both a wider empirical lens in future work and more self-conscious interrogation of the explicitly political role that marginalized identities serve within existing dominance hierarchies. *Politics & Gender* strongly encourages future submissions on these topics from interested scholars working on topics in this area.

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What Does Queer Theory Teach Us about Intersectionality?

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"What does queer theory teach us about *x*?" ask Berlant and Warner (1995). "As difficult as it would be to spell out programmatic content for

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an answer, this simple question still has the power to wrench frames" (p. 348). This challenge comes from an early essay published to circumvent queer theory's appropriation.[1] Its power "to wrench frames" is what I am posing to intersectional research, not only to reflect on what intersectionality has allowed feminists to accomplish but also to identify some existing shortcomings in the scope and domain of its employment. Because there is little disputing intersectionality's theoretical contribution to feminist research in the past decades — one scholar calls it "the most important theoretical contribution that women's studies . . . has made so far" (McCall 2005, 1771) — it is important for us to take stock of the sorts of political problems that intersectional scholarship has addressed and the ones to which it has often been inattentive.

My argument here is two-fold. First, many researchers employing intersectionality in their work do so as a combination of two paradigms, what I call "descriptive representation" and "critical" paradigms. The first (descriptive representation) directs feminists toward the multiple dimensions of identity as the puzzle to be disentangled and solved and finds its exemplary formulations in the critiques of "Woman" as a unitary category.[2] Feminists using the second paradigm (critical) take as their central puzzle the underlying intersecting structures that pattern out injustice and serve as collective identity's historical conditions of possibility. While this division between a descriptive representation and critical paradigm is contrived for the sake of this taxonomy, it helps me clarify the second argument: that insofar as feminist intersectional research continues to approximate these two paradigms, it is ill-equipped to address a crucial dimension of collective identity, particularly identities politicized as queer: what theorists have called queer identity's "world-making" aspect. Eliding this aspect prevents intersectionality researchers from specifying what makes politicized identities *political*.

1. de Lauretis coined the term *queer theory* when she used "Queer Theory" as the title of a conference in 1990 at the University of California, Santa Cruz. As Halperin (2003) points out, though this was meant to be subversive, it quickly became normalized institutionally and mainstreamed in certain cultural and academic circles. He cautions: "The first step was for the 'theory' in queer theory to prevail over the 'queer,' for 'queer' to become a harmless qualifier of 'theory': if it's theory, progressive academics seem to have reasoned, then it's merely an extension of what important people have already been doing all along. It can be folded back into the standard practice of literary and cultural studies, without impeding academic business as usual . . . Finally, queer theory, being a theory instead of a discipline, posed no threat to the monopoly of the established disciplines: on the contrary, queer theory could be incorporated into each of them, and it could then be applied to topics in already established fields" (2003, 341–42).

2. The usual essay cited for this point is Crenshaw (1989).

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I define *world-making* and elaborate it as a neglected dimension of politicized collective identity by bringing queer theory to bear on these two intersectional paradigms. Staging a confrontation between autonomous fields like "queer theory" and "intersectionality" is a fraught affair, since both emerge from specific political and theoretical traditions, and so the conjunction here reflects a much broader confrontation between disparate world-historical traditions of political thought. But by posing a partial topology of contemporary queer theory to clarify world-making, I want to suggest future ways in which political scientists can use intersectionality as more than a tool for representing multiple dimensions of identity (descriptive representation), as more than a call for increasingly detailed accounting of the structural forces that coordinate patterns of injustice as entrenched and persistent ones (critical).

In going further, I argue that intersectional research should adopt a queer world-making approach that examines how complex and intersecting social categories provide the positive condition for activists and theorists to articulate emergent normative visions of justice, visions that are not captured by treating social science categories as matters of description and representation, but that are nevertheless constitutive of the meaning of the categories themselves. This queer theory framework thus theorizes collective *politicized* identity as an expression of a vision of justice that is *claimed* in the context of a world-making struggle, and it does so while drawing our attention to the intersectional politics of world-making itself.

"Descriptive Representation" and "Critical" Intersectionality

To capture the stakes in distinguishing between these varying paradigms of intersectionality, I want to describe each briefly in terms of the political problem to which it is a response, rather than account for the philosophical grounds upon which each paradigm rests.[3] This is crucial because the difference between "queer theory" and "intersectionality" is a difference not only in theoretical and bibliographic grounding but also in the way they construe the nature of the problems to which they are answers.

Intersectionality research conducted within the descriptive-representation paradigm arises as a response to the political problem of exclusion. Such exclusions appear in many feminists' past and present tendency to reduce to a singular, privileged rubric the multiplicity of an

3. For a different approach to organizing the field of intersectional research, see McCall (2005) and Hancock (2007).

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individual's identity, such as privileging gender at the expense of racial identity. Or it appears as the broader exclusion of individual persons from a group, such as the absence of women in public spaces, or the absence of women of color in otherwise women-dominated spaces. In response to this political problem of exclusion, intersectional research of the descriptive representation variety tries to include the excluded. Thus, feminists have shown that women of color are excluded from white feminist spaces (Higginbotham 1993; hooks 1981), that lesbian sexuality and baiting is used to exclude non-Western women's participation in international organizing (Rothschild 2005), that Third World feminists are excluded both from their own local manifestations of cultural critique and from their European and American counterparts (Mohanty 1984; Narayan 1997), among countless other instances. The units of analysis for intersectional research in this paradigm are typified in the triptych race-class-gender.

Research in the critical paradigm also attends to the multiple dimensions of identity, but it is a response to a different though related political problem: that despite the critique of essentialism mounted by feminists like Beauvoir, on one hand, and the critiques of unitary categories like "Woman" largely by women of color, on the other, essentialist identity categories continue to resist critique and transformation both ideologically and materially. And so while detailing the fictitious, essentialist nature of "Woman" through descriptive intersectionality has afforded us critical distance from the category, it has done little to affect the socially objective ("reified") character of the category that continues to pattern out material resources in deeply gendered ways.

Such descriptive criticisms have yet to dislodge decisively the structures that secure something like sexual dimorphism as a fundamental feature of our experience of the world.[4] And so "critical" intersectionality researchers

4. Linda Zerilli (2005) argues that this difficulty of fundamentally transforming the way we see and speak of sex/gender arises from the way we envision the relationship between theory and practice. Critiques of essentialism typically assume the pedagogical form of dramatizing the empirical diversity of sex/gender that is masked by gender dimorphism. Such critiques treat sex/gender as if they are matters of rules that we apply to bodies imperfectly (and which ideology critique will then demystify as wildly homogenizing). But because these critiques try to alter restrictive sex/gender systems by challenging the rules and criteria that constitute sex/gender, either by pointing out exceptions to the rules or by simply multiplying the number of rules and criteria to capture *more* sexes/genders, these critiques rely for their efficacy on the assumption that sex/gender systems function, in fact, as sets of rules under which we subsume bodies. But there has been discomfort among some theorists about whether this is the case (Dietz 2002; Ferree 2009; Glaeser 2009; Salamon 2006; Steinmetz 2009) and that sex/gender have more complicated relationships to language, judgment, and cognition.

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have risen to the challenge by showing how social structures — from poverty and biopolitics (Smith 2007), kinship (Rubin 1975), racism (Cohen 1997, 2010; Stockton 2006), colonialism and its afterlife (McClintock 1995; McWhorter 2009; Narayan 1997), militarized nationalism (Enloe 2004), and past and present institutions of life sciences (Fausto-Sterling 2000; Lacquer 1992) to the broader world-historical contexts of capitalism, global division of labor, and modern historicism (Chakrabarty 2000; Spivak 1988) — entrench as intransigent fixtures of our world the "fiction" of essentialized identity. Thus, the critical response to the political problem of women confronting the socially objective character of what is technically artificial entails supplementing a description of identity's multiplicity with, in Salamon's words, "[asking] after the ways in which bodies inhabit different sexes and genders and what social structurings make those inhabitations possible" (2006, 578). The units of analysis in critical approaches are thus theorized as historical structures and processes, rather than abiding characteristics of individuals (so, "patriarchy" versus "womanhood").[5] Rather than responding with inclusion via attention to exclusion, the response from the critical approach is to attend to structures and processes that render the world resistant to fundamental emancipation.

There are conceptual shortcomings with each paradigm that pose significant challenges to our research practice. For example, and without denying the political purchase of this tactic for feminists in the past, the trope of making invisible people visible that is typical of work in the descriptive paradigm is underwritten by the notion — the political commitment, even — that the inclusion of marginalized or invisible perspectives will serve as an important corrective to our social scientific vision. Descriptive representation demands from us that we form a more complete and objective field of vision by including in our work a previously excluded perspective. Or, alternately, it tasks us with reconciling the parallax perspectives of the researcher and the subject – that is, identity as an object of research ("objective") and identity as lived experience ("subjective").[6] In either case, descriptive work construes the problem of exclusion to be one of myopic vision, a partiality we need to

5. As Luft puts it, intersectionality of the kind I am calling "critical" is a framework that "starts from [an] assumption about structure, power, and multiplicity, and then operationalizes it as a methodological principle for taking multiple interactive processes into account" (2009, 102). For additional examples of the critical approach, see Risman (2004), McWhorter (2009), the conversation between Butler and Fraser in the *New Left Review* (Butler 1998; Fraser 1998), and Spivak (1993).

6. For a good example of an attempt at reconciliation, see Lucal (1999).

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rectify by representing and making visible those forms of living and being disavowed and erased.

There are dangers for this approach. For his part, Foucault indicates in *The History of Sexuality* that the figuration of medical categories of sexuality, far from being beneficent acts of extending visibility to the previously marginalized, worked to naturalize a constellation of deviant social practices and peoples as pathological, thus justifying them as targets for the state's moral, scientific, and legal administration. It is sadly the case that, historically, efforts to make public or "visible" deviant practices and peoples often functioned as a pretense for sustaining the operative system of discipline that classified such deviance *as* deviance in the first place.[7] We see this elsewhere: in the American apocalyptic depiction of the AIDS public-*health* crisis as representing a queer *sexual* threat (Bersani 1987; Watney 1987); in today's efforts to "include" queer Americans in U.S. nationalist imaginations by making visible — even dramatizing as a spectacle — the perverse racialized and eroticized "queer terrorist of elsewhere" as someone whose existence secures our nationalist schema of good and bad queers (Puar 2007);[8] and in the feud between queer politics and "mainstream" lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) politics regarding the latter's fixation on marriage and what many queer activists see as their reactionary and conservative fantasy of "really" being normal, effectively dropping the critique of normalcy altogether (Halperin 2003; Warner 1999).

So descriptive representation, responding to the political problem of exclusion, is often insufficient for dislodging the governing system of

7. See Foucault (1978); for psychoanalytic extensions or criticisms of Foucault's treatment of deviance in the psychoanalytic formation of the subject, see Copjec (1990, 1994); more generally, see Adams and Cowie (1990); Butler (1997). For a classic psychoanalytic account of psychosexual formation, sex difference, and deviant desire, see Chodorow (1978).

8. Thus, Puar (2007) finds that it is no accident that the transition from us figuring American queers as promiscuous home wreckers always already dying from AIDS to queers as the dapper vanguard of the new reproductive family unit coincides with images of the sexually pathological "queer terrorist of elsewhere." Puar, drawing connections among U.S. nationalism, biopolitics, and terrorist sexuality, writes that "the contemporary U.S. heteronormative nation actually relies on and benefits from the proliferation of queerness, especially in regard to the sexually exceptional homonational and its evil counterpart, the queer terrorist of elsewhere. These fleeting invitations into nationalism indicate that the U.S. nation-state formations, historically reliant on heteronormative ideologies, are now accompanied by homonormative ideologies that replicate narrow racial, class, and gender national ideals," which end up representing male Muslim sexuality as "pathologically excessive yet repressive, perverse yet homophobic, virile yet emasculated, monstrous yet flaccid." Once the specificity of American homonationalism is elaborated, we are not surprised to find that its success is symptomatic of a biopolitics that seeks to "rearticulate the devitalization of one population sequestered for dying — Iraqi detainees accused of terrorist affiliations — into the securitization and revitalization of another population, the American citizenry" (2007, xxv).

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representation that makes available these very categories that are subsequently included or excluded. When a group's emergent visibility is staged in relation to the representational status quo uncritically, visibility colludes with the policing of identity. For sexual politics more generally, "representing" deviance has consolidated modern disciplinary regimes (Butler 2004); served as a pretense to invest in and relive our wounded identities in a reactionary politics possessed by the past (Brown 1995); or narcissistically hypostatized trauma into an inner moral truth that ends up naturalizing those very moral regimes against which queer activism has historically struggled (Berlant 2002).[9] These are all serious pitfalls given that sexual politics in the United States have struggled tirelessly to revolutionize our prevailing schemas for representing normal/deviant sex and sex practice, and to avoid settling for enfranchising us onto the side of "normal" folk. Polemically stated, we must be wary of rendering visible marginality and deviance for inadvertent therapeutic purposes.

Many of these shortcomings are allayed in the critical approach. Because the units of analysis for critical intersectionality are dynamic structures, researchers working in this paradigm are better equipped to attend to the normative ordering of material and ideological systems. At its best, critical intersectionality maps out the complexity of identity as a way of diagnosing these larger world-historical structural contexts. But if the political problem, to which critical intersectionality arose as an answer, is the socially objective character of identity (that is, its reification), then we need to specify how the identifications of these structural conditions of possibility can lead to an adequate political response. Obviously, critical

9. Berlant (2002) writes that "subaltern pain is not considered *universal* (the privileged do not experience it, they do not live expecting that at any moment their ordinarily loose selves might be codified into a single humiliated atom of subpersonhood). But the subaltern pain is deemed, in this context, universally *intelligible*, constitutive objective evidence of trauma reparable by the law and the law's more privileged subjects. . . . In other words, the universal value is here no longer a property of political personhood but, instead, a property of rhetoric that claims to represent not the universal but the true self" (2002, 122). One result of turning such trauma into "the true self" is naturalizing the regime that governs the trauma: "It is also possible that counterhegemonic deployments of pain as the measure of structural injustice actually sustain the utopian image of a homogenous national metaculture, which can look like a healed or healthy body in contrast to the scarred and exhausted ones" (2002, 108). Ford (2007) quips on the conservatism of reducing trauma to inner moral truth regarding racial identity: "The . . . schizoid relationship to race is the stuff of farce. Race-conscious progressives insist that generalizations about race are valid for purposes of university admissions but not for stopping terrorists from boarding commercial aircraft or indicting drug couriers in the nation's freeways; conservatives insist just the opposite. Advocates of multiracial identity beat up relentlessly on racial essentialism when pressed to choose one and only one race, but their solution is to insist on multiracial categories and designations to reflect their 'true' racial identity" (2007, 480).

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intersectionality research continues to provide us a map of our difficult terrain. But much of it is unable to specify of what the relationship between critical, intersectional, empirical research and feminist *politics* consists.

We feminists often leave the relation between knowledge and politics unspecified, implicitly operating on the assumption that empirical knowledge of socially objective structures and causal complexity will diminish their seeming immutability. Or, dangerously, we venerate knowledge of complexity ("intelligibility") for its own sake. McCall (2005) writes tellingly in an essay that is otherwise exemplary of the "critical" genre of scholarship: "All three [ways of dealing with categorical complexity that McCall outlines in her essay] attempt to satisfy the demand for complexity and, as a result, face the need to manage complexity, *if for no other reason than to attain intelligibility*" (2005, 1773; emphasis added).

This passage is symptomatic of the ambiguous relationship that feminist researchers repeatedly confront between the knowledge of intersectional complexity we obtain and what constitutes emancipatory political practice.[10] Despite what I take to be her intentions, the ambiguous relation between knowledge and politics is resolved here by McCall's veneration of knowledge for its own sake, as if it inherently carried emancipatory potential or its relation to practice was self-evident.

This goes to the heart of a common shortcoming for both descriptive-representation and critical intersectionality, which is that, as Zerilli writes, "feminists have not adequately articulated the difference between speaking about women as a demographic or social group and speaking about women as a political collectivity" (2005, 171). If this is true, then it is because we have often failed to articulate within the scope of intersectional research the specifically *political* quality of collective identities, to stress what distinguishes them from identities that are accomplished historical or descriptive facts of the status quo, in short, to acknowledge that what is "common" and what is sensed as "shared" within a political group like queers is not a purely descriptive element *nor* a common underlying historical process.[11] My worry is that between

10. Reflecting on the Woman debates in the 1990s, what many feminists were negotiating was not only whether feminism could exist without a foundational unitary category "Woman" but also the nature of the relation between knowledge (construed often as theory) and politics. For further treatment of this issue, see Zerilli 1998.

11. For variations on this point, see the recent surge of queer work on "affect" as that which underwrites the spontaneous emergence of *political* subjectivities and citizenship which cannot be reduced to clearly defined *demographic* collectivities: Berlant (1991, 1997) and Puar (2007); on

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the two paradigms of intersectional research, we have been working with a narrow repertoire of what can count as "in common" for political groups whose shared solidarity is a fragile political achievement, rather than historically or descriptively given.

Between examining the exclusions of people or elucidating concealed structural processes and historical conditions of unfreedom, our intersectional research often adopts a conception of identity that misses the *politicization* of collective identity, for instance, the gap between *being* gay and *claiming* queerness.[12] Descriptive intersectionality conceptualizes collective identity, such as queer, as constituted on the basis of a demographic characteristic ("deviant" sexual orientation), whereas critical approaches view it as a determined product of persistent structures of which we can obtain emancipatory empirical knowledge (heteronormativity), rather than the successful effect of a political *claim* that has no necessary or intrinsic relation to the existing demographic character or shared history of the subjects who make this claim to queerness. This process of politicization and claims making, a practice of calling forth something new that can even *be* in common and shared, is what I specify, with queer theorists, as queer "world-making."

Queer Politics and World-Making

I argue that world-making is the decisive aspect that characterizes a collectivity as a *political* one. The concept appears throughout queer theory scholarship, particularly in its proximate post-foundational democratic theory configurations.[13] Berlant and Warner, for example, write:

> By queer culture we mean a world-making project, where "world," like "public," differs from community or group because it necessarily includes more people than can be identified, more spaces than can be mapped beyond a few reference points, modes of feeling that can be learned rather

affect philosophically: Massumi (1995); on the difference between "class" as a historical and political category: Spivak (1988); more generally, see Chambers and O'Rourke (2009) and Warner (2002).

12. As Ford pointedly describes it, "So *queer* denotes not an identity but instead a political and existential stance, an ideological commitment, a *decision* to live outside some social norm or other. At the risk (the certainty) of oversimplification, one could say that even if one is born straight or gay, one must decide to be queer" (2007, 479).

13. See, for example, Berlant and Warner (1998), Chambers (2007), and Zerilli (2005); "world-making" is deeply related to the proximate concept of "constituent power" in Frank (2010), particularly pp. 128–55, and Kalyvas (2005).

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> than experienced as a birthright. The queer world is a space of entrances, exits, unsystematized lines of acquaintance, projected horizons, typifying examples, alternate routes, blockages, incommensurate geographies. (1998, 558)

It entails an ongoing practice "dispersed through incommensurate registers, by definition *unrealizable* as community or identity." Because "queer worlds do not have the power to represent a taken-for-granted social existence," they envision queer world-making as an ongoing collective practice of enacting "the radical aspirations of queer culture building: not just a safe zone for queer sex but the changed possibilities of identity, intelligibility, publics, culture, and sex that appear when the heterosexual couple is no longer the reference or the privileged example of sexual culture" (pp. 548, 559).

Other queer theorists explore aspects of world-making when they study affect, race, and colonialism (Eng 2010; Gandhi 2006; Hanchard 1998), the history of countercultural sexual practices (Chauncey 1994; Halberstam 1998; Halperin 1990), queer phenomenology and existentialism (Ahmed 2006; Salamon 2010), or media studies (Chambers 2009). Brown has world-making in mind when she advocates for an alternative to a definition of critical politics as reliving a wounded past:

> What if it were possible to incite a slight shift in the character of political expression and political claims common to much politicized identity? What if we sought to supplant the language of "I am" — with its defensive closer of identity, its insistence on the fixity of position, its equation of social and moral positioning — with the language of "I want this for us"? (1995, 75)

Chauncey (1994) speaks of "forging queer identities" by making "gay worlds in the streets"; Frank (2010, 183), in the context of democracy's aesthetic dimension, speaks of "the people envisioned as a poetic, world-making power"; and Zerilli (2005)elaborates "world-building" as the name of feminists' collective efforts to found new forms of political association and authority.

While they are world-making, queer movements do not limit themselves to redistributing material resources, affecting legal change, or creating queer institutions, though each of these are crucial. Queer world-making is the making of a commons, itself realizable only through *claims* for a common world that does not yet exist, which is technically unimaginable but nevertheless retained as a possibility by enacting the "aspiration to live another way now, here" (Berlant and Warner 1995,

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348).[14] It is an expression of a vision of justice by a collective that claims this vision without any grounds to guarantee or underwrite such a thing. World-making is thus, as Frank notes in the context of American revolutionary politics, "self-justifying" because for world-making collectivities, "the act of declamation [is] often taken to be as important as the particular political issue being declaimed against" (2010, 151). What constitutes a group as a queer one is not necessarily that it rests on a demographic commonality, nor that it is the necessary effect of heteronormativity, but *that it claims* a vision of a queer world order at all, and by collectively claiming for it seek to call "queers" as a collective political subject into being.[15]

Because this utopian political form that queer identities assume often renders them fleeting (because this form of collective identification exists only insofar as political claims are made in its name), this specifically *political* quality of queer identity is often overlooked in orthodox intersectional research. Wilder describes the utopian political form this way:

> Strategic utopia . . . entails concrete interventions that enact (envision, perform, pursue) and anticipate (precede, foresee, call forth) a transformative set of coordinates. This imagined alternative order appears to have *no evident relation to actual conditions* even as it is already immanently discernible and embodied, however fleetingly or spectrally, in existing consciousness, practices, or institutions. . . . Strategic utopia is not simply about claiming the impossible instrumentally to make moderate gains today. But it does indicate the political effectivity of acting "as if" — *as if the future was imminent, as if a seemingly impossible order already existed* — to rework existing coordinates (by anticipating alternative arrangements) and to bring forth "utopian" alternatives (by awakening immanent possibilities in the present). (2009, 104–5; my emphasis)[16]

14. For example, Butler writes: "We misunderstand the sexual field if we consider that the legitimate and the illegitimate appear to exhaust its immanent possibilities. There is, thus, outside the struggle between the legitimate and the illegitimate — which is one that has as its goal the conversion of the illegitimate into the legitimate — a field that is less thinkable, one not figured in light of its ultimate convertibility into legitimacy . . . this would be a sexual field that does not have legitimacy as its point of reference, its ultimate desire" (2004, 105–6).

15. The emphasis of world-making as a creative act is crucial. It does not mean creation *ex nihilo*, but what Eco describes as invention: "We may define as invention a mode of production whereby the producer of the sign-function chooses a new material continuum not yet segmented for that purpose and proposes a new way of organizing (of giving form to) it in order *to map* within it the formal pertinent elements of a content-type. Thus in invention we have a case of *ratio difficilis* realized within a heteromaterial expression; but since no previous convention exists to correlate the elements of the expression with the selected content, the sign producer must in some way *posit* this correlation so as to make it acceptable. In this sense inventions are radically different from recognition, choice, and replica" (1979, 245).

16. Thanks to Jon Masin-Peters for this helpful reference.

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Since the world that is the object of queer world-making is not something to be substantiated in light of what grounds it, intersectional researchers make an enormous mistake attempting to study and identify queers and their claimed worlds as things that can be identified akin to a social scientific object that I can ground, that I can show as valid on the basis of something else. Practices of world-making that constitute politicized groups exist as claims that *posit* a shared normative vision of the world. And so queer world-making, and the queers who are the provisional and contested achievement of this project, possess a fundamentally creative or inventive dimension that cannot be strictly ascribed to, or judged as valid on the basis of, the descriptive or structural character of the political subjects who participate in it.

This, however, is precisely what both descriptive representation and critical intersectionality demand of queer subjects and politics when it unpacks the category "queer" strictly in terms of sexual orientation, social structures, shared histories, and abiding characteristics grounded in the present constitution of the status quo, subsequently *de*politicizing the category of "queer." It misses the ungrounded world and so commons-making, justice-positing character of queer collectivities by either reducing this world-making character to an apolitical (i.e., given) demographic feature of a collective subject to be grounded descriptively, or it elides it altogether as if there is a natural adequation between our shared history of sexual oppression and our political sympathies and attachments to a world claimed as queer.

One of queer theory's lessons for intersectional research is that the gap between an empirical/historical category and political collectivity exists because the latter is brought into existence through world-making, that is, the struggle to *create* a commonality, which is not self-evidently given in demographic or historical premises, despite the indispensability of these latter aspects as a condition for understanding what is at stake in the former.[17]

Intersectionality as Attentive to World-Making

When the social scientist tries to respond to the political problems of exclusion or a structurally intransigent world by accounting (either

17. Puar writes similarly that "the limitations of intersectional identitarian models emerge" when we dismantle "the representational mandates of visibility identity politics that feed narratives of sexual exceptionalism" and find ourselves needing new ways to "approach queernesses that are unknown or not cogently knowable, that are in the midst of becoming, that do not immediately and visibly signal themselves as insurgent, oppositional, or transcendent" (2007, 204).

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descriptively or critically) for intersectional complexity, often subtending this accounting process is the idea that such accounting is the prerequisite to emancipatory politics, insofar as we need to know who we are and from whence we came before we can begin to make claims of justice on behalf of that knowledge. But it is the case that accounting for who we are, our queerness, is already a political claim about how the world is and how it ought to be. When queer activists and theorists identify as such, they are not just grounding it on their identity's abiding features or structural and causal conditions. They are also claiming, positing, enacting a queer commons and public (in a way that does not readily yield to being judged as valid or grounded) in the leap from individual subjectivity to shared collective identity. This leap is no mere accounting of who we are — objectively, truly, once and for all — as foreplay to the serious business of world-making. Instead, the leap from individual subjectivity to politicized collectivity *is* a world-making leap. It consists of the articulation of an emergent normative vision of justice among allies and companions with whom I hope to be in common cause, an articulation that springs from the demographic categories that we embody, but which is not immediately captured *by* such categories if they are understood as containers of visibility and intelligibility — that is, if they are understood as capturing *being* gay rather than the *claim* to queerness.

Empirically, the stakes for our attending to world-making become acute when we reflect, for instance, on Proposition 8 campaigns in California in 2008, where many pro-marriage gay-rights organizations working to articulate themselves *as* a movement excluded assistance outright from sympathetic black churches and vice versa. If we read this conflict with descriptive representation, then the contours of this dispute will be attributed to "queers" and "blacks." If we read it with a critical approach, then the relevant structural or historical explanation might be, for instance, that blacks are prone to authoritarianism because of high church attendance or shared domination under white supremacy,[18] that therefore they reproduce simplistic conceptions of traditional authority, and, finally, that they therefore are somehow "the problem." It will in any case appear preordained as a function of the structural and demographic specificity of the subjects in question.

This analysis is politically counterproductive. It identifies the relevant actors as prespecified by descriptive characteristics or existing structural

18. Marc Hetherington and Efren Perez, "How Race Can Color the Questions We Ask and the Inferences We Draw," unpublished manuscript, last modified June 10, 2011.

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conditions and elides the fact that political solidarity is also a function of what subjects posit justice as consisting, something irreducible to the former conditions. The problem is not with blacks *or* queers; it is with people who *hold certain normative visions of the world*, *whether queers*, *blacks*, *both*, *or neither*. Because we are dealing with collective actors whose shared qualities are normatively envisioned rather than historically or descriptively given, we should not ground the intersectional contours here exclusively on the demographic fact *that* these are gays, blacks, and churches but, instead, must attend, as a distinct matter, to the contested world-making practices and posited visions of justice, which in fact underwrite political solidarities and alliances. We need to take history and social structures seriously while attending to the *distinct* world-making practices, lest we slip back into yet another essentialism — this time a structural and historical one.[19]

If we feminists want to respond adequately to the political problems that our intersectional research seeks to overcome, then we need to go beyond the paradigms hitherto employed. Our approaches will omit how, for politicized identities, "who we are" is founded by "what we wish for us to become." We need to incorporate into our work an attention to the normative political theories and practices that found the politicized collectivities of whom we are ostensibly aiding. The distinctive character of the history of queer politics and theory — its relentless attention to world-making, a refusal to be contained by its own historical conditions of possibility — shows that otherwise intersectional researchers will not even grasp what makes queer "queer."

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19. This turn to historical or structural essentialism is given a recent and timely defense in Patten 2011; as should be clear from this essay, I do not believe this more sophisticated form of essentialism is a viable strategy for feminists, so long as it continues to foreclose future contestation of the boundaries of historically delimited cultural and social formations.

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Intersectionality in Time: Sexuality and the Shifting Boundaries of Intersectional Marginalization

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"Here Come the (Stylish) Grooms," declared the headline, which was accompanied by a 9 1/2-inch-high photograph of two smiling, dancing, and, yes, stylish grooms. The article appeared on the front page of the *Thursday Styles* section of the October 20, 2011 edition of the *New York Times*. Alluding to the New York State law passed in June of that year that gave legal recognition to same-sex marriage, it began, "As they walk down the aisle, gay couples are making new rules while keeping some old ones."

Because, I will confess, it was not until lunchtime that I made my way to the "real" news in the front section of the paper, it was only then that I came across, on the first page of the *New York* section, a second article entitled "After Arrests in Park Known for Sex, Cases are Sealed, but Names Are Made Public." "With its densely wooded trails and easy access," the article explained, Saxon Woods, a park in White Plains, NY, "had

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