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THEORIES

PLAYING WITH BUTLER AND FOUCAULT: BISEXUALITY AND QUEER THEORY

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*Scholars writing on the topic of bisexual identity frequently lament the lack of bisexual representation in works of queer theorists. However, though the problem has been noted, it has yet to be addressed within the main body of queer theory. The seminal works of this theoretical school, written by authors such as Michel Foucault, Judith Butler, Diana Fuss and Eve Sedgwick, all bypassed bisexuality as a topic of inquiry even while writing against binary, biological models of gender and sexuality. Works written within the last 15 years, often in response to or building off of these early works, have for the most part continued to ignore the numerous questions posed by bisexuality. I argue that queer theory would be strengthened by turning the lens onto bisexual subjects and realities. To show the utility of such an addition, this article will take on two of queer theories most cited works, Foucault's *The History of Sexuality* (1978) and Butler's *Gender Trouble* (1990/2006). By writing bisexuality into these works, I will demonstrate that the inclusion of bisexuality ultimately bolsters the arguments of both authors. This article first turns to Foucault, whose work is often considered the catalyst of queer theory, to show that bisexuality can be profitably analyzed through his framework of medicalization, speciation and reverse discourse. I then look at Butler's foundational work, illustrating that her arguments on the interrelatedness of sex/sexuality/gender and also on gender performativity are reinforced by the inclusion of bisexuality.*

Keywords: queer theory, bisexuality, sexual identity, Michel Foucault, Judith Butler

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INTRODUCTION

As an anthropologist interested in the construction of bisexual identity within the United States, I felt queer theory seemed an obvious theoretical basis for my work. Thus, I was surprised when my literature review revealed very few works of queer theory that dealt with the topic of bisexuality. What to me seemed an obvious marriage of theory and topic has been anything but. Although queer theory is dedicated to the deconstruction of the naturalized binary of heterosexual and homosexual, bisexuality, which seems to aid this deconstruction by its very existence, is rarely a topic of interest or inquiry for queer theorists. This article shows that the lack of discussion around bisexuality within works of queer theory has ultimately weakened the arguments queer theorists are trying to make. Through an analysis of the seminal works of Judith Butler and Michel Foucault, I show how the inclusions of bisexual identity by these authors would have reinforced their main points on the construction of sexuality and gender within the West.

However, to discuss the utility of addressing bisexual identity through the lens of queer theory, one must first understand what is meant by *queer* and *bisexual*. Each of these terms denotes a history that is at once political and academic. Further, both words are difficult to pin down as both lack singular or simple definition.

Queer can be, and is, used in multiple different ways, in academia and in Western culture. Most obviously, it can be used as a derogatory noun or adjective for homosexuality or effeminacy. Relatedly, it can also be used to describe something that is somehow out of the ordinary or not quite right. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, *queer* was “taken back” by activists concerned with gender and sexual freedom and became a word that described a particular type of politics. Groups like Queer Nation practiced a “politics of provocation, one in which the limits of liberal tolerance [were] constantly pushed” (Epstein, 1994, p. 195). These groups, rather than practicing assimilation, asserted “in-your-face difference, with an edge of defiant separatism” (Gamson, 1995, p. 395). During the same time period, *queer* also began to be used as an “umbrella term” under which all non-heteronormative individuals could reside (Goldman, 1996; Jagose, 1996). Rather than rolling out the “alphabet soup” of g(ay) l(esbian) b(isexual) t(ransexual) t(ransgendered) i(ntersexed) a(sexual), *queer* allowed a pithy shorthand for authors and organizations concerned with inclusivity. Queer also became an identity category unto itself. Individuals who wanted to label themselves with a nonlabel, who wanted to be fluid or inclusive in their own stated desires or who wanted to challenge hegemonic assumptions of sexuality described themselves as queer (Doty, 1993; Jagose, 1996). A queer identity implies “that not everybody is queer in the same way . . . a

willingness to enable others to articulate their own particular queerness” (Daumer, 1992, p. 100). Or, as Halperin (1995) stated, queer is “by definition whatever is at odds with the normal, the legitimate, the dominant. There is nothing in particular to which it necessarily refers” (p. 62). Drawing on portions of each of the above, the early 1990s saw the creation of another type of queer: “queer theory.”

Queer theory is a segment of academic thought that focuses on the constructedness of gendered and sexual identities and categorizations. To the queer theorist, heterosexuality and homosexuality are binary social constructs that hold saliency only in certain historical moments, rather than descriptors of innate sexual types (Seidman, 1994). Thus, rather than studying the homosexual or heterosexual individual, the queer theorist studies the webs of power and discourse that create and uphold the idea that such individuals exist, and that defining individuals by sexual object choice is somehow natural (Henderson, 2003; Seidman, 2006; Steinman, 2001). Homosexuality is analyzed in part to “expose the deeper contours of the whole society and the mechanisms of its functioning” (Epstein, 1994, p. 197). Heterosexuality is therefore “queered” through this branch of thought, as it loses its status as the original or default sexuality and becomes rather one half of a binary in which each side is intelligible only in relation to the other (Stein & Plummer, 1996). And though sexual identity categories have been reified in popular and medical thought, the queer theorist notes the inherent fluidity of sexuality and thus questions the “unity, stability, viability and political utility of sexual identities” (Gamson, 1995, p. 397). Identities, sexual or not, become tools of social order and control, constantly re-created and re portrayed by the individual (Slagle, 2006). Thus, queer theory also destabilizes and denaturalizes genders (masculine/feminine) and biological sex (male/female), questioning the assumed connectivity between sex and gender, or the legitimacy of presumed scientific classification (Drescher, 2007; Jagose, 1996).

As mentioned above, queer theory has part of its root structure within the queer political movement of the late 1980s and early 1990s. However, queer theory also arose from the gay and lesbian academic endeavors that began in the 1960s and 1970s. At this time, social scientists began to write about gay and lesbian identities and communities (Hooker, 1967; Levine, 1979; Newton, 1972; Sonenschein, 1966). Before this time, though homosexuality had been a focus, it had been written about within sexuality and psychology as a set of sexual practices, or a medical condition (Anderlini-D’Onofrio, 2003; Tierney, 1997). Like queer theory, in its own time gay and lesbian scholarship was heavily tied to the political situation. By the 1980s, scholars had begun to write about gays and lesbians as a quasi-ethnic community, parallel to African American or other racialized minority communities (Epstein, 1987; Gammon & Isgro, 2006; Lovaas,

Elia, & Yep, 2006; Murray, 1979). Although realizing that identity was constructed and unstable, scholars during this time nonetheless embraced identity politics as a tool in the struggle for equal rights for sexual minorities (Jagose, 1996). However, the borders drawn by identity politics felt exclusionary to many, and gay and lesbian scholarship and politics were also accused of being assimilationistic, with only certain, more mainstream or conventional individuals allowed voice (Slagle, 2006; Stein & Plummer 1996). Queer theory, with its acceptance of fluidity and goal of binary deconstruction, was seen as a more inclusive, radical option.

Queer theory also has its roots in several theoretical movements of the 1980s and 1990s. The social constructionist movement in the social sciences and history was vitally important to ensuing queer understandings of sexuality (Gamson, 1995; Seidman, 2006). Standing apart from essentialists, constructionists believed that classifications such as “heterosexual” were the products of specific histories and cultures, rather than true in all times and places (Epstein, 1994). During this time, feminist theory also began to question the validity of the identity of “woman,” noting the way that language and science were used to validate cultural understandings of gender (Jagose, 1996). Feminist inquiries about identity and into binaries like man/woman and masculine/feminine would heavily influence later discussions within queer academic circles. Queer theorists likewise drew from poststructuralism, which maintains that meaning is unstable and that the individual is created by/creates social structures, with one not existing prior to the other (Namaste, 1996, p. 221). Related ideas of deconstructionism, which attacked the validity of binaries (Sullivan, 2003), and a postmodern disavowal of objective, depersonalized truth (Wilchins, 2004) also influenced queer theory.

Although trendy in certain academic circles, queer theory has not been embraced by everyone and has faced critiques from numerous authors. Many feel that queer theory ignores issues such as race and class, elevating sexuality as the only important facet to identity (Goldman, 1996). Others have stated that queer theory, though attempting to deconstruct binaries of sexuality and gender, ends up creating new binaries: queer versus ‘normal’ (Oakes, 1995). Sullivan (2003) noted that queer theory often ends up implying that heterosexuals are “situated in a dominant normative position,” that all gays and lesbians “aspire to be granted access to this position,” and that all queers “consciously and intentionally resist assimilation of any kind” (p. 48). Queer theorists have also been accused of ignoring the importance of gay and lesbian scholarship in their own works, and portraying “all previous work in lesbian and gay studies as under-theorized, as laboring under the delusion of identity politics” (Halperin, 2003, p. 341). However, the criticism that I am most concerned with is that queer theory, in its attack of the hegemonic binary of hetero/homo, ends up ignoring

those sexualities that fall outside of that binary (Gammon & Isgro, 2006; Namaste, 1996). Thus, queer theorists have been curiously silent on the subject of bisexual identity.

Similar to the term *queer*, the word *bisexual* “has several meanings, all of which overlap with one another and are sometimes used interchangeably.” Bisexuality can be used to refer to biological hermaphroditism (Hemmings, 1997b). *Bisexuality* can refer to a series of acts, and/or a behavior. To be behaviorally bisexual is to be sexually active with men and women, regardless of sexual identity. In fact, these individuals might label themselves as heterosexual (a married man who occasionally receives oral sex from other men) or homosexual (a lesbian who has sex with a man). Bisexuality can also be used to describe any individual who falls on the continuum between the polar oppositionals of heterosexual and homosexual. Any individual with unacted-on desires or fantasies for the same sex can be labeled as mentally or emotionally bisexual (Klein, 1978). *Bisexuality* can also be used to describe all sexuality, with an argument being made that every individual has “bisexual potential” (Garber, 1995). Finally, *bisexuality* can be used to refer to an identity. It is bisexual identity, and the political movements and academic scholarship concerning bisexual identity, that is the focus of this article.

Like queer identity and politics, bisexual identity and politics arose out of the gay and lesbian political movements, as well as the feminist movement, of the 1970s. Also, as with the queer movement, the bisexual movement came about in part because of dissatisfaction with the strict identity politics of many gay and lesbian groups (Anderlini-D’Onofrio, 2003). Self-identified bisexual individuals in the late 1980s began to agitate to have the term *bisexual* added to organization names and conference titles. In many cases, as with the Northampton Pride March, the term *bisexuality* was added, and then dropped, and then added again, as heated debates focused on who was, and/or should be part of the gay and lesbian community (Hemmings, 1997b).

In the late 1970s, a handful of scholars began to write about bisexuality. Blumstein and Schwartz (1977) discussed the sexual actions of individuals who self-labeled as bisexual, whereas Mead (1975) explored the social constraints of societies and their effects on bisexual actions and identities. Within psychology, Klein (1978) developed the Klein Sexual Orientation grid, addressing the place of desire and fantasy within sexual identities. By the 1990s a small but distinct group of bisexuality scholars had emerged in the social sciences and humanities, often with a background in gay and lesbian scholarship. Scholars in this field were dedicated to exploring an identity that has been “repeatedly overlooked . . . or understood to be a combination of heterosexuality and homosexuality without maintaining a unique identity of its own” (Burrill, 2002, p. 97). Within this scholarship,

several themes have emerged, including the absence of a single definition for bisexuality. For some authors, this absence provides bisexuality a place of political strength, as it insures the inclusiveness of the identity (Rust, 1996). Others believe that this lack of salient definition has adversely affected the ability of individuals to feel comfortable identifying with the label of "bisexual," as they are often unsure of what bisexuality is or if they are being bisexual in the "right way" (Ault, 1996a; Eadie, 1993). A second theme within bisexuality studies is the invisibility of the identity within the United States. In a society where monogamous couplings are the norm, bisexuality is hard to see; a bisexual in a monogamous relationship will read as heterosexual or homosexual (Whitney, 2002). The inability to "see" bisexuality leads to a lack of connection among bisexuals and a fear of bisexuals by those individuals who do not identify as such (Hemmings, 2002; Ochs, 1996). Drawing on Rich's 1980 work in which she developed the theory of compulsory heterosexuality, James (1996) terms this phenomenon "compulsory monosexuality." He stated that U.S. society mandates that every person be attracted to just one sex and denies that a person can be attracted to both. Bisexual people are devalued by the erasure of bisexuality in much the same way that gays and lesbians are devalued by compulsory heterosexuality (James, p. 221). Perhaps the most written-about theme has been the hostility that bisexuals face, particularly from self-identified lesbians (Armstrong, 1995; Christina, 1995; Daumer, 1992; Hartman, 2005). Pajor (2005) called bisexuals the "white trash of the gay world, a group whom it is socially acceptable not to accept" (p. 574). Despite the array of literature available in this subdiscipline and the numerous anthologies published on the topic, bisexuality scholarship was, and is, often ignored by the broader fields of sexuality research (Angelides, 2006).

As with queer theory, several theoretical schools have been called upon by researchers interested in bisexual identity. For example, many authors have turned to theories of social construction and identity politics (Gammon & Isgro, 2006). Hemmings (1997a) detailed the ways that bisexuals, lesbians and "hasbians" (women who previously identified as lesbian, but who entered relationships with men) often overlap in their identities and understandings of sexuality, and the ways that these identities can become fluid or partial (Hemmings, 1997a). Several authors discuss how bisexual identities serve to highlight the ways that identity theories are "simultaneously indispensable and restricting" (Young, 2004). Other authors have turned to postmodern theories when discussing bisexuality, as bisexual identity is seen as a natural intersection with "threads in postmodern discourse such as indeterminacy, multiplicity and the blurring of 'identity'" (Gammon & Isgro, 2006, p. 169). Hall (1996) stated that "Bisexuality = Postmodernism Embodied" (p. 9). Storr (2003) believes that "the existence

of a self-conscious bisexual identity, and of recognizable forms of bisexual community, organization and politics, are very clearly rooted in early post-modernity” (p. 159). Still other bisexuality scholars have utilized feminist theory, believing the feminist separation of gender from biology to be an important basis for framing bisexual identity (Bradford, 2004). Daumer (1992) believes that the contemplation of bisexuality forces feminist theory to devise “alternative, non-oppressive ways of responding to alterity” (p. 91).

The above discussion seems to show queer theory and bisexuality scholarship as two fields that should have much to contribute to one another. Both schools have roots in gay and lesbian scholarship, social construction theory, feminist theory and postmodern theory. Like queer theory, much work done on bisexuality has focused on the deconstruction of binaries. Also like queer theory, much of the work written on bisexuality has focused on the problems with identity theories, and the “othering” which has been a result of identity politics. Further, queer theory and bisexual scholarship have questioned the naturalization of heterosexuality, studying its construction as a vital part of sexual categorization (Daumer, 1992). However, queer theory has ignored, and continues to ignore, questions of bisexuality and bisexual identity. It seems a curious gap, keeping in mind the aim of most queer theorists: the destabilization of gender and sexual binaries. Bisexuality, which cannot help but be uniquely placed inside/outside of the binary of heterosexuality/homosexuality, seems to be an ideal starting place for deconstruction. However, “in spite of occupying an epistemic position within this very opposition, the category of bisexuality has been curiously marginalized and erased from the deconstructive field of queer theory” (Angelides, 2001, p. 7).

This trend has been noted by several bisexuality scholars. Goldman, writing in 1996, notes that “queer theory—except that written by bisexuals themselves—consistently ignored bisexuality and rarely quoted bisexual theorists” (Goldman, 1996, p. 176). James, writing in the same year, also pointed to the shoddy treatment bisexuality has received from queer theory, stating that bisexuality is used by queer theorists as “a misfit third category of sexual identity, generally reserved for ambiguous historical figures, indiscriminate lovers, fence sitters, or closet cases” (p. 218). Ten years later, Angelides (2006) noted this same absence, whereas Gammon and Isgro (2006) likewise bemoan the “unexpected and ongoing absence of bisexuality in much of queer theory” (p. 174). Young (2004) noted that when a text was not specifically about bisexuality, if bisexuality is mentioned at all it is often:

tacked on to one or more of the innumerable iterations of “lesbian and gay” . . . and then not mentioned again. Very rarely is it actually

discussed, explored, or articulated as a queer identity alongside “lesbian” and “gay.” (p. 386)

Burrill (2002) compared the treatment of bisexuality to that of heterosexuality in gay and lesbian scholarship, an “unquestioned paradigm” that is mentioned and then ignored by the majority of authors (p. 97).

There are several possible reasons for this lack. Some scholars argue that queer theory relies on binary oppositions to distinguish gay from straight (James, 1996). Thus, in an attempt to break down dualistic opposition, queer theorists ignore sexuality that lies outside of them and end up reifying the binaries that they are attempting to challenge (Steinman, 2001). Other scholars believe that queer theory privileges certain sexualities—certain types of queer—over others. Individuals that “fall outside of this normativity are thus rendered queer queers and must position ourselves and our work in opposition to it” (Goldman, 1996, p. 179). Bisexuality, posited here as one of the “queerest of the queer,” is thus forced to deconstruct queer theory, rather than being a part of the theory itself. Still other scholars point to the separation and stratification of sexuality and gender in queer theory as the culprit (Angelides, 2006). Young (2004) believes that “silence tends to breed silence,” and that the most queer theorists are unaware of the writings on bisexuality, as they are often published in bisexuality readers, “often overlooked in queer studies, given the equation, in most instances, of ‘queer’ with ‘lesbian and gay’” (p. 388). Others believe that bisexuality is assumed to be some mix of homosexuality and heterosexuality and is therefore considered implicit in discussions of sexual duality (Angelides, 2006; Ault, 1996b). Relatedly, bisexuality can be understood as a part of the binary system, and thus not a force of deconstruction (Daumer, 1992). Finally, there is a feeling from some queer theorists that ‘queer’ has moved beyond bisexuality, as *bisexuality* is a term situated within a sexual/gendered binary by its very name. Hemmings (1997b) quoted one scholar as saying that “bisexual theory is not as sophisticated as queer theory” (p. 32). Perhaps bisexuality in general is not seen as sophisticated enough for queer theory.

There is no doubt that mentions of bisexual identities and bisexuality scholarship have been absent from works of queer theory. However, this absence is not merely problematic because of its exclusivity. What the second half of this article shows is that this absence has actually weakened queer theory. To show this, I turn to the foundational works of the discipline. After a survey of works written on the subject of queer theory, I have found that four are most often cited as seminal: Foucault’s (1978) *A History of Sexuality*, Butler’s (1990/2006) *Gender Trouble*, Sedgwick’s (1990) *Epistemology of the Closet*, and Fuss’s (1991)

introduction to *Inside/Out*. Although multiple other authors are mentioned in conjunction with queer, these four are consistently labeled as catalysts and founders of the field (Jagose, 1996; Halperin, 2003; Spargo, 1999; Steinman, 2001). Each of these four works ignores bisexuality, either completely or by relegating bisexuality to footnotes or as an add-on. This silence has carried forward to today, with queer theorists still busily responding to these seminal works, at the exclusion of looking to areas, such as bisexuality, that were originally missed. Although these early queer theorists chose to ignore bisexuality in their analyses, bisexuality could have been a profitable avenue of exploration for them. To highlight the usefulness of a bisexual inquiry in queer theory, I have chosen to write bisexuality into the works of Michel Foucault and Judith Butler. After summarizing the main points of both books, I will use said points to analyze bisexuality, showing how the inclusion of this topic would have rendered the arguments of Foucault and Butler clearer and stronger.

PLAYING WITH FOUCAULT

Foucault, a French poststructuralist, wrote *A History of Sexuality* more than a decade before queer theory was initially articulated. However, many authors believe that “it was Foucault’s overall model of the discursive construction of sexualities that was the main initial catalyst for queer theory” (Spargo, 1999, p. 26). Although other authors writing during the late 1970s developed theories on the social construction of sexuality (such as McIntosh and Weeks), it was to Foucault that most queer theorists turned. This was perhaps because Foucault saw little stability in identity politics and believed that the individual was created through and by discourse, which itself was created by systems of knowledge power. This stance would have resonated with early queer theorists, whose recognition of unstable sexual identities originally sparked their move away from gay and lesbian scholarship. Further, as poststructuralism forms an important backbone of queer theory, it is not surprising that authors turned to Foucault. His works can be read as more radical, and more steeped in the deconstruction of categories of sexuality, than the works of his contemporaries writing on the subject.

Foucault took as his topic of inquiry the “repressive hypothesis” of the Victorian era, aiming to show that sexuality, far from being a forbidden topic of speech/thought during the last two centuries, has actually been the center of a veritable explosion of discourse in the West. Not satisfied to merely prove the prevalence of sexual discourse, Foucault (1978) wanted instead to “account for the fact that [sexuality] is spoken about, to discover who does the speaking, the positions and viewpoints from

which they speak, the institutions which prompt people to speak about it and which store and distribute the things that are said" (p. 11). Through an analysis of the interstices of knowledge, power and sexuality, Foucault traced how sex acts became medicalized, and how modern categories of sexuality were created through a combination of speciation, belief in truth and reverse discourse. To give a concrete example of this, he often turned to homosexuality, and the creation of the homosexual person in the West.

The first point that Foucault (1978) made about our modern system of sexuality is that it is based in the medicalization of sex and pleasure, and the creation of sexual species. He believed that sexuality in Western culture is understood as *scientia sexualis*, rather than *ars erotica*, or as a matter of science rather than a matter of pleasure (p. 58). Within a system of scientific sexuality, the sexual is controlled by various loci of power, such as the fields of biology, psychology and medicine. Foucault believed that during the 19th century medicine "created an entire organic, functional, or mental pathology arising out of 'incomplete' sexual practices" (p. 41). These incomplete sexual practices were anything that fell outside of conjugal sexual relations/sex for procreation. If sexuality had become a scientifically controlled process, it was those practices that catered to pleasure, rather than biology, that were stigmatized. However, in the process of searching out and labeling sexual perversions, the medical and scientific fields were not ridding society of these things. Rather, these fields were creating a new type of person: the sexual deviant. Speaking about homosexuality specifically, Foucault clarified how:

The nineteenth-century homosexual became a personage, a past, a case history, and a childhood, in addition to being a type of life, a life-form, and a morphology, with an indiscreet anatomy and possibly a mysterious physiology. Nothing that went into his total composition was unaffected by his sexuality . . . The sodomite had been a temporary aberration; the homosexual was now a species. (p. 43)

Thus, where once a sex act could stand on its own, the new medical discourse morphed this act into a type of person and a medical identity. Foucault uses the metaphor of biological speciation here deliberately: the homosexual or other-labeled "pervert" becomes seen as naturally occurring type of person who is different from (and inferior to) the unmarked nondeviant in a host of ways that culminates in same-sex sexuality. This can be seen in the late-19th-century writings of Karl Ulrichs who believed that homosexuality was the result of some men being born with strongly female souls, and vice versa (Sullivan, 2003, p. 4). Richard Krafft-Ebing,

writing during the same period, believed that homosexuality was caused by “neuro-psychical degeneration” (Sullivan, 2003, p. 7).

For this medicalization and subsequent speciation to take place, the population of the West had to be willing to confess their sexual acts and desires and to hand the power of labeling these confessed desires over to another. This conjunction of power, truth and confession is Foucault’s second point. He stated that since the Middle Ages, “Western societies have established the confession as one of the main rituals we rely on for the production of truth” (Foucault, 1978, p. 58). Although this constructed necessity for confession was originally supported by the Catholic church in Europe, confession continued to be important even as the church became less so (p. 63). Confession, like sexuality, eventually fell to the sciences to regulate, and sexologists and psychologists utilized confession as medical therapy (p. 68). The confession of sexual perversion, and the analysis and labeling of this confession by a professional, turns “sex into discourse” (p. 61). Thus, the scientific professional was imbued with the power to “give truths” of sexuality to the confessor—to tell them to what “species of pervert” they belonged.

It is at this point that Foucault made his third, albeit brief, point. Once multiple people have internalized a discourse, and have accepted a label, they are able to seek each other out. What begins as a way of categorizing and controlling eventually becomes a way for like to meet like, and for an alternate discourse, this time created by the very individuals originally labeled, to emerge. This “reverse” discourse, as Foucault called it, makes possible the creation of self-identities. Thus, in the mid-20th century, “homosexuality began to speak in its own behalf, to demand that its legitimacy or ‘naturalness’ be acknowledged, often in the same vocabulary, using the same categories by which it was medically disqualified” (Foucault, 1978, p. 101). In this reverse discourse, gays and lesbians are able to label themselves, through the power of the “coming-out” rhetoric. Thus, the truth now (at least partially) rests in the hands of the individual, and the newly formed community.

Foucault’s theory of sexual construction shows itself as able to explain the rise of the homosexual, and eventually, the creation of gay and lesbian identity. What his theory does not delve into is the place of bisexuality in this historical construction. Despite Foucault’s silence on the subject, this same process of medicalization, speciation, confession and reverse discourse can be used to illuminate many of the differences between the development of homosexual and bisexual identities and politics.

Bisexuality, as a term used to describe sexual acts and desires, was first utilized in the late 19th century (Ault, 1996a). It is important to note that the term did indeed exist before this time (unlike the terms *heterosexual* and *homosexual*). However, during the early 1800s the term *bisexual* was

used to describe organisms with male and female reproductive powers, rather than a type of human sexuality (Angelides, 2001). Early sexologists pulled away from this original definition and conceived of bisexuality as some mixture of an anatomical condition (intersexuality) and a state of mind. Thus, a bisexual individual was one who in some ways expressed traits of men and women. For example, Ellis and Kraft-Ebing, two early sexologists, discussed bisexuals as “organically twisted” and “psychical hermaphrodites” (Angelides, 2006, p. 131). It wasn’t until the 20th century that scientists moved towards using the term *bisexual* to refer to individuals that had sexual attractions to men and women (Angelides, 2006).

However, once *bisexuality* began to refer to sexuality rather than anatomical/psychological intersexuality, it was still not used to denote a type of individual or “species” of pervers. Many authors writing in the early 1900s talked about bisexuality as a stage of development and not as its own, independent category or sexuality. An example of this was the theory of “sexual evolution.” In this model, the “human species evolved from a primitive hermaphroditic state to today’s gender differentiated physical form [with the] psychological development of the individual parallel [to] this evolutionary process” (Fox, 1995, p. 49). In other words, just as all human embryos start as intersexed, so too do they all start as bisexual. For example, psychoanalyst Wilhelm Stekel (1922) stated in the 1920s that “all persons originally are bisexual in their predisposition. There is no exception to this rule” (p. 39). Sexologist Havelock Ellis (1915) believed that the “basis of sexual life is bisexual” (p. 18). Although he noted that individuals tended to display heterosexual or homosexual characteristics, he felt that all individuals began as bisexuals and eventually felt more pull toward one sex or the other. Ellis went on to state that bisexuality as a category introduces “uncertainty and doubt” into the study of sexuality (p. 19).

Another scholar who wrote about bisexuality as a developmental phase was Sigmund Freud who believed that all individuals were born with bisexual potential. However, as an individual matured, he or she would become either a heterosexual or a homosexual, with homosexuality being a sign of arrested psychosexual development (Freud, 1962). Therefore, bisexuality was not a sexual identity, but rather an intermediate position based on an infant’s hermaphroditism in the womb (Freud & Brill, 2008, p. 7). Interestingly, Freud, like Ellis, thought that bisexuality as a topic caused problems for the study of sex. Freud (1940) stated that bisexuality “embarrasses all our enquiries into the subject and makes [sexuality] harder to describe” (p. 188).

What this short history shows is that bisexuals were never a “species” according to medical discourse. Bisexuality could be a stage, or a primordial sexuality, but it was never used to describe a person. In fact, the

medicalization of “homosexual acts” forbids the creation of a bisexual person, because all individuals who were sexually active with others of the same sex were labeled as homosexual. Eadie (1993) stated that “bisexuality simply cannot exist as a category in discourses which name all male-male and female-female sex ‘homosexual’ and all male-female sex ‘heterosexual’” (p. 146). Perhaps the one way to perform a “bisexual act” is to have sex simultaneously with partners of both genders. However, as “any stain of homosexuality was enough to subsume bisexuality into homosexuality,” it is likely that even multipartnered sex would be labeled as homosexual (Gammon & Isgro, 2006, p. 165). Further, much of the work written on sexuality seems to assume monogamy, despite the examples of polyamory that exist throughout history. Because “bisexual acts” did not exist within the medical discourse, there was also no corresponding bisexual species. A group of individuals could not be labeled as “bisexual” if there was no action they could perform that was read in this way. Current bisexuality scholars have noted this lack in medical and psychological literature. Hemmings (1995) stated that the fact that bisexuality “has not been pathologised as a sexual identity per se may be one reason for the contemporary claims that bisexuality does not exist” (p. 51).

Because the bisexual was not placed into a “species” or written about as such by the medical community in the 19th and early/mid-20th centuries, there was also no “truth” in bisexuality. No psychologist or doctor could listen to a confession and label the confessor as bisexual. So, though other sexualities were being doled out as the truth, bisexuality was not an option. Angelides (2001), quoting Foucault, noted that “the category of bisexuality seems to have been spared the rigors of this ‘never-ending demand for truth’” (p. 2). Finally, because bisexuality was not reified as a medical category, and used as a way of medically labeling individuals, there was not the same sort of “reverse discourse” built up around the topic. Because of this, bisexuals were slower to build an identity movement than gays and lesbians had been. Although homosexual individuals used the categories and the language of the medical fields to create a movement, bisexual identity politics grew from dissatisfaction with the gay and lesbian movement. Thus, the “reverse discourse” utilized by bisexual politics would have been based in the rhetoric of gay and lesbian politics, rather than in science. Further, the lack of a medical typology/legitimate identity has caused confusion as to just what bisexuality is, even among bisexuals themselves. Eadie (1993) noted that:

With alarming regularity, I encounter people who feel that, in the absence of a coherent (which would also mean policed) bisexual identity, their expression of bisexuality is wanting. . . . This persistent insecurity

is generated by the absence of any normative identities which might provide the security of being bisexual “in the right way.” (p. 144)

Thus, just as Foucault’s theory of discourse can explain the Western construction of gays and lesbians, it can also explain the lack of salience around bisexual identity. With no medical discourse, no scientifically granted truth and no reverse discourse, it is little wonder that bisexual identity has formed more slowly than others. The fact that Foucault’s work can be used to explain this difference between homosexual and bisexual identities confirms that bisexuality would have been a fruitful topic for Foucault to explore. The usefulness of bisexual identity to buttress Foucault’s work also points to the utility of the subject for modern queer theorists drawing on Foucault.

PLAYING WITH BUTLER

Although Foucault’s work can be read as the catalyst of queer theory, it is Judith Butler’s 1990/2006 work, *Gender Trouble*, which is often understood to be “the most influential text in queer theory” (Spargo, 1999, p. 52). This text also highlights the second strategy used by queer theorists when dealing with bisexuality (the first being total silence). Unlike Foucault, Butler does mention *bisexuality* by name several times throughout her book. However, bisexuality is only present in laundry list style, somewhere between gay, lesbian and heterosexuality. It is never articulated apart from these other sexualities, and never developed in any way. Because of this, bisexuality remains as absent in this text as it was in Foucault’s.

As the title of her book suggests, Butler (1990/2006) moved from a tight focus on sexuality (such as Foucault maintained) to a broader view of gender and sexuality and the ways in which these constructions can be read as mutually constitutive. Butler also introduced the idea of gender as performative, rather than given. Though bisexual identity is absent in Butler’s work, it can be easily included into her ideas of gender trouble and performativity, in a move that once again strengthens the theoretical underpinnings of the argument being made.

Butler noted that social constructionists writing before her have tended to separate out sex, gender and sexuality (and/or desire) as though these are discrete categories of human existence. Sex had been understood as the biological body, gender as the cultural understandings of the biological body and sexuality as an articulation of sex object choice. However, Butler cautions that these phenomena can never be understood separately, because each is positioned with/by the others. Thus, “intelligible genders are those which in some sense institute and maintain relations of coherence and continuity among sex, gender, sexual practice, and desire” (Butler, 1990/2006,

p. 23). For example, to be a man (sex) is to be read as masculine (gender) and as heterosexual (sexuality). However, beyond this, part of being masculine is being heterosexual. Sexuality can thus never be divided from gender, because it constitutes an important aspect of what gender is.

Further, Butler (1990/2006) stated that “the cultural matrix through which gender identity has become intelligible requires that certain kinds of ‘identities’ cannot ‘exist’—that is, those in which gender does not follow from sex and those in which the practices of desire do not ‘follow’ from either sex or gender” (p. 24). Thus, one can be a feminine, woman-bodied heterosexual. This is an identity that is easily culturally understood. However, to attempt to mix this up, and be a masculine, woman-bodied heterosexual, or a feminine, woman-bodied homosexual, is to portray a gender that is unintelligible to mainstream American culture. In these unintelligible genders rests the potential for “gender trouble.”

Although interested in the interconnectedness of sex, gender and desire, Butler is also interested in the how gender is enacted in 20th century America and Europe. She does not believe that gender is something that an individual is given. Rather, she stated that gender is something that one has to do, continuously, throughout one’s life. Gender then becomes a performance, where:

acts, gestures, and desire produce the effect of an internal core or substance, but produce this on the surface of the body, through the play of signifying absences that suggest, but never reveal, the organizing principle of identity as the cause. Such acts, gestures, enactments, generally construed, are performative in the sense that the essence of identity that they otherwise purport to express are fabrications manufactured and sustained through corporeal signs and other discursive means. (Butler, 1990/2006, p. 185)

Gender is thus not a stable attribute of identity, but something that must be constantly revealed and restated. With this in mind, Butler (1990/2006) called on her readers to make gender trouble “through the mobilization, subversive confusion, and proliferation of precisely those constitutive categories that seek to keep gender in its place by posturing as the foundational illusions of identity” (p. 46).

As mentioned previously, Butler does not address bisexuality in her arguments about the interconnectedness of sexuality and gender, nor in her section on the performative nature of gender. When discussing the former, she talks more about homosexuality, and particularly, lesbian identity. When addressing gender performativity, she turns specifically to the process of drag. However, I believe that bisexuality, taken as an identity,

serves as a way of starting gender trouble. Bisexuality can also be used to highlight the importance of performance.

I agree with Butler that sexuality is an important aspect in the construction, and performance, of gender. Thus, to be a lesbian is a deviation of the “correct” mode of feminine and creates gender trouble. However, this gender trouble seems to be dismissed by broader Western culture, which tends to view gays and lesbians as somehow cross-gendered. Thus, a lesbian is assumed to be masculine, keeping the “correct” gender and sexuality matched up, and minimizing the challenges to the gender system. Hemmings (1997b) noted that the stereotypes of the “‘mannish woman’ and effeminate man,” and their correlate ‘opposite’ object choices” allow gender and sexuality to stay coupled (p. 17).

Bisexuality, on the other hand, cannot be so easily matched, because it does not allow gender to be wholly tied with sex object choice. If a person is choosing both sexes as erotic partners, her or his gender cannot be matched with sexuality. A woman who sleeps with men and women cannot be read as either feminine or masculine without causing gender trouble. Either her gender is constantly changing (with her partner), or her gender does not match her sexuality. Further, by desiring men and women she has really removed herself from either gender category, as “men and women” is not an option in either masculinity or femininity. She is therefore causing gender trouble in a way that cannot be dismissed, unless her sexuality is called into question. The fact that bisexuality *is* constantly questioned seems to attest to the gender trouble that this identity causes (Hemmings, 1997b). Bisexuality is “the Snuffaluffagus of sexualities,” with individuals debating whether or not it exists at all (Macalister, 2003, p. 25). Is this debate partially due to an inability to read genders and sexualities that do not match? This is a question that Butler could have addressed, had she added an analysis of bisexuality to her work. This analysis would have strengthened her arguments on the interconnections of sexuality and gender.

An analysis of bisexual identity would also have allowed Butler to expand her idea of performativity. She noted, and I agree, that the continued performance of gender is what allows genders to be culturally intelligible. A man who makes sure to talk about cars and sports around his male friends is performing his gender, either consciously or unconsciously. This same argument can be made for sexuality, which is part of any gender performance. A female kissing another female can be read as a sexual performance and a (faulty/subversive/troubled) gender performance. However, how does one read bisexuality? If there are no bisexual acts, but rather, only heterosexual and homosexual ones, then how can bisexuality ever be performed?

Whitney asks this question, wondering “what behaviors, manners of dress or speech might I ‘put on’ in order to prove myself bisexual . . . How can I embody bisexuality as an inherent part of myself, an unmistakable

identity?” (Whitney, 2002, pp. 116–117). She noted that any gender or sexuality must be performed to be considered “real.” However, any performance of bisexuality would seem to directly play into common stereotypes of bisexuality. In this way, “the pressure which is often imposed on bisexuals to ‘prove’ that they exist is in direct conflict with the pressure to prove that they are anything less than sexual deviants and perverts” (p. 118). Thus, in a society based on (serial) monogamy, bisexuality cannot be performed, and thus cannot be validated. Further, and to get back to my earlier point, what gender would a bisexual perform to be correctly read? Androgyny? This would have been an interesting point for Butler to consider when she was discussing performativity.

From the above, one can see the utility that exists in adding bisexuality to Butler’s work. As bisexuality troubles the binaries of sexuality and gender and lacks the potential for performance, an analysis of it highlights the importance of cultural binaries and gender/sexuality performance. Further, theorists today could easily use Butler’s theoretical framework to continue to engage with bisexuality. How do bisexuals perform and understand their identities, given the limitations? What do bisexuals who claim to “love people, not genitalia” tell us about sex/sexuality/gender? How can these individuals be made culturally intelligible?

CONCLUSION

The lack of bisexual identity in works of queer theory might lead one to assume that the two fields are incompatible. However, the above analysis demonstrates that this is far from the case. A rereading of Foucault and Butler shows that discussions of bisexual identity would have ultimately strengthened the arguments of both theorists. Bisexual identity, by its very existence, plays with categories of sexuality and gender. Further, the history of bisexual politics holds an important place in the discussion of sexual identity and should not be glossed over. An inclusion of bisexuality into works of queer theory would allow a more historically and culturally accurate view of sexuality, while providing another argument for the deconstruction of the gay/straight binary.

Of course, not all scholars believe that bisexuality should be included in queer theory. Burrill (2002) believes that “this new trend to ‘queer’ all sexual identity categories might negatively impact those, specifically bisexuality, that have not been allowed any kind of valorized identity in the first place” (p. 98). Gammon and Isgro (2006) agreed, stating that “we share with other sexuality theorists and activists the concern that such efforts effectively make invisible that which is already a decentered and marginalized subject position; bisexuality” (p. 177).

I do believe that bisexuality, an identity that is often questioned and not always understood, will remain ambiguously constructed if queer theory is utilized. A theory that aims to break down identity categories will not successfully create a cohesive bisexual identity. However, the identity politics of the gay and lesbian movement of the 1970s have shown us that valorized identities, though politically powerful, are also potentially othering. Because of this, I see no reason why bisexuality should remain outside of the realm of queer theory. The melding of the two will allow queer theory to strengthen its position of deconstruction, while forcing bisexuality to remain openly identified and inclusive.

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