterosexual” and “homosexual,” like so many other conventional boundaries, has always been constructed on the foundations of another related opposition: the couple “inside” and “outside”. . . .

To the extent that the denotation of any term is always dependent on what is exterior to it (heterosexuality, for example, typically defines itself in critical opposition to that which it is not: homosexuality), the inside/outside polarity is an indispensable model for helping us to understand the complicated workings of semiosis (1991b:1).

The articles collected in *Inside/Out* suggest the various ways in which heterosexuality and homosexuality are mutually dependent, yet antagonistic. Queer theory is interested in exploring the borders of sexual identities, communities, and politics. How do categories such as “gay,” “lesbian,” and “queer” emerge? From what do they differentiate themselves, and what kinds of identities do they exclude? How are these borders demarcated, and how can they be contested? What are the relations between the naming of sexuality and political organization it adopts, between identity and community? Why is a focus on the discursive production of social identities useful? How do we make sense of the dialectical movement between inside and outside, heterosexuality and homosexuality?

Fuss (1991b) elaborates on these questions in her comments on Foucault (1980). The production of homosexuality in legal and medical discourse engendered a paradox: although the adoption of homosexual identity allowed for the guarantee of civil rights, it brought with it the notion of the closet<sup>9</sup>—that is, the idea that some people are “visible” about their sexualities while others remain silent. In other words, the emergence of homosexuality was accompanied by its disappearance (Fuss 1991b:4). One could declare oneself to be an “out” lesbian, gay, or bisexual, but this affirmation was possibly only given two related assumptions: the centrality of heterosexuality, and the existence of gays, bisexuals, and lesbians who were not out—that is, those who were “in the closet.”

What is noteworthy about this example is the impossibility of locating oneself “outside” the dominant discourse. An attempt to declare oneself to be *out* of the closet marks nonheterosexuals who are presumably *inside*. In efforts to define a sexual identity *outside* the norm, one needs first to place oneself *inside* dominant definitions of sexuality. In Fuss’s words, these gestures represent “a transgression of the border which is necessary to constitute the border as such” (1991b:3).

Queer theory recognizes the impossibility of moving outside current conceptions of sexuality. We cannot assert ourselves to be entirely outside heterosexuality, nor entirely inside, because each of these terms achieves its meaning in relation to the other. What we can do, queer theory suggests, is negotiate these limits. We can think about the *how* of these boundaries—not merely the fact that they exist, but also how they are created, regulated, and contested. The emphasis on the production and management of heterosexuality and homosexuality characterizes the poststructuralist queer theory project. Two examples will make this point clearer.

D.A. Miller (1991) argues that in Alfred Hitchcock’s film *Rope*, homosexuality can only be implied. Miller draws on Roland Barthes’s (1965) distinction between connotative and denotative meanings, wherein denotation refers to something literal while connotation is a kind of secondary meaning, which hints at (yet never quite confirms) a literal, denotative possibility. In *Rope*, Miller contends, homosexuality is connotative: it is present everywhere, yet never articulated as such. This means that homosexuality is always inside mainstream cinema, but never visibly so. Miller is aware that the operations of inside and

<sup>9</sup> Eve Sedgwick (1990) provides a more detailed examination of “the closet” within Western epistemologies.

out are complex and contradictory. Although homosexuality may be only implied, at the same time it is that absence which we viewers wish to see.

Although *Rope* does not specify gay sexual relations, it also does not explicitly prohibit them, because this prohibition at least would recognize a homosexual possibility (Miller 1991:124–25, 140, note 8). It is this refusal to specify—or deny—which Miller examines. He maintains that this ambiguity is something a critical reading practice can exploit: the absence of homosexual denotation is what keeps us looking. In other words, by only implying homosexual identities, the film induces its viewers to wonder about their viability. Far from negating nonheterosexuality, such a structure makes it central to the narrative, because it is that unseen entity for which we search. Thus Miller demonstrates that what appears to be outside a given text is always already inside it. His position makes critical use of both Foucault and Derrida: he shows the textual production of homosexual subjectivity, and goes further to situate this position within the broader network of relations to which it belongs.

Alexander Doty (1993) takes up Miller's use of connotation and denotation, and applies it to contemporary mass cultural phenomena. He reads television sitcoms such as *Laverne and Shirley* as sites which embody queer desire. Even though the main characters of these programs are defined as heterosexual, Doty observes that the men to whom they relate are habitually overlooked. For example, when Shirley marries Army surgeon Walter Meany, she "immediately turns to hug and kiss Laverne, as Walter is excluded from the shot" (Doty 1993:56). Through the camera's gaze, Doty maintains that the sitcom is centrally concerned with lesbianism. The fact that Walter is rarely in the narrative after his marriage to Shirley confirms this commitment to women-centered relations. Doty focuses on these kinds of narrative and cinematic devices to highlight the presence of queer elements within these supposedly "straight" settings.

Doty contends that queerness pervades all cultural productions: it is not a space limited to lesbians, gay men, and/or bisexuals; it is a position available to everyone. If we allow this possibility, Doty suggests, we can think about different strategies for interpreting mass culture:

Since the consumption, uses, and discussion of mass culture as queers still find us moving between being on the "inside" and the "outside" of straight culture's critical language, representational codes, and market practices, we are in a position to refuse, confuse, and redefine the terms by which mass culture is understood by the public and in the academy (1993:102).

Here Doty remarks on the double bind of interpretation with regard to sexuality. Although normative heterosexuality continually reproduces itself through the media, it does so by relegating homosexuality to a parenthetical status. To denote bisexual, lesbian, and gay identities would be to refuse this marginalization. Doty contends that nonheterosexuals are at once outside and inside hegemonic heterosexuality. Highlighting the manner in which these locations are mutually dependent makes it clear that the definition of categorical boundaries is problematic. Doty is not merely making a call for lesbians, gay men, and bisexuals to proclaim that they are "inside"; he is asking us to think about the social construction of an inside/outside opposition. Instead of promoting an assertion of lesbian, gay, and/or bisexual identity, Doty investigates the cultural assumptions hidden in this proposition: that an articulation of nonheterosexuality bolsters the centrality of heterosexuality itself. This focus on the production of a hetero/homo binary allows for consideration of strategies which could displace the opposition.

To those who take heterosexuality for granted within popular culture, Doty has two

things to say: 1) lesbians, gay men, and bisexuals are present within all kinds and forms of cultural representation; and 2) nonheterosexual identities need to be excluded from the public sphere if heterosexuality is to figure centrally. Like Miller, Doty draws our attention to the workings of heterosexuality and homosexuality. He demonstrates that homosexual subject-positions are inscribed practically everywhere, although they are less frequently denoted as such. A focus on this paradox—the simultaneous exclusion and presence of homosexuality—forces an examination of the manner in which heterosexuality achieves its legitimacy and apparent “naturalness.”

Queer theory labors at a juncture of inside and out. Following Foucault, it examines the discursive production of homosexual subject-positions. Drawing on Derrida’s notion of supplementarity, it interrogates the construction and regulation of borders in sexual identities, communities, and politics. Poststructuralist queer theory analyzes the manner in which cultural texts privilege heterosexuality over other sexual identities, as well as how this estimation requires homosexuality. Moreover, queer theory studies the dilemma implicit in this logic: the adoption of a “homosexual” position strengthens heterosexuality itself.

#### FROM DEVIANCE TO DIFFERENCE: TOWARDS A QUEER SOCIOLOGICAL THEORY

From the preceding examples, the field of queer theory may appear to have import only for social scientists working in cultural and media studies. It is certainly true that the domain has arisen from humanities-based sites of inquiry, and that it therefore provides readings of literary and cultural texts. A queer theory influenced by poststructuralism, however, has broader implications for sociological approaches to sexuality.

Fuss, Miller, and Doty ask about the cultural operations which relegate homosexuality to an implied, parenthetical status. Drawing from the lessons of poststructuralism, these critics analyze the different contexts in which all sexual identities are situated. This analysis diverges from social scientific studies of gay and lesbian sexualities published in the late 1970s and early 1980s.<sup>10</sup> Much of that work focused on the emergence of homosexual subject-positions or identities, often in concert with capitalism. Jeffrey Weeks (1977), for instance, provides a historical examination of homosexual identity and politics in Britain. He is undoubtedly influenced by Foucault, as evidenced by his discussion of the nineteenth-century medical model of homosexuality (1977:23–32). Like Foucault, Weeks grasps the “reverse discourse” that is possible with the introduction of homosexual identity. He traces the emergence of homosexual consciousness and community in twentieth-century Britain.

This kind of research is extremely important in affirming lesbian and gay identities and communities. Because of the absence of studies on these questions (particularly from a historical perspective), this scholarship is badly needed. Yet ironically, the attention accorded to homosexuality serves to strengthen the heterosexual/homosexual opposition even further. Although Weeks is certainly located within the framework known as social constructionism,<sup>11</sup> he focuses on the discursive production of homosexuality. What Weeks does not consider is the extent to which an affirmation of homosexuality confirms a hetero/homo opposition. In other words, he asks questions similar to Foucault’s—“What discursive processes produced the homosexual at this point in time?”—but he does not pose

<sup>10</sup> For a selection of this work, Altman (1981), d’Emilio (1983), Katz (1976), and Weeks (1977).

<sup>11</sup> Social constructionists argue that sexual identities are not natural entities, but are products of the social and historical locations in which they are located. These thinkers differ from essentialists, who believe that sexual identities are transcultural and transhistorical. See Epstein (1987), Fuss (1989), and Kinsman (1987) for an overview of social constructionist thought.

more Derridean questions—"In what ways does an adoption of homosexual identity reinforce a hetero/homo split?"

Weeks turns his attention to the formation of homosexual politics, but he ignores the broader context in which they are located—heterosexual hegemony. As Johnathon Ned Katz remarks, an exclusive emphasis on homosexuals obscures the generative character of heterosexuality:

Considering the popularity of the heterosexual idea, one imagines that tracing the notion's history would have tempted many eager scholar-beavers. The importance of analyzing the dominant term of the dominant sexual ideology seems obvious. But heterosexuality has been the idea whose time has not come. The role of the universal heterosexual hypothesis as prop to the dominant mode of sexual organization has determined its not-so-benign scholarly neglect (1990:8).

A poststructuralist queer theory, then, offers sociology an approach to studying the emergence and reproduction of heterosexuality.<sup>12</sup> Rather than designating gays, lesbians, and/or bisexuals as the only subjects or communities worthy of investigation, a poststructuralist sociology would make sense of the manner in which heterosexuality is itself a social construct.<sup>13</sup>

An emphasis on heterosexuality also expands traditional sociological approaches to sexuality, such as labeling theory. Labeling theory (McIntosh 1968; Plummer 1975) underlines the social functions of particular nominal labels. Mary McIntosh, for example, views homosexuality as a social role. For her, the name *homosexual* demarcates acceptable and unacceptable behavior, and segregates individuals into "deviant" and "normal" categories. She contends that the shift from conceptualizing homosexuality as a medical condition to viewing it as a social role is crucial, and that it will enable investigation of "the specific content of the homosexual role and . . . the organization and functions of homosexual groups" (1968:192). Like social constructionists (e.g., Weeks 1977), McIntosh submits that sociological studies of sexuality will focus on the social organization of homosexuals rather than on an individualized, psychologistic explanation of homosexual behavior.

Although the shift to a specifically social analysis of homosexuality is welcome, McIntosh ignores the social character of heterosexuality. To follow McIntosh's research program, sociologists would study lesbian and gay subcultures and communities. Yet they would not study the ways in which heterosexuality reproduces itself—whether through patrilineal kinship arrangements or ideological discourse advocating the primacy of the nuclear family. Labeling theory allows us to understand lesbian and gay communities and identities more clearly, but it sheds little light on heterosexuality.

In terms of sociological theory, poststructuralism requires that we abandon the approaches of labeling theory and/or deviance—perspectives which define gay and lesbian identities only in opposition to a natural, stabilized heterosexuality. By moving beyond a deviance model, we can understand how the cultural logic of inside and outside plays itself out in our institutional relations and practices. One example would be courses which focus on lesbians and gay men as "deviant" without examining the ways in which heterosexuality is taken for granted. In this instance, lesbian and gay difference can be

<sup>12</sup> Katz (1990) and Kinsman (1987) have begun some of this urgent work.

<sup>13</sup> Lorna Weir and Leo Casey remark that one of the problems associated with a gay male sexual liberationist politic is that it is reduced to a sexological agenda. They comment that "[a]ccess to non-traditional jobs, equal pay, day care, new forms of community and artistic practices are an integral, non-sexological part of lesbian politics" (1984:152). Weir and Casey underline the generation of heterosexual hegemony through work and the organization of the family, the community, and leisure.

framed only in opposition to the apparent “normalcy” of heterosexuality. If we focus only on the “subculture” of homosexuality, and if we never interrogate the conditions which engender its marginalization, we shall remain trapped within a theoretical framework which refuses to acknowledge its own complicity in constructing its object (or subjects) of study.

Whereas a sociology of homosexuality studies homosexual individuals and communities, a sociology of heterosexuality studies the manufacturing of heterosexist ideology in an effort to grasp how it affects all subjects—gay, lesbian, heterosexual, bisexual, and/or transgender. This latter perspective thinks not on *behalf* of homosexuals, but *in terms of* all sexual subjects—or, better, in terms of the (hetero)sexualization of all subjects. As lesbian and gay activists insist, individuals are assumed to be heterosexual unless they identify themselves otherwise. A critical sociological perspective of sexuality would examine the rhetorical, institutional, and discursive mechanisms needed to ensure that heterosexuality maintain its taken-for-granted status. Homosexuality as “deviance” gives way to homosexual difference.<sup>14</sup>

Both mainstream sociological perspectives (e.g., labeling theory) and (mainstream) gay studies (Weeks 1977) neglect the social reproduction of heterosexuality, choosing instead to focus on gay and lesbian communities. Poststructuralism is particularly useful in this light because it considers the relations between heterosexuality and homosexuality. It addresses not only the emergence and development of homosexual communities, but also the intersection of these identities within the broader context of heterosexual hegemony. By focusing on this play between inside and out, studies of sexuality move in a new direction.

A poststructuralist sociological approach to sexuality would develop the inside/outside trope of queer theory in greater depth. Although a focus on the reproduction of heterosexuality is important, a critical analysis of sexuality would also theorize which sexual identities are undermined. If it is true that the play of heterosexuality and homosexuality is pervasive, as queer theory suggests, what does this mean for those people who identify as *neither heterosexual nor homosexual*? Is the category “homosexual” the only one available to resist heterosexual hegemony? Where do bisexuals<sup>15</sup> and transgenders<sup>16</sup> fit into these debates?

The inside/outside trope has tremendous import in explaining conflicting forces which constitute (or dispute) hetero- and homosexualities. Yet this model, I suggest, can itself be too easily grafted onto preexisting sexual and gender binaries, thereby failing to take into account the range of nonheterosexual identifications available. It is noteworthy that the field of queer theory has said very little on the question of bisexuality.<sup>17</sup> Analogously,

<sup>14</sup> Perhaps we are doing nothing more here than being good Gramscians—that is, examining how consent is achieved, maintained, and resisted. Gramsci (1971) elaborates on the notion of hegemony, an ongoing process which requires the consent of social actors. For an application of Gramscian ideas in a poststructuralist context, see Laclau and Mouffe (1985).

<sup>15</sup> The category “bisexual” generally refers to individuals who have sexual relations with members of the same sex as well as with those of the “opposite” sex. See Hutchins and Kaahumanu (1991) for a comprehensive introduction to bisexuality.

<sup>16</sup> “Transgender” is used to designate the lives and experiences of a diverse group of people who live outside normative sex/gender relations (i.e., where the biology of one’s body is taken to determine how one will live and interact in the social world). The transgender community is made up of transsexuals (pre-, post-, and nonoperative), transvestites, drag queens, passing women, hermaphrodites, stone butches, and gender outlaws who defy regulatory sex/gender taxonomies. See Leslie Feinberg’s (1992a) ground-breaking pamphlet *Transgender Liberation: A Movement Whose Time Has Come* for an excellent introduction to these issues. Her novel, *Stone Butch Blues* (1992b), is equally useful in more clearly understanding the lives of transgenders.

<sup>17</sup> Intellectuals from Teresa de Lauretis (1991) to Eve Sedgwick (1990) claim to have written a theory which is “queer,” but they grant only lesbians and gay men the right to belong to that category. Although a mere disregard of bisexuals is worrisome in itself, the identity is sometimes dismissed with intensity. The fifth annual Lesbian and Gay Studies Conference at Rutgers University, for example, dropped “bisexual” from the conference

transgender subjectivity causes a curious silence.<sup>18</sup> If bisexual and transgender subject-positions are impossible, a poststructuralist sociologist would ask, what kinds of political alliances are preempted? One of the dangers involved in an exclusive consideration of heterosexuality and homosexuality is that of neglecting the diversity of sexual and gender positions available.<sup>19</sup> Consideration of recent lesbian and gay activism reveals a marked disregard of the multiplicity of nonheterosexual identities.<sup>20</sup> Often these struggles lose sight of *sexual liberation* and risk being reduced to the mere reification of gay and lesbian identities.<sup>21</sup> In this light, attention to the workings—and exclusions—of inside and out can help build a new vision of community.

A sociological queer theory informed by poststructuralism would be markedly different from either mainstream sociological approaches to sexuality or queer theory in its current garb. The move to a model of difference would provoke new insights into the continual reproduction of heterosexual hegemony. This approach offers a specifically historicized understanding of sexual identities, politics, and communities. Looking back on the past, however, does not imply that one must be reduced to it. By theorizing the workings and exclusions of inside and out, a sociological queer theory takes the political risk of expanding current borders of gay and lesbian communities. In this gesture, bisexual and transgender identities can be realized, and the basis for a broad political coalition can be established.

A sociological queer theory does more than change how sociologists study sexuality, or how queer theorists analyze culture. A sociological queer theory informed by poststructuralism also transforms the organization of contemporary sexual politics. An emphasis

title. Some intellectuals believe that bisexuality is an impossible position. Interviewed in *Outweek* magazine (Feb. 6, 1991), Eve Sedgwick claimed, "I'm not sure that because there are people who identify as bisexual there is a bisexual identity."

Even when bisexuality can be uttered, as evidenced by Doty's (1993) recent writings, it almost always remains parenthetical, in the form of a footnote. Doty himself admits that he provides "rather cursory attention to specific bisexual positions" (1993:105). Daumer (1992) raises some of the ethical challenges that bisexuality poses to lesbian feminism.

<sup>18</sup> Here, a paradox must be noted. Queer theory has witnessed an explosion of essays on the subject of drag (Butler 1990, 1991; Garber 1992; Tyler 1991); yet it remains incapable of connecting this research to the everyday lives of people who identify as transgender, drag queen, and/or transsexual. Indeed, queer theory refuses transgender subjectivities even as it looks at them. The relation, as Sedgwick frames it, is one of "drag practices and homoerotic identity formations" (Moon and Sedgwick 1990:19). In this logic, the impossibility of transgender *identities* secures the legitimacy of monosexuality.

It is interesting to contrast Marjorie Garber's (1992) treatment of transgender issues with that of Esther Newton (1972). Methodologically, Newton offers an ethnographic analysis in keeping with social scientific approaches to research.

Responding to the solipsistic character of queer theory, transsexual activists Jeanne B. and Xantra Phillippa recently produced a button reading "Our blood is on your theories." For a brilliant discussion of (post)transsexual subjectivity, see Stone (1991).

<sup>19</sup> Interestingly, the shift from "gay/lesbian" to "queer" was intended to include bisexuals and transgenders. In the field of activism, this shift was marked by groups such as Queer Nation (QN). In the academy, "queer theory" has exhibited a tense relation to the very term *queer*. Teresa de Lauretis (1991), for example, distances herself from the "queer" of QN, while most other scholars writing under the label consider only lesbian and gay subject-positions. The term *queer* has been ossified so quickly within the academy that bisexuals and transgenders must continually insist that it includes them. Duggan (1992) provides a useful introduction to queer politics and theory.

<sup>20</sup> The recent March on Washington (1993), for example, was officially titled "The 1993 March on Washington for Lesbian, Gay, and Bi Equal Rights and Liberation." The category "bisexual" was included only after intensive lobbying. Although grassroots communities included transgenders in their formative organizing activities, "transgender" was not part of the March's title. In the debate on the name, some lesbians and gay men pitted bisexuals *against* transgenders. For a more extensive analysis of these issues, see Kaahumanu (1992).

<sup>21</sup> Steven Epstein remarks that the early gay rights movement encouraged the exploration of "the homosexual in everyone" (1987:21), but that this position gave way to one which consolidated gay identity in opposition to that of heterosexuality. In the 1990s, the insides and outs of a hetero/homo polarity obscure the lives of bisexuals and transgenders, effectively preempting a broad-based political coalition working for sexual liberation. Instead, mainstream lesbian and gay activism concentrates on being *included in* the military, *in* the government, *in* the nation.

on difference enables the articulation of a variety of sexual and gender identities: transsexuals, bisexuals, drag queens, fetishists, lesbians, gay men, queers, and heterosexuals. Although such a practice remains committed to deregulating heterosexual hegemony, it also appreciates that this work can—indeed, must—take place from a variety of sites.

This stress on the multiplicity of identity expands contemporary sexual politics beyond a stagnant hetero/homo opposition. It provides people with more choices in how they define themselves, and insists on the diversity within communities of the sexually marginalized. By unsettling much of the lesbian and gay response to heterosexism, and by suggesting that many nonheterosexual positions are available, such activism focuses its attention on *displacing* heterosexuality, homosexuality, and the relations between the two. If heterosexuality is something which is taken for granted, and if the adoption of a homosexual identity only serves to bolster the strength of heterosexuality, then perhaps the most effective sites of resistance are those created by people who refuse both options. A critical sexual politics, in other words, struggles to move beyond the confines of an inside/outside model.

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