Handbook of Feminist Family Studies

Queering “the Family”

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Chapter 4: Queering "the Family"

> **queer**\'kwir\adj [origin unknown] (1508). 1. a: differing in some odd way from what is usual or normal b: (1) ECCENTRIC UNCONVENTIONAL (2) mildly insane, TOUCHED c: absorbed or interested to an extreme or unreasonable degree: OBSESSED *d: sexually deviate: HOMOSEXUAL # usu. used disparagingly*. 2. a: WORTHLESS COUNTERFEIT < ~ money> b: QUESTIONABLE SUSPICIOUS 3. not quite well. syn see STRANGE—queerish adj—queerly adv queerness n.
>
> —*Webster's Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary* (1983)
>
> **queer transitive verb** (circa 1812). 1. to spoil the effect or success of <queer one's plans> 2. to put or get into an embarrassing or disadvantageous situation.
>
> —*Merriam-Webster Online* (2007)

Queer theory makes the familial strange. It unmasks the social practices that construct "normality" and leads us to question the values embedded in such constructions. Queering "the family," the ideological bedrock that equates morality with mom, dad, and 2.5 children living in a private suburban home (see Smith, 1993), requires us to "spoil the effect or success of" this equation, and the inequities thus produced. Our goal in this chapter is to situate queer theory within feminist family scholarship. First, we describe how queer theory partially emerged from the limitations of lesbian and gay (LG) studies. Then, we present the basic tenets of queer theory, identify the ways in which it parallels feminist theories, and discuss tensions **[p. 44 ↓]** between queer theory and both feminism and LG studies. Finally, we describe the impact that queer theory has already had on family studies and present ways in which this impact may grow. Because we are all feminist family scholars who study and write about queering,

our collaboration reflects our enthusiasm for pushing the boundaries of feminism and family theories to stimulate new ways of thinking about families.

From LG Studies to Queer Theory

LG studies emerged in the late 1970s from the convergence of political struggles to legitimate LG identities with academic attention to homosexuality as a social phenomenon rather than a medical pathology (Richardson & Seidman, 2002). These efforts were a response to the Cold War era discourse that "if permitted at all, turned on the question of whether [homosexuality] was sin, sickness, or crime" (Adam, 2002, p. 15). Early LG studies scholarship located "the problem" of homosexuality within heterosexist society rather than within LG people. This approach was limited, however, by the assumption that modern Western homosexual identities were universal and timeless rather than historically specific (Richardson & Seidman, 2002). For example, linear theories of identity formation were proposed to explain how one's true (homosexual) self emerged (Rust, 1993). In these models (e.g., Cass, 1984), one's true lesbian or gay self was realized by going through stages of feeling different, identifying that difference as relating to sexuality, deciding how to manage one's homosexual desires in the face of prejudice, and ending with self-acceptance and a "stable" lesbian or gay identity. Bisexuality in these models was a problematic transition stage as one moved toward one's true homosexuality (Rust, 1993).

The notion of an ahistorical psychologically adjusted homosexual self was politically expedient and it provided an important corrective against the legacy of homosexuality as a mental disorder (D'Emilio, 1998). However, it was quickly challenged by social constructionist scholars who questioned how the very ideas of "sexuality" and "selfhood" arose and became fused within specific socio-historical conditions (Richardson & Seidman, 2002). For example, historian John D'Emilio (1998) detailed how the rise of wage labor during industrialization diminished the importance of family as a site of productive and reproductive labor. This created historically specific opportunities such that:

> Only when individuals began to make their living through wage labor, instead of as parts of an interdependent family unit, was it possible for

> homosexual desire to coalesce into a personal identity—an identity based on the ability to remain outside the heterosexual family and to construct a personal life based on attraction to one's own sex. (p. 134; see Katz 1995 for a parallel history of heterosexuality)

Along with the rise of social constructionism, intense conflicts about the boundaries of collective identity arose within LG movements and communities at this time (Adam, 2002). These divisions may have primed LG people to adopt queer theory, especially those whose agenda was sexual freedom rather than the end of male domination (Jeffreys, 2003). The convergence of social constructionism and collective instability created fertile ground for interest in queer theory, which has been referred to as postmodern deconstruction applied to the domain of sexuality (Beasley, 2005).

What is Queer Theory?

Deconstruction of Binaries

Queer theory conceptualizes the world as "composed of falsely bounded categories that give the impression of fixity and permanence where none'naturally' exists" (Crawley & Broad, 2008, p. 551). Thus, rather than examine homosexuality as a historically produced minority status, queer theorists focus on linguistic binaries (e.g., heterosexual/homosexual) and the ways in which these conceptual oppositions are power relations that construct normality versus deviance and thereby function to regulate and punish (Adam, 2002). From this perspective, studying LG people from either an essentialist or a constructionist lens is problematic because it categorizes without questioning the categories themselves. Take, for example, the man Oswald hired to help haul woodchips from the county compost center. She assumed he was gay because of the way she met him; however, on the way to the compost facility he mentioned being married and regaled her with stories about how **[p. 45 ↓]** "the wife" was keeping him "in line." Later, amid another story about "the wife" he referred to her as a "tranny queen." In this moment, he exposed the fiction undergirding Oswald's (unspoken) attempts to determine whether he was gay or straight. Furthermore, any attempt to classify his

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marriage as “deviant” or “normal” within any set of standards exposes the assumptions behind these categories and the ways in which either choice promotes the idea of normativity against a derogated “other.”

Power, Social Control, and Heteronormativity

Central to the deconstruction of binaries is an analysis of heteronormativity and heterosexuality. Heteronormativity is an ideological code that promotes rigidly defined conventional gender norms, heterosexuality, and “traditional family values” (Ingraham, 2005; Oswald, Blume, & Marks, 2005). Current social and intimate experiences are defined by a heterosexual/homosexual binary that serves as a method of social control to encourage conformity within the heteronormative power structure (Crawley & Broad, 2008; Sedgwick, 1990). Heteronormativity has very real material consequences for those situated differently in the matrix of domination. Queer scholarship questions how institutionalized heterosexuality ensures that some people will have more power, privilege, status, and resources than others (Ingraham, 1994).

Too often, studies of sexuality have emphasized the margins or the “deviations” without questioning the center. A queer analysis denaturalizes heterosexuality as a taken-for-granted biological entity and unpacks its meaning- making processes (Ingraham, 1994). Thus, critical investigations of heterosexuality bring to the forefront the material, institutional, discursive, and political mechanisms that are often rendered invisible and, thereby, ensure the maintenance of heterosexuality as axiomatic and normal. For example, Oswald and Suter's (2004) comparative research on heterosexual weddings as experienced by heterosexual versus LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender) people exposes how heteronormative family membership is ritually reproduced (and the membership of “nonnormative” people called into question) through symbolic repetition and social pressure.

Queer theory argues that power is enforced through the parading of discourses (Crawley & Broad, 2008). Discourses are “systems of statements, practices, and institutional structures” (Hare-Mustin, 1994) that appear to justify the very social forms

they create and enforce. Foucault (1977, 1978, 1980), who is credited with laying the groundwork for much of queer theory, argues that discipline in (post)modernity creates “docile bodies,” which conform to the discourses of capitalism, democracy, and the military-industrial complex. Rather than physical force coercing us to behave, surveillance of ourselves and one another propels us to act in accordance with these ruling discourses (Foucault, 1977), for example, by conforming to rigid categorizations of gender and sexuality. Situating Foucault's analysis of power in the context of families prompts scholars to ask how heteronormativity shapes the experiences, identities, and discourses of family members. For example, some participants in Berkowitz (2007) consciously invoked heteronormativity as an organizing principle for family life. Craig, a gay father raising two adoptive children with his partner, explained:

> [I'm] in charge of the childcare, I'm the mom basically. I have definitely taken on the role of the mother at home … in some ways we kind of entered into the situation with that understanding … he even said before we had kids like, “well you have to be the mommy” kind of thing, like, he didn't want to be, he wanted me to be the nurturer.

The fact that being lesbian or gay is not in itself enough to transcend heteronormativity brings us to structure and agency.

Structure and Agency

Oswald et al. (2005) conceptualize heteronormativity as an ideological composite that “fuses together gender ideology, sexual ideology, and family ideology into a singular theoretical complex” (p. 144). Furthermore, simply because individuals identify as LG—or even as queer— does not necessarily mean that they enact queer genders, sexual practices, or family configurations. Queer theory pushes us to examine gender, sexuality, and family as interdependent binaries to be negotiated through human agency in the face of heteronormative power. Put simply, **[p. 46 ↓]** to queer one's gender, sexuality, or family “is to expose oneself to risk; risk of rejection by members of one's family of origin, hostility from neighbors or friends, interference from the state, threats to one's livelihood from employers, and physical violence from strangers and acquaintances” (p. 151). An unwillingness to jeopardize belonging may explain why

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people conform or hide rather than queer (Oswald & Suter, 2004). In the example above, we could argue that Craig's use of “the mom” enables his family to be more accepted and understood by others. However, we note that the risks of queering do not rule out the possibility of resisting the heteronormative order; Craig could choose to conceptualize and enact his life differently. One of the goals of queer theory is to “disrupt the normalizing tendencies of the sexual order, locating nonheteronormative practices and subjects as sites of resistance” (Green, 2007, p. 28).

Queer Theory Parallels with Feminist Theory

Both feminists and queer theorists are antiessentialist, attempting to deconstruct and reinscribe categories of gender and sexuality (Gamson & Moon, 2004; Richardson, McLaughlin, & Casey, 2006; Valocchi, 2005). Toward this end, queer and feminist theories share three important endeavors. First, although an overly simplistic distinction is often drawn between feminist and queer studies on the basis that feminists emphasize gender, whereas queer theorists emphasize sexuality (Weed & Schor, 1997), both approaches have explored the ways that gender and sexuality are performed in context. Second, feminist and queer theorists both interrogate the intersection of gender and sexuality with other social identity categories such as race-ethnicity, class, and nationality. Third, both feminist and queer theories originally developed through activist movements, and both have been criticized for moving too fully into academe.

Gender versus Sexuality

Traditional feminist thought locates gender at the center of analysis (Beasley, 2005). Within family studies, the feminist goal has been to critique and revise power relations so one's biological sex no longer determines spousal or parental roles, rights, or access to resources. Much of this work has mistakenly presumed that all women and men are heterosexual (Oswald et al., 2005), though increasing attention has been paid to problematizing heterosexuality (e.g., Richardson, 1996).

Queer theory resists heteronormativity in much the same way that feminist theories decenter hegemonic masculinity; power relations are redrawn such that heterosexuality is no longer the gateway to rights or resources. Heteronormativity in this equation includes gender but combines it with sexuality and family status (Oswald et al., 2005). For example, Hicks's (2000) queer theory– informed study of social workers managing lesbian applicants for adoption deconstructed the ways in which these practitioners upheld heteronormativity. Social workers conceptualized lesbians as "good" or "bad" and approved petitions when they perceived the lesbian to be "good," meaning apolitical, asexual, caring, gender typical in appearance or lifestyle, friendly with heterosexual men and women, and able to manage prejudice from others. Hicks's research enables us to see how using only gender or only sexuality would produce an incomplete analysis. Furthermore, the implicit message of this study illustrates queer theory's position that people who transgress heteronorms, including the "bad" lesbians in Hicks's study, are legitimate beings worthy of rights and resources (Stacey & Davenport, 2002).

Performance in Context

From a postmodern feminist perspective, all identity categories (e.g., gender and sexuality) are negotiated within changing social and temporal locations. In other words, the meaning of specific identities shifts in relation to changes in discursive and material contexts. Furthermore, as we enact an identity, we are coconstructed by meanings provided by other actors (Blume & Blume, 2003).

Queer theory is also a postmodern approach in which identity is fluid and contextual (Beasley, 2005). Though the distinction between queer theory and postmodern feminism is rather blurred, Butler's (1990) notion of "performativity" provided a central queer contribution to this theoretical canon. Butler rejects both gender and sexuality as "natural" or fixed and argues that they are ongoing fictions constructed by the repetition **[p. 47 ↓]** of "stylized bodily acts" that reify male and female as natural opposites that desire each other. Reification occurs because the performance is discursive; it reaffirms the "truth" of existing cultural narratives. Analyses of performativity focus on the instability of supposedly natural categories and the ways in which simple interactions

can uphold or subvert heteronormative power. Consider the following excerpt from Ahmed (2006) analyzing how others respond to her relationship:

> When a neighbor asks, “Is that your sister or your husband?” I don't answer and rush into the house. It is, one has to say, quite an extraordinary utterance. There are two women, living together, a couple of people alone in a house. The first question reads the two women as sisters … In this way, the reading both avoids the possibility of lesbianism and also stands in for it, insofar as it repeats, in a different form, the construction of lesbian couples as siblings: lesbians are sometimes represented as if they have a family resemblance … The sequence of the utterances offers two readings of the lesbian couple, both of which function as straightening devices: if not sisters, then husband and wife. The lesbian couple in effect disappears. (pp. 562–563)

Note how Ahmed brings to light the production of heteronormativity through discursive“straightening devices” that render lesbians invisible. This is the process of reification.

Intersectionality

Feminist standpoint theorists (e.g., Combahee River Collective, 1986) assume individuals have multiple intersecting identities that mutually contribute to their unique perspectives such as being Black and female. Intersectionality was developed in response to second-wave feminist theories that did not adequately address the experiences of women of color or other minority groups (De Reus, Few, & Blume, 2005). Intersectionality deuniversalizes knowledge by locating its production within specific social positions such as a Black feminist standpoint (e.g., Collins, 2000). Furthermore, not focused solely on disadvantage, intersectionality combines both privileged and subordinate positions (King, 1988).

Queer theory has been criticized for primarily describing a White middle-class gay experience (see Ferguson, 2005). However, queer theorists have begun to address

multiple intersections with other identities such as race-ethnicity, class, and nationality. Cantú (2001), for example, used "queer materialism" to study how gay male immigrants from Mexico to the United States resisted the notion of "kin-based immigrant" by moving within gay migration chains. In addition, increasing attention has been paid to how LG people resist queering by pursuing their gender, race, and class privilege. For example, many of the predominantly White middle-class fathers in Berkowitz (2007) hired nannies to enable them to continue their career path, avoid the second shift, and have leisure time with their families. While these men are marginalized for their sexual identities, an intersectional approach highlights how their race and, more clearly, their class privilege offer them the ability to avoid child care and domestic duties. Where heterosexual fathers may rely on their female partners to keep house and care for children, gay fathers who have the financial resources can extend this gender exploitation beyond the confines of their family and employ migrant women, women of color, or poor women to perform the traditional duties of the wife. This dynamic parallels what Duggan (2002) has called "homonormativity," which is the assimilation of LG identities into heteronormative ideals of modern domesticity and consumption.

Praxis

Feminist praxis refers to developing critical consciousness about an issue and working to articulate and institutionalize a strategy for change (De Reus et al., 2005). Transnational feminisms are praxis-oriented theories that address the globalized experiences of immigrants, migrants, or refugees who maintain family links across borders and cultures (Blume & De Reus, 2008). For example, postcolonial feminist approaches (e.g., Spivak, 1999) critique the universality of Western hegemony and advocate using group identities to advance practical politics on behalf of marginalized groups.

As in transnational and postcolonial feminist approaches, queer theory represents an ideology with roots in both academia and activism. Earlier, we summarized queer theory's partial roots in the 1970s' political struggles for LG legitimacy. In the 1980s, much of the struggle was organized around fighting HIV/AIDS, for example, through the direct actions of the AIDS **[p. 48 ↓]** Coalition to Unleash Power (ACT-UP). In early 1990, alarmed by the steep rise in hate crimes against LGBT people in New York City,

members of ACT-UP formed “Queer Nation” and distributed flyers titled “Queers Read This” (Anonymous, 1990) at the 1990 NYC Gay Pride Parade (Rand, 2004). Though short lived (the group officially disbanded in 1992), Queer Nation had a profound and lasting effect on political discourse, for example, by reclaiming the word “queer” and insisting on a confrontational politics of difference from, rather than assimilation to, heteronormativity (Rand). Praxis between Queer Nation and 1990s scholarship intensified the commitment of many scholars to using queer theory (e.g., Stryker, 2004).

Tensions between Queer Theory and Feminism and LG Studies

Despite queer theory's convergence with aspects of feminism and LG studies, considerable tensions exist. First, there are conceptual incompatibilities; specifically, the deconstruction of binaries undermines the “necessary fiction” (Weeks, 1995) of stable and collective identities on which social movements depend (Adam, 2002). To the extent that queer theory redefines gender and sexuality as reiterated discourses rather than identities with a material base (e.g., Butler, 1990), it trivializes injustice by deflecting attention away from the global material inequalities that women, including lesbians, continue to suffer (Jeffreys, 2003), and it resists any possibility of social change (Murray, 1997). Furthermore, the queer theory position that power is enforced through the internalization of discourses (“docile bodies”) rather than brute force is untenable when we consider, for example, the high prevalence of rape and domestic violence and the inadequate institutional response to survivors (Jeffreys, 2003). Feminist and LG scholars with a materialist orientation do not dispute that internalization plays an important role in reproducing power relations; rather, they object to the idea that power can be reduced to it (Jeffreys).

A second tension concerns the genealogy of ideas. Queer theorists have been criticized for writing as though social construction arose “like Athena, fully formed from the head of Michel Foucault” (Epstein, 1996, p. 146). For example, Butler's (1990) elaboration of “performativity” makes no mention of West and Zimmerman's (1987) already well-established concept of “doing gender.” Furthermore, queer theorists have dismissed second-wave feminist theories as “essentialist,” ignoring how some second-wave

theories, including lesbian feminism, clearly articulated gender as a social construction (Jeffreys, 2003).

The third tension concerns the extent to which queer theory is, as Sedgwick (1990) claimed,“universalizing” rather than “minoritizing.” Jeffreys (2003) argues that queer is the new patriarchy. Queer ideas and politics, in her view, frame a gay male sexual agenda as queer (read universal) and thereby erase lesbian identity and political interests; it is “universal man” all over again. For example, she describes the “ick factor” by which gay men express their disgust toward women's bodies (e.g., “tuna jokes”) and aligns it with the queer-culture celebration of lesbians wearing dildos, role-playing butch-femme, using pornography, exploring sadomasochism, and pursuing masculinity to the point of trans- sexual operation. According to Jeffreys, this queer celebration of masculinity reproduces patriarchy by refusing a lesbian feminist critique of domination and subordination.

Impact of Queer Theory on Family Studies

Family scholars and other social scientists have only recently begun to view queer theory as legitimate and useful (Oswald et al., 2005; Valocchi, 2005; Warner, 2004). Oswald et al.'s (2005) “Decentering Heteronormativity: A Model for Family Studies” chapter in *Source- book of Family Theories and Research* (Bengtson, Acock, Allen, Dilworth-Anderson, & Klein, 2005) provided the first articulation of queer theory within the field of family studies. Oswald et al. (2005) specifically called for family scholars to apply a queer lens to family studies research and presented a conceptual model for understanding how heteronormativity is resisted and accommodated at multiple levels with regard to gender, sexuality, and family. The authors discussed the concept of “queering the family” and provided examples of how family researchers have used methods to “decenter” heteronormativity.

[p. 49 ↓] The inclusion of this chapter in the *Sourcebook* led to a “firestorm” of controversy; interested readers should refer to the chapter in which this drama is summarized (Bengtson et al., 2005). While the family field has had long-standing tensions regarding the inclusion of diverse families, including those with LG members, it was the inclusion of queer theory that triggered an explosion among family scholars

who equate queering with the end of morality (e.g., Knapp & Williams, 2005). This is arguably because our previous inclusion of LG family members had expanded definitions of family diversity without fundamentally challenging our disciplinary core. For example, it is a short step for many to go from “stepfamily” to “gay-stepfamily”; even those opposed to LG families can accept arguments that they exist and therefore must be included in the canon. However, queer theory moves beyond such inclusion and questions the very normality of heterosexuality and heteronormativity. Some of our colleagues are not open to doing this work.

Given the *Sourcebook* controversy, we sought to determine the extent to which the “Decentering Heteronormativity”chapter is actually being used. We collected syllabi from family theory courses being taught at 36 of the roughly 40 doctoral programs in family studies; 22 of the syllabi included a unit on feminist theory, and of these, 6 also assigned the “Decentering Heteronormativity” chapter. Interestingly, this chapter was included with feminist theory on only one syllabus; on the others, queer theory was situated under theorizing about families and change, within a content area, as a part of social constructionism, or as a “think piece” assignment where students critiqued and integrated two theories. The diversity of approaches suggests that our field does not have an established place for queer theory; those who see it as a fundamental part of graduate training are left to situate queer theory on their own. Furthermore, those who assigned the *Sourcebook* chapter are faculty at research- intensive, land-grant institutions who have made their own significant contributions to family theory and who are tenured (five of the six). We surmise that queer theory is being adopted by cutting-edge scholars who have the job security and professional reputation to take risks with content. What remains to be seen is the extent to which queer theory will inform future family research. Given that the vast majority of family studies programs are undergraduate or professional master's programs, we look forward to any evidence that queer theory is being introduced in these classrooms and then used in later direct practice with families. Below, we discuss the opportunities family scholars have to bring queer theory into the family canon.

Implications of Queer Theory for Family Studies

Theory

We do not need queer theory to justify attention to diverse families; feminist theories (e.g., Osmond & Thorne, 1993) and ethnic minority scholarship (e.g., Collins, 2000) have already provided this. Nor do we need queer theory to demonstrate how the modern hetero- normative family serves conservative political and economic interests; Marxists did that decades ago (e.g., Barrett & McIntosh, 1982; Engels, 1884/1972). Queer theory is not needed to study subjectivity; symbolic interaction gave us the "definition of the situation" in 1928 (D. I. Thomas, cited in LaRossa & Reitzes, 1993). Furthermore, we do not need queer theory to talk about homosexuality; LG studies brought this to the fore (e.g., Weston, 1991). Finally, family discourse (e.g., Gubrium & Holstein, 1990) provides a lens for studying how people invoke the word "family" to make moral claims; queer theory is not needed to make this connection. What we *do* need queer theory for is the examination of how heteronormativity is reproduced and resisted by everyone.

Effectively using queer theory requires family scholars, including feminists, to remedy two common problems in family scholarship. First, we must clarify that, although the term *queer* is often used as an analogue for LGBT, using queer theory is not about studying LGBT or queer people as a minoritized group (Giffney, 2004). Rather, the unit of analysis for queer theory is heteronormativity regardless of the specific group or phenomenon under study; the level of analysis can vary (individual, relational, subcultural, and/or societal), and the methodologies used can be diverse. A queer analysis attends to the interdependence of gender, sexuality, and family in relation to heteronormativity. This clarification brings us to the second challenge: **[p. 50 ↓]** Family scholars who want to use queer theory must avoid equating gender with heterosexuality. This rampant practice inhibits our ability to see the complexities of

gender, privileges heterosexuality, and fails to question the power relations behind calling something a “family.”

One major contribution queer theory has already made to the family field can be seen in analyses that challenge the idea that we should consider LG-parented families to be “normal” because they are analogous to families with heterosexual parents. Stacey and Biblarz (2001) critiqued research comparing children of LG parents to children of heterosexuals with regard to gender conformity, heterosexual orientation, and other developmental outcomes. While these studies have been critically important in affirming LG families and in assisting family courts in making informed child custody decisions (Patterson, 2006), they have, ironically, maintained the heteronormative family binary by upholding the heterosexual-parent family as the ideal against which LG-parent families should be compared (Stacey & Biblarz, 2001). Furthermore, Stacey and Biblarz point out that some of the studies used to support the claim that children of LG parents are “no different” than children of heterosexuals in fact do show differences. For example, though equally likely to identify as heterosexual, children of lesbians have been found more likely than children of heterosexuals to explore their sexuality (Tasker & Golombok, 1997).

Stacey and Biblarz (2001) situate the claims of “no difference” within a political climate that makes doing otherwise quite risky but push us to take those risks in the interests of both knowledge and the people we study and serve. At least two negative implications of “no difference” for the children of LG parents have been identified. First is the pressure on these children to hide any difficulties they may be experiencing (Goldberg, 2007a; Kuvalanka, Teper, & Morrison, 2006). For example, a female participant in Kuvalanka (2007) said,

> I've struggled with depression my whole life, and I have definitely sometimes [worried that] me being kind of screwed up would be attributed to my mom. And honestly, some of it probably is her fault, and that is something that she and I have dealt with over the years together. But feeling this need to justify her all the time, and feeling kind of bad sometimes that I'm not, like, the perfect kid, so I can be like,“See, lesbian parents do good!” (p. 143)

Second, the notion of “no difference” denies knowledge people have about how parents who resist heteronormativity benefit their children by challenging social norms (Stacey & Biblarz, 2001); for example, individuals with LG parents have reported that they were socialized to be open-minded and tolerant of differences (Goldberg, 2007a; Tasker & Golombok, 1997). According to Goldberg, her participants “felt that they were better people as a function of having a gay parent, as it had‘opened [their] eyes to other ways of being’ and forced them to confront their own homophobia and fear of difference” (p. 555).

In addition to believing that queer theory is useful to family scholars, we anticipate that family scholars will innovate queer theory. Queer theorists have been criticized for using barely decipherable language to express simple ideas (Jeffreys, 2003); they have written for a largely academic audience (e.g., Dinshaw et al., 2007) and have emphasized queer politics (e.g., Warner, 1999) and practices (e.g., Halberstam, 2003). In contrast, family scholars are often practice oriented and, if the bumper sticker above Oswald's computer reflects our discipline, we “eschew obfuscation.” Furthermore, we believe that most people's lives are a combination of resisting and upholding heteronormativity, and thus queer theory is not just relevant to studying queer-identified phenomena. In other words, we want our theories to be clearly stated and widely relevant and our research to inform nonacademic practice. These values can enable us to bring queer theory to unexpected places. We can combine queer theory with other family theories, with family research methods, and with family studies pedagogy.

Through her study of disclosure practices of adults raised by LG and bisexual parents, Goldberg (2007b) combined traditional family theories with queer theory. Using symbolic interactionism and life course theories, Goldberg posited that participants' prior knowledge (e.g., previous experiences with disclosure or non- disclosure), their interpretations of their immediate context (e.g., perceived homophobia of others), and the quality and dynamics of participants' current relationships with their parents all may influence whether participants disclose their parents' sexual identity. Integrating queer theory, she further theorized that participants' disclosure decisions are motivated **[p. 51 ↓]** by the interaction between a desire to resist heteronormative definitions of family and an assessment of social risk:

> Adult children of LGB parents … may "queer the family" through explicit disclosure of their family structure. … They out themselves as living representations of the heterogeneity of contemporary family forms. On the other hand, some adult children may … experience the pressures of heteronormativity, anticipate the social consequences of such queering processes, and stay silent. (p. 106)

Furthermore, Goldberg (2007a) noted how participants both resisted and accommodated the pressures of heteronormativity in relation to disclosure of their own gender and sexuality. Some participants with nonheterosexual and/or non-gender-conforming identities reported delaying their own "coming out" for fear of confirming the stereotype that "gay parents raise gay children;" furthermore, "when they did come out, they were highly sensitive of how people might evaluate or interpret the fact that both they and their parent(s) were gay" (p. 556). Pairing queer theory with traditional family theories benefits the field by providing a new lens through which to view family processes.

Queer theory could also be combined with feminism. Ironically, this may be more controversial than combining queer theory with traditional family theories because feminist theory remains marginalized in our field (Allen, 2001). Although Wills and Risman (2006) documented a 25% increase in feminist or gender content in family scholarship between the years 1972 and 2002, feminism is still underrepresented. Some feminist scholars may feel that it is unfair for us to push them toward queer theory when gender inequality remains rampant and unacknowledged. We argue, however, that queer theory exposes why a singular "focus on the gendered nature of family life" (p. 698) is incomplete and compels us to unpack how the male/female binary is intricately bound with the heterosexual/homosexual and family/not-family binaries (Oswald et al., 2005).

Queer theory also prompts family scholars to ask new questions about family life. Oswald et al.'s (2005) conceptual model can be used to examine how individuals and families negotiate heteronormativity, as well as how organizational practices uphold or resist it. We can use queer theory to explore how the subjective categories of gender, sexuality, and family come to be, and how they are experienced (Warner, 2004), resulting in "research that represents individuals' lived experience in ways that

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honor the complexity of human agency, the instability of identity, and the importance of institutional and discursive power" (Valocchi, 2005, p. 768).

Method

Through its emphasis on the deconstruction of discourses, queer theory problematizes the subject of inquiry, the nature of inquiry, and even the inquirers themselves (Kong, Mahoney, & Plummer, 2001). Regarding the studied subject, queer theory pushes us to acknowledge that the classification systems for gender, sexual orientation, and family membership generally used by researchers are convenient for researchers but not necessarily accurate or informative. For example, given standard demographics measuresof male/female, heterosexual/gay/lesbian/bisexual, married/not-married, and single-parent/two- parent households, it is impossible to fairly characterize the following family from the first author's research:

> Two lesbian mothers, each of whom brought one biological child into the relationship. Despite living as a two-parent family with two 6-year-old boys, they do not have legal rights as a couple, or as parents to their nonbiological child. Further, though they identify as a lesbians, many people read them as a heterosexual couple in public and this affects their behavior, for example by always having the "feminine" looking one write checks so that the "masculine" looking one will not have to show her identification. In addition to this complexity, one child's biological father (to whom the child's biological mother was once married, and who retains his parental rights) is part of their daily family life, though he identifies as transgender and presents himself as gender ambiguous.

One strategy is to create classification systems that are more inclusive. However, this solution fails to take seriously the queer theory assertion that all classifications are problematic. As Kong et al. (2001) state, "The very idea that various types of people named homosexuals or gays or lesbians can simply be called up for interviews becomes a key problem in itself" (p. 244). Queering methodology means giving up on the idea that we can put people in groups and then analyze some other part of their lives as if their **[p. 52 ↓]** group membership was a simple fact. Using queer theory

means sampling whatever set of people or phenomena is of interest but then going beyond their so-called characteristics to study the mundane processes that go into these classifications as they relate to heteronormativity.

Because queer theory emphasizes process, qualitative methods are probably most relevant. Valocchi (2005) contends that ethnographic methods are best suited for the application of queer theory tenets, which require “a sensitivity to the complicated and multilayered lived experiences and subjectivities of individuals, and to the larger cultural, discursive, and institutional contexts of these lives where resources are allocated, images created, and taxonomies are given power” (p. 767). Furthermore, qualitative approaches, with their emphasis on how individuals create meaning, may “have a better chance of accounting for queer experiences in the same terms as the actual people living these experiences” (Warner, 2004, pp. 334–335). However, we also hold out the possibility that innovative quantative methods will be developed to investigate queering processes.

Feminist reflexivity (see Allen, 2000) is an important tool for both qualitative and quantitative researchers who want to develop their capacity to queer both theory and methods. Reflexivity has been conceptualized as gazing back, through theory and methodology, at one's own socially situated research project and position as researcher (Harding, 2003). For example, researchers should be reflexive about how their research constitutes the object it investigates; “when we name a population to investigate, when we operationalize practices and behaviors … we are manufacturing a reality that follows from the questions we are asking” (Warner, 2004, p. 335). The application of feminist reflexivity to using queer theory pushes us to monitor our own lapses into heteronormativity as we conduct supposedly queer research. Consider this episode from Berkowitz's data collection:

> My lesbian-identified aunt's partner invited me to go with her to the kickoff event for PRIDE week in New York City. I decorated myself in rainbow gear and soon felt as if I was fitting in with the crowd. After a few hours, we decided to leave and hopped on a cross-town bus. As I got off the bus, she hollered to me in a matter-of-fact tone, “Make sure you take off those stickers and bracelets or people are going to think you are gay.”

As Berkowitz reflected on that moment, she became critically aware of her unearned heterosexual privilege and was overwhelmed with the feeling that she was an imposter who was frequenting queer spaces for her own personal academic gain. However, at the core of queering is an understanding of how power is embedded in different layers of social life enforced through binaries and conceptual dualisms. Thus, a queer reflexivity would recognize that it was only because of these false dualisms that heterosexual privilege and consciousness could surface to cause this researcher to feel as if she were an imposter. Armed with a queer reflexivity, she now gazes backward at this moment with a nuanced realization of her ability to resist and challenge these illusory dualisms in the context of her research questions, data collection, analysis, and writing.

Pedagogy

Queer pedagogy has been defined as “a radical form of educative praxis implemented deliberately to interfere with, to intervene in, the production of‘normalcy’ in schooled subjects” (Bryson & de Castell, 1993, p. 285). As critical feminist pedagogies built on Freire's (1971) liberatory pedagogy by specifying and expanding notions of who may be oppressed and how (Weiler, 1995), queer pedagogy takes us a step further by challenging the “naturalness” of gender, sexuality, and family binaries. Rather than primarily seeking to include and/or legitimize marginalized groups and identities (see Allen, 1995), a queer pedagogy aims to analyze discursive and cultural practices that create identities and privilege some over others. For example, rather than simply including information about LG couples and/or parents in course curriculum, instructors using queer pedagogy would also engage students in discussions about “genuine” versus “pseudo” families and how this false binary is perpetuated in society. According to Nelson (1999), “pedagogies of inclusion thus become pedagogies of [ongoing] inquiry” (p. 373).

Queer pedagogy can be employed in traditional family courses in numerous ways; three examples are shared here. First, Oswald et al.'s (2005, p. 147) conceptual model for understanding how heteronormativity is resisted and accommodated can be included in any family course. With diagram in hand, students can analyze a movie, reading, **[p. 53 ↓]** image, policy, or their own experience regarding how people are

negotiating gender, sexuality, and family. Second, courses can include explorations of the heterosexual family myth (Herdt & Koff, 2001), which perpetuates the falsehood that heterosexual relationships, marriage, and parenting are the only paths to happiness. Third, strategies of reframing and deconstructing can be used in response to students' normative questions about gender, sexuality, and family (Curran, 2006). For example, if a student asks, “Do gay parents make their children gay?”, rather than attempting to provide an informational answer, a queer pedagogical approach would prompt an instructor to ask the class to think about the sociocultural-political contexts in which the question was asked, possible motivations behind the question, and a range of possible reactions and responses to the question, as well as contributing factors (Curran). As queer pedagogy is not restricted to queer subjects (Luhmann, 1998), strategies of reframing and deconstructing can also be employed in any family course as discussions of gender, race, and family ensue. Furthermore, like feminist pedagogy (e.g., Allen, 1995), queer pedagogy deconstructs the traditional teacher-learner binary that regards the instructor as all-knowing and the student as ignorant (Luhmann, 1998). With a queer pedagogical approach, instructors are not required to have all the answers—they must be willing, rather, to engage with their students in the inquiry of subjectivities.

Conclusion

Queer theory moves us “from an exclusive preoccupation with homosexuality to a focus on heterosexuality as a social and political organizing principle, and from a politics of minority interest to a politic of knowledge and difference” (Seidman, 1994, p. 174). A bona fide feminist queering of families would advance theoretical and empirical analysis of the heteropatriarchal power dynamics that structure (post)modern families to facilitate gender, sexual, and familial transformations. As Kurdek (2005) asserts, “change is the core construct of family science” (p. 162). If change is indeed at the crux of families, then perhaps family studies is ready to be queered. Armed with the “tools to pry off the labels that segregate homosexuality from the family [and] queer studies from feminism,” we can finally begin to queer the family (Marcus, 2005, p. 192).

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