SYMPOSIUM

Heterosexual Political Science

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Doing queer theory as political scientists enables us to approach central questions of the discipline in new and productive ways. This work makes possible innovative theoretical investigation of core concepts in political science such as power, justice, freedom, equality, and democracy. Queer theory can deepen the study of power by focusing on the lives, experiences, and institutions of GLBT people and communities. In the process, new frameworks are developed for the study of political theory more broadly. When done well, queer theory draws on the field's interdisciplinarity by bringing political scientists into conversation with other scholars on key matters that are best not bound by disciplinary borders. Similarly, queer theory at its best draws on the multiple perspectives developed in fields such as post-colonial, ethnic and critical race, feminist, class and ability, religious, and cultural studies.

Made possible by feminist theorists and queer political scientists such as Wendy Brown, Martha Ackelsberg, Joan Tronto, and Mark Blasius in the past several decades, numerous significant works in queer theory have been published by political scientists. Shane Phelan's (1989; 1994; 2001) work was pathbreaking in both its critique of identity politics and its capacity to integrate critical race theory into political theories of lesbian politics. For example, Phelan deftly teases her way through tensions between inclusionary and exclusionary modes in queer politics, shedding light on internal tensions in democratic theories of citizenship more broadly. Morris Kaplan (1997) renegotiates terms of privacy in democratic theory through an examination of gay and lesbian rights challenges. By working in the interstices of race, class, and sexuality, Cathy Cohen (1999) offers a unique politics of communities. Susan Burgess (2008) takes on the founding fathers by using concepts from queer theory to critique and theorize judicial review. Cynthia Burack (2008) investigates the Christian right seriously to examine the role of theology and exclusionary politics in political thought and practice. Angelia Wilson (1999) studies the relationship between theory and practical politics, as well as sexuality and religion. Joe Rollins (2004) develops a sexual epistemology through analysis of AIDS in legal studies.

Here, I provide examples from my own investigations of families to illustrate the kind of work that can be done by political theorists in queer theory (Brettschneider 1997). Interested in differentials in law, practice, and views regarding GLBTQ (gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, queer) and non-GLBTQ people seeking to adopt children, I was led to question basic ideas of family formation in the West more deeply. Why does the adoption market discriminate against GLBTQ people? Why are GLBTQ families pitied as mere approximations of real families? We can start addressing these issues by formulating empirically driven questions. Exploring answers as theorists can provide new insight into long-held foundations of political thinking.

While any person physically able to participate in the birth process may do so, GLBTQ people are presumed to require the assistance of technology and law, as opposed to the natural pathways of birthing humans used by non-GLBTQ people. While non-GLBTQ people may also use newer reproductive technologies or adoption to raise children, society assumes that they will do so only when "nature" and "natural relations" break down. Technology and law are seen as supplementary, not foundational, to the processes of family formation for non-GLBTQ people. Non-GLBTQ people's processes of family formation are considered natural processes, while GLBTQ families are presented as man/human-made. GLBTQ families are perceived as being constituted through the social constructions of law (via adoption) and science (via newer reproductive technologies), instead of through nature.

The study of GLBTQ persons in the areas of adoption and family formation coincides with rich contributions of queer theory. Queer theory exposes central operating assumptions of Western thinking, such as its use of the concept of the "natural" as a mode to camouflage arenas of politics in need of critical examination. By creating "nature" as a sphere outside of or prior to politics and relegating various phenomena to this sphere, political theorists can overlook important power relationships. Critical theorists, including Marxist, feminist, queer, and critical race theorists, show that the pursuit of justice requires careful examination of phenomena and relationships presumed to be natural.

Queer theory has continued to expose the politics of the natural in critical theory in part through the concept of performativity (Butler 2000). In queer theory, facets of identity presumed to be natural are revealed as constituted through acts that refer to common-sense notions of reality. For example, through the study of drag, we come to see that gender identity is not inherent in a person or group. In queer theory, we understand that who we are is created through what we do and our repeated performances. These acts are seen as effects of what is taken to be the cause—the identity assumed to be already present. It is through the repetition of the acts that the characteristics come to be seen as normal. Through particular tropes of authorization—the politics of the processes by which the acts are called for, acknowledged, named, and legitimized—the acts come to be understood in both theory and everyday use as effects of an underlying true or essential self.

Queer theory work on family formation exposes many ways that we continue to hierarchically value biological families above adoptive families, valorizing one and degrading the other. This valuation and degradation is central to the

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privileging of and discrimination against actual family forms. Within this context, problematically differential treatment of GLBTQ people and couples occurs in practices of family formation such as adoption. Studies that elucidate the way that ideas play out in concrete forms of discrimination against GLBTQ people are important, and their significance reaches even further. In the context of queer theory, empirical analysis of the practices of discrimination directly affecting GLBTQ people also exposes other value hierarchies in the realm of family formation, which affects us all.

It is common to find resistance to social constructionist theories in the form of scholarship that protects and privileges a notion of the natural. In traditional political theory, certain phenomena and identity characteristics are understood as natural or inherent. Women's inherent, essential role as second to men's role is a classic example. Feminist critical theory demonstrates not only how this idea is operative when thinkers are discussing actual men and women, but also how this dualism forms part of the structure of our thinking. Social constructionist theories expose the reality that dynamics and qualities thought to be essential, inherent, or natural are political—they are social constructions created through dynamics of power. In feminist and queer theories, we perceive not only how the qualities and roles of men and women have been created unequally, but also that the very classification of humans into categories of male and female is itself a social construction that both is a consequence of inequality and enables structures of inequality itself.

Queer theoretical work on families demonstrates the ways in which the biological family is cast as the prototypical model and an adoptive family as a mere imitation. Biologically formed families are seen as pre-political and privileged "originals" in a manner similar to Rousseau's valuation of the natural world over the corrupt and corrupting political world. Through the many GLBTQ family "copies," we can recognize the subjectivity—obscured by the supposedly natural character of the processes of "bio-families"—that is fundamental to family formation. Identifying the roles of choice, control, and volition is crucial to understanding why it is easier to place these apparently alternative modes of family formation into a legal rather than natural framework. Additionally, in the ways that the theory justifies itself, this identification also opens space for the messiness and "moral failure" of individuals who then require the law to help get them back into shape.

The use of queer theory also supports the critical power of political theory more generally. It helps clarify points of accountability that are sometimes lost in more general studies of "justice" or "freedom." For example, queer theory work on adoption clarifies contradictions in other political studies on adoption, exposing power dynamics that are often glossed over in scholarship attending to feminist, race, class, queer, and cultural insights into the politics of the adoption process. This approach even helps other critical theorists to see the enduring presumptions and biases that persist in their work and that they themselves seek to undo (e.g., Fogg-Davis 2002; Shanley 2001). For example, a queer theoretical study can expose presumptions about mono-raciality in a critical race study of transracial adoption. Queer theory can highlight assumptions about the naturalness of opposite-sex parents in an otherwise gender-critical work by feminist theorists.

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In my current project, I use a study in adoption to explore the relationship between efforts to end discrimination against certain groups and efforts to create new modalities of oppression for others. This work explores the ways that increased access for GLBTQ adults as prospective adoptive parents, hailed as a progressive victory, comes at the direct expense of women of color. My study helps clarify confusion in GLBTQ political studies that characterize the Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA) as a setback in GLBTQ rights and a harbinger of a retraction of GLBTQ family rights more broadly. At the same time, however, other legislation is being hailed as a step forward in opening up access to adoption and expanding the arena of GLBTQ rights. These two discourses, occurring in the same historical moment, appear to contradict each other. When we employ critical race studies, putting race clearly in the picture, the two discourses become less contradictory.

Studies show that DOMA disproportionately impacts GLBTQ people of color, as this group is more likely to both have children and hold jobs that would afford benefits to same-sex partners and families of same-sex couples if they were not barred from receiving them because of marital

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status (Cahill and Tobias 2007). If we place DOMA in the context of other specific legislation that works against women of color, we get an even clearer picture. When considering the impact of anti-drug legislation begun in the 1980s and more recent welfare and immigration-related legislation passed the same year as DOMA, we find a significant trend that economically disadvantages women of color and impacts their ability to keep their families intact. In this period, the potential pool of children available for adoption was expanded, and the era is noted as an opening for GLBTQ adults wishing to adopt. However, in these discussions, GLBTQ adults are semi-unconsciously presumed to be a racially homogeneous group and are coded as white. A central piece of the relevant legislation concerns the broadening of options for transracial adoption. The expanded pool is created by severing the legal ties between women of color and their children. From the perspective of queer women of color, these decades have marked a retrenchment of rights on the fronts of both adoption and marriage, and thus, there is no "contradiction of the era."

My study of adoption using a cross-cutting analysis of both race and sexuality is generated from and has important implications for theoretical work. This study in queer theory focuses on the relationship between institutions and the imbricating ways that race and ethnicity are politicized and created by the state along with other politically salient identity signifiers such as sex, gender, religion, nationality, and class. I focus on the apparent gap between theoretical work that abandons the assumption of separable and hierarchically ordered "identities" and applied experience that appears to require such assumptions.

Second-wave feminist theory, critical race theories of the same era, and queer theory all eschew the notion of a hierarchy of oppressions. Instead of focusing on one axis of power and oppression (such as race or gender) or ranking differential modes of oppression in relative terms, identity-related progressive and radical theorists and activists analyze power in terms of the mutual constitution of multiple identity markers. Yet, as my work on adoption shows, the ability of white-coded gay and lesbian persons to adopt has improved at the same time that the biological ties between women of color and their children have become easier to sever. Despite theoretical and activist attempts to un-think the paradigm of single-axis politics and hierarchies of oppression, social, economic, and political structures continue to separate, categorize, and rank humans in our interactions with the state and as we continue to constitute the state.

The conclusion of this work is not merely that we must tolerate one-dimensional constructions of identity and the ranking of oppressions in the real world, waiting for the day that lived reality can meet the standards of our Platonic forms of thought. Instead, I demonstrate that our thinking continues to operate in an essentialist mode, and I argue that we must continue to challenge our own modes of thinking in which we separate and order identities. This theoretical work reveals that in GLBT studies, GLBT still largely stands for white GLBT persons. Frequently, GLBT studies masks the racially differentiated aspects of related legislation (whether seen as positive or negative) and, as a result of the lack of critical race analysis, presents skewed theories. Such a problem exists not only "out there" in the messy world, but also "in here," in the minds of theorists, shaping the very structure of our thinking.

These examples of theoretical work also challenge the formations of Western political thought that have been elemental in the discipline of political science. From Aristotle through Arendt, the family has been identified as foundationally nonpolitical, outside of or prior to politics. Yet, queer theoretical work on families situates the family as a core site of politics. The family is a place of power dynamics, a space where justice is enacted and withheld and where we experience levels of freedom and degrees of equality. The state plays a constitutive role in the family, as the family constructs the dynamics and makes possible institutions of the state. Through this connection, queer theory's capacity to call into question the basic tenets of political theory in political science is evident. Queer theory is able to shift the terrain of political theory in the discipline. This approach can productively interrogate at the same time that it can break new ground for the study of political theory.

It is also necessary to address some questions of direct relevance to queer theorists and theory in the discipline of political science. We can begin such an address by asking the questions: Does queer theory need a subject? Does a queer theoretical study need to focus on a group of people who are defined as gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgendered, inter-sex, and/or queer? At times, GLBTQ studies is understood as the study of GLBTQ people. More particularly, GLBT studies can also be understood as the study of GLBTQ subjects. GLBT studies may thus be perceived as a lesser form of work, not actually political science, because it "only" concerns GLBT persons and phenomena.

This assumption is problematic in many ways. First is the obvious question of why a study of the politics of any group would be less worthy in the discipline than a study of the politics of another group. My work in queer theory can be dismissed as "not real political theory." At the same time, my research often does not have a subject group. Demonstrating the ways in which biologically formed families are valued differently than families formed through adoption does not require a concrete study of GLBTQ people's families. Using queer theory's methodology of denaturalization to show how the so-called "natural" family is produced through politics does not require a study of the ways that GLBTQ families face discrimination. My work can be criticized as not being GLBT studies if one adopts an essentialist view that queer theory must study GLBTQ people. Simultaneously, my work can be criticized as not being real political theory because it is queer theory, even if this work does not study GLBT individuals or groups.

Another relevant point to address is how queer theorist colleagues are faring in political science departments in U.S. universities. As Novkov and Barclay (2010) also discuss, my experience has shown that work in GLBT studies and queer theory is often seen as a special interest political science at best and not political science at worst. At my university, one can earn promotion and tenure by participating in defining

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the fields and range of one's work (as opposed to simply adhering to existing disciplinary norms and expectations). We have a queer studies program, and a solid selection of queer studies courses are taught each semester. Still, the last four cases for promotion and tenure of faculty in queer studies in the college of liberal arts were significantly challenged, two of which were drawn from the department of political science. One candidate was negatively evaluated at the departmental level by a majority of the senior faculty as "not doing political science." In this view, the candidate's work was perceived as appealing only to a special interest audience—as if all fields, by definition, are not appealing primarily to an especially interested audience.

My experience reflects the results of Novkov and Barclay's survey in a number of other ways as well. It is still generally risky, although more possible than in the past, to be an "out" gay or lesbian faculty member. Bisexual faculty are considered more seriously suspect. Transgender faculty are more likely unseen, but the very small number who are "out" make it difficult to generalize. A significant difference remains between one's identity and the content of one's scholarly work and politics. Most GLBTQ faculty do not engage in queer studies; many may not take up queer topics in their teaching, research, or service. Faculty identified as heterosexual who teach Foucault or explicitly queer subjects may face challenges. However, queer faculty who prioritize queer subjects in their service, teaching, and scholarship face the distinct possibility that their colleagues will not see their work as work. Service may be viewed as social support instead of basic quantifiable service. "Out" queer faculty continue to be targeted in student evaluations and peer assessments as "lobbying" and "pushing an agenda." Colleagues seem at a loss for academic metrics to assess research, which results in vague assertions of shoddy scholarship or questionable merit.

Although a burgeoning body of rich queer theoretical work is being done in political science, there is much room for growth. There is perhaps more activity in this field in political science than in some other disciplines, although there are many exciting projects still to be undertaken. It will be important for APSA to continue to attend to the intellectual, organizational, and campus climates to support the best work in the field and discipline. ■

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