

MIMI
MARINUCCI



FEMINISM IS QUEER

About the Author

Mimi Marinucci completed a PhD in philosophy and a graduate certificate in women's studies from Temple University in 2000. Currently serving as associate professor of philosophy and women's and gender studies at Eastern Washington University, Marinucci teaches courses on feminism, philosophy, and feminist philosophy. Marinucci, who is especially interested in the subjective and social aspects of knowledge production, particularly knowledge produced around issues of gender and sexuality, is the author of several articles that employ references from popular culture in the service of a more scholarly agenda. Examples include 'There's Something Queer About The Onion' (forthcoming in *The Onion and Philosophy*, edited by Sharon Kaye), 'What's Wrong with Porn?' (in *Porn – Philosophy for Everyone: How to Think with Kink*, edited by Dave Monroe), 'Television, Generation X, and Third Wave Feminism: A Contextual Analysis of the Brady Bunch' (*Journal of Popular Culture*, Volume 38, Number 3, February 2005), and 'Feminism and the Ethics of Violence: Why Buffy Kicks Ass' (in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer and Philosophy: Fear and Trembling in Sunnydale*, edited by James B. South). Marinucci is also the founding editor of *Wave 2.5: A Feminist Zine*, a two-time Utne Independent Press Award nominee (2005, 2009).

FEMINISM IS QUEER

The intimate connection
between queer and feminist theory

MIMI MARINUCCI



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When the adventurers reassembled upon the roof it was found that a remarkably queer assortment of articles had been selected by the various members of the party. No one seemed to have a very clear idea of what was required, but all had brought something.

(L. Frank Baum, *The Marvelous Land of Oz*, p.67)

Preface

Not Just the New 'Gay'

It was a queerly assorted company, indeed, for there are more quaint and unusual characters in Oz than in all the rest of the world, and Ozma was more interested in unusual people than in ordinary ones – just as you and I are.

(L. Frank Baum, *The Magic of Oz*, p.568)

Once considered quite offensive, 'queer' is now used with increasing regularity, often as a straightforward alternative to 'gay'. Consider, for example, its use in the title of the recent HBO hit *Queer as Folk*, which featured a group of friends comprised mostly of gay-identified men, or Bravo's *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy* (later just *Queer Eye*), which featured fashion and lifestyle advice from, again, a group of gay-identified men. While I am neither naive enough nor arrogant enough to suppose that 'queer' admits of just one interpretation, namely the one I happen to provide, I do recognize that the casual trend of replacing 'gay' with 'queer' ignores some important theoretical work aimed at exposing the representational limitations of 'gay' and the comparable representational richness of 'queer'. I also recognize that the oversimplification of complicated concepts in the popular media is a sure sign that the larger culture is at least vaguely aware of those concepts. This book aims to provide background and context for those who are curious about the recent insertion of 'queer' into polite vernacular. This book also aims to provide background and context for those who encounter 'queer' in scholarly writing that is often so mired in technical jargon that it may seem utterly meaningless to the uninitiated.

Introductory texts in gender studies, sometimes identified as women's studies or feminist studies, address gender identity. Introductory texts

in sexuality studies, sometimes identified as lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender studies (or LGBT studies), address sexual identity. Unfortunately, however, introductory texts situated at the intersection of gender identity and sexual identity are rare. This book is, in part, an attempt to fill that gap, and could therefore serve as a text for any course of study, be it in a university setting or in the context of independent scholarship, directed towards the examination of virtually any aspect of gender, sex, and sexuality.

The structure of this book makes it useful for readers at different levels and from different fields. While the chapters and sections of this book fit together as interconnected components of a coherent whole, they can also be read separately. Those who choose to read chapters or sections out of context or out of order should refer to the appendix as needed. Potentially unfamiliar terminology is carefully explained, often in footnotes, as it occurs throughout the text, and these explanations are in turn collected in the appendix, which is aptly titled 'Terms and Concepts'. This manner of presentation allows readers who do not require additional background information to read the main text with minimal interruption, while simultaneously offering helpful explication for those who need it. This is especially useful given that one of the greatest challenges in teaching queer theory, which is inherently interdisciplinary, is the varying degree of student familiarity with relevant background concepts. This often leads students to seek definitions, either from a dictionary or from the instructor. Unfortunately, dictionary definitions, which are detached from the specific context in which the terms occur, often do very little to promote understanding of specialized academic terminology. Indeed, queer theory resists the reductionist practice of pretending that it is possible to delineate, once and for all, the necessary and sufficient conditions for membership in any given category. Nevertheless, it is often necessary to provide an entering wedge for the uninitiated. Presenting contextualized explanations in the form of commentary and discussion provides this entering wedge without thereby pretending to offer a fixed or final account of that which is always and inevitably in a state of flux.

The book is divided into three main sections and a shorter fourth section. The first section, 'Sexuality', consists of three chapters, including Chapter 1, 'The Social Construction of Sexuality'; Chapter 2, 'The Social History of Lesbian and Gay Identity'; and Chapter 3, 'Queer Alternatives'. Chapter 1 summarizes the emergence of the various concepts of sexuality and sexual identity that exist in contemporary western culture, and compares them with concepts employed throughout history and across cultures. Chapter 2 traces the relatively recent emergence, first of gay identity, and then of lesbian identity. Chapter 3 then introduces queer identity as an alternative to more familiar categories of sexual identity, which usually concentrate on sexual partner choice and ignore the many other subtleties surrounding sexual pleasure and desire. The second

section, 'Sex', consists of Chapter 4, 'Unwelcome Interventions', and Chapter 5, 'Welcome Transformations'. While Chapter 4 examines the role of medical technology in enforcing a boundary between female and male bodies, particularly in the case of intersex bodies, Chapter 5 explores the implications of this boundary enforcement for transgender people. The third section, 'Gender', consists of Chapter 6, 'Gender Defined and Undefined', and Chapter 7, 'Feminism Examined and Explored'. Chapter 6 examines the concept of gender, especially its role in linguistic contexts. Chapter 7 summarizes the various attitudes concerning gender and gender oppression collected under the banner of feminism. The fourth and final section, 'Queer Feminism', contains just one chapter, namely Chapter 8, titled 'Notes Toward a Queer Feminism', which explores what a queer approach to feminism might involve. I should note that although it is useful as a rough and ready way of organizing a potentially overwhelming body of material, the division of this material into sections on sexuality, sex, and gender is rather imprecise given the intimate interconnections between and among these concepts.

For those seeking only a brief introduction to queer theory, feminism, or the connections between them, this book, or even individual sections or chapters of this book, may be sufficient. For those seeking a more detailed explanation of these ideas and issues, each chapter provides a list of additional resources, including scholarly books and articles, as well as audio-visual material and works of fiction. Instead of recommending obscure material that the average reader would be unable to access, I have made an effort, whenever possible, to recommend material that is fairly easy to come by, for example in online sources or widely reprinted in various anthologies. I have included videos and novels for the dual purpose of providing relevant information and examples, while simultaneously implementing my understanding that people are sometimes better able to learn new material when it is presented in a variety of different formats.

I did not cover all of the material that I could have, and my decisions about what to include and what to exclude are largely the product of my own introduction to this literature. 'It is a delusion', notes Sandra Harding, 'to think that human thought could completely erase the fingerprints that reveal its production process' (Harding, 1993, p.57). This is the case with the representation of any subject matter, and therefore it is likewise the case, not only with queer theory and feminist theory in general, but also with my own representation of queer theory and feminist theory in particular. Although queer theory and feminist theory are both informed by lived experience and grass-roots activism, much of their development has taken place inside the ivory towers of academia. Insofar as queer theory and feminist theory constitute academic projects, they are inevitably covered with the fingerprints of race and class privilege. My presentation of this subject matter is no exception,

reflecting the conditions of race and class privilege that characterize my experience as a white, middle-class, US woman with a PhD in philosophy and the security of a tenured university professorship.

Although I do not delve deeply into issues of race and class, this does not mean that queer theory and feminist theory have no bearing on issues of race and class, nor does it mean that issues of race and class have no bearing on queer theory and feminist theory. As discussed in Chapter 8, much of the appeal of queer theory and at least some forms of feminist theory is that, while ostensibly about gender, sex, and sexuality, they likewise comprise a critique of what Karen Warren (2000) refers to as the 'logic of domination', which attempts to justify the systematic subordination of those who lack power by those who possess it. Queer theory and feminist theory thus invite a critical analysis of racism, capitalism, globalization, and other expressions of the logic of domination. To the extent that a critical analysis of racism, capitalism, globalization, or anything else, can contribute to an understanding of the logic of domination, it thereby contributes to both queer theory and feminist theory.

Subtle but powerful expressions of the logic of domination are prevalent in the ordinary use of the English language, but I have taken care throughout this text to avoid unnecessarily oppressive turns of phrase. I resist what is sometimes referred to as ableist language, for example, by avoiding visual and auditory metaphors such as 'seeing' the point and 'listening' to reason. Instead, I reserve visual and auditory references for those fairly rare contexts in which vision or hearing is actually relevant to the ideas that I aim to express. This is analogous to avoiding allegedly generic uses of 'man' and 'men', as discussed in Chapter 6, and instead reserving those terms for contexts in which sex and gender are of some relevance. I also avoid the use of unnecessary bodily metaphors, such as 'standing up' for a cause. In addition, I resist the use of binary language by avoiding the gender pronouns 'he', 'she', 'him', 'his', and 'her', and I resist the use of universalizing language by avoiding the plural pronouns 'we' and 'our'. I also resist oppositional language by avoiding such expressions as 'arguably', and 'on the contrary'.

Throughout this book, I have attempted to avoid what Janice Moulton (1996) refers to as the adversary paradigm.

Under the Adversary Paradigm, it is assumed that the only, or at any rate, the best, way of evaluating work in philosophy is to subject it to the strongest or most extreme opposition. And it is assumed that the best way of presenting work in philosophy is to address it to an imagined opponent and muster all the evidence one can to support it.

(Moulton, 1996, p.14)

I therefore avoid the customary practice of offering premises in support of a clearly articulated conclusion, and then defending that conclusion by arguing against any concerns my opponents, real or imagined, would be likely to raise. Insofar as this manner of presentation disrupts the presumably stable meaning of what philosophical reasoning entails, it can be understood as an example of *queering*. This will be discussed in more detail later, but for now I will borrow from Krista Benson (2010) the delightfully simple explanation that queer theory is the recognition that ‘shit’s complicated’. Queering thus refers to the process of complicating something, and it is not necessarily limited to sexual contexts. Indeed, it is queer to do philosophy without making arguments. It is likewise queer to live in ways that challenge deeply held assumptions about gender, sex, and sexuality. Thus, queer encompasses even those who do not identify as homosexual (or even as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender), but find that we are nevertheless incapable of occupying the compact spaces to which our cultural prescriptions regarding gender, sex, and sexuality have assigned us.

My interest in queering the philosophical process notwithstanding, I also aim to produce work that is both academically rigorous and philosophically significant. Toward this end, I have provided information that I take to be relevant in establishing context and background that will, hopefully, help readers understand how I arrived at a position I characterize in Chapter 8 as queer feminism. Because queer feminism supports the simultaneous viability of multiple forms of feminism, however, I have found it unnecessary to defend this form of feminism against other forms of feminism. While I could have geared my discussion toward an imaginary opponent who does not accept the legitimacy of any form of feminism, I opted instead to address my comments to the people I believe to be my likeliest readers: namely, those with an existing interest in theories of gender, sex, and sexuality.

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SECTION I

SEXUALITY

'Dear me! Aren't you feeling a little queer, just now?'
Dorothy asked the Patchwork Girl.

(L. Frank Baum, *The Patchwork Girl of Oz*, p.295)

The Social Construction of Sexuality

'You're likely to see many queer things in the Land of Oz, sir,' said the Wizard. 'But a fairy country is extremely interesting when you get used to being surprised.'

(L. Frank Baum, *The Emerald City of Oz*, p.219)

The Kinsey Report

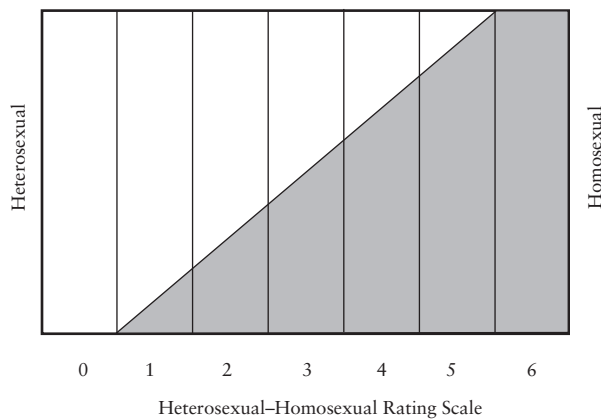
Many people who support the interests of lesbian women and gay men maintain that homosexuality is a universal phenomenon. Drawing on research conducted by Alfred Kinsey and the Kinsey Institute, homosexuality is often estimated to occur in roughly 10 per cent of the population. Based on thousands of detailed interviews, Kinsey's findings were published in two volumes: *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male* (Kinsey, Pomeroy, and Martin, 1948) and *Sexual Behavior in the Human Female* (Kinsey, Pomeroy, Martin, and Gebhard, 1953). These are often referred to informally as the 'Kinsey Reports'. The Kinsey Reports challenged conservative beliefs about sexuality by suggesting that taboo practices, such as masturbation, promiscuity, and homosexuality, were much more prevalent than previously acknowledged.

For better or worse, the oft-quoted statistic that homosexuality occurs at a steady rate of 10 per cent is not a straightforward conclusion of the Kinsey Reports. Kinsey actually reported that '37% of males and 13% of females had at least some overt homosexual experience to orgasm' and that '10% of males were more or less exclusively homosexual and 8% of males were exclusively homosexual for at least three years between the ages of 16 and 55'. Kinsey also reported 'a range of 2–6% for more or less exclusively homosexual experience/response' among women. Finally, it was reported that '4% of males and 1–3% of females had been exclusively homosexual after the onset of adolescence up to the time of the interview' (as cited by The Kinsey Institute, n.d.). If these figures

reveal anything about the rate of homosexuality, it would seem to be that it is largely dependent on the method of accounting. Furthermore, while Kinsey's subject pool was quite large, it was comprised primarily of white college students in the Midwestern USA. The rate of homosexuality within that demographic during the first half of the 20th century does not necessarily generalize to other populations.

Kinsey's 'Hetero-Homosexual Rating Scale', referred to informally as the 'Kinsey Scale', is often upheld as evidence that both bisexuality and homosexuality are natural alternatives to heterosexuality.¹ The Kinsey Scale classifies sexual orientation along seven categories numbered 0 through 6, with 0 representing those whose experiences and interests are 'exclusively heterosexual' and 6 representing those whose experiences and interests are 'exclusively homosexual' (Kinsey *et al.*, 1948, p.638). According to the Kinsey Scale, everyone else has at least some tendency toward both homosexual and heterosexual expression (refer to Figure 1.1). Rejecting 'the assumption that homosexuality and heterosexuality are two mutually exclusive phenomena' (Kinsey, 1941, p.425), Kinsey avoided using 'homosexual' as a noun and instead referred adjectivally to homosexual behaviours and attractions.

Figure 1.1 Kinsey's hetero-homosexual rating scale



- 0 Exclusively heterosexual with no homosexual
- 1 Predominantly heterosexual, only incidentally homosexual
- 2 Predominantly heterosexual, but more than incidentally homosexual
- 3 Equally heterosexual and homosexual
- 4 Predominantly homosexual, but more than incidentally heterosexual
- 5 Predominantly homosexual, only incidentally heterosexual
- 6 Exclusively homosexual

Source: Kinsey, *et al.*, 1948, p.638 (as published online by the Kinsey Institute, 1999)

Kinsey encouraged social awareness and acceptance of sexual diversity, but not by attempting to establish the universal existence of a discretely homosexual population distinct from the larger heterosexual population. Rather, by characterizing sexual orientation as a continuum, Kinsey challenged the widespread belief that, for most people, sexual desire is directed exclusively toward members of just one sex category. Moreover, by concentrating on homosexual behaviour instead of homosexual identity, Kinsey implicitly challenged what is sometimes referred to as *essentialism*. Essentialism is the belief that homosexuality and other identity categories reflect innate characteristics that comprise the fundamental nature of the members of those categories.² Because the essentialist account regards homosexuality as an enduring feature of the human condition, rather than the product of social contingencies, those who accept essentialism often assume that homosexuality is historically and culturally universal.

Social Construction

Some theorists who resist the popular assumption that the interests of lesbian women and gay men are best served by an essentialist perspective on homosexuality instead suggest that the categories associated with sexual pleasure and desire are historical and cultural developments. This thesis, often referred to as *social constructionism*,³ applies to heterosexual identity as well as alternative sexual identity categories, such as homosexual, lesbian, gay, and bisexual. This does not mean that specific sexual acts are unique to the social contexts in which they occur. A wide range of physical interactions and bodily manipulations connected with sexual desire or conducive to sexual pleasure occur across cultural and historical boundaries. The relationship of these interactions and manipulations to socially entrenched concepts of sexuality and categories of sexual identity, however, is far from universal. As Jeffrey Weeks notes, 'the forces that shape and mould the erotic possibilities of the body vary from society to society' (Weeks, 2003).

This was the point of a landmark article, aptly titled 'The Homosexual Role' (1968), in which Mary McIntosh suggested that homosexuality is not a condition by which people are affected, but rather a social role to which people are assigned. According to McIntosh, 'the purpose of introducing the term "role" is to enable us to handle the fact that behavior in this sphere does not match popular beliefs: that sexual behavior patterns cannot be dichotomized in the way that the social roles of homosexual and heterosexual can' (1968, p.184). McIntosh addressed the influence of social role, specifically the role of homosexual male, on perceptions of both self and other:

In modern societies where a separate homosexual role is recognized, the expectation, on behalf of those who play the role and of others, is that a homosexual will be exclusively or very predominantly homosexual in his feelings and behavior. In addition, there are other expectations that frequently exist, especially on the part of nonhomosexuals, but affecting the self-conception of anyone who sees himself as homosexual. These are: the expectation that he will be effeminate in manner, personality, or preferred sexual activity; the expectation that sexuality will play a part of some kind in all his relations with other men; and the expectation that he will be attracted to boys and very young men and probably willing to seduce them.

(1968, pp.184–5)

Categories of identity determine and are determined by the ways in which people understand themselves and are understood by others. In other words, concepts of identity determine and are determined by the prescriptions and proscriptions that structure and are structured by social existence. Additionally, categories of identity are often *binary*, established by means of a contrast between the dominant group and those excluded from the dominant group.⁴ Indeed, the term category ultimately derives from the ancient Greek word *kategoria*, meaning ‘accusation’ (Iannone, 2001, p.93).⁵ In terms of sexual orientation, the dominant group is established by the distinction between normal and abnormal sexuality, coupled with the accusation that specific forms of sexuality are deviant. I am homosexual only in a culture that, first, has a definition of homosexuality and, second, has a definition of homosexuality that applies to me. Likewise, I am heterosexual only in a culture that, first, has a definition of homosexuality and, second, has a definition of homosexuality that applies to people other than me. The concept of heterosexuality, and hence heterosexual identity, could not exist without the concept of homosexuality, and hence homosexual identity. This inverts the customary way of thinking, in which heterosexuality is regarded as the primary, or original, form of sexuality and homosexuality is regarded as secondary, a mere variation on that first theme. For this reason, it has been suggested that, at least conceptually, homosexuality precedes heterosexuality (Katz, 1996). At the very least, homosexual and heterosexual identities emerge simultaneously and, more to the point, only in the context of a distinction between homosexuality and heterosexuality.⁶

The existence of both homosexuality and heterosexuality is contingent rather than necessary. To describe something as contingent is to claim that, under different circumstances, things could have turned out differently. This should not be confused with voluntarism regarding sexual identity. It is, as explained by Edward Stein, ‘a mistake to collapse

the distinction between social constructionism and essentialism into the distinction between determinism and voluntarism or *vice versa*' (1992, p.329). Social constructionism does not suggest that people are free to choose between homosexuality and heterosexuality. It does, however, suggest that the conceptual framework, or *paradigm*, within which homosexuality and heterosexuality occur is a historical development. To fully understand social constructionism, it is important to understand how paradigms function. For this reason, some background information about the concept of a paradigm may be useful.

Semantic Holism

The notion of a paradigm, as it is used here, is an extension of a concept introduced and developed in 1962 by Thomas Kuhn (1970) in reference to scientific practice. Kuhn maintained that the terminology employed within the various sciences is part of an interwoven web of beliefs, such that the meaning of any individual term is fully understood only by direct or indirect reference to the larger vocabulary and corresponding belief system. The indoctrination of scientists is largely a matter of language acquisition, and the language acquired determines standards of evidence and, hence, the range of empirical facts to be acknowledged and explained. This characterization is sometimes referred to as semantic *holism* and contrasted with semantic *atomism*. Whereas holism explains the individual parts by reference to the greater whole, atomism explains the whole by reference to its constituent parts.

This distinction is readily illustrated by ambiguous images conducive to two distinct and mutually exclusive visual interpretations. A familiar example is the black and white image alternately recognized as a vase against a dark background or a silhouette of two human faces (Figure 1.2).⁷ Conceived as a vase, the image cannot be described by reference to terms such as forehead, nose, and chin; conceived as a pair of faces, the image cannot be described by reference to terms such as base, stem, and rim. The inference, for example, that the proximity of the lips is suggestive of a kiss makes sense only if the overall image is understood to represent a pair of faces. Indeed, the meaning of the term lip is quite different when applied to faces than when applied to vases. Kuhn maintained that the meaning of scientific terms is likewise dependent on the overall framework, or paradigm, in which those terms occur. Kuhn also maintained that, just as the ambiguous image is consistent with more than one interpretive framework, it is often the case that the empirical evidence is consistent with more than one paradigm.

This is not to be confused with wholesale *relativism*, which admits of no relationship between reality and interpretation, and no distinction between fact and fiction.⁸ The claim that the ambiguous image can be

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