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GAY, LESBIAN, AND QUEER STUDIES

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In their relatively recent but flourishing history, lesbian and gay studies have moved rapidly through a series of major transformations. Defining a core or boundaries to this body of knowledge is no easy undertaking. Gay and lesbian studies, like the communities and movements associated with them, were perhaps least problematic as a term sometime in the 1980s. Since then, *gay* and *lesbian*, which were disputed names even as they gained widespread currency in the 1960s and 1970s, have been challenged by such terms as *bisexual*, *transgender*, and *queer*. A leading journal in the field calls itself *GLQ* to try to avoid the charge of exclusivity. Yet all these words taken together still do not capture the full range of interests and topics pursued by scholars who write about the many manifestations of sexual and emotional connection, in their social and cultural contexts, that fall outside the heterosexual realm. Two-spirited aboriginal people, historical romantic friendships, and acolyte-mentor relationships are but a few of the topics that go beyond the categories but nevertheless draw together a great many researchers and theorists into communication with each other about how gender, sexuality, identity, power, and culture “work.” Gay and lesbian studies have arisen in the various disciplines of the social sciences and humanities, in professions such as law and business, and in such natural sciences as biology. They have also provided the opportunity for vigorous interdisciplinary dialogues and networks among scholars as well as cultural workers located in communities.

Perhaps what gives some sense of commonality to these many endeavors is their opposition to the study of

homosexuality that preceded them. The Cold War era of the 1950s was occupied almost entirely by a set of ideologies intent on annihilating homosexual desire and its social formations (Adam 1995). Whether in legislatures, courts, churches, universities, or the mass media, talk of homosexuality, if permitted at all, turned on the question of whether it was sin, sickness, or crime. Scholarly debate, along with public discussion, largely addressed the issue of which tools of repression would prove most effective: psychiatry, law enforcement, or religious indoctrination (Terry 1999). Gay and lesbian studies, then, emerged as an effort to decolonize science by breaking the pathology paradigm and wresting the stories of homosexual experience from the monopoly of the social-control professions.

This transition in thinking from the 1950s to the 1970s exists in a yet larger historical context that merits consideration. The desire to document and celebrate the lives of people with homoerotic expression is as lengthy as literacy itself. Ancient recorded epics, such as the Babylonian *Gilgamesh*, the Greek *Symposium*, and the Roman *Satyricon*, contain central narratives of male sexual friendship, as do some of the oldest surviving texts of China, India, Persia, and Japan. Literacy has been much less available to women, but when nuns were first schooled in writing, female passion soon came into view as well (Murray 1996). From the late nineteenth century until 1933, Germany became a center of scholarship, most notably Magnus Hirschfeld’s Institute for Sexual Science, itself just one element of a large and flourishing gay and lesbian culture (Berlin Museum 1984; Schwules Museum

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und Akademie der Künste 1997). Prewar Germany was the site of new novels, drama, and art on gay and lesbian subjects and of the first surveys and academic treatises on the biology, anthropology, and history of homosexuality. The Nazi regime obliterated this first wave of gay and lesbian studies. By the 1950s, only a few lone pioneers in Europe and North America worked against tremendous odds to rediscover what had become “hidden from history” (Duberman, Vicinus, and Chauncey 1989).

The gay and lesbian studies of the 1970s, then, were something of a “second wave” like second-wave feminism. Also like women’s studies, gay and lesbian studies became possible only because of the larger social climate of change characterized by the so-called new social movements of the 1960s. Movement and knowledge-creation were indistinguishable in a period when civil rights, women’s, and gay and lesbian movements sought to take back public and scholarly images and stories about themselves. Like the socialist and national liberation struggles that aimed to break the ideologies that legitimated the subordination of workers and of colonized peoples in Asia and Africa, the new social movements worked to refound science in ways that better expressed their own experiences. The participants in all these new knowledge projects thought of themselves as engaged in consciousness-raising and liberation by challenging social exclusion and creating the tools of self-empowerment.

Debates in gay and lesbian studies were the debates of movement thinkers about who we are and what we want. Key texts written by Jill Johnston, Adrienne Rich, and Mary Daly functioned as manifestos calling lesbians to act on a new vision of a women-centered society free of patriarchal domination. Similarly, Dennis Altman and Guy Hocquenghem postulated new utopias of free-floating desire unhampered by homosexual and heterosexual identities and boundaries. Gay and lesbian writing was struggling out of a long period of censorship and outright suppression. The promise of liberation was allowing people to glimpse the possibility of a new world free of prejudice and to dream of radically rearranged societies where people could explore new options in loving and living together.

TRANSITIONS IN THE LATE 20TH CENTURY

There are a good many social and cultural factors that shaped the new lesbian and gay studies in the last quarter of the twentieth century. Shifts in the sociohistorical environment of the period, reorganization of movement groups and strategies, and new intellectual trends all contributed to a thorough and ongoing rethinking of studies of sexuality and gender. Over time, gay and lesbian movements, like the other new social movements around them, moved away from confrontation and radicalism (Adam 1995). Part of this has to do with the colder political climate of the

neoconservative governments of the 1980s, embodied especially in the Thatcher and Reagan administrations, where reform movements and their constituencies were pressed into a more defensive posture in the face of global capitalism. Part of these changes also has to do with a modicum of success won, especially in advanced, industrial nations, through the attainment of basic antidiscrimination laws and the consolidation of social spaces resistant to police repression. The political strategies that proved most viable in liberal, democratic societies were typically civil rights arguments reliant on judicial and legislative reform. Lesbian and gay politics became somewhat more “domesticated,” or perhaps “mature,” through integration into conventional political channels, and homosexuality tended to become constructed as a minority, parallel to ethnic minorities, in contrast to the gay liberation image of homoerotic desire as a potential in everyone.

The emergence of the AIDS epidemic in the early 1980s emboldened antigay forces to try to roll back newly acquired citizenship rights, but perhaps paradoxically, AIDS also led to new alignments between (some) governments and gay and lesbian communities as AIDS service organizations were brought into health and social service systems and thus into further integration in mainstream state systems (Adam 1997; Altman 1988).

Commercialization also blunted liberationist rhetoric. Gay and lesbian worlds flourished in the post-Stonewall United States and in the European Union, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and Japan, anchored often by commercial establishments, such as bars and discos. Over the years, the growing size of Pride celebrations attracted the interest of major corporations, who came to view gay and lesbian communities as underexploited sources of consumer buying power. The overtly political gay and lesbian press of the 1970s faded away as slick commercial magazines promoting fashionable and expensive “gay lifestyles” came to the fore. This more depoliticized and consumerist environment emboldened a new class of conservative commentators both inside the gay press and in the mainstream media.

In this environment, then, the liberationist project lost sustenance and direction. In his 1990 review of the state of gay and lesbian studies in the United States, Jeffrey Escoffier (1998) lamented the growing disconnection between community and movement politics as the field began to migrate into the academy. A great deal of the new gay and lesbian studies of the 1960s and 1970s grew out of the excitement of discovering a lost history, so much so that early conferences subsumed all other research under the “history” label. A wide range of people from inside and outside the academy turned up at the New York conferences of the Gay Academic Union in the mid-1970s to report on their findings, and many of these findings found their way into gay and lesbian community newspapers. At that time, even professional scholars pursued gay-related research “to the side” of their regular work for fear that it would be seen as more stigmatizing than creditable inside

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universities. But the struggle of lesbian and gay caucuses inside such disciplinary associations as the American Sociological Association in the 1970s and 1980s succeeded in creating space inside the academy, and more and more work in the area began to emerge from students and researchers in the universities.

THE EMERGENCE OF LESBIAN AND GAY STUDIES

Ken Plummer's (1992) review of lesbian and gay studies in Europe and North America marveled at the array of conferences, journals, and bookstores that had sprung up over two decades. Psychologists were displacing the homosexuality-as-sickness view with new investigations into *homophobia*, the irrational prejudice directed against homosexual practices and peoples. Sociologists, anthropologists, and historians were unsettling biological models of sexuality by showing how desire is deeply shaped by cultural context and how pet notions concerning "the natural," "the moral," and "the desirable" are peculiarly ethnocentric. Literary critics were exposing histories of censorship and distortion that had suppressed homoeroticism in novels, movies, and biographies.

Gay and lesbian studies were also changing as a result of internal dilemmas and philosophical currents that affected other philosophies of change such as Marxism, feminism, and postcolonialism. As enthusiastic researchers went out to rediscover gay and lesbian history, they first looked for people much like themselves, only to discover that same-sex desire and relationships took often unfamiliar forms in other eras and cultures. This initial belief in a discoverable homosexual throughout history and around the world came to be known as *essentialism* (Boswell 1989). Out of the dilemmas of essentialism came a scholarship that sought to understand how (homosexual) desire arose and was lived through in very different social and historical environments. This *social constructionist* view was perhaps best expressed in the work of Jeffrey Weeks inside gay and lesbian studies and by Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann (1966) outside. In a groundbreaking trilogy founded in British history, Weeks (1977, 1981, 1985) showed the complex weave of social, historical, and semiotic currents that produced modern conceptions of what homosexuality is. Although same-sex sexual and emotional connections can be documented in many different societies and historical periods, the modern sense of homosexuality as an identity and a people is a relatively recent development.

Despite important differences in philosophical approach and genealogy, social constructionism tended to be identified as well with the work of Michel Foucault (1978) who treated the ways in which sexuality, and knowledge about sexuality, existed within regulatory regimes that give it shape and meaning. For Foucault, modern gay and lesbian identities and movements could

scarcely be simply about "liberation" because they built on the "homosexual" category, an invention of Western societies to police and contain desire. At the same time though, many of Foucault's followers have forgotten his view that the politics of sexual identities is not just about limitation but also about the generation of new pleasures and ways of living. This dilemma—or perhaps better said, dialectic—continues to fuel debates among scholars and activists who want either to build up or to tear apart "gay" and "lesbian" categories (Gamson 1998). Perhaps ironically, the *personal is political* credo of the liberationists was a stimulus for the Foucaultian revolution in social theory. It became increasingly difficult through the 1970s and 1980s to postulate an essential homosexual waiting to be liberated, just as Marxian ideologies ran aground with claims of an unsullied, militant, working class about to spring forth, ready to effect a socialist revolution if only "false consciousness" could be punctured. Just as feminists began interrogating just what the category of *women* means in the face of critiques by lesbians, women of color, working class women, and third world women, just what it is that unifies gay men or lesbians seemed increasingly difficult to discern. This *deconstruction* of core categories became a major academic industry in the 1990s, identified in social theory with *postmodernism* and in lesbian and gay studies with *queer theory*.

THE RISE OF QUEER THEORY

By the 1990s, *liberation* had given way to *transgression* as a leading project, and gay and lesbian studies had grown immensely, fragmented, and changed direction. Queer theory, set in motion by the pioneering work of Judith Butler (1990) and Eve Sedgwick (1990), strongly reinvigorated work in gay and lesbian studies (or perhaps, one should now say, queer studies), set a new course for the area, and resulted in a wave of innovative, critical publications. Queer theory stepped back from the study of homosexuality to the question of how people and desires come to be separated into the two camps of homosexuality and heterosexuality in the first place. Sharing with deconstruction an interest in discovering the underpinnings of linguistic binaries such as homosexual-heterosexual, male-female, and white-black, queer theory proposed to delineate the regulatory regimes that sort sexualities and subjectivities into valued and devalued categories. The promise of queer theory was to move beyond the minoritizing logic of the study of a gay and lesbian "ethnicity" toward an understanding of the ways in which heterosexuality and family pull the cloak of virtue around themselves by manufacturing a deviant *other* into which a great many people can be dumped and dismissed. A good deal of insightful work on the ways in which heterosexual masculinity constructs itself by simultaneously exploiting and denying its homoerotic impulse has emerged from this perspective. Mark Simpson's (1994) provocative essays have

exposed ways in which the simultaneous reliance on, and denial of, homoeroticism among men informs everything from football to action movies, even though he is perhaps not an “official” queer theorist. In a send-up of the British “new lad,” Simpson (1999) observes how the quest for masculinity inevitably involves large doses of male bonding and “an exhausting schedule of boozing, shagging babes and fighting over football scores which is, in part, a hysterical attempt to ward off any suggestion of poovery and keep the homo tag at bay” (pp. 8–9).

Queer theory encouraged analysis not only of the overtly homosexual but also a reading between the lines for patterns of absences and silences through which texts deny same-sex desire. It revealed how the manufacture of a reviled “homosexual” in Western societies has often been a method by which “heterosexuality” and “family” assured themselves of their superiority, rather like the way racism has loaded repugnant attributes onto people of color to justify the privileges of white people. Queer theory hoped, as well, to jump the traces of gay/lesbian categories by embracing other outlaws from the patriarchal family, often by celebrating boundary crossers such as transgendered people and bisexuals. In one sense, queer theory recaptured a radical moment associated with gay liberation in its affirmation of the widespread nature of homoerotic desire and the artificiality of the homosexual-heterosexual division.

So strong has been the vigor of queer theory that Lisa Pottie (1997) discerned a trend toward the “selling” of queer theory as a fashionable new commodity among academics and students, at least in English departments receptive to cultural studies. On the other hand, reports out of other disciplines in the humanities, social sciences, and natural sciences show more skepticism regarding support for scholarship in the area, where gay, lesbian, and queer studies eke out an existence as an avocation of scholars hired to do other things (Duggan 1995; Taylor and Raeburn 1995; Weston 1996).

Intersections with Sociology

The study of sexuality has tended to be a relatively marginal part of sociology textbooks and curricula, and the representation of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgendered (LGBT) peoples and cultures has been even more peripheral, despite their popularity among students and currency in the media. The low profile of lesbian, gay, and queer studies in sociology texts is all the more surprising given the significance of sociologists and sociological thinking to theoretical developments in the study of gender and sexuality, and many significant contributions made by them in developing the area.

Sociological work has often been in close dialogue with parallel and overlapping work by historians and anthropologists who share interests in documenting the lives of non-heterosexual people, tracing the evolution of identity and community or comparing the social construction of sexual

patterns in different societies around the world. Perhaps the earliest known example of sociological ethnography is Maurice Leznoff and William Westley’s (1998) “The Homosexual Community” which began as an M.A. thesis and appeared as an article in 1956 in *Social Problems*. It treated the largely subterranean social networks of gay men in Montreal at a time when homosexuality was subject to criminal penalty. Sociological treatments of gay and lesbian topics did not emerge in any sustained way until the mid-1970s, following the momentous social changes of the 1960s, marked symbolically in the history of the gay and lesbian movement by the Stonewall Rebellion of 1969 (Adam 1995). In 1976, a group of faculty and graduate students gathered in a hotel room at a meeting of the American Sociological Association to found the Sociologists Gay Caucus (later Sociologists Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, and Transgender Caucus) (Murray 2004). It is also in 1976 that a division in sexual behavior (later sexual behavior, politics, and community) formed in the Society for the Study of Social Problems. In this period, new work appeared that laid out leading themes pursued by sociologists in subsequent years: surveys of sexual behavior, phenomenological and interactionist accounts of living gay in a homophobic world, reflections on the dynamic growth and historical evolution of gay and lesbian communities, ethnographies of those communities, and examination of social movements and their impacts on the societies around them. Since the 1980s, these concerns were supplemented by studies of the emerging AIDS epidemic, relationships and family building, and the diversity of homosexual and bisexual experiences in terms of ethnocultural communities in Western societies, (trans)gender variations, and societies in the global South.

Two early surveys were carried out in the United Kingdom in the 1960s (Schofield 1965; Westwood 1960); then Martin Weinberg and coinvestigators in the United States sketched the basic parameters through surveys of gay men in the 1970s (Bell and Weinberg 1978; Weinberg and Williams 1974) and subsequently of bisexuals of both genders (Weinberg, Williams, and Pryor 1994). Edward Laumann et al. (1994) produced one of the very few, authoritative surveys of sexual behavior across the United States since Kinsey but did so against tremendous odds as Christian Right lobbyists succeeded in blocking research funding for sex-related work. Laumann et al. measured homosexuality along three dimensions—as desire, behavior, and identity—each of which produced a divergent profile of same-sex inclination.

The pioneering work of John Gagnon and William Simon (1973) in sexuality studies was confirmed in some of the foundational works of the 1970s. Ken Plummer’s (1975) *Sexual Stigma* questioned naturalist accounts of sexuality by drawing on symbolic interaction to counter the dominance of both biomedical and deviance rhetorics. Barry Adam’s (1978) *The Survival of Domination* sought to disentangle the subjectivity of inferiorization from the language of pathology so frequently used to stigmatize the

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experience of subordinated people. And Henning Bech's (1997) *When Men Meet*, first published in Danish in 1987, explored the phenomenology of homoerotic sensibility. More recently, Didier Eribon's (2004) *Insult and the Making of the Gay Self* draws on a French cultural grounding to explore similar themes.

Sociologists examined the momentous changes of the last quarter of the twentieth century through periodic soundings of the state of lesbian and gay communities (Murray 1996; Plummer 1981, 1992; Seidman 2002) and analysis of the tumultuous sex debates among feminists and gay and lesbian activists (Seidman 1992; Stein 1997). There has never been a straightforward relationship between identity and behavior as a great many people "experiment" with affective and sexual connection with people of their own sex while avoiding or resisting the implication that they "are" gay, bisexual, or lesbian. Taking on gay identity and identification with LGBT communities have themselves been influenced by the changing status of LGBT people in the societies in which they live and by the availability of LGBT social spaces. Richard Troiden's (1988) *Gay and Lesbian Identity* examined how people come to adopt identities, while later work, especially influenced by the queer theory preoccupation with "fluidity," documented mobility through variable identities (Rust 1995, 2000; Whisman 1996).

Since Leznoff and Westley's early ethnography, several studies have offered snapshots of particular scenes, networks, and community facets. Carol Warren's (1974) *Identity and Community in the Gay World* portrayed a small network of gay men without falling back on the prevailing psychiatric and pathologizing language of the day. Laud Humphreys's (1975) *Tearoom Trade* tends to be remembered now more for its audacious methodology than for its documentation of the vast hidden world of intermale sexual contact or its innovation of the concept of the "breastplate of righteousness" to describe those who cover their own unconventional behavior with the bluster of conventional moral rectitude. Other work has documented the formation and development of lesbian friendship networks (Dunne 1997; Krieger 1983) and innovative cultures of masculinity among gay men (Levine 1998; Nardi 2000).

The rising preoccupation of the 1990s and 2000s with the legal recognition of same-sex relationships (Adam 2003, 2004; Bernstein 2001) has increasingly placed the formation of intimate relationships on the forefront of the public agenda and influenced the direction of research as well. Phillip Blumstein and Pepper Schwartz (1983) wrote the landmark study on relationships comparing married and unmarried heterosexual and homosexual couples regarding the ways in which they manage money, sex, and power, sketching a complex pattern of similarity and difference among the four categories. Kath Weston's (1991) anthropological study of relationship formation among San Francisco lesbians and gay men dispensed with implicit comparisons with the nuclear family in favor of an ethnography of kinship formations properly indigenous to

LGBT communities. Sociologists have been among the members of several disciplines interested in lesbian parenting (Arnup 1995; Nelson 1996), often, at least implicitly, testing the moralist hypothesis that only nuclear families can raise healthy children, sometimes underplaying the differences evident in children raised by lesbian (and less often, gay male) parents as differences are so often read as shortcomings among people continually measured against heterosexist norms (Stacey and Biblarz 2001). The exploration of LGBT households inevitably addresses feminist claims that patriarchal family systems are neither necessary nor desirable and that alternative intimate arrangements can work. Other research challenges the preeminence of the couple by giving greater recognition to friendship networks (Nardi 1999; Roseneil and Budgeon 2004). Christopher Carrington (1999) cautions that same-sex households can scarcely ignore gender as they work out their own divisions of household labor, and Janice Ristock (2002) shows that they can be vulnerable to domestic abuse, but overall LGBT communities have been crucibles of relationship innovation displaying a remarkable diversity of viable forms that continue to challenge the patriarchal foundations of contemporary law (Weeks, Heaphy, and Donovan 2001).

While inquiry into homophobia has changed shape over time, it has scarcely faded away. Rabidly antigay subcultures flourish in most high schools, producing the major class of perpetrators of antigay violence (Comstock 1991). In the United States since 1977, local referenda have been used, election after election, to repeal antidiscrimination legislation, and since 1995, a majority of the states along with the national Congress have succumbed to a panic over "gay marriage," banning the legal recognition of same-sex relationships. The ability of the Christian right to construct a sometimes winning ideology around the idea of an effete, moneyed homosexual class demanding special rights in opposition to God-fearing, family-oriented, patriotic Americans continues to demand analytic strategies that deconstruct the cultural coordinates of these ideologies and understand the social forces that keep such ideologies in operation.

Laud Humphreys (1972) wrote one of the first significant books on the gay liberation movement. Sociological work has long sought to identify the social forces that generate collective identity and collective mobilization. Accounting for the social environment that generates both homophobia and movements resistant to it was a central concern of Barry Adam's (1995) *The Rise of a Gay and Lesbian Movement* and Gary Kinsman's (1996) *The Regulation of Desire*, both originally published in the mid-1980s. Inspired by Stuart Hall's analysis of the ideological shifts of the 1980s, Anna Marie Smith (1994) examined how racist and homophobic campaigns served the ends of the neoliberal tide engineered in part by the Thatcher administration in the United Kingdom. Subsequent work has delved into the dynamics of particular lesbian movement groups (Ross 1995), of the antigay opposition (Stein

2001), and of struggles over inclusion of sexual orientation in hate crimes legislation (Jeness and Grattet 2001). Many social movements are both local and global phenomena, and gay and lesbian movement groups have continued to spring up in disparate societies around the world, raising larger sociological questions of how global changes in political economy, kinship, and intimacy lead to the parallel emergence of transnational mobilizations (Adam, Duyvendak, and Krouwel 1999).

Gay, lesbian, and queer studies have been one resource for understanding how AIDS has been manufactured as a moral and political entity in contemporary societies (Adam and Sears 1996; Altman 1986; Epstein 1996; Levine, Nardi, and Gagnon 1997; Watney 1987). Sociological perspectives ought to be fundamental to making sense of how people with HIV disease come to be constructed as a national threat subject to detention at the borders of the United States (Patton 1990) or how people make sense of sexuality and form intimate relationships, thereby making themselves vulnerable to HIV transmission. Safer sex practices can scarcely be understood apart from what people think and feel about sex, how it is a means of communication with others, and the ways in which people make sense of sexual discourses circulating in society, yet sociology and gay-lesbian studies have remained relatively marginal to the biomedical research establishment, which occupies HIV-related research, including its “psychosocial” aspects. Nevertheless, sociologists have made some notable contributions to HIV research since the articulation of a sociological research agenda at a San Francisco meeting of the American Sociological Association (Huber and Schneider 1991). Especially noteworthy has been work on how HIV-positive people deal with the difficulties imposed by the society around them (Adam and Sears 1996; Kayal 1993; Stoller 1998; Weitz 1991) and how HIV disease was taken up by a wide range of social actors from activists to professionals, transforming it from an entirely unknown entity into a series of scientific and social objects (Epstein 1996; Levine et al. 1997; Stockdill 2003).

RECENT, CURRENT, AND FUTURE TRENDS

Sociologists have been among the contributors to ethnographic studies of same-sex relations and network formation in societies around the world, a central focus of much anthropological work. Two encyclopedic overviews (Greenberg 1988; Murray 2000) of cross-cultural variability raise fundamental questions regarding the structural locations that give rise to homoerotic attraction and the ways in which societies structure the resultant relationships, variously integrating, ignoring, or repressing them. The complex interaction of social relations of production and distribution, kinship, and family formation create the social context in which same-sex relationships come to be valued or sanctioned, and there is still more work to be

done in understanding how these social systems work. In recent years, the intersections of race, gender, nation, and sexuality have come to the fore as significant sites of making sense of the many ways in which people live out same-sex relations, imagine identity, find social space, and move between cultures (Carrillo 2002; Crichlow 2004; Schluter 2002; Sullivan and Leong 1995).

Today, writing about transgendered people is challenging pathology paradigms, much as gay and lesbian studies did in the 1970s, and sociologists are participating in a much larger wave of new scholarship recognizing the culture of drag (Rupp and Taylor 2003), and documenting the challenges of living transgendered in everyday life (Namaste 2000).

While queer theory has generated a new scholarship in the humanities, its effect in sociology has been more tangential. At one level, queer theory’s interest in performativity, deconstructing gender, and exposing the fragility of the “natural” arrived as “old news” in sociology, for which these ideas are in many ways the stock-in-trade. At another level, queer theory displayed a number of limitations, at least when viewed through a sociological lens: Its preoccupation with public texts as privileged expressions of the real, its apparent disinterest in state and capital, its seeming disengagement from the struggles of LGBT movements, all appeared to be at odds with social research currents. Still, sociology has perhaps been too immune from queer theory’s sharp eye for irony, contradiction, and moral binaries, and insufficiently willing to examine its own complicity with heteronormativity (Seidman 1996).

Public Sociology and Social Policy

With the collection of many of the keys texts of lesbian, gay, and queer studies in sociology in Peter Nardi and Beth Schneider’s (1997) *Social Perspectives on Lesbian and Gay Studies* and the founding of a section in the American Sociological Association on the sociology of sexualities in 1997, there is consolidation of an institutional framework for further development of the area. The challenge today is to bring the tools of sociological analysis to bear on a series of enduring issues: identifying sources and reproduction mechanisms of homophobia (Adam 1998), working with the indigenous cultural forms of LGBT communities in building those communities, documenting and learning from diversity in one’s own society and abroad, and contributing further to reflections on who we are and what we want to become. LGBT issues have taken a central role in the public agenda of many countries around the world in recent decades. The ability of LGBT people to become fully enfranchised citizens remains contested in many societies. At a time when the opponents of equality know nothing of the lives of LGBT people and seek to limit them to a subordinate status, sociology can have a role in the courts, in public policy forums, and in civil society, speaking to the reality of those lives. When



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many pseudosociological claims circulate in the public realm to justify the subordination of sexual and racial minorities, sociologists can and should bring their knowledge to bear on such questions as the kinds of family forms that make up the “building blocks” of society, the social

consequences of legal decisions that enforce unequal access to public services, the ways religious authorities legitimate violence against real people, and how homophobic ideologies can have health consequences in suicide and disease transmission.

