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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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become widely known on websites catering to men interested in anonymous gay sex." It was also, however, "well known to the Westchester County Department of Public Safety," and in May 2011 — a month before Governor Andrew Cuomo signed New York's Marriage Equality Law — the police launched "Operation Overexposed." The subsequent arrests for public lewdness and forcible touching "made only a dent in the problem at the park," however, and so in October, "the county police took the unusual step of releasing to the news media the names and photos of 16 men it said had engaged in unlawful sexual activity in Saxon Woods." "The idea," readers were told, "was to create a fear of being publicly shamed."

As full-color photographs of "stylish grooms" have become iconic, almost stereotypical images of twenty-first-century gayness, public shaming and cruising-area stings seem increasingly like black-and-white stock images of an ostensibly bygone era of gay repression and abjection. Indeed, readers might be forgiven for wondering whether the two headlines had been pulled from news reports separated not by several pages but by several decades. The coincidence of the two reports in the same newspaper on the same early twenty-first-century day reminds us, however, that it is not only "gay couples" who are simultaneously keeping and flouting "old rules." Rather, political institutions and actors are doing so as well, and within a two-month period, different institutions in the same state made very different choices on this front. As one began to afford legal recognition to same-sex marriages, the other seemed to presume that same-sex sex remains so shameful that the threat of having one's name released for engaging in it would constitute a deterrent or a punishment.

In this context, the juxtaposition of the two pieces is suggestive, pointing as it does to nonlinear timelines and messing up progress narratives in ways that, I argue, invite us to consider the implications of time and intersectionality for analyses and evaluations of sexuality in American politics and policy. Bringing into conversation frameworks offered by scholars of intersectionality, American political development (APD), and queer studies, and drawing on examples from my research about advocacy and social-movement organizations, I place an intersectional analysis of sexuality-related public policy "in time" in two different, but overlapping, ways: 1) by exploring the longitudinal trajectories of political battles and the dynamism of intersectional marginalization; and 2) by highlighting the asynchrony of recent developments in sexuality-related public policy and exploring its implications for intersectional marginalization and sexuality.

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A full consideration of this "mash-up" of intersectionality, APD, and queer theory is, of course, impossible in this short essay. I hope that the abbreviated analysis I offer begins to illuminate, as the editors wrote in their invitation to this symposium, "the ways in which sexuality is concealed and revealed" by intersectional analyses. In particular, I argue that reading the two articles together and through the lenses of time and intersectionality illuminates the ways in which the dual assumptions that legal same-sex marriage constitutes progress and that anonymous sex is anachronistic, immature, and regressive serve to construct "worthy" and "unworthy" queer sexualities. In this light, increased support for same-sex marriage among advocacy organizations and the general public is not simply a milestone on the road to lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) equality but, instead, a reflection of patterns of intersectional marginalization within LGBT groups. These patterns are themselves related to narratives of gay progress that mask an uneven trajectory, one in which intersectional marginalization does not dissolve but is instead reconstituted along other lines.

I begin with a brief review of relevant features of intersectionality, APD, and queer theories of time and temporality. I then chart some key changes in advocacy on LGBT issues over the last several decades, focusing in particular on the ways in which thinking about advocacy in time helps to illuminate their implications for intersectional understandings of politics and policy. I conclude by using same-sex marriage to illustrate some of the ways in which analyzing sexuality in time reveals the intransigence of intersectional marginalization.

Intersectionality, American Political Development, and Queer Time

As many readers know, theories of intersectionality contend that groups can be marginalized along many axes within what Patricia Hill Collins has called the "matrix of domination" (1990; for other foundational articulations, see, inter alia, Combahee River Collective 1981; Crenshaw 1989; Hull, Scott, and Smith 1982; Mohanty 1988). From an intersectional perspective, these multiple forms of marginalization — including race, gender, class, sexuality, and disability — do not function as "separate, fixed, and parallel tracks, but are rather dynamic, simultaneous, and mutually constitutive" (Strolovitch 2007, 24). Over the last several decades, scholars from a variety of disciplinary locations have trained intersectional lenses on analyses of marginalization in a

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wide range of social, economic, and political realms. As a result of this work, we know a tremendous amount about the constitution and effects of intersectional marginalization in realms that include public opinion (Simien 2005), legislative politics (Hawkesworth 2003; Lien et al. 2007; Smooth 2006), interest groups and social movements (Cohen 1999; Kurtz 2002; Strolovitch 2006, 2007; Townsend-Bell 2011; Weldon 2011), and public policy (Berger 2006; Hancock 2007).

Concurrent with the "intersectional turn" in studies of marginalization has been a "historical turn" within political science. Scholars of American political development have called for increased attention to the dynamics of time and history, as well as for more nuanced approaches to processes of construction and mechanisms of change in political institutions and public policy (Orren and Skowronek 2004; Ritter 2007). Although APD has not been centrally concerned with marginalization, the last decade has seen a burgeoning body of research on race and, to a lesser degree, gender and sexuality in American political development (see, for example: Brunyeel 2007; Canaday 2009; Frymer 2008; Johnson 2006; King 2000; King and Smith 2005; Lieberman 1998; Lowndes 2008; Murakawa 2008; Novkov 2001; Ritter 2006; Strach 2007; Sullivan 2007; Tillery n.d.; Vallely 2004; Weaver 2007). Because intersectionality takes as one of its starting points the insight that marginalization is not static, it is attentive to the historical processes and contexts in which marginalization is constituted. Intersectionally oriented APD research has served as an important corrective to "snapshot" analyses of the political causes and consequences of marginalization (Pierson 2004), revealing a great deal about the dynamic intersections among race, class, gender, and sexuality (Novkov 2008).

Alongside these two developments has been the development within queer studies of ideas about "queer temporalities" (see, inter alia, Freeman 2010; Halberstam 2005). This body of scholarship engages themes too wide-ranging to summarize here, but among its central and, for my purposes, most germane insights is that the "sensation of asynchrony can be viewed as a queer phenomenon," and one that invites us to "reimagine 'queer' as a set of possibilities produced out of temporal and historical difference" (Freeman 2007, 159). Scholars have shown that queer sexualities are often stigmatized in temporal terms, as not abiding by the "clock" of normative heterosexuality: queers have been cast as immature, regressive, temporally backward, dislocated from any specific historical moment, and as having no past (Freeman 2007, 161–62). Freeman notes that early sexologists, for example, "followed race

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scientists in describing 'inverts' as evolutionary throwbacks, physical remnants of earlier eras" (p. 161). Temporal concepts were also at the core of Freud's theories of sexuality; he characterized "any departure from the heterosexual reproductive imperative as a sign of being stuck in a developmental phase or as an endless return to the past" (Freeman 2007, 161).

Affirmative Advocacy in Time

Recent developments in and battles surrounding queer politics and sexuality-related public policy are ripe for an analysis that brings together ideas and interventions from these bodies of scholarship. In recent years, issues including same-sex marriage, repealing the "Don't Ask Don't Tell" (DADT) policy that prohibited gay men and lesbians from serving openly in the military, and the Employment Nondiscrimination Act (ENDA, which would protect LGBT people from job discrimination) have come to occupy central places on the national political agenda. Once mainly the purview of LGBT organizations and their antigay adversaries, these issues have been taken up by an increasingly broad array of progressive organizations. For example, public-sector unions such as the American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees (AFSCME) placed themselves at the center of the battle to repeal DADT, and the National Lawyers Guild (NLG) was a central player in working to defeat California's Proposition 8, which ended same-sex marriage in that state (Strolovitch forthcoming).

Such catholic engagement with LGBT issues has not always been the case. As part of the research for my book *Affirmative Advocacy*, I asked survey respondents several questions to gauge their attention to LGBT people and sexuality-related policy concerns over the course of the 1990s. First, I asked them to compare the degree to which their organizations addressed the policy concerns of LGBT people, Asian Americans, African Americans, Latinos, American Indians, elderly people, immigrants, poor and low-income people, women, and workers. I then asked them how concerned they thought their constituents were about the policy issues that affect each of those groups, and the degree to which they thought that the public thought the concerns of these groups ought to be addressed. Across all the categories of the social and economic justice organizations in the study, LGBT people and their issues came in last. Respondents said that their organizations were least

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active on these issues, that their constituents were least concerned about them, and that the public considered them least worthy of attention (Strolovitch 2007, 70).

In addition to these broad questions, I asked "generalist" civil rights organizations (that is, groups addressing civil rights broadly construed, rather than ones focused on particular minority groups) about their work on discrimination against LGBT people — an intersectionally disadvantaged subgroup of their broader constituencies.[1] While 64% of these organizations said that they were active on this issue, the levels of activity they devoted to them were typically symbolic and significantly lower than they were for the majority and advantaged subgroup issues about which they were asked (hate crime and affirmative action in higher education, respectively). For example, the executive director of one such group who had described affirmative action in higher education as a "high priority" for his organization explained that his group had been much less involved with ENDA. "We support ENDA," he said, but apart "from coalitional [efforts], not so much" (Strolovitch 2007, 122).[2]

Interviews that I conducted with officers at other kinds of organizations suggested that this approach — characterized by a general recognition that LGBT issues should be part of a broadly progressive agenda, but which were, in practice, pursued stealthily or at arm's length — was fairly typical at the time. In the case of labor organizations, for example, LGBT issues often made their way onto the agenda in the form of contract issues rather than as policy advocacy (Sweeney 1999). When I asked the president of a large union about his organization's activities on ENDA, he pointed instead to a contract that he had negotiated that included benefits for same-sex domestic partners. "We got it," he said, "and now it's standard in our contracts."

Viewed as a "snapshot," this kind of advocacy seems limited and miserly. Viewed as a "moving picture," however, such engagement, limited though it was, constituted a marked improvement over the 1980s, when, for example, Spalter-Roth and Schreiber found that even women's organizations in which lesbians played leadership roles were reluctant to address lesbian issues or to educate "their constituencies, policymakers, and the public about homophobia" (Spalter-Roth and Schreiber 1995, 123). But while contracts

1. To examine the degree to which, and the ways in which, advocacy organizations claiming to speak for women, racial minorities, and low-income people represent intersectionally disadvantaged constituencies, I designed a policy typology that distinguished among four types of issues — universal, majority, advantaged subgroup, and disadvantaged subgroup.

2. Interview with organization officer, May 2001.

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and other "below the radar" strategies — what Kurtz characterizes as a "do it but don't talk too much about it" approach — allow unions to work on issues that benefit an intersectionally disadvantaged subgroup, they are only loosely related to changes in public policy (Kurtz 2002, 87). Moreover, the signals that they send — to intersectionally disadvantaged subgroups, to broader constituencies, and to the public — suggest that they are unworthy of public engagement.

A consideration of the recent involvement of AFSCME in the effort to repeal DADT and of the NLG in defending same-sex marriage within a moving picture also might seem to suggest that as LGBT issues have become less controversial, they have become "mainstreamed" and, in effect, no longer intersectional (Dhamoon 2011). Rather than signaling the dissolution of intersectional marginalization, however, contemplating the over-time evolution of battles over issues such as same-sex marriage reveals the dynamism, shifting boundaries, and stubborn effects of intersectional marginalization. First, notwithstanding the high-profile involvement of particular organizations, LGBT-related policy advocacy remains a very low-level priority for most organizations. When I asked respondents to a 2007 survey of advocacy organizations about the degree to which their organizations address the policy concerns of 16 different groups, LGBT people were once again near the bottom of the heap. With 45% of respondents saying that they did not serve this constituency, they came in ahead of only religiously observant people (50.3%) and HIV+ people (46.6%; these groups overlap with each other, of course). I did not ask about these last two groups in the 2000 survey).[3] However important the work of AFSCME and NLG, it is not part of a more general and realigning surge in advocacy on behalf of the intersectionally marginalized LGBT constituents of economic and social justice organizations.

In addition, the lack of intersectional engagement on the part of non-LGBT organizations that I discussed earlier ran both ways: not only did civil rights, labor, and women's organizations give short shrift to LGBT issues, but LGBT organizations also gave little attention to their own intersectionally marginalized constituents. For example, when I asked

3. Respondents were asked "To what degree does your organization address the policy concerns of each of the following groups?" The survey listed children; elderly people; immigrants; middle-class people; poor or low-income people; working families; gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender people; religiously observant people; HIV-positive people or people living with AIDS; women; Arabs or Muslims; Asian-Pacific Americans; Blacks/African-Americans; Latinos/Hispanics; Native Americans/American Indians; and whites.

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the political director of an LGBT rights group that has been at the forefront of advocacy on HIV/AIDS about the extent to which her organization had been involved in efforts to make free or low-cost AIDS medications available to low-income people who are HIV-positive, she averred that her organization was involved "tangentially" but that it was "certainly not a leader on those issues." Framing the issue as outside of her organization's central mission in spite of its likely effects on many of its low-income and uninsured constituents, she said that "[t]here are other organizations out there who are far . . . better suited to get involved" in that issue (Strolovitch 2007, 108).[4]

Such inattention on the part of LGBT organizations to disadvantaged subgroup issues extends to a broad range of issues and has stimulated a great deal of debate, much of which has brought an intersectional and critical lens to the focus on "marriage equality" as both a policy priority and a barometer of progress.[5] Many argue that focusing on marriage diverts resources from other issues with potentially broader reach, particularly for less advantaged LGBT people (Cohen 1997; Conrad 2010; Duggan 2005). Critics contend further that many of the rights and privileges most closely associated with marriage (whether "gay" or "straight") are ones that should instead be afforded to everyone by the state, not just to couples or through marriage, and many also take issue with what they claim is the "civilizing mission" of same-sex marriage (Conrad 2010; Duggan 2005). Rather than "rethinking the practice of 'coupling,'" the New York–based Gay Shame Collective has argued, for example, "same-sex marriage rhetoric commonly celebrates that possibility as a means to normalize queer sexuality and elides the relationship between marriage and 'the reproduction of patriarchal relations'" (Boellstorff 2007, 227–28).

Positive attitudes toward same-sex marriage are, of course, highly correlated with positive attitudes toward LGBT people more generally (Egan and Sherrill 2006). It is also hard to argue that bans on same-sex marriage are not regressive, and that while people support them for an array of reasons, they typically grow out of and reflect antigay sentiment (Lax and Phillips 2009). But while the article about the "stylish grooms" took for granted that legalization of same-sex marriage was good for gay people, an intersectional lens suggests that such victories might have

4. Interview with organization officer, August 2001.

5. I cannot do justice to the huge body of feminist, queer, and other writing critiquing marriage in general and same-sex marriage in particular. My goal is to draw out some of the critiques that bear most centrally on my arguments about time and intersectionality. Critics have also taken on the focus of many groups concerning efforts to repeal DADT.

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more ambiguous implications, some of which are well illustrated by the arrests in the White Plains park. In the progress narrative of same-sex marriage, anonymous gay sex is framed as a symptom of the secrecy and self-loathing fomented by the denial of social acceptance and by antigay laws. In that story, same-sex marriage renders anonymous sex in parks unnecessary. This last point highlights, in turn, the dual role of time in understanding intersectional marginalization: If gay men can get maried, anonymous sex at rest stops can be cast as an anachronistic practice imported from another, less liberated, time. In this light, the rights and respectability made possible through marriage serve also to silence, exploit, and reinforce other lines of marginalization and exclusion, and those who continue to engage in such practices are now doubly margnalized — first, by the stigma associated with homosexuality among members of the general public, and again by the internal policing and secondary marginalization on the part of an LGBT community that views such practices as unevolved (Cohen 1999).

Conclusion

The *New York Times* articles with which I opened this essay highlight two of the many, often contradictory, developments in LGBT rights and queer politics of the last several decades — developments that, I have argued, provide telling lenses into the longitudinal dynamism, but also the intransigence, of intersectional marginalization. Analyzing sexuality intersectionally and in time suggests, for example, that laws extending marriage rights to same-sex couples are not obvious milestones of progress on the road to LGBT justice. When it comes to sexuality, progress is not merely an "unsteady march" (Klinkner and Smith 1999) but, rather, is "time out of joint." Developments construed as benchmarks of forward-marching justice are often ambiguous, double edged, and even regressive.

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Disability as a New Frontier for Feminist Intersectionality Research

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Disability is the new gender. I make this claim with trepidation and a sense of irony. Certainly, disability studies today is like women's studies was in the 1970s and 1980s, when feminist scholars had to convince colleagues in "mainstream" political science that gender was something worth attending to, that it was a serious enterprise, and that it should be part of the mainstream. The fields of history and English have been somewhat more welcoming of disability as a valid topic of study, just as these fields

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