



Queer Theory for Everyone: A Review Essay

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Queer Theory for Everyone: A Review Essay

Library shelves tell interesting stories. Thirty or forty years ago, it took almost no time to get from feminism to homosexuality—in the stacks. Neither category took up much space, and few books stood between them, since the Library of Congress system classifies feminism and homosexuality together in Subclass HQ, “The Family. Marriage. Women.” That subclass has filled out rapidly in the past forty years, and in the past two decades much of the growth has been in HQ 74-77—“Bisexuality. Homosexuality. Lesbianism. Transvestism. Transexualism.” Books that once huddled together for warmth on a few shelves now proudly occupy many linear feet in most major research collections. Paralleling the growth of gay studies has been the even more substantial increase within HQ 1101-2030.7: “Women. Feminism.”¹

One ironic result of the surge in lesbian-gay studies and feminist studies is that the distance between these sections in the library has grown even as sexuality and gender have coalesced in feminist and queer scholarship. The more books there are in HQ 74 and HQ 1101, the longer it takes to get through each section, and the longer it takes to get from one to the other. That homosexuality and feminism are neighbors at all is an artifact of a classification system that absorbs both “sexual life” and “women” into “family” and “marriage,” the first two words in the overarching HQ subclass heading. Although “family” and “marriage” unite “homosexuality” and “women,” they also separate them. Between HQ74-77 and HQ 1101-2030 we find HQ503-1064: “The family. Marriage. Home.” Stuffed into those call numbers are “parents,” “single people,” “man-woman relationships,” “adultery,” “divorce,” “widows,” “gerontology,” and—as if when marriage ends, so does life—“Thanatology. Death. Dying.”

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¹ For more information on the Library of Congress’s subclasses in the social sciences, see http://www.loc.gov/catdir/cpso/lcco/lcco_h.pdf (last accessed April 5, 2005).

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It is not surprising that those who devised the Library of Congress headings in the late nineteenth century defined homosexuality as a sexual deviation to be sandwiched between bestiality and incest, on one side, and prostitution, sadism, fetishism, masturbation, and emasculation, on the other.² Nor is it astonishing that the system's inventors asserted, well before Monique Wittig, that lesbians (HQ 74.2) are not women (HQ1101; Wittig 1993, 108). Scholars may try to overturn these divisions, but classification systems designed for bookshelves transform intersections into sequences that then become hierarchies. The first term in any Library of Congress data entry is the most visible because it governs where and therefore how we see a book. A scholar may argue that at the turn of the century race, gender, and homosexuality were all mutually constitutive categories, but the book in which Siobhan B. Somerville (2000) makes this assertion is classified as first and foremost about gender identity (HQ1075.5.U6S6S: 1. Gender identity—United States—History).

Like the sexological categories Somerville analyzes, Library of Congress descriptions often reveal more about the values of the classifiers than about the books they categorize. For example, Esther Newton's *Margaret Mead Made Me Gay* (HQ76.3.U5 N49) includes several essays on the relationship between feminism and lesbianism, but the library's third subject listing for the book is "Lesbian feminism—United States." *Lesbian feminism* is a term associated much more with separatism than with the sexually mixed consciousness-raising groups Newton describes in her essays on feminism. But either out of ignorance of such nuances or in accordance with a one-drop rule of sexual deviance, the library rubric reduces Newton's account of knotty encounters between women to a single political movement and filters lesbians out of feminism: books on "lesbian feminism" are shelved with "homosexuality," not "feminism."

Those who write, read, and teach books that strain the limits of classification systems can pride themselves on how poorly those schemes reflect new ways of thinking about gender and sexuality. The library is filled with works that dissolve the dictates governing their placement. We now have the tools to pry off the labels that segregate homosexuality from the family, queer studies from feminism, and lesbians from women. This essay begins with an overview of how we acquired those tools and then inventories the equipment provided in some recent queer scholarship, most of it focused on nineteenth- and twentieth-century England, France, and the United States, for understanding not only sexuality and gender but also

² See Chan 1986 for the history and usage of the Library of Congress system.

modernity and its offshoots—science, liberalism, democracy, and consumer culture.

Genealogies of sexuality and gender

Feminism in the United States has, since the 1960s, understood sexuality as both an arena for women's liberation and as a crucial vector of women's oppression. Manifestos such as Anne Koedt's "The Myth of the Vaginal Orgasm" ([1970] 1971) and encyclopedic works such as *Our Bodies, Ourselves* (Boston Women's Health Book Collective [1970] 2005) claimed women's rights to sexual pleasure, autonomy, and knowledge. The demand for female sexual autonomy also required understanding the forces arrayed against it: hence the focus on rape, sexual harassment, and male domination in early writings by Kate Millett, Susan Brownmiller, and Catharine MacKinnon. Lesbians played an important role in those early feminist formulations, as we see in two recent collections whose essays chart the intertwined history of lesbianism and feminism since the 1960s: Newton's *Margaret Mead Made Me Gay: Personal Essays, Public Ideas* (2000) and Amber Hollibaugh's *My Dangerous Desires: A Queer Girl Dreaming Her Way Home* (2000). Both books express frustration with 1960s and 1970s feminist tenets—that heterosexuality embodies men's oppression of women, that male domination suppresses lesbian love and bonds between women, and that lesbianism liberates women from male oppression by refusing men and all things masculine. One classic formulation of those tenets was Adrienne Rich's "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence," first published in *Signs* in 1980, which summoned feminist theory to go beyond "token allusion to lesbians" (Rich [1980] 1983, 140). To do so, Rich argued, would require understanding "the institution of heterosexuality itself as a beachhead of male dominance" (141) and lesbianism as women's resistance to "male tyranny" (160). But prescribing lesbianism as an antidote to everything toxic about heterosexuality excessively sanitized lesbianism, purifying it of power, gender, and desire.³ Butch women were censured for being male-identified, and femme women were criticized for cleaving to patriarchal codes of femininity (Hollibaugh 2000, 63, 123; Newton 2000, 161, 172).

Feminist arguments about sexuality as the site of women's oppression depend on an interesting circularity: they define gender as the sexual

³ On lesbianism as a desexualized fantasy of feminism, see also de Lauretis 1994, 185, and Dever 2004.

conflict between men and women, and sexuality as the gender conflict between men and women. As a result, early feminist manifestos for lesbianism either had little to say about gay men or saw gay men as having much more in common with male oppressors than with lesbians. Rich cited “the prevalence of anonymous sex, . . . the justification of pederasty among male homosexuals,” and the “pronounced ageism” of gay men’s “standards of sexual attractiveness” as examples of the “differences” between lesbians and gay men, expressing the sense of strict sexual difference now associated with radical feminism ([1980] 1983, 157). But Rich, MacKinnon, and Brownmiller also articulated a fundamentally liberal politics, since they assumed that to deprive women of autonomy, equality, individuality, and happiness is to commit unacceptable violence on rights-bearing human beings. Feminists in the United States diagnosed sexual difference as the cause of the heterosexual conflict they aimed to eradicate, but even as they made sexual difference paramount, they also located its disappearance as the horizon of equality.

The continental versions of feminism that circulated in the United States in the 1980s through the work of H el ene Cixous, Luce Irigaray, and Julia Kristeva also took up a sexualized opposition between femininity and masculinity. Irigaray’s writings described male homosexuality in ways uncannily similar to Rich’s work. But French feminist theory was interested in neither individual liberty nor the eventual eclipse of sexual difference. For thinkers influenced by Jacques Lacan’s ideas about subjectivity, freedom was a necessary casualty and sexual difference an inescapable condition of being human. Feminists in the United States understood lesbianism as the rejection of the masculinity embedded in heterosexuality. French feminists theorized female homoeroticism as the embodiment of the feminine difference on which true heterosexuality depended but which phallocentrism suppressed. In the late 1990s, that embrace of heterosexual difference led a different set of French feminists to denounce lesbians and gay men who demanded political and social recognition. French opponents of gay marriage included conservative womanists, such as Fran oise H eritier and Sylviane Agacinski, who warned that sexual difference is the universal basis of culture and that psychic health, sound parenting, and mature sexuality flourish only when a couple unites the complementary opposites Man and Woman (see Eribon 2000; Butler 2002).

The French model of sexual difference once exerted a strong influence on U.S. feminist scholarship. In the past two decades, however, that influence has waned as psychoanalysis and deconstruction have become increasingly specialized, as students have lost interest in France, and as the fall of communism and increasing U.S. conservatism have combined to

make liberalism more appealing to progressives.⁴ Liberalism has become a prominent ingredient in arguments for the rights of women and sexual minorities. In both instances the grounds are similar: respect for difference and interest in promoting equality and autonomy. Newton, for example, includes “the right to be different without being persecuted” and “the right to a greater measure of sexual freedom and choice” among the causes gays embody (2000, 237). Claims for equality, such as the demand to legalize gay marriage, are not uncontroversial, and many queer theorists warn that equality will be the death of difference because it will force minorities to adapt themselves to a norm that was formulated to exclude them (Warner 1999). But even warnings about its homogenizing consequences affirm liberal values: nonconformity and individual dissent. Where French feminists valorize gender difference as a universal difference (Schor 1995), liberals in the tradition of John Stuart Mill value the idiosyncratic difference of the sexual minority.

The influence of liberalism provides one genealogy of how feminism, instead of dividing homosexuality into a positive feminine version and a negative masculine one, can make common cause with gay rights in the name of freedom of sexual choice. Other important factors in the rapprochement of feminism and queer theory have been the increased visibility of women in gay movements, increased contact between feminist lesbians and gay men, and the academic dialogue between queer and feminist theorists that became possible when queer scholars claimed an academic presence. In the 1980s, scholars objected to the ways that feminists like Rich and Irigaray characterized male homosexuality (Sedgwick 1985, 26; Owens 1987), and in recent years many men doing queer studies give equal weight to feminist research agendas.⁵ Parallel lines can sometimes converge. Feminist theory shifted from studying women to studying gender as a set of relations, and lesbian and gay studies analogously moved from tracing historically stable identities based on object choice to defining queerness in relation to sexual norms. Those parallel shifts have created intersections between queer and feminist scholars who now share gender and sexuality as objects of analysis.

The queer turn began as a gambit to reclaim a slur whose lack of

⁴ Henry Abelove offers a more optimistic genealogy when he argues that authors who laid the ground for gay liberation in the United States were influenced by a liberal ideology whose strength derived not from U.S. global domination but from decolonization struggles that challenged Western powers to live up to their liberal principles (2003, 70–88).

⁵ Examples include Bagemihl 1999; Goldberg 2001; Nealon 2001; and Lucey 2003.

specificity unified outlaws and outcasts of all stripes.⁶ *Queer* has become a compact alternative to *lesbian-gay-bisexual-transgender*, but it also emphasizes affinity and solidarity over identity. In this essay I use *queer* to refer to this deliberately loose, inclusive association. Like the postmodern turn in feminism, the adoption of *queer* issued a reminder that complex identifications and differences undermine identity. But despite the fanfare that heralded queer theory as an advance over lesbian and gay studies, usage has not affirmed any firm distinction between *queer* and *lesbian and gay*. While *queer* foregrounds the belief that sexual identity is flexible and unstable, *gay* and *lesbian* do not assert the contrary. *Queer* is more capacious than *lesbian and gay*, but it always includes gays and lesbians and often functions as a metonymy for *lesbian and gay*. And while queerness is supposed to signify the instability of all sexual identities, scholars who define queerness as the lability of sexual identity in general almost always do so with reference to gay identity in particular; there is little extant work on the queerness of those conventionally considered heterosexual.⁷

Despite its political advantages, *queer* has been the victim of its own popularity, proliferating to the point of uselessness as a neologism for the transgression of any norm (queering history, or queering the sonnet). Used in this sense, the term becomes confusing, since it always connotes a homosexuality that may not be at stake when the term is used so broadly. *Queerness* also refers to the multiple ways that sexual practice, sexual fantasy, and sexual identity fail to line up consistently. That definition expresses an important insight about the complexity of sexuality, but it also describes a state experienced by everyone. If everyone is queer, then no one is—and while this is exactly the point queer theorists want to make, reducing the term's pejorative sting by universalizing the meaning of *queer* also depletes its explanatory power. Used to refer to any departure from the norm, the term *queer* obscures why Matthew Shepard, Brandon Teena,

⁶ For a particularly cogent discussion of the shift from *gay and lesbian* to *queer*, see Abelow 2003. Within the gay community today, *queer* has become perfectly anodyne, although not all dictionaries register this shift in usage, and government agencies unsympathetic to gay causes have denied funding to groups that use the word *queer* on the grounds that it is a pejorative term. For gay community organizers, the suggestion that *queer* is an offensive term is perceived as an effort to suppress overt references to homosexuality by deeming them obscene; see, e.g., Meenan 2004.

⁷ For example, Leila J. Rupp (1999) asserts a belief in the indeterminacy of all sexual identity but focuses only on same-sex examples of that indeterminacy. Michael DeAngelis (2001) offers an exceptionally sustained study of the mutual influences of straight and gay culture.

and Sakia Gunn were murdered for being queer, while people who excluded gay groups from city parades applauded New York Mayor Rudy Giuliani in drag.

Despite these limitations, one of queer theory's most valuable contributions, and one that establishes an important link to feminist work on sexuality, is to demonstrate how homosexuality and heterosexuality mutually define each other. Two of the most significant works to do this were Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble* (1990) and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's *Between Men* (1985), both of which develop their arguments through readings of Gayle Rubin's classic essay "The Traffic in Women" (1975). Rubin's essay made two claims that have been crucial to theorizing sexuality and gender: that patriarchal culture depends on men's exchange of women and that the incest taboo (which generates exogamy, hence exchange) presupposes a prior, unspoken taboo on homosexuality. In *Gender Trouble*, Butler argued that gender is performance in the sense of a copy for which there is no original. Since gender must be continually reproduced, its structure is always vulnerable to mutation and subversion (1990, 30); as Butler puts it in a later work, "the norm has a temporality that opens it to a subversion from within and to a future that cannot be fully anticipated" (2000, 21). Expanding Rubin's insight that the incest taboo assumed a taboo on homosexuality, Butler analyzed definitions of gender that emerge from a "heterosexual matrix" that defines femininity as a desire for men, masculinity as the desire for women (1990, 37–38). The heterosexual matrix of gender also mandates that same-sex identification accompany cross-sex desire. It represses heterosexuality's painful renunciation of homosexuality, which prohibits straight people from mourning the homosexuality they must repudiate (1990, 48–49, 53). Fusing that argument with a reading of Joan Riviere's essay on womanliness as masquerade, Butler reconceived heterosexuality as the melancholic mimicry of a lost but unmourned homosexuality: a heterosexual woman becomes the woman she cannot have, a heterosexual man seeks to embody the man he is barred from desiring. In the process of showing how feminist models of gender continued to depend on heterosexual definitions of identity and desire, Butler rewrote psychoanalytic theory to show the difficulty of maintaining any strict separation between homo- and heterosexuality.

Gender Trouble helped set an agenda for queer studies that included items only now receiving full attention. For example, the book's "Concluding Unscientific Postscript" on Michel Foucault's study of Herculine Barbin presciently argued that there is no clear genetic distinction between male and female sexes, a claim that is developed in recent books by Bruce

Bagemihl and Anne Fausto-Sterling. Bagemihl's *Biological Exuberance* (1999, 37) collates evidence that many animals do not have two distinct genders. Biologist Fausto-Sterling notes in *Sexing the Body* (2000) that although binary gender norms would suggest that intersex births are rare, in fact such births are only rarely *visible*: there are approximately 340 times as many intersex babies born as albino ones (51, 53). Taking her cues from work like Butler's, Fausto-Sterling charts how scientists' assumptions about the forms that gender should take have distorted their accounts of the forms it does take. In *Bodies That Matter*, Butler argued that bodies take shape in response to norms, and that the process of materializing and reproducing norms can also change norms (1993, 64–65, 95). Similarly, Fausto-Sterling defines sexuality as “a somatic fact created by a cultural effect” (2000, 21). If culture can create somatic facts, she asks, can culture also change them?

Butler showed that definitions of gender assume definitions of sexuality; she challenged the power of sex and gender norms by defining norms as vulnerable to subversion and by showing that norms depend on what they exclude, since heterosexuality at its most normative is organized around homosexuality. In an equally influential study that also took Rubin's “The Traffic in Women” as a point of departure, Sedgwick's *Between Men* (1985) redefined male heterosexuality as an exchange of women that forges homosocial bonds between men. In an important counter to earlier feminist work that assimilated the sexual connections between gay men into the social associations of straight men, Sedgwick argued that the boundary between homosocial and homosexual has been a heavily policed site of paranoid, violent contests for power in modern Western culture. For decades, literary analysis of forbidden desire had focused on adultery. *Between Men* revised that tradition by focusing on what should have been obvious but for so long not only went without saying but was treated as unspeakable: what is forbidden to heterosexual desire is first and foremost homosexual desire. Sedgwick redefined heterosexuality as a fear of male homosexuality that motivates men to route their desire for one another through women. In Sedgwick's argument, heterosexuality is not simply about the relations between men and women but also about the relations between men; sexuality defines gender, but sexuality is not reducible to heterosexuality as a simple confrontation of male and female. By arguing that men define women as their binary opposites because so little distinguishes male homosociality from male homosexuality (1985, 118–19), Sedgwick formulated gender difference as a function of the homosocial/homosexual divide. Like Butler, Sedgwick showed that homosexual desire

was not the exclusive property of a minority and that homosexual and heterosexual desire mutually defined each other.

One of the crucial innovations of both *Between Men* and *Gender Trouble* was that they took the encounter between gender and sexuality, previously staged more or less exclusively within feminism, and reoriented it as an encounter between feminism and gay studies. Sedgwick did this by synthesizing feminist theory with scholarship on male homosexuality. Butler confronted feminism with a homosexuality represented primarily by lesbianism, but a lesbianism that included the butch-femme configurations dismissed by earlier thinkers like Rich. Women's studies scholars may be inclined to dismiss queer studies as only about men, but to do so neglects women's foundational work in the field and assumes a polarization between men and women that queer studies itself disproves. Much queer work now focuses on men and women together, and even queer work that concentrates on men draws on feminist insights and models, attesting to feminism's powerful influence beyond women's studies.

Nor is research on men irrelevant to women. One of the most powerful points made by women in the vanguard of sexual politics since the 1980s has been that female and male sexuality are not simply opposed. In a 1985 talk given at the groundbreaking Barnard Conference on Sexuality, Hollibaugh posed questions that in some sense set the agenda for work like Sedgwick's and Butler's: "Who are all the women who don't come gently and don't want to; . . . are the lovers of butch or femme women; who like fucking with men; practice consensual S/M; feel more like faggots than dykes; love dildos, penetration, costumes; . . . think gay male porn is hot?" ([1985] 2000, 96). Nor is it always women who cross over into territory deemed masculine; Hollibaugh notes how feminism changed gay men and allied them more closely with lesbians (2000, 113, 151, 159).⁸ Far from representing the displacement of feminism with a version of men's studies, queer studies documents a genuine exchange between men and women that could provide a model for studies of heterosexuality.

Tempting as it might be for feminist scholars to limit their reading in queer studies to work on lesbians, and as much as recent historical scholarship suggests long-standing links between feminist and lesbian political causes, bringing queer theory into women's studies only through work

⁸ It should be noted that Newton, by contrast, highlights the tensions that persist between lesbians and gay men and indeed flare up in mixed lesbian-gay communities like Cherry Grove, Fire Island. Since power in our society depends on proximity to men, lesbians remain invisible. Newton sees the move to queerness as one in which lesbians move closer to gay men but the reverse does not take place (2000, 67, 85).

on lesbians misses the point. Queer studies offers more than a resource to diversify the study of women by providing information on lesbians as a distinct group. In her magisterial *An American Obsession* (1999), Jennifer Terry gives substance to the claim that homosexuality in the twentieth-century United States has been the central prohibition defining all norms, especially gender norms. Those who challenge the conventions that limit women can learn a great deal from the women *and* men who challenge sexual norms, even when those men and women are not overtly feminist. If sexuality is one of the elements making up the sign *woman*, and if the goal of feminist theory is to challenge what we mean by *woman*, then queer studies is a crucial tool for feminist theory.⁹ By expanding the range of visible, plausible, and livable sexualities, queer studies expands the meanings of *woman* and *man*. We can see this at work in the ways that public discourse about sexual practices in print, in conversation, on the Internet, and on television has changed in the past two decades. Thanks in large part to a number of openly lesbian and bisexual women, women of all tastes can find erotica and sex toys with relative ease. Women from sexual minorities and straight sex radicals helped create a feminist *ars erotica* in which women and men of all sexual orientations have, so to speak, come together.¹⁰ It is a clear and not so straight line from *Our Bodies, Ourselves* to *On Our Backs* to *Sex and the City*, as it is from *The Joy of Sex* to *Sex Tips for Straight Women from a Gay Man* and *Lesbian Sex Secrets for Men*.

⁹ It could be argued that by undermining gender as a stable category, queer theory undermines feminism, which depends on the concept of women. However, this fear is groundless, for two reasons. First, queer theory does not completely abandon the concept of gender, since homosexuality depends on assigning a gender to oneself and to the people to whom one is sexually attracted. Queer theory simply refuses the strict limits that heterosexism sets on the possible configurations of genders, bodies, and desires. Second, since feminism is by definition invested in changing women's social and political positions, the concept of woman on which feminism rests is mobile, not static, and thus not at risk from the kinds of plasticity that queer theory ascribes to gender.

¹⁰ For the ways in which the lesbian-feminist movement, often maligned as asexual, also constituted an *ars erotica*, see Newton (with Walton), "The Misunderstanding" ([1984] 2000, 174), which details the sexual etiquette developed by lesbian feminists. Although the sex-positive lesbianism of the 1980s is often understood as an absolute rejection of a repressive lesbian feminism, hindsight suggests a dialectical relationship between the two in which lesbian feminism articulated a principle and a method that remained vital for the sexual culture that displaced it. The principle was the value of women's sexual pleasure, and the method was organizing to provide communal and consumer support for that pleasure. The key contradiction of lesbian-feminist ideology was its refusal of anything associated with masculinity, which conflicted with the principle of sexual pleasure for women, since almost every aspect of sexual pleasure has nominally been defined as masculine.

Overlap is not equivalence

Much as queer studies and feminist studies owe to each other, and much as queer studies is an important component of gender studies, queer studies is neither equivalent nor analogous to gender studies. Not every question that feminist scholarship needs to investigate can or should be referred to sexuality. Nor do feminist and queer studies face the same challenges today. The significance of *woman* is historically variable, but in English the word itself has been in place for centuries. By contrast, terms for homosexuality rapidly proliferate and disappear, and they often remain confined to codes, slang, and scientific jargon. As a result, gay history confronts different obstacles than women's history does. Nor are the patterns of discrimination the same. Those who most contest women's value, achievements, and rights do not contest that women exist; indeed, they insist all too strenuously on what women must be. By contrast, those who dismiss homosexuality often do so by claiming that no solid evidence proves that there really are, or ever have been, gay people.

Queer studies offers two responses to such erasures. The first is to produce gay history, a response complicated by the privacy, secrecy, shame, and fear that inhibit people from leaving detailed records of their sexual lives. Some gay subcultures thrive on flamboyance and scandal, but in many different regions and classes reticence has been the lifeblood of queer communities. Even more challenging for any history of modern homosexuality is the extent to which sexuality, as Jonathan Goldberg asserts, is experienced as that which is unconscious, unknowable, and cannot be named with any specificity (2001, xi). Historians of more conventional topics can consult official archives or find material in collections of private papers. Those writing queer histories of the past and present often need to construct their own archives through oral history, personal testimony, and participant observation. This method has gained ground in recent queer work. In *Female Masculinity* (1998), Judith Halberstam works her way through a series of published documents and a wealth of film material, but she also compiles a record of contemporary drag king culture using photographs, interviews, and ephemera she collected as a participant observer. In *An Archive of Feelings* (2003), Ann Cvetkovich draws on ethnography and oral history to document lesbian involvement in the New York ACT UP movement. The interviews, dialogues, journal entries, and collaborative pieces included in Newton's and Hollibaugh's anthologies identify other genres that allow queer women to make their lives the stuff of history. Newton explains that "the reasons I write anything . . . are the same as those for any human action: to be found in culture, history, personality and chance" (2000, 4). Newton means that one can use history

and culture to explain why she writes, but her sentence also suggests that she writes in order “to be found” in a history and culture that has excluded her. Through auto-archiving, those hidden from history take history into their own hands.

The project of recovering the past may seem to replace a complex, ineffable sexuality with simplistic empirical evidence. But in her introduction to Hollibaugh’s essays, Dorothy Allison articulates the importance of archiving precisely in terms of the unknowable: “The world is changed through story, each of us giving over what we know for what we do not yet know” (2000, xviii). The delicate balance between knowing and not knowing also surfaces in recent queer theories of memory. David Eng, for example, shows how the memories embedded in personal memoirs can counter master narratives (2001, 55). Eng makes this point in relation to Maxine Hong Kingston’s *The Woman Warrior*, but it applies equally to the material gathered by Newton, Hollibaugh, and Cvetkovich. Eng argues that recollection displaces what it recollects; in memory and in memoirs, the unconscious attaches censored images to permissible ones, and memory thus allows what has been prohibited to resurface in the preconscious (2001, 56, 78). If history is the scholarly process of assembling a memory of the past, Eng’s definition helps us to see how that process can restore what has been suppressed without claiming finality and totality.

Scholars also counter queer erasure by exposing its rhetorical strategies and its irrational assumptions. In his monumental book on sexual diversity in animals (1999), Bagemihl demonstrates how the denial of sexual diversity extends even to the birds and the bees. Scientists steeped in the ideological premise that heterosexual gender is natural have relentlessly denied their own observations of animal behavior or neglected their own protocols for collecting scientific evidence. Bagemihl wittily documents how animals are presumed “heterosexual until proven guilty” (93) when scientists assign gender on the basis of sexual and reproductive behavior, so that animals observed having sex or offspring are assumed to be male or female without any verification of their genitalia (94). Observers define heterosexuality broadly and homosexuality narrowly. Any affectionate behavior between male and female animals suffices to identify their relationship as sexual, but genital sex, as difficult to observe directly among animals as it is among humans, is the only evidence considered sufficient for identifying same-sex animal pairs (107, 117, 160). Even when sex between animals with the same genitalia seems undeniable—for example, a bonobo monkey inserting her erect clitoris in another’s vagina—scientists

dismiss animal homosexuality by labeling it a mistaken or pathological imitation of heterosexuality (89, 123).

Bagemihl has a clear agenda: he wants to prove that homosexuality occurs in nature and therefore cannot simply be dismissed as a cultural deformation or biological error. To this end he provides examples that conform to a familiar rhetoric of gay rights. Every kind of sex is natural, if animals are the measure of nature. *Biological Exuberance* provides copious evidence of animals having homosexual sex, group sex, anal sex, oral sex, clitoral sex, and masturbating with digits and with tools (1999, 19). The only sexual attitude unique to humans, Bagemihl underscores, is homophobia (54). Bagemihl cautions against anthropomorphizing animals by showing how erroneous ideas about human sexuality have been mistakenly applied to animals, and his book incites useful skepticism about how scientists have defined nature. At the same time, Bagemihl draws provocative connections between animals and humans. Animals, like humans, have social behaviors about sex that vary from species to species, and animal homosexuality, sexual plasticity, and nonreproductive sex all have roles to play in human evolution (45, 64, 69). Homosexuality is everywhere in the animal kingdom, including in more than sixty species of mammals and birds (47), and Bagemihl amasses evidence scattered in hundreds of scientific articles to compile a fuller picture of animal sexual behavior. We learn that among some birds female pairs raise offspring together, receiving sperm from male birds who have no other involvement in child rearing (23), and that species such as musk oxen, white-tailed deer, cheetahs, and red squirrels form same-sex pairs but never opposite-sex ones. Among black swans only males form long-term same-sex couples and raise offspring, while among sage grouse, only females engage in homosexual group sex (30). Animals also engage in temporary imitations of cross-gender behavior, loosely analogous to human transvestism though not necessarily to homosexuality. For example, homosexual mounting is common among male bighorn sheep, but females do not allow themselves to be mounted except during estrus, so that male sheep who imitate female sheep avoid being mounted by other males (39).

Queer models

In the process of developing a more refined vocabulary for sexual diversity in animals, Bagemihl also provides readers with a more complex framework for understanding sexual behavior in humans—just one of many reasons his book should be required reading in sexuality courses. Most human

beings are not exclusively straight or gay; nor does bisexuality, which connotes an even split between two orientations, adequately describe most people's experience. The famous Kinsey scale offers a slightly more nuanced approach by placing homosexuality and heterosexuality on a continuum, but its terms fail to capture the nuances of lived sexuality. In *Sexing the Body* (2000) Fausto-Sterling cites a multidimensional model that graphs sexual attraction, behavior, fantasies, emotional preference, social preference, self-identification, and lifestyle on a temporal scale. In a similar move, Bagemihl's focus on animals in *Biological Exuberance* frees him to develop a terminology that usefully distinguishes components of sexuality that most human labels collapse. *Courtship* is his term for stylized behaviors prior to mating. *Affection* comprises forms of touch such as grooming, caressing, or play fighting that Bagemihl considers sexual if they lead to arousal or take place within a pair bond. He defines *sex* as genital contact and stimulation. When sex is present in pair bonding, the pair consists of *partners*, while Bagemihl uses the term *companions* to describe pair bonds without sex. Another distinct sexual behavior is parenting, which among animals often takes place between companions rather than between partners.

Biological Exuberance challenges ideas about nature in its massive presentation of the many ways that animal sexuality departs from our sex and kinship norms, and its distinctions among sex, pair bonding, and parenting are suggestive for humans as well, allowing better definition of what already exists and of what could come into being. To place greater empirical accuracy in the service of utopian change is not unique to queer theory; this strategy has also been characteristic of feminist discourse about sex, often in the form of confrontations between lesbians and straight women. Bagemihl's new vocabulary has precursors in Rubin's "Thinking Sex" (1984) and in Esther Newton and Shirley Walton's 1984 essay "The Misunderstanding," which proposed a new sexual vocabulary that distinguished sexual preference, erotic persona, erotic role, and erotic acts ([1984] 2000, 171).

Stephen O. Murray's *Homosexualities* (2000) synthesizes scholarship on diverse cultures and historical periods in order to generate a new taxonomy of types of homosexuality that span place and time. *Juvenile homosexuality* describes activities permitted, even encouraged, until adulthood. *Age-structured homosexuality* legitimates cross-generational same-sex contact but forbids any other kind. *Transgendered homosexuality* describes situations in which both partners are the same sex but only one maintains that sex's gender assignment; for example, the man who penetrates is a man, but the man penetrated by a man is a woman. In *egal-*

itarian homosexuality same-sex partners are considered to have the same gender and to be attracted to their own gender (see also Newton 2000, 232–35). The finer the optic with which scholars view sexuality, the more difficulty they have defining it at all, and Murray's encyclopedic approach sacrifices specifics to bold definitions that cut across geographic and temporal borders. Butches and femmes from the 1950s rub shoulders with ancient Athenians as participants in gender-stratified homosexuality, while egalitarian homosexualities encompass premodern and modern societies in Europe, Asia, and Africa. Such schemes are perhaps most useful as provisional heuristic devices. Many queer theorists have criticized the ways that identity categories and classification restrict sexual expression, and it is unlikely that the proliferation of new identity categories will remedy the problems of classification in general.

Murray's system also leaves no room for the ways that normative homosexuality, like normative heterosexuality, generates its own transgressions (Winkler 1990), or for the complex ways that the dominant coexists with the residual and the emergent at any given historical moment (Williams 1986). A world in which sex is as relentlessly transnational as money, commodities, and images relentlessly hybridizes the sexual categories of different classes, cultures, and nations (Grewal and Kaplan 2001). Despite these problems, Murray's model has interesting implications for sexuality studies because it implies that different forms of homosexuality have less in common with one another than with their heterosexual equivalents. Imagine comparing age-stratified homosexuality not to other kinds of homosexuality but rather to the age-stratified heterosexuality that pairs older men with younger women. Few theorists, however, have speculated that heterosexuality might take distinct forms, and variations and tendencies within heterosexuality continue to be obscured by the illusion of its universality.

In addition to providing more refined ways to think about all kinds of sex, queer studies has, like feminism, expanded the definition of what counts as sexuality. In queer studies today *sexuality* often does not refer primarily to gender or sex; instead, *sexuality* can mean affect, kinship, social reproduction, the transmission of property, the division between public and private, and the construction of race and nationality. Only a decade or so ago queerness was understood as the antithesis of the normative nuclear biological family. In *Families We Choose: Lesbians, Gays, Kinship*, Kath Weston extended feminist studies of kinship to show how lesbians and gay men countered rejection by biological families (parents and siblings) by forming voluntary, nonprocreative families (1991, 35). For much of the twentieth century, Western Europe and the United States

did indeed define queerness in opposition to the holy trinity of heterosexuality, biological reproduction, and the nuclear family. As Carolyn Dean has shown, French discourse between the world wars dismissed homosexuality as sterile (2000, 12–13). Hollibaugh recalls the fight against the California Briggs initiative that defined homosexuals as the ultimate threat to families and children (2000, 63). Newton writes in her book on Cherry Grove that gays are “outside the realm of kinship” and thus perpetually defined as children (1993, 290). Terry shows how popular social theories identified homosexuals as threats to the family and defined good parenting as the prevention of homosexuality in children (1999, 24, 61, 215). Scholars in other fields have extended Weston’s observation that gay people have found ways to affiliate and reproduce themselves outside of biological reproduction, whether through queer mimesis (Moon 1998) or historical feeling (Nealon 2001).

In the epilogue to her 1991 book, Weston noted that a queer baby boom, then most notable among lesbians and now also visible among gay men, was beginning to break down the orthodoxy of nonprocreative homosexuality (193). The increasing profile of queer families and the quickening pace of debates about gay marriage are abrading what was once a stark distinction between straights ensconced in families and queers exiled from them. Reinventing the family rather than replacing it has become a prevalent way of theorizing queerness, a task that links lesbians and gays to straight men and women reinventing kinship (Hollibaugh 2000, 136). In the legal realm, the connection between feminist claims for reproductive rights and queer battles for sexual rights materialized when the Supreme Court declared sodomy laws unconstitutional by citing both *Roe v. Wade* and an amicus curiae brief on sodomy laws filed by historians of sexuality.

New theoretical work continues to develop the consequences of decoupling family, kinship, and sex from heterosexual intercourse. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak has displaced queerness as the disruption of the nuclear family with her concept of “originary queerness” (2003, 32, 33). In *Antigone’s Claim*, Butler proposes that nonsocial or presocial kinship, though marked as outside the law, bears “the trace of an alternate legality” (2000, 40). In *The Misfit of the Family: Balzac and the Social Forms of Sexuality* (2003), Michael Lucey uses the “alternative families” spawned by Napoleon’s Civil Code to go beyond queerness as an outlaw sexual identity. Instead, Lucey proposes that same-sex relations, like other forms of sexuality, result from struggles between interests that become particularly acute at times of economic, social, and legislative upheaval. Sexuality, for example, can be “a ruse of inheritance structures” (150) rather than an expression of desire. In a legal code that does not depend on natural

law but is responsive to political action, even families not explicitly envisaged by that code can scabble for a place within it. Instead of constructing homosexuality and heterosexuality as opposed identities, Lucey subsumes both within a model of sexuality as “a set of social forms, of institutions, differentially distributed across a social field, subject to modifications both by external social forces and by the cumulative effect of individual actions” (xxx).

Social theorists and historians of modernity have charted how capitalism relegates feeling to the private sphere of family life and assigns affective labor to women, particularly mothers. Some of the most recent work in queer theory argues, however, that affect bridges the private and public. Pride, hate, shame, love, anger, desire, trauma, loss, and melancholy are crucial terms for a host of queer critics.¹¹ In *An Archive of Feelings* (2003, 7, 17) Cvetkovich makes a thorough case for the ways that affect, far from shrouding its subjects in isolation and privacy, can become the basis for creating new and very public cultures. Arguing that the resolution of trauma does not have to be a return to normalcy, Cvetkovich explores how sexual abuse and AIDS have been platforms for creating new sexual cultures (121–22).

In the course of making arguments about sexuality and affect, queer theorists must negotiate with psychoanalysis. Yet another family resemblance among feminists and queer theorists is a complicated relationship to the work of Sigmund Freud and Lacan. One thinker’s good Freud (femininity as social construction, homosexuality as normal) is challenged by another’s bad Freud (femininity as passivity, homosexuality as primitive).¹² Some theorists turn to psychoanalysis to understand how homosexuality, like heterosexuality, is structured around sexual difference and castration (de Lauretis 1994), while others define queerness as the refusal of castration anxiety (Lucey 1995, 47). The queer proposition that identification is a form of desire emerges from a critical reading of Freud’s notorious opposition between them (Fuss 1995, 11–12). Where some use psychoanalysis to understand how dominant ideology gets reproduced (Mitchell 1974), others argue that psychoanalysis explains how desire and the unconscious disrupt dominant ideology (Eng 2001, 77). As a theory of gender, desire, and subjectivity, psychoanalysis has appealed to some queer theorists even as others have refused the heterosexual presumptions

¹¹ See Berlant 1997; Dinshaw 1999; Eng 2001; Love 2001; Nealon 2001; Sedgwick and Frank 2003.

¹² For bad Freud, see Terry 1999 and Eng 2001. For good Freud, see Ablove 2003, 1–20.

embedded in concepts such as castration, sexual difference, and the Oedipus complex. For example, Lucey explains that he turned away from psychoanalytic readings of Honoré de Balzac that focused on timeless, individual psychic structures in order to pursue sociological readings that explore the effects of legal and economic change on kinship structures (2003, xv). But Lucey is careful to note that only certain psychoanalytic readings occlude history (xv), and his qualification reminds us that psychoanalysis is not going away. Psychoanalysis lives on in what we might call our cultural and scholarly unconscious. Even as we reject Freud, we continue to talk about anxiety, projection, displacement, symptoms, trauma, Freudian slips, and the unconscious, and psychoanalysis has a new lease on life in the hands of the feminist and antihomophobic theorists reinventing it as a theory of change.

As sexuality has come to be defined more broadly as a vector of social reproduction that includes kinship and affect, it has also been analyzed as a ubiquitous component of racial definition. Eng, Somerville, Terry, and Lisa Duggan are among those who have recently demonstrated how fully U.S. ideologies have intertwined sexuality, gender, and race since the late nineteenth century. Somerville and Eng also explore how the African Americans and Asian Americans targeted by anthropology and sexology used literature to disrupt the racial and sexual differences imposed on them. The several authors cited trace how late nineteenth-century thinkers intent on classifying and evaluating races and sexual types produced analogies between homosexuality and primitivism. Eng focuses on Freud (Eng 2001, 13), Terry and Somerville on sexologists and early anthropologists (Terry 1999, 33, 36; Somerville 2000, 37), and Duggan argues that the white national imagination perceived both the white lesbian and the black man as threats to white domesticity (2000, 27). Moving from Alice Mitchell's trial for murdering her female lover to a wider study of Memphis in the 1890s, Duggan links the fear of lesbians registered by that trial's sensationalist press coverage to the fear of African American men's sexuality that led white people to form lynch mobs.

Convincing as all these arguments are, several of them conflate analogy with equivalence in ways that make the exact relationship between sexuality and race difficult to understand. Somerville shows that race and homosexuality were both effects of hierarchical classification and a politics of body surveillance. Both homosexuals and blacks were marked as abnormal and unnatural, but being stigmatized in similar ways does not demonstrate, as the book's jacket copy claims, "that race has historically been central to the cultural production of homosexuality" (2000, back cover). Somerville proves that classification was central to discourses of sexology and

race, but the fact that similar terms and methods were used to describe race and homosexuality does not prove that one concept produced the other or that all classifications are also racializations. Similarly, Terry argues for an analogy between homosexuality and primitivism, but while analogies are reversible, Terry mostly demonstrates that sexologists called homosexuals primitive, not that anthropologists ever called primitives homosexual (1999, 33, 36, 97). Like Somerville, Terry takes anthropological references to *hypersexuality* as allusions to *homosexuality* (33, 36), but there is no direct evidence that the first implied the second. These are not mere quibbles; in proving the interdependence of sexuality and race, these books alert us to the importance of understanding their relationship as precisely as possible, exactly because they demonstrate beyond a doubt their more general claim that the scientific, educational, and judicial establishment of the United States conflated inversion with racial primitivism.

Queer modernity

Recent scholarship on race and sexuality shows that both concepts emerged as effects of modernity's epistemological commitment to classification. Modernity is as difficult to date in the history of sexuality as in any other field (see Dinshaw 1999), and there is no consensus about how to periodize queer history. While some argue that Oscar Wilde's 1895 trial was pivotal for the emergence of lesbian and gay identity, others insist that gay and lesbian cultures flourished well before the rise of sexology or the publicity of scandal. Laura Doan, in her excellent book *Fashioning Sapphism*, shows that Radclyffe Hall's 1929 trial brought lesbianism into the public sphere but also points out that earlier ignorance about lesbianism allowed relationships to flourish that would wilt under later policing (2001, xv, 124). Nor is there agreement about the exact timing of the homo/hetero opposition, although most agree it was well in place by the middle of the twentieth century. Jonathan Ned Katz asserts that intimate male friendships were more common in the nineteenth century because homosexuality and heterosexuality did not yet exist as concepts (1995, 2001, x, 17–18). Alice Domurat Dreger (1998), by contrast, shows that by the mid-nineteenth century doctors were using heterosexuality as a standard for assigning gender to hermaphrodites.

Recent work also complicates our understanding of how homo/hetero divisions relate to gender crossing. By equating homosexuality and gender inversion, sexology converted homosexuality into heterosexuality: the man who desired another man was really a woman. In alerting us to the relatively late appearance of a homosexual role for British women, Doan also

contends that sexology had a limited impact on popular culture. *Fashioning Sapphism* offers convincing evidence that in the 1920s women in masculine clothing were not perceived as lesbians—or even as masculine; instead, trousers and the right short haircut were the ultimate in modern, youthful, feminine chic (2001, 102, 107, 110, 113). What now looks like gender inversion and has therefore been interpreted as lesbian style was in fact a new type of femininity that signified trendiness, not deviance. Halberstam (1998) offers a similar caveat against collapsing gender and sexuality when she argues against reading all instances of female masculinity as lesbianism.

Claims about the recent invention of heterosexuality suggest that for most of the nineteenth century heterosexuality was too absolute to be perceived as a category distinct from other types of sexuality. It follows that before heterosexuality and homosexuality came into focus, marriage, family, gender, desire, and sex were not explicitly defined in ways that excluded same-sex relations. Indeed, a rigid two-gender system may have fostered same-sex intimacy and conferred immunity on same-sex partnerships by viewing them as anodyne variations on heterosexual ones. This is in some sense what Carroll Smith-Rosenberg claimed in “The Female World of Love and Ritual” (1975), published in the inaugural issue of *Signs*. Smith-Rosenberg argued that separate male and female spheres encouraged women who were emotionally distant from men to have passionate relationships with one another and that such relationships were never perceived as deviant, by which she meant in part that they were never perceived as sexual. Yet any return to that claim needs to contend with the evidence amassed since then. Such friendships also existed among men (Katz 2001), and people in all classes knew about homosexuality as a practice if not as a concept and often considered its practitioners unnatural and perverse (Marcus 2002). While some people who engaged in homosex suffered no negative consequences, others were censured, exiled, arrested, and imprisoned. The new theory that could account for all we now know has yet to be produced; the weight of new data has smashed earlier paradigms, and new ones have yet to emerge from the rubble.

Yet amid the welter of data one consensus has emerged: defining homosexuality as we now do—as sameness of sex, rather than in terms of age or gender difference—is a distinctly modern phenomenon. Doan’s *Fashioning Sapphism* (2001) equates lesbianism with both modernity and modernism, Terry’s *An American Obsession* calls the lesbian one of the “bad seeds of modernity” (1999, 97), and Newton writes that lesbians and gays are “at the leading edge of modernism” (2000, 240). Like gays

and lesbians, modernity and modernism are everywhere, and their meanings proliferate accordingly. Epistemological modernity produces scientific positivism and classification (Terry 1999), which enabled queer social scientists like Ruth Benedict and Margaret Mead to replace cultural hierarchy with cultural relativism (Banner 2003). Economic modernity yields consumer capitalism, which subjects gender to relentless innovations (Doan); political modernity is equated with liberalism and its contradictions (Terry, Newton); and aesthetic modernism celebrates difference, subversion, and innovation (Newton, Terry, and Doan).

As an epistemology, modernity values evidence and investigation, equates facts with nature, and grounds knowledge in the body. As both a concept of nature and a protocol for observing nature, modern science esteems restraint and control. Nature, the body, and the scientific method become synonyms for mapping reality's limits and disciplining the imagination, as Thomas Laqueur argues in his painstaking study of how modern science apprehended the sexual practice of masturbation (2003, 280–82). Yet even as modern positivism understands experiments as mustering empirical evidence to curb imaginative hypotheses, the scientific method also strives to master and hence overcome nature, to exceed the limits of the known. It is in this sense that Doan writes that modernity has always been “a space for experimentation” (2001, 194), sexual as well as scientific. By ceaselessly shifting nature's familiar borders, scientific modernity contributes to a historical process in which sexualities once branded deviant, such as nonprocreative heterosexuality, are now widely accepted as a new norm (see Rupp 1999, 40; Newton 2000, 210; Laqueur 2003, 22, 51, 358).

Just as an epistemological commitment to experiment exerts pressure on definitions of nature, economic modernity has undermined the family units often defined as natural and in the process has created mobile, autonomous individuals defined by consumer and sexual desires. As John D'Emilio argued in “Capitalism and Gay Identity” (1993), capitalism diminished the importance of the heterosexual family and freed individuals to form gay communities in cities. Subsequent studies have confirmed the close connection between urbanization and gay culture.¹³ Nor are capitalism's effects confined to cities; as Newton shows in her book on the Fire Island resort town Cherry Grove, the limited egalitarianism built into the consumer economy also benefited gay people with money to spend

¹³ See Howard 2000 for a study of how gay culture has also thrived far from urban centers.

outside urban centers (1993, 143).¹⁴ From economies of scarcity that imagined nature as constraint we have moved to economies of abundance that promote the indulgence of unlimited desire (see Bagemihl 1999, 215, 252, 255; Terry 1999, 119; Laqueur 2003). Consumer culture has fostered gay life (Newton 1993, 143; DeAngelis 2001, 122, 127) just as modernity's fantasy of a liberated female consumer has its counterpart in new demands for women's autonomous sexual pleasure (Terry 1999, 135; Newton 2000, 180–82; Laqueur 2003, 82). But as Foucault ([1976] 1980) reminds us, incitements to pleasure install new modes of discipline; as Butler (2002) warns, to replace old norms with new ones reinforces the formal distinction between the normal and the deviant; and as Laqueur (2003) argues, celebrations of limitless pleasure lead to more urgent demands for self-control. Those whom religion targets as bearers of sinful desires come to typify a new freedom from natural limits. Queers thus easily symbolize modern tendencies toward hedonism, secrecy, and excessive individuality, and the very pervasiveness of these tendencies fosters a drive to contain them by imagining them to be the unique properties of a few fringe groups (see Terry 1999, 9–10; Dean 2000, 141, 157; Laqueur 2003, 210).

Politically, modernity is a double-edged sword. Modernity's epistemological proclivity for classification inscribes sexual and racial hierarchies onto laws, policies, and movements (Eng 2001, 9). The democracy associated with modernity undoes hierarchies, but modern panic about the erosion of old differences leads to the invention of new ones. In the twentieth century homosexuality has often both embodied democratization and registered the point at which tensions within democracy boil over (Terry 1999, 21, 27–29; Dean 2000, 35). As Terry argues, U.S. liberalism associates democracy with diversity, progress, equality, and self-restraint—and with a decadent freedom in need of regulation (1999, 9–10). The sanctity liberalism accords the private sphere can protect homosexuality, but the emphasis on private rights can also relegate gays and lesbians to silence and invisibility and exclude those deemed sexually deviant from public space, political participation, and the social body (Newton 1993, 238; Dean 2000).

¹⁴ Newton (2000, 36) contrasts two currents in Western gay history: an anti-Puritan theatricality that thrives in the underworld, demimonde, and aristocracy, and an egalitarian, democratic queerness characteristic of bourgeois liberalism. It may be more helpful, however, to view both theatricality and egalitarianism as offshoots of modern capitalism. Capitalism thrives on promoting individual whimsy and uniqueness, but its profit-making imperative demands extending the privilege of self-definition to as many people as possible, on terms as homogeneous as possible.

Conclusion

The books under review represent only a fraction of extant scholarship on sexuality, but even this limited selection conveys how much we have learned and how much more research there still is to do. What directions do these books suggest for the immediate future?

We now have a critical mass of scholarship on homosexuality based on legal and criminal records, medical writing, popular journalism, and novels. Those sources best illustrate how lesbians and gay men negotiate with institutions and individuals more or less hostile, neutral, or external to them. We also have a smaller body of research that draws on sources shaped by a presumption of shared location within a sexual culture: participant observation, oral history, letters exchanged among lovers and queer allies, and documents crafted for a specific rather than a general public. The two kinds of sources have generated very different histories of sexuality. The United States in the 1950s is a period of repression for Terry (1999), who focuses on law, science, and mainstream journalism; of ambiguity for Michael DeAngelis (2001), who explores popular teen culture; and of transition for Newton (1993), who interviews residents of a long-standing gay community. The time is ripe for a queer history that synthesizes extant scholarship and draws on the fullest possible range of sources.

Outside the realm of queer theory, very little current scholarship takes seriously the claims that sexual orientations defined as different actually have much in common, or that the sexualities we consider normal and think we know best are consequently those we understand the least. Most work on sexuality continues to focus on those who deviate from the male heterosexual norm—queers, women, and masturbators—and on masculinist society's anxious, phobic responses to deviance. Straight men in queer theory are straw men, with the ironic result that male heterosexuality maintains its status as universal, normal, homogeneous, predictable, and hence immune from investigation. There could be no more powerful extension of queer theory than detailed research into straight men's desires, fantasies, attractions, and gender identifications—research unafraid to probe the differences between sexual ideology and sexual practices.

To apply the lessons of queer studies to many kinds of sexuality and to ask what different sexual orientations have in common both require a more broadly based readership for queer studies. I began with call numbers; let me end with blurbs. Laqueur's *Solitary Sex* (2003) has been designated HQ447—"masturbation." Like its call number, the book lies between homosexuality and feminism and forms a bridge between them. Although at times Laqueur treats masturbation as yet another discrete

sexuality, the book's bibliography works against that approach. Laqueur's scrupulous attention to feminist and queer scholarship makes *Solitary Sex* a truly comprehensive study of modern sexuality's relation to religion, politics, economics, and science. Perhaps because of its proximity to homosexuality, *Solitary Sex* has been subjected to some of the censorship and trivialization suffered by many works in queer studies. But its blurbs give it an intellectual credit extended to few works in queer studies, not least because both emphasize that although Laqueur's book has sex in the title, it is about more than sex. Psychoanalyst Adam Phillips underscores that Laqueur shows that "the history of masturbation has . . . much to tell us about the history of freedom and individualism" (Laqueur 2003, dust jacket). Stephen Greenblatt writes, "This book tells a remarkable story, at once ghastly and risible, about the professional fashioning of a universal human practice into a dread disease. . . . Laqueur's scholarly courage—for it took courage to write this book—has reaped ample rewards" (Laqueur 2003, dust jacket). As a scholar of Shakespeare sensitive to the ways that cultures split into high and low, sacred and profane, Greenblatt understands the courage required to write about a subject that, he reminds us, still triggers anxiety and embarrassment even in sophisticated readers.

Laqueur deserves these astute words of praise, which recognize that his book is not simply about sexuality and that he took risks by writing it. It is encouraging that he was able to find scholars who do not specialize in sexuality per se to recognize and endorse his achievement. It is also striking to compare the jacket copy of *Solitary Sex* to the back matter of most queer studies books. Almost no blurbs for queer studies books mention their authors' courage, although Greenblatt's point about braving an uncomfortable topic applies equally well to those who work on homosexuality.¹⁵ Laqueur's blurbs are also by thinkers as different from him as they are from each other. By contrast, the four blurbs gracing Terry's *An American Obsession* (1999) are all by scholars in queer and feminist studies (rather than in American studies most broadly defined), while the quartet commenting on Duggan's *Sapphic Slashers* (2000) are all known for work in lesbian and gay theory and history.

Editorial and bibliographic conventions may continue to create subtle distinctions within queer studies, feminist theory, and the history of sexuality, but it is clear that scholars who want to understand modernity must

¹⁵ Those who doubt that any academic today could find queer studies disconcerting can test that disbelief against a recent report on the career paths of PhDs with dissertations on queer history (Stein 2001).

study gender and sexuality in all their manifestations. The day is soon at hand when the Library of Congress will rethink its classifications, when all forms of sexuality will be considered important subjects of general knowledge, and when the connections between queer theory and feminism will seem too obvious to require explanation.

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