

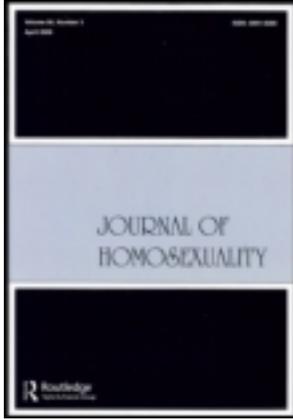
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Shifting Ground(s)

Karen E. Lovaas PhD^a, John P. Elia PhD^a & Gust A. Yep PhD^a

^a San Francisco State University, USA

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INTRODUCTION

Shifting Ground(s): Surveying the Contested Terrain of LGBT Studies and Queer Theory

Karen E. Lovaas, PhD

San Francisco State University

John P. Elia, PhD

San Francisco State University

Gust A. Yep, PhD

San Francisco State University

SUMMARY. While queer theory initially grew out of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) studies, there are numerous points of

Correspondence may be addressed: Karen E. Lovaas, San Francisco State University, Department of Communication Studies, 1600 Holloway Avenue, San Francisco, CA 94132 (E-mail: klovaas@sfsu.edu).

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contestation between these two approaches, originating mostly from their disparate positions on (sexual) identity politics. To describe, analyze, and contextualize this *contested terrain*, we begin this piece by providing some historical notes on LGBT studies and queer theory. Next, we turn to an explication of some enduring tensions to identify the criticisms generated by LGBT scholars toward queer theory approaches and vice versa. What follows is our rationale for producing *LGBT Studies and Queer Theory: New Conflicts, Collaborations, and Contested Terrain*. In this section we discuss how this project originated and the specific objectives we hope this volume will meet. The contributions of the individual articles in this volume are identified and summarized next. Finally, in the context of LGBT studies' and queer theory's similar qualities and points of difference, we offer ideas for potential directions of scholarship in the future that would explore three major areas: identity and difference; community and community organizing; and political engagement and social change. doi:10.1300/J082v52n01_01 [Article copies available for a fee from The Haworth Document Delivery Service: 1-800-HAWORTH. E-mail address: <docdelivery@haworthpress.com> Website: <<http://www.HaworthPress.com>> © 2006 by The Haworth Press, Inc. All rights reserved.]

KEYWORDS. Gay and lesbian community, heteronormativity, identity politics, lesbian and gay studies, queer theory, sexual identity, sexual oppression, sexual politics

Queer, as a political theory and practice, has been viewed as the “radical” face of the lesbian and gay movement. Yet in a surprisingly short time, it has become respectable. The popular media has lapped up the language and imagery of queer. Queer cultural theory now abounds in academic books and courses. Queer [theory] claims to be a more “inclusive” politics, but inclusive of whom and of what? . . . Queer is far from the revolutionary movement it would like itself to be, it is little more than a liberal/libertarian alliance . . . [Q]ueer offers us [feminists] nothing. It is yet one more face of the backlash, trying to pass itself off as something new—we will not be fooled!

—Julia Parnaby (1996, pp. 3, 10)

“Queer” acknowledges ongoing debates over the question of essentialism versus constructionism in both gay and lesbian studies, and in feminist theory, and recognizes the inadequate current knowledge of differences between and among various gay men and women.

–John C. Hawley (2001, p. 6)

[O]ne of the great failings of queer theory and especially queer politics has been their inability to incorporate into analysis of the world and strategies for political mobilization the roles that race, class, and gender play in defining people’s differing relations to dominant and normalizing power.

–Cathy J. Cohen (1997, p. 457)

Queerness provides a positionality from which differences, such as class, race, gender, and sexual style, can be further theorized and reevaluated . . . I see some hope in the healthy tensions and contradictions of a lesbian and gay intellectual endeavor: namely the possibility of reopening a wider discussion on gender, sexuality, class, race, and other differences in the context of queer experience . . . “Queer” like “woman” or “subaltern” is a pragmatically generic and diffuse category, outlining an area for legitimate condensation and contestation.

–Jacqueline N. Zita (1994, pp. 258, 268)

The tensions produced by LGBT and queer approaches to studying sexuality exemplified in the quotes above indicate just how significant the contested terrain is between those scholars using LGBT Studies and queer theory. Such a contested terrain may be seen in a variety of arenas, including scholarship, the classroom, politics, and in our communities and relationships. Studying these tensions from a variety of disciplinary and inter/transdisciplinary contexts sheds light on the magnitude of influence these approaches have had on scholars studying sexual identity politics and sexuality and gender, more generally.

In this introduction to *LGBT Studies and Queer Theory: New Conflicts, Collaborations, and Contested Terrain*, we establish a context for this volume by: (1) offering some historical notes on LGBT studies and queer theory; (2) outlining some enduring tensions between these two

approaches; (3) describing our rationale for undertaking this project at this particular moment and delineating our specific objectives; (4) summarizing the contributions of the individual articles in this volume; and (5) suggesting possibilities for future work utilizing the productive potentials of these areas of contestation. The overarching hopes for this volume are to articulate some enduring points of contestation from multiple points of view and from a variety of disciplinary and inter/transdisciplinary perspectives, and to provide ideas—and possibly incentive—for future research and/or teaching in this arena. We begin with a discussion of some historical notes on LGBT studies and queer theory.

SOME HISTORICAL NOTES ON LGBT STUDIES AND QUEER THEORY

Lesbian and gay studies in the U.S. are generally discussed as having emerged from the homophile movements of the 1950s and 1960s and the gay and lesbian liberation movements. They largely followed the early stages of the civil rights and women's movements of the 1960s and 1970s that led to the incursion of ethnic and women's studies in the academy (D'Emilio, 1992). The primary goal of lesbian and gay studies has been "to express and advance the interests of lesbians, bisexuals, and gay men, and to contribute culturally and intellectually to the contemporary lesbian/gay movement" (Abelove, Barale, & Halperin, 1993, p. xvi). Queer theory is a more recent theoretical development dating from the early 1990s spurred on by Queer Nation, and is frequently described as an outgrowth of LGBT and feminist studies and politics (Duggan, 1995; Jagose, 1996; Stein, 1999).

It may be useful to remind ourselves briefly of the larger frame within which these approaches arose and continue to develop, i.e., to view them in the context of ongoing intellectual movements of modernism and postmodernism. Modernist approaches, associated with much traditional work in the social sciences, including LGBT studies, are likely to involve a search for knowable meanings via rational and scientific methods (Seidman, 1993). For example, within this worldview, history is seen as a linear process of progressive development. From the modernist perspective, historical records and artifacts provide us with a window through which we may come to understand the past. Modernism is undergirded by the notion that there is significant consensus in the West about history, identities, and values, allowing the telling of metanarratives of the origins and identity development of the sexual

self. This is the logic of much of the “coming out” literature, which presumes a process of uncovering an essential homosexuality; one’s past may be read and re-read as having always contained the “true self.”

Queer theory is conceptually aligned with the postmodernism and poststructuralism of literature, the arts, and the humanities more generally. In particular, it employs a postmodernist critique of biological determinism, or essentialism, and emphasizes a self-reflexive understanding of gender and sexuality. Seidman (1993) notes that “[q]ueers are not united by any unitary identity but only to their opposition to disciplining, normalizing social forces” (p. 133). Subjectivities are multiple, fluid, and include agency, the ability to act, as opposed to a static, unified, view of the self, an object controlled by the dominant society. Master narratives are deconstructed to expose the falsely unified stories they tell about subjects and countered by local narratives. The postmodernist take on subjects highlights the necessity of situating or contextualizing subjects, past and present, with as much specificity as possible. “Queer theory,” says Plummer, “is really poststructuralism (and postmodernism) applied to sexualities and genders” (2003, p. 520). Gamson (2000) concisely summed up the recent history of ideas regarding various thoughts about sexual subjectivity. He avers,

... we have gone from unreflective confidence in the existence of sexual subjects—who only needed to be found and documented—to a boom in lesbian and gay studies filled with subjects speaking and writing about their own lives, to a suspicion that sexual subjects do not exactly exist to be studied, an ongoing deconstruction of sexual subjectivity. (p. 348)

The chronology Gamson suggests certainly helps us understand one of the major, if not the most significant, clashes between LGBT studies and queer theory, viz., their respective positions on sexual identity politics. This will be explored in more detail later. Now, we turn to an examination of some tensions between LGBT studies and queer theory.

SOME ENDURING TENSIONS

Although we recognize that LGBT studies and queer theory share moments of historical emergence and growth that have profoundly influenced the other’s theoretical development, academic expansion and political engagement (de Lauretis, 1991; Gamson, 2000), we chose the

title of this volume, *LGBT Studies and Queer Theory: New Conflicts, Collaborations, and Contested Terrain*, to highlight areas of disputation and competition between these two lines of inquiry. Holding LGBT studies and queer theory apart, at arms' length, is an intentional device that we hope will serve to acknowledge real areas of tension. However, the danger in this strategy is that it may appear to polarize, or at least accentuate the divide. Thus, we have titled this introductory essay, "Shifting Ground(s): Surveying the Contested Terrain of LGBT Studies and Queer Theory," purposefully. Though there is considerable critique of the existing research coming from both of these approaches to understanding sexualities within the pages of this volume, we do not want to lose sight of the shared, overlapping, frequently complementary grounds on which they stand. In terms of commonalities, both LGBT studies and queer theory are modes of inquiry whose focal point is gender and sexuality. Both are linked to significant social movements of the mid-late 20th century, particularly the 2nd wave of feminism and the gay liberation movement. Both have made significant use of qualitative approaches to how meanings are subjectively constructed. Both seek to link research with politics and liberate sexual and gender "minorities" from oppressive forms of heteronormativity and sexual and gender prejudice that have been, and continue to be, harmful to those who do not fit gender and sexual norms.

But there are also significant differences in LGBT's and queer theory's assumptions about the nature of individual and collective realities and the appropriate modes of inquiry for describing and transforming them. As summarized above, some of these have included, respectively: disciplinary distinctions (e.g., the social sciences and the humanities); disciplinary and inter/transdisciplinary modes of research; and, questions of stability and fluidity of sexual and gender identities. On this last point, it is our sense that gay and lesbian studies have tended to emphasize the stability of gay and lesbian sexual identities, while queer theory, though growing out of LGBT studies, *primarily* aims to continuously destabilize and deconstruct the notion of fixed sexual and gender identities. LGBT studies is generally criticized for taking a minoritizing view (see Sedgwick, 1990), that maintains rather than disrupts the homosexual/heterosexual binary (Gamson, 1995/1998; Sedgwick, 1990). Akin to an ethnic identity model, the minoritizing view has been challenged both in the critique of compulsory heterosexuality made by lesbian feminists that highlights differences between women's and men's life choices, and by scholars and activists of color who argue that this is predominately studied through the lens of white, middle-class males. This

charge has been appropriately leveled against both approaches. While some scholars describe queer theory as more radical and inclusive than gay and lesbian studies (Stein, 1999; Warner, 1993), many queer theorists' penchant for overlooking race has also been demonstrated (see, for example, Alexander, 2003; Barnard, 2003; Johnson, 2001). Additionally, Hennessy (2000), Jackson (2003), Kirsch (2000, and in this volume), and Morton (1996) are among those who critique queer theory for its inattention to material conditions and practices.

Disciplinary struggles between the two approaches are played out in the academy where queer theory has been perceived by some as a "mixed blessing" in that, on the positive side, it "has produced an enormous amount of publishing activity among lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender scholars, invigorating the field and helping to usher in a new visibility for the study of gender and sexuality" (Brookey & Miller, 2001, p. 139). Alternately, Halperin asserts that queer theory's ascendancy in institutions of higher education has had "the undesirable and misleading effect of portraying all previous work in lesbian and gay studies as under-theorized, as laboring under the delusion of identity politics" (2003, p. 341).

Identity politics are a recurring theme of the contested terrain. There is much heated discussion about the political utility of queer theory: "some critics have portrayed queer theory as an esoteric and politically bankrupt approach that contributes little to social change" (Brookey & Miller, 2001, p. 139). Queer theory is accused of compromising, if not abandoning, its subversive origins and questions are raised as to whether or not it has the wherewithal to sustain effective political alliances. For example, Medhurst and Munt (1997), co-editors of *Lesbian and Gay Studies: A Critical Introduction*, protest "[W]hilst Queer Theory seems to have suspended Lesbian and Gay Studies nomenclature in the academy, we are disturbed by the elitism which has come to be associated with it, in spite of its originally inclusive political agenda" (p. xi). Parnaby (1996) argues that queer theory fails to address the ways in which men oppress women and Jeffrey (2003) observes that queer theory has yet to supply sufficiently specific channels of tackling heteropatriarchal power. Similarly, Namaste (2000, p. 23) notes that queer theory shows "remarkable insensitivity" to the lives and experiences of transgendered people. This position is countered by those who argue that it is the identity politics associated with LGBT approaches have been primarily fueled by assimilationist impulses that are unable to adequately deal with contemporary exigencies. The social implications of our theories matter a great deal, for "[t]here is much at stake

here, not just for research and theory but for everyday politics: Collective action . . . requires sophisticated inquiry into the simultaneous, and linked, processes by which the experiences of sexual desire are given institutional, textual, and experiential shape” (Gamson, 2000, p. 360). We propose that we cannot afford to be more engaged in undermining each other’s efforts than in vigorous discussions and constructive dialogues.

RATIONALE AND OBJECTIVES FOR THIS VOLUME

This project flows from a series of conversations begun almost six years ago about the possibilities for queering communication and other related fields of study. The book *Queer Theory and Communication: From Disciplining Queers to Queering the Discipline(s)* (Yep, Lovaas, & Elia, 2003) was a tangible product of those talks and spurred our interest in the subject of this volume. We were intrigued with the strength of feeling evinced by many contributors to the prior collection regarding queer theory’s real and promised achievements, evidence of its failings, and its sometimes antagonistic relationship with LGBT studies.

As we stated in the introduction to the previous volume, we believe that LGBT studies and queer theory need “to coexist in an ongoing productive tension” in which neither holds nor pursues “theoretical hegemony” (Yep, Lovaas, & Elia, 2003, pp. 4-5). This volume critically explores a variety of facets of the evolving debates over the ground of sexuality and gender studies and politics, highlighting their academic, social, and personal implications. Its objectives are: (1) to extend the conversation begun in the previous volume (Yep, Lovaas, & Elia, 2003) to more disciplines and interdisciplinary contexts; (2) to create a vehicle for disseminating current work grappling with the “contested terrain” of LGBT studies and queer theory; (3) to consider the implications of this research for scholars, teachers, and political activists; and (4) to galvanize further research related to engaging tensions of multiple approaches to research and political action.

This volume contains 12 articles from a variety of disciplinary and interdisciplinary fields, and each one in its own way offers a description of the contested relationship between lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) studies and queer theory. Although both of these approaches were born in the service of liberating sexual and gendered *others*—and have been important theoretically and have served as the basis for much needed activism—from the injustices and harm inherent in

heteronormativity, in many instances scholars who have endorsed the LGBT studies perspective have been at odds with the theoretical positions employed by queer theorists and vice versa. Many of the pieces contained in this work articulate the tensions between these two theoretical positions, and the implications these various points of contestation have on academic, community, and personal life. This volume has been divided into three sections, viz., theoretical debates and interventions, intersections, and contexts.

CONTRIBUTIONS OF THE ARTICLES

We begin with “Theoretical Debates and Interventions,” a grouping of four essays that address some of the current theoretical issues in research on sexualities and offer ways to push the work in a few specific disciplines to move in new directions. First comes Max Kirsch’s “Queer Theory, Late Capitalism and Internalized Homophobia.” Kirsch points out that while queer theory offers a different approach than LGBT studies and cultural theory in an attempt to liberate lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender individuals, it is actually dubious in terms of whether or not it can create positive social change. He contends that queer theory’s erasure of identity feeds into late capitalism and perpetuates internalized homophobia. He concludes that queer theory would be more useful if it shifted from the critique of identities to an acknowledgement of the value of *identifying with* social movements. Then, Kirsch believes, more effective coalition building can occur and greater focus on matters of importance to promoting social change.

Next, the volume turns to Peter Hegarty and Sean Massey’s article, “Anti-Homosexual Prejudice . . . as Opposed to What? Queer Theory and the Social Psychology of Anti-Homosexual Attitudes.” Using Sedgwick’s observations about minoritizing and universalizing theories of sexuality as a backdrop, this piece includes a critical examination about how anti-homosexual prejudice has been framed and studied by social psychologists. After offering a comprehensive summary and analysis of the prominent recent research that has focused on the minoritizing approach, Hegarty and Massey conclude that queer theory has the potential of revolutionizing social psychological research and could foster an enhanced understanding of anti-homosexual prejudice.

Following this piece, Melissa M. Wilcox’s “Outlaws or In-Laws? Queer Theory, LGBT studies, and Religious Studies” reveals how religious studies have been either overlooked or superficially treated in

both LGBT studies and queer theory. In some cases, Wilcox contends, religious studies are treated disparagingly within these canons. Her work assesses LGBT studies and queer studies in religion and suggests ways that both approaches can provide productive new avenues for the future in terms of infusing LGBT studies and queer theory in religious studies.

The final article in this section is Jeff Bennett's "A Queer Anxiety: Assimilation Politics and Cinematic Hedonics in *Relax . . . It's Just Sex*," which provides a rigorous analysis of how queerness is commodified in independent cinema. Specifically, this piece uses the film, *Relax . . . It's Just Sex* to show the tensions of trying to maintain gay and lesbian sexual politics while trying to appeal to a wide audience with a variety of sexual tastes and sexual politics. Bennett points out that while this film defies sexual norms, it ultimately falls back on hegemonic and "essentialized understandings of identity closely aligned to liberation rhetoric." Bennett urges queer activists to be more attentive to discourses that shape everyday life.

"Intersections" is the second section of the volume. These five essays examine how LGBT studies and queer theory explore the interplays and collisions between sexuality and other vectors of difference, such as race, class, and gender, in both U.S. and international contexts.

This section begins with an article by Steven Angelides entitled, "Historicizing (Bi)Sexuality: A Rejoinder for Gay/Lesbian Studies, Feminism, and Queer Theory." His article begins by discussing the irony-misfortune-that while queer theory promises to interrogate heteronormativity and ". . . work the hetero/homosexual opposition to the point of collapse," bisexuality has been virtually ignored within queer theory. Angelides points out that no one has ever attempted to explain this phenomenon, and therefore he sets out, in part, to offer an historical account of bisexuality's erasure within the canons of queer theory. This study clarifies the tensions between LGBT studies, feminism, and queer theory. In the end, Angelides contends that many queer theorists have had a misguided theoretical approach to sexuality and gender. Angelides concludes by asserting that ignoring the history of bisexuality and the conflict within these theoretical paradigms has created problems in terms of deconstructing the hetero/homosexual binary.

Also examining the territory of bisexuality, Mark A. Gammon and Kirsten L. Isgro's "Troubling the Canon: Bisexuality and Queer Theory" is an historical account about how bisexuality has been theorized, and an analysis of how such theorizing has shaped its relationship to queer theory. Like Angelides, these scholars note bisexuality's absence

in Queer theory and research, an absence with serious consequences on a few fronts. Gammon and Isgro address bisexual epistemologies and their significant implications for queer theory, politics and daily life.

Moving from explorations of bisexuality to other vectors of difference, this section continues with Karen Kraulik's *Cape Queer? A Case Study of Provincetown, Massachusetts*. This article examines how sexuality intersects with race, gender, and class in the development of Provincetown, a gay and lesbian resort community. In the process, Kraulik finds how this community was affected by the global mechanics of capitalism that eventually led to a rearticulation of race, class, and gender inequities.

In the next essay "Jewish Disappearing Acts and the Construction of Gender," Ruth Johnston focuses on the interarticulation of race/ethnicity and gender. She investigates this interarticulation by examining the conceptualization of the Oedipus complex at the turn of the 20th century and the conceptualization of gender performativity in contemporary queer theory. More specifically, Johnston registers a contradiction as well as a historical shift in the representations of Jewish identity that is implicated in the construction of sexual categories in the last century.

Our final essay in this section is Dean Durber's "Desiring Mates." In this piece, Durber examines the relationships between male friends ("mates") in Australia. In his historically situated, and culturally specific analysis, Durber challenges the discourse of gay liberation and the notion of the closet by positioning "mateship" unions within a queer theoretical framework. He argues that through silence and the refusal to be labeled as either homosexual or heterosexual, mates can claim a space of deep emotional bond and pleasure that may or may not include sexual contact. Through this process, Durber maintains that mates resist normalized constructions of sexual identities.

"Contexts" is the third section of this volume. It consists of two essays by authors embodying, practicing, and reflecting on LGBT studies and queer theory in different institutional arrangements and contexts.

This section starts with Jen Bacon's "Teaching Queer Theory at a *Normal School*." It is a case study of the ongoing struggle to queer an institution of higher learning. In the essay, Bacon identifies and reflects on the attempts to introduce sexual diversity at the level of the institution, the curriculum, and the classroom. She notes that the process of sexual diversification is full of tensions and contradictions that are manifested in debates over free speech on campus, departmental jurisdiction for a queer studies minor, and curricular content for a lesbian studies course.

The second article in this section is Claudia Schippert's "Containing Uncertainty: Sexual Values and Citizenship." In the essay, the author reflects on one of the challenges of being a queer ethicist. Drawing from the writings by Weeks, Richardson, Bell and Binnie, and Phelan, Schippert engages the debate of citizenship and the ongoing tensions between LGBT and queer positions. Based on her analysis, she concludes that these debates suggest that political morality and sexual ethics need not be conceptualized according to a particular constructive engagement of citizenship in order to "count" as politically effective.

To close our volume, we offer R. Anthony Slagle's "Ferment in LGBT Studies and Queer Theory: Personal Ruminations on Contested Terrain." In this self-reflexive essay, Slagle examines the personal struggles, relational investments, and disciplinary politics that characterize the ongoing effort to address issues of theory and praxis related to human sexual diversity in a highly charged social and intellectual landscape.

PRODUCTIVE POSSIBILITIES ON CONTESTED TERRAIN

As stated earlier, LGBT studies and queer theory exhibit paths of ongoing convergence and divergence. The essays in this collection attempt to bring together and make explicit these topics of continuing consensus and agreement as well as contestation and debate in a singular volume. Although some individuals are calling for the moment of the "post-queer," we argue that there are a number of potentially productive venues for theory, research, and praxis as LGBT studies and queer theory continue to evolve and engage in the production of sexual knowledges on this contested terrain. In this final section, we make speculations about some of these productive possibilities.

We believe that there are three general areas that appear to be productive for future work. The first focuses on issues of identity and difference. Although both LGBT studies and queer theory engage these concepts differently, the notion of a sexual identity—whether fixed and permanent or fluid and eternally changing—is central in theory and praxis. However, sexuality is always already intersecting with other vectors of identity and difference. For example, the concept of a "gay identity" tends to generally refer to U.S. middle-class white men (Bérubé, 2001), or to put it another way, sexuality intersects with race, class, gender, and nationality. Writing about sexual oppression, Blasius (1997) observes that "we are oppressed because of our sexuality, our

gender, and our sexed corporeality” and “this sexual oppression is mediated, subjectified, and enacted through the categories and relations of racism, of class exploitation and economic advantage or deprivation, and of cultural hegemony” (p. 350). Although this intersectional approach to sexual identity is now widely accepted and recognized, neither LGBT studies nor queer theory has adequately embraced it as a theoretical lens or as a tool for activism (Cohen, 1997). This situation becomes even more complex if we examine how sexual desires, practices, and expressions are embodied by individuals and groups who challenge the homosexual/heterosexual binary such as bisexuals (e.g., Fox, 2004; Storr, 1999; Tucker, 1995) and the gender binary system such as “genderqueers” (e.g., Nestle, Howell, & Wilchins, 2002) and trans-identified persons (e.g., Green, 2004; Namaste, 2000; Rubin, 2003). Finally, these intersections become further complicated if we consider how sexuality is lived and experienced in diasporic, transnational, and global contexts (e.g., Altman, 2001; Cruz-Malavé & Manalansan, 2002; Lee, 2003). But can we afford to think about sexuality without attending to how it intersects with gender, race, class, nation, and ability/disability?¹ While many salute the inclusive potential of the term *queer*, it is still the case that there is far more literature about middle class white males than about dykes of color, “genderqueers,” or trans immigrants, for example. Wherever we go and whatever contexts we work and play in, how does the homosexual/heterosexual binary figure in those arenas and with what material effects? What transpires and what can be transformed when LGBT and queer viewpoints meet in a classroom, a boardroom, a playroom? How do we go about constructing unconventional, alternative, queer relationships in the face of hostile institutions and discourses (see Elia, 2003)? How do the forces of globalization and transnationalism operate in constructing and deconstructing sexual identities?

The second area focuses on community and community organizing. To maintain itself as the universal standard of normality, heterosexuality—as an identity, institution, practice, and experience—desperately needs an “abnormal and pathological other” (e.g., sexual deviants) and this process created an entire class of abject and abominable bodies, souls, and persons (Yep, 2003). The “abnormality” of sexual deviants serves to authenticate the “normality” of heterosexuality. However, an unforeseen consequence occurred as these sexual deviants started organizing around their assigned pathological status: their sexual identity. A sexual minority community was formed and this gave them strength in numbers and resources to combat their own oppression and sexuality became the basis for a political movement. But should the notion of

community as a site for cooperation, equality, and communion be unquestioned and unexamined (Joseph, 2002)? As gender, class, and racial diversity became more and more apparent, multiple sexual communities started developing and the question of organizing across these constituencies has become increasingly important for effective political action (Blasius, 1997). How do LGBT studies and queer theory imagine, construct, and enact community? How do they mobilize these groups for social change?

The third area focuses on political engagement and social change. Questions such as “what constitutes political engagement?” and “what constitutes social change?” become important ones to clarify, debate, and operationalize. Should change be at the level of individual psyches and interpersonal relations and/or at the level of the social structure? Which ones should receive higher priority given limited resources? Should change be immediately “measurable” such as modification of current legislation or implementation of new ones? What about changes in individual consciousness such as awareness of the harms of homophobia and heterosexism and the violence of heteronormativity? Should change occur from within the current social system or should change mean an overhaul of the existing system? What ideologies drive these actions? Should sexual minorities assimilate into heteronormative culture? Should sexual minorities challenge the structure and dynamics of current social and cultural arrangements? These ideological struggles have given rise to what Paul Robinson (2005) calls the “queer wars”—the debates about the politics of sexuality in contemporary U.S. culture. How do LGBT studies and queer theory conceive social change and how it could be enacted? How do LGBT studies and queer theory frame the current debates over sexuality, sexual oppression, and sexual liberation and with what personal, collective, and material consequences? Engaging these questions has the potential to change the quality of life for many individuals. It could also produce different social worlds.

To conclude, LGBT studies and queer theory need not be viewed as locked in a competition from which only one will inevitably emerge, as the modernist mythology of history as linear progression urges us to believe. Post-feminism was also prematurely announced, as feminism gave way—under some duress—to womanism and feminisms. Judith Butler has said that she approaches feminism

with the presumption that no undisputed premises are to be agreed upon in the global context. And so, for practical and political reasons, there is no value to be derived in silencing disputes. The

questions are: how best to have them, how most productively to stage them, and how to act in ways that acknowledge the irreversible complexity of who we are? (2004, p. 176)

The terrain of sexuality and gender studies will continue to be contested rather than permanently settled, leaving ample spaces for intellectual growth and new political moves. Scholars, activists, and scholar/activists have the option and the responsibility to work to make the tensions productive and complex. Together, we are shifting the grounds on which these debates and dialogues are taking place. Collectively the articles in this volume integrate institutional, cultural, and discursive facets of sexualities; individually the articles explore, integrate, and push current conceptions of LGBT studies and queer theory across and within a variety of disciplines. As such, we hope it is a powerful example of this direction. There is always new ground to break, new ground to stand on.

NOTE

1. As we write this introduction, we are particularly mindful of the power of whiteness to re-center itself whenever and wherever we allow our attention to stray for even a moment, despite intentions and commitments to the contrary. We had hoped that this volume would, in the end, include more voices of people of color, and address issues of race and nation more forcefully.

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