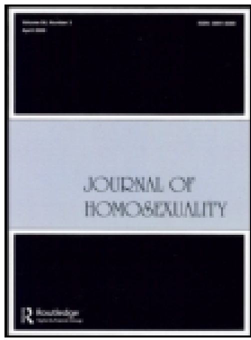

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Outlaws or In-Laws? Queer Theory, LGBT Studies, and Religious Studies

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SUMMARY. Many queer theorists, like many queer activists and perhaps many LGBT people in general, regard religion as so inimical to their purposes and lives that it is not even worthy of critique; references to religion in queer theory, queer studies, and even LGBT studies are usually sparse, brief, and generally derogatory. Likewise, within most of the field of religious studies, queerness is rarely an issue of concern or even consciousness except in the context of organizational tensions over the proper roles of "homosexuals." While there is a growing body of work that brings these two fields together, the study of religion seems to be adapting only haltingly and partially to contemporary developments in LGBT studies and queer theory. This essay assesses the current state of the "proto-fields" of LGBT studies and queer studies in religion, offers suggestions for new directions in the future, and considers the potential benefits of the interaction of these fields. doi:10.1300/J082v52n01_04 *[Article copies available for a fee from The Haworth Document Delivery Service: 1-800-HAWORTH. E-mail address: <docdelivery@haworthpress.com> Website: <http://www. HaworthPress.com> © 2006 by The Haworth Press, Inc. All rights reserved.]*

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In their introduction to an anthology entitled *Que(e)rying Religion*, co-editors Gary David Comstock and Susan E. Henking note that "for many," queer identities and religious identities "are so dissimilar as to have no continuity at all" (1997, p. 11). Indeed, a brief survey of the foundational and recently influential works in queer theory yields no more than a small handful of passing references to religion. Generally, these address only Christianity and brand religion as a stultifying, oppressive institution of a heteronormative, sexist social order. This perspective is common among LGBT people, as well; O'Brien (2004) recalls attending several Pride parades in the late 1990s at which members of Affirmation (a group for LGBT Mormons and their allies) and Dignity (a similar group for Catholics) were met with silence and boos from the audience. It is notable, then, given this supposed agreement on the oppressive role of religion, that analysis of religion's discursive power and the potential for performative resistance to that power has not been of interest in queer theory to date.

On the opposite side of this apparent divide lies the discipline of religious studies. Despite the development of numerous LGBT religious groups and the growth of LGBT-centered theology and even queer theology, all too often when the topic of "homosexuality" is taken up by religion scholars, the discussion is heterosexist or downright homophobic–and bisexuals and transgender people are written out entirely. It is not uncommon to find conference panels and special journal issues dedicated to organizational analysis of the "homosexuality debates" in Protestant churches, or to debates over the "proper role" of gays and lesbians in a particular religious body. In some cases (e.g., Wellman, 1999) such work is still of high quality, but it is far from being LGBT studies in religion, not only because it rarely discusses queer folk (focusing instead on the pronouncements of heterosexuals) but also because the authors are often neither conversant with LGBT studies nor queer theory (for a particularly egregious example wherein the author resurrects the invert, see Sherkat, 2002).

If queer theorists are fond of seeing themselves as "academic outlaws," to quote William Tierny (1997), religion scholars (even those of us who are queer) all too often have appeared as queer theory's academic in-laws: claiming to be "family," barging in at inopportune moments, always managing to mess up the guest room. As someone with a

foot in both camps, I wish to argue here that both fields stand to learn far more from each other than either one realizes, and that the roots of that potential are already in existence. This essay begins with a discourse on definitions, as I attempt to hold constant for just a few moments the elusive definitions of lesbian/gay studies, LGBT studies, queer studies, queer theory, religion, and religious studies. It then turns to an evaluation of existing works in LGBT and queer religious studies, and offers challenges for the future as we pull these works and others together into a visible and audible subfield of study. The final section considers the ways in which religious studies and queer theory might benefit from a closer association than they have had to date.

DEFINITIONS

Gay, Lesbian/Gay, Lesbian/Gay/Bisexual, LGBT, Queer

The history of the terminological shifts from "gay" through "lesbian/gay," "lesbian/gay/bisexual," and "LGBT" to (sometimes) "queer" is both convoluted and fairly well-known; for both reasons, I will not cover it in depth here. A few points are worth mentioning, however, in order to illuminate the use of terminology in the study of LGBT religiosities. First, this is a history of struggles over inclusion and exclusion, as shifts from "gay" through to "LGBT" and "queer" came about in part in an attempt to be more fully inclusive of the diversity in our communities. Second, each of these shifting terms is also contested. Sometimes this contestation leads to the creation of new terms, but it is also a function of the diversity of opinions within our communities. Third, and most important, simply changing the terms has repeatedly proven insufficient to bring about the desired inclusion.

Queer theorists, for instance, laud the radical inclusivity of "queer," even to the point of refusing to restrict the term to a fixed definition (c.f. de Lauretis, 1991; Garber 2001; Jagose, 1996; Warner, 1993). On the other hand, de Lauretis, who is credited with coining the term, dropped it within a few years, claiming that it had failed to live up to its promise of inclusion (de Lauretis, 1994). As a result of these tensions, not only do LGBT studies and queer theory often regard each other with suspicion, but feminist scholars accuse both of being androcentric, bisexuals and transgender people charge that they are included in name only, sex radicals object that sex itself is rarely mentioned, working class scholars and activists (as well as anti-capitalists) insist that both perspectives ig-

nore class, and scholars and activists of color–both Western and Third-World–seem resigned to the idea that once again, a movement founded by primarily by whites has become a movement primarily of, and for, whites. And yet, none of these accusations stands entirely unchallenged, for gender, race, class, sexual and gender diversity, and even postcolonial theory (Hawley, 2001a, 2001b) have been ably and productively integrated into queer studies and queer theory.

Given this fraught and contested history, as well as the value that queer theorists place on fluidity, I dare not attempt a single definition of any of the above categories. However, at least a rough distinction must be made to evaluate the ways these areas of study have intersected with the study of religion. For that purpose, I propose the following working definitions, which are intended to congeal the centers of these fluid categories only until the end of this essay. First, for the sake of simplicity, I will assume a chronological continuity between "gay studies," "lesbian/gay studies," "lesbian/gay/bisexual studies," and "LGBT" studies, with the difference being an increasing sensitivity (or at least an increasing intent to be sensitive) to sexual and gender diversity over time. As a result, while I will make clear which identities are included in the studies I discuss, I will include older "gay," "lesbian," "lesbian/gay," and "lesbian/gay/bisexual" studies under the rubric of "LGBT." I will follow what seems to be the most common, current usage of this term; consequently, in the sections that follow, "LGBT studies" refers to scholarly works that attempt to add the experiences of lesbians, gay men, bisexuals, and/or transgender people to existing disciplines or schools of thought.

Secondly, I will use the term "queer theory" to refer to analytical approaches that radically challenge societal norms and assumptions regarding gender and sexuality. Again here, I attempt to follow current usage as much as possible. The term "queer studies" is also common, but it has been used variously to refer to LGBT studies, to applications of queer theory, or to both. While I agree with Garber (2001) that the two fields are far closer than they may wish to admit, and while I am personally fond of confusing these categories by using "queer studies" as a blanket term, for the sake of this essay I instead frame LGBT studies and queer theory as separate, ideal types.

Religious Studies

Although some would argue that religious studies has its own unique, singular perspective as a field, in the end there is simply too much meth-

odological diversity for this to be true outside of particular departments or conferences. As I will use it here, "religious studies" refers to scholars and scholarly works (some, like some LGBT studies, produced outside the academy but still by those with significant post-graduate academic training) that focus primarily on religion. This includes the work of people trained and employed in religious studies or religion departments; the work of those trained in such departments but employed in the practice of religion; and the work of those trained and perhaps employed in other fields such as sociology, art history, anthropology, history, literature, ethnic studies, women's studies, and the like, whose work focuses on the analysis of religion. Religious studies scholars thus include a wide range of people, from theologians and archaeologists to sociologists and literary critics.

Furthermore, the word "religion" is itself perhaps the most-discussed and least-defined term within religious studies. Despite earlier attempts at imposing a substantive definition on the term, many religionists now tend toward what is often termed a "functional" definition. In effect, this means that the proper objects of religious studies include not only those institutions, texts, traditions, beliefs, and practices that are commonly understood to be religious, but also those that *function similarly* to religion in terms of their ability to confer ultimate meaning and in terms of their centrality in the lives of their followers. This loose definition, which I will follow here, implies that not only are such obvious candidates as Judaism, Buddhism, and indigenous African traditions within the sphere of religious studies, but so too are communism (under certain circumstances; c.f. Lincoln 1989) and the nebulous phenomenon often referred to in the U.S. as "spirituality." This perspective opens interesting avenues for exploring the intersections of LGBT studies, queer theory, and religious studies.

LGBT STUDIES, QUEER THEORY, AND THE STUDY OF RELIGION

Although a few mid-century authors had discussed the intersection of "homosexuality" and religion, a larger body of scholarly works on the issue began to appear in the early 1970s. These were clearly influenced by the rise of LGBT religious organizations, which had begun to appear in the mid-twentieth century (see Comstock, 1996) and had mushroomed in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Scholarly writings in turn, however, also influenced both organizations and individuals. Early so-

ciological studies of MCC (e.g., Bauer, 1976; Enroth & Jamison, 1974), while disturbingly simplistic in their rather pathological representation of "homosexuals," may have served to inform LGBT readers that a "gay church" existed. And as LGBT Christians and Jews struggled to make theological sense of their lives, John J. McNeill's enormously influential book, *The Church and the Homosexual*, appeared in 1976. Responding to the growth in LGBT participation in Catholicism, McNeill's book proved foundational not only for Catholic LGBT theology, but also for Protestant and Jewish reinterpretations of Biblical tradition.

Since these early and interrelated developments, the literature on LGBT issues in religion has grown exponentially (along with LGBT religious organizations). What was a trickle in the 1970s increased through the 1980s, and became a steady stream in the 1990s. In 2003, this trend shows no sign of diminishing, or even of leveling out. For a number of possible reasons (worthy of a study in themselves), the most common type of literature is first-person narrative. Several prominent autobiographies are in this class, written by such figures as Troy Perry, Mel White, Malcolm Boyd, and Chris Glaser (White & White, 2004). Far more common, however, are anthologies of personal reflections; in many cases, these have preceded scholarly studies in any given area or have included the earliest articles along with autobiography (c.f. Beck, 1982; Kolodny, 2000; Leyland, 1998). While these narratives deserve far more study than they have received to date, because this article focuses on secondary works I will not explore them in more depth here. This leaves four general areas of scholarly production within the intersection of LGBT studies, queer theory, and religion: theology and the study of sacred texts, historical studies, comparative approaches, and social scientific studies.

Theology and Sacred Texts

Overall, the goal of LGBT-focused theological and sacred text studies has been to reclaim or create religious traditions for lesbians, gay men, and (only more recently) bisexuals and transgender people. This has taken place through a number of methods, which have varied both over time and across religious traditions. However, the field was founded and has been dominated by Catholic and Protestant writers, whose approaches have also influenced those in other religious traditions.

While the earliest theological works argued for sympathetic treatment (Bailey, 1955; Fosdick, 1943) or limited tolerance of Christian homosexuals (see Comstock, 1996 for an overview), the first phase of concerted theological development by LGBT people can be said to stretch roughly from the publication of McNeill's *The Church and the Homosexual* (1976) to the appearance of Goss' *Jesus Acted Up* (1993). During this period, LGBT Christian theology was marked by a defensive form of theology, or what Goss (2002, p. 241) terms "an apologetic mode." Responding to an increasingly vociferous Christian conservatism that labeled homosexuality flatly sinful or even demonic, these theologians turned to the queer "texts of terror" (as Wilson [1995] terms them: the story of Sodom and Gomorrah, the Levitical injunctions, and so on) or to theological classics such as the Catholic tradition of natural theology to disprove homophobic interpretations of these traditions. Developing both theological sophistication and a certain inter-referentiality, authors such as McNeill, Mollenkott and Scanzoni (1978), Nugent (1983), Gramick and Furey (1988), and Countryman (1988) "fought fire with fire" against the onslaught of Christian homophobia.

In other areas, however, some LGBT people were already working on "constructive" rather than "defensive" forms of religious commentary-works that explored ways to claim or create religious traditions for LGBT people rather than defending LGBT people against the homophobia of existing traditions. Such an approach is implicit in some of the personal stories collected in such volumes as Beck's *Nice Jewish Girls* (1982) and in the autobiographical writings of some Christian theologians (e.g., Perry, 1972; Glaser, 1988). However, it is also evident in the work of lesbian theologians and theologians (a word coined by feminists to reflect their focus on the feminine divine). While feminist religious commentary has also relied on defensive theology, women within the feminist spirituality movement began in the early 1970s to focus on developing new rituals and images of the divine for women, rather than refuting existing, sexist theology, and Christian and Jewish feminists followed on their heels (c.f. Plaskow & Christ, 1979). Given the strong presence of lesbians in the feminist movement, it is unsurprising that lesbian writers (especially Daly, 1973, 1978, 1984; Heyward, 1984) were some of the earliest producers of constructive LGBT theology. Also important for feminists has been a re-working of religious ritual as well as religious thought; this impulse has retained its importance in LGBT religious commentary (possibly especially within Judaism; c.f. Alpert, 1997), but has been underdeveloped to date.

The most recent developments within constructive LGBT theology have been attempts to "queer" Christian theology–not just by making queer Christians visible, but by "spoil[ing]" or "interfer[ing]" with the tradition (Goss 2002, pp. xiv, 228-229). While this approach has met with varying degrees of success, as discussed below, it has come the closest to applying current trends in queer theory to the theological or textual study of religion.

Theologies and studies of sacred texts are extant but few and far between in Buddhism (c.f. Cabezon, 1992; Corless, 2004; and the first section of Leyland, 1998), Hinduism (Pattanaik, 2002; Wilhelm, n.d.), and Islam (al-Hajj Kugle, 2003; a few articles in Murray & Roscoe, 1997), but the fact that these areas are being explored at all holds great promise for broadening LGBT studies of sacred texts and traditions. As with theology and textual studies in Christianity and Judaism, the few works on Hinduism, Buddhism, and Islam are generally written by practitioners of those traditions and employ both defensive and constructive approaches. However, there is some indication, logically enough, that defensive approaches are more attractive when the author's religious context is explicitly homophobic and bases that homophobia in theological or textual arguments. Thus, at this point it appears that among these three religions, Muslims are more likely to argue *against* a basis for homophobia in Islam, while Hindus and Buddhists have expended more effort in arguing *for* the presence of homoeroticism and gender crossing in their traditions.

Historical Studies

In general, LGBT religious history has focused on excavating evidence of homoeroticism and gender-crossing in traditional religions to argue for the acceptance of LGBT people in contemporary religious groups. The groundbreaking scholar in this area was John Boswell, whose *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality* (1980) and *Same-Sex Unions in Premodern Europe* (1994) were both controversial and widely read. In the first book, Boswell argues that, contrary to Catholic and Protestant claims today, Western Christian attitudes toward homoeroticism have fluctuated considerably over the course of Christian history. In the second book, he claims to have unearthed a series of medieval rituals from both the Eastern and Western branches of Christianity that celebrated the union of two men or two women. Despite the controversy surrounding them, both books have served as an important

base for claiming the right of gays and lesbians to full participation in the Christian tradition.

Much of Boswell's work focused on male homoeroticism and occasionally on male cross-dressing. In part this was from necessity, because of the dearth of texts on women's homoerotic activities or cross-dressing. However, in the mid-1980s and 1990s a few women scholars began to fill in some of these gaps by researching the lives of nuns who had "special friendships" or were particularly close to other women (e.g., Brooten, 1996; Brown, 1986; Matter, 1986). And in recent years, some of the most significant developments in LGBT Catholic history have come from Mark Jordan, whose *The Silence of Sodom* (2000; see also Jordan 1997, 2003) combines historical, theological, literary, and cultural-critical approaches to present a searing and insightful analysis of male homosexuality in the Church today.

While it is clearly in the context of Catholicism that historical studies of LGBT people in traditional religions have been most developed, in other religious contexts theological works have often delved into history, tradition, and culture as well as sacred text (e.g., Alpert, 1997). Daniel Boyarin's queer, feminist reinterpretations of the Talmudic tradition in Judaism (c.f. Boyarin, 1997) emphasize gender roles, but in so doing they also challenge traditional understandings of male homoeroticism in the Talmud. A few scholars have also unearthed evidence of homoeroticism in particular regions and historical periods in Buddhism (c.f. Ihara, 1990; Jackson, 1998) and Islam (Murray & Roscoe, 1997); again, in part because of limitations in the primary source material, this work is predominantly male-focused.

Increasingly, historical studies of gender systems in pre-colonial Native American cultures have been important sources of affirmation and identity for the Gay American Indian and Two-Spirit movements. Most important in these cases are the living sources of history: elders. In addition, some Native and white scholars, often combining interviews with critical readings of early anthropological texts, have outlined the structures of several of these quite varied systems (c.f. Jacobs, Thomas, & Lang, 1997). More than anything else, the growing breadth of historical work in LGBT religious studies is emphasizing that, just as in secular histories, religious understandings of gender-crossing, gender multiplicity, and homoeroticism are highly varied across religions, regions, and historical periods. In light of such historical work, it has become more difficult for either queer activists or anti-queer religious groups to claim that homophobia, biphobia, and transphobia are intrinsic and "natural" to any given religious tradition.

The newest histories to be written are those of LGBT religious movements themselves. With the growth of queer religious organizations beginning nearly a year before Stonewall, these histories are not only timely but critical, as they can serve to question our understanding of LGBT history as a whole in the twentieth century. Such histories are rare as yet, however (but see Gill, 1998; Wilcox, 2001), although at least two book-length histories are in process and an online database has been founded to encourage further work (the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Religious Archives Network, or LGBT-RAN, housed at the Chicago Theological Seminary). A great deal more work is needed in this area, especially in oral history as some of the founders and early leaders of these movements approach their later years.

Comparative Collections

Aside from the theological enterprises mentioned above, there have been no single-author attempts at broadly comparative studies of religious approaches to homoeroticism or gender-crossing. This may be for the best, as on the one hand religion scholars have increasingly recognized the difficulty of conducting nuanced, accurate, and responsible comparative studies, while on the other hand LGBT studies and especially queer theorists have emphasized the challenges of cross-cultural and transhistorical studies of sexuality and gender. This is not to say that studies of this sort could not be useful, but rather that the scholar undertaking such work would need to be meticulously precise in order to avoid the twin pitfalls associated with the cross-cultural comparison of two socially constructed sets of categories.

In the meantime, two useful sources exist for those who wish to undertake limited comparison on their own. The first is a collection of official religious statements (mostly Christian) on “homosexuals,” “homosexuality,” or occasionally “gays, lesbians, and bisexuals,” primarily from the 1970s and 1980s (Melton, 1991). Though extremely useful, Melton’s work is in dire need of a supplement that covers changes in the 1990s and the early twenty-first century. The second collection, also not updated since its 1993 publication, is Arlene Swidler’s *Homosexuality and World Religions*. Each chapter of this volume covers a major world tradition or set of traditions, and is authored by a scholar whose work focuses on that tradition (though not always on LGBT issues); the chapters are not analytical but rather seek simply to detail general attitudes toward homoeroticism and gender-crossing in each religion or group of religions. While the book’s “world religions”

paradigm becomes somewhat awkward in the chapter on "traditional religions of the Americas and Africa" (over-generalized to say the least), it serves as a useful overview source in the absence of other resources.

Although both editors and all of Swidler's authors appear to be supportive of LGBT people, more often than not these two books focus on official and thus non- (or closeted) LGBT opinions of LGBT people in the tradition. Useful as such information may be, it may also perpetuate the silencing of religious LGBT people in favor of the pronouncements of heterosexuals and the mono-gendered. Perhaps the time is not yet ripe for a collection that focuses solely on LGBT, homoerotic, cross-gender, and Two-Spirit activism within world religions, but such a collection should be an important goal for the future.

Social Scientific Studies

Despite their frequent tendency to accord only passing attention to religion, the social sciences have in fact been quite productive on the topic of religion and LGBT studies. Most notable in this area is anthropology, which was perhaps the earliest field to take homoeroticism seriously and to acknowledge the global diversity of homoerotic practices and definitions of gender. That LGBT studies in religion have not sufficiently incorporated this work is most probably due to the typical focus of anthropology on small-scale, traditional societies. Because religion is not a distinct social institution in many of these societies, and because of the "whole-culture" approach that is typical of at least classical anthropology, studies involving homoeroticism and gender-crossing rarely focus on religion. However, it would be fruitful for scholars to seek in these works the possible intersections between religious beliefs and practices, homoeroticism, and gender-crossing. One potential source for such an undertaking is Blackwood and Wieringa's edited volume, *Female Desires* (1999).

There are three important exceptions to anthropology's lack of focus on religion and LGBT issues: all are studies of LGBT congregations in the United States. The earliest, and still to date the best planned, was well ahead of its time and sadly remains as an unpublished dissertation; it compares an MCC congregation, a Dignity chapter, and a synagogue in "Lake City" (Gorman, 1980). Leonard Norman Primiano's *Intrinsically Catholic* (1993a), a dissertation on Philadelphia's Dignity chapter, also has remained unpublished to date, but Primiano has published articles based on the study (Primiano, 1993b, 1995). However, the first book-length study of an LGBT congregation to reach publication is

Moshe Shokeid's admirable *A Gay Synagogue in New York* (1995). Since none of these works cites any of the others, it is particularly significant that despite the diversity of the groups under study all three authors come to similar conclusions. Each of these five congregations (and the anthropologists studying them) bemoaned and puzzled over the dearth of women attendees; the mostly gay men who did take part in these groups came in search of a community with which to worship and a space in which to continue the integration of their sexual and religious identities. Almost all had begun this integration individually, but had eventually become comfortable with the idea of attending a "gay group," and had approached the religious organization most suited to their upbringing and current beliefs. These general trends have been both supported and expanded upon by the sociological studies discussed below.

Within the psychology of religion there has been a smattering of articles on LGBT issues over the past few decades (most recently Mahaffy, 1996; Rodriguez & Ouellette, 2000). Most of these have been concerned with identity negotiation and internalized oppression. Interestingly, religion in general has not been shown to have a simple connection to internalized oppression, and even attendance at LGBT-specific religious organizations does not seem to result automatically in differing levels of self-esteem from those who attend other religious organizations or who do not attend at all. Mahaffy, a sociologist whose predominantly psychological study and analysis are the most complex of the recent works, notes a distinction between lesbian Christians who came out later than they became Christian, and those who became Christian after coming out. While she finds that membership in a conservative Christian organization strongly predicts some level of internal dissonance between lesbian and Christian identities, Mahaffy argues that strategies for resolving that dissonance vary depending on the strength of lesbian identity, the strength of Christian identity, and the level of integration between the two.

The sociology of religion has seen greater development in LGBT studies than has the psychology of religion, but it has been aided in part by the growing rapprochement between fieldwork-oriented sociologists and anthropologists. In fact, a new anthology of ethnographic studies on LGBT religiosity (Thumma & Gray, 2004) includes scholars from anthropology, sociology, and religious studies, whose work and findings differ far more by topic than by discipline.

Sociological approaches to LGBT issues have come from several different angles. Because the so-called "homosexuality debates" in main-

line Protestant churches have sometimes been compared to the debates over slavery that split many denominations in the nineteenth century, organizational sociologists have shown a great deal of interest in analyzing denominational responses to these tensions. Most of this work, however, has focused on the coping strategies, adaptive strategies, and debates of heterosexuals and heterosexual denominations; while they provide significant sources for a queer discursive analysis, such interpretive work has not yet been conducted.

As in anthropology, one of the most productive, albeit insufficiently developed, approaches is the sociological study of LGBT people themselves as they express, battle, build, and sustain their religious beliefs, practices, identities, and institutions. Aside from a few early and fairly problematic studies of the Metropolitan Community Church (Bauer, 1976; Enroth & Jamison, 1974), the sociology of religion generally ignored LGBT religiosities until the early 1990s. Three recent studies, however, examine LGBT organizations that are based in fairly standard versions of Christianity–a local support group for lesbian and gay evangelical Christians (Thumma, 1991), and the Metropolitan Community Churches (Warner, 1995; Wilcox, 2003)–and come to conclusions that agree closely with anthropological findings regarding both the functions and the gendered nature of such groups. Another short study, conducted by Gray and Thumma (1997), opens an interesting door to queer analysis with its presentation of "The Gospel Hour," a gospel-music drag show in Atlanta that customers often regarded as an alternative religious service.

Easily the most influential sociologist of LGBT religions is Gary David Comstock, whose 1996 study of lesbians, gay men, and bisexuals in the United Methodist Church and the United Church of Christ was unprecedented and remains unparalleled. In addition to producing a thorough and detailed analysis of the experiences of LGB laypeople and religious leaders within these two denominations, Comstock provides an exhaustive overview of social scientific research on LGBT religious experiences through 1994. Second only to Comstock in productivity is British sociologist Andrew K. T. Yip, who has been publishing prolifically in this area since the mid-1990s (e.g., 1997, 2002). In addition to his earlier work on gay male Christian couples, Yip has recently been studying bisexual Christians and lesbian, gay, and bisexual Muslims in the U.K.

Recently, two studies (Comstock, 2001; Shallenberger, 1998) have followed the lead of both anthropologists and sociologists in reconsidering the position of the researcher. In an attempt to limit their own me-

diation of their research participants' voices, these two scholars simply published transcripts of their interviews, keeping their own commentary to a minimum. While both authors are to be lauded for thinking critically about their own locations as white, male researchers, they unfortunately fail to take into account the fact that their own questions, projects, presence, and occasional editing (especially in Shallenberger) affect their supposedly "raw" data just as much as overt analysis might do. While both projects have moved the sociology of LGBT religion forward in important ways–Shallenberger's by studying LGBT people outside of religious organizations and Comstock's by focusing on African American religious leaders–their lack of analysis and commentary severely lessens the impact of what could have been extremely important works.

A final approach, that of cultural studies, defies classification within a traditional discipline; I have included it under the social sciences only because it fits within this category better than in any of the others. Two works are especially worth mentioning here. The first, Didi Herman's *The Anti-Gay Agenda* (1997), is an in-depth analysis of the late twentieth-century discourse surrounding "homosexuality" in the *Christian Century*, a slightly-right-of-center news periodical. Tracing a growing focus on the "demonic" through the early 1990s, Herman notes that by the mid-1990s the editors had once again tempered their rhetoric, turning like much of conservative Christianity to gentler (and perhaps more insidious) language of "acceptance" and healing. Jakobsen and Pellegrini pick up on this same language in *Love the Sin* (2003), critiquing both the blatant influence of Christianity in U.S. politics and law, and the rhetoric of tolerance that pervades public discussion of not only sexuality but also of racial and religious "difference" from the white, Christian, heterosexual "norm."

ANALYSIS: LGBT STUDIES AND RELIGION

In the three decades of its existence, LGBT studies in religion has made impressive progress. There is, however, a great deal more work to be done if this "proto-field" is to become the vibrant enterprise it has the potential to be. Currently, the two most pressing needs are conversation and diversification.

Bibliographies and textual references in many of the works discussed above reveal that the authors are generally aware of, and familiar with,

each other's writing. However, it is equally clear that these scholars are not, for the most part, in sustained conversation with each other. That is, they read each other's works and refer to them in their own writings, but each is working, to a certain extent, in isolation. To be sure, there are opportunities for scholars of LGBT religion to meet. A handful of small conferences have been held in recent years; the Center for Lesbian and Gay Studies in Religion and Ministry in Berkeley offers increasing opportunities for conversation; and the American Academy of Religion includes both a Lesbian Feminist Issues in Religion group and a Gay Men's Issues in Religion group, each of which holds several individual sessions and occasionally joint sessions at the AAR's annual meeting. However, the interdisciplinarity of religious studies, and the fact that many scholars work on LGBT issues in passing rather than as a central focus, mean that although such scholars may have met and conversed with each other, they do not meet regularly enough to undertake a sustained conversation about these issues. The result is that while there have been a number of advances in the field, they appear for the most part as isolated fragments with little attempt made to compare findings or develop comparative or theoretical perspectives.

Another symptom of the lack of conversation is the ongoing binary divide of both gender and sexual orientation that appears in conferences and in publishing. This is not to say that male and female scholars do not communicate, collaborate, read each other's work, or attend each other's sessions, because they do all of these things. However, it is worth asking what sort of collaboration (and what sort of understanding of gender and sexuality) is facilitated by the separate existence of groups for gay men's studies and lesbian women's studies in religion? In addition to enforcing a clearly dualistic notion of gender, these two groups nominally exclude bisexuals and transgender people. Again, this is not to say that bisexual and transgender scholars have not presented papers at these sessions, or that studies addressing bisexual and/or transgender issues have not been conducted under these rubrics. But bringing all of these groups into serious and sustained conversation–and creating a location that encourages and facilitates such participation–is critical to the future of LGBT religious studies, not to mention the development of queer approaches to the study of religion.

These multiple forms of exclusion and division echo in past and recent works, as well–though less so among those scholars (mostly the social scientists) who rarely attend AAR meetings. While the work of such social scientists may suffer from the lack of conversation with their religious studies counterparts, the work of religious studies scholars

clearly suffers from over a decade of official gender separatism. Rebecca Alpert's masterful work in Jewish theology, for instance, specifically presents itself as centering on Jewish lesbians, offering a few references to Jewish gay men, bisexuals, and transgender people, but basically leaving them to do their own theological work. Likewise, Alpert, Elwell, and Edelson's recently published collection of rabbinical autobiographies is entitled *Lesbian Rabbis* (2001). The exclusion of bisexual women in this volume was apparently inevitable, as the editors note that they attempted to recruit such rabbis but were unable to convince anyone to submit an article. However, the book's editors also note that there are a small handful of openly gay (male) rabbis, yet their volume does not include these men's stories.

I want to emphasize here that I do believe there are good reasons in some cases for studying men and women separately, but I find interesting and somewhat troubling the extent to which this separation currently occurs. Two examples from the opposite side of the gender divide are the recent *Queer Dharma* collections (Leyland, 1998, 2000) and Mark Jordan's superb study, *The Silence of Sodom* (2000), which is unfortunately subtitled *Homosexuality in Modern Catholicism* despite the fact that it explicitly disavows any effort to discuss women's experiences. Leyland's decision to include only gay men, as he explains in the introduction to the first volume of this massive collection (see 1998, p. 9), was based on the fact that his Gay Sunshine Press has historically focused on publishing works about, by, and for gay men. This, I think, is far less defensible than Jordan's reasonable explanation that in a gender-separated religion (he is writing about ordained Catholics) one must expect the experiences of men and women to be radically different. I am troubled, however, by the repeated insistence in such gender-focused (and monosexual, and mono-gendered) works that those who have been left out will eventually come along and write their own works. In an academy that is unremittingly white- and male-dominated and heterosexist, and in a field in which publishing even one LGBT-focused article can threaten one's career, it is naïve at best and grossly irresponsible at worst to blithely assume that "some other scholar" will pick up all the pieces one has disdained to touch. Only one author (Yip, a sociologist) has yet focused on the experiences of bisexuals, and only in the past few years did any work focus on transgender people (Mollenkott, 2001; Sheridan, 2001; Tanis, 2003). Why do gay and lesbian scholars expect that the people we have excluded and ignored will want to join us, and why do we presume they *could*, if they did so choose?

Equally glaring, and irresponsible for many of the same reasons, is the virtually complete exclusion of people of color and of disability issues from these works. Like queer theory and LGBT studies more broadly, LGBT studies in religion is almost completely white-dominated and heavily ethnocentric; published studies also ignore differences in ability and are often forthrightly ableist. Even if a sustained conversation should begin to coalesce around LGBT issues in religion, it will be incomplete and inconclusive without serious consideration of the intersectionality of not only sexuality and gender, but race, class, ability, nationality, postcoloniality, and other factors in our interactions with religion. It will also be glaringly incomplete without the active participation of LGBT people of color, working class people, people with disabilities, and third-world people. Without that kind of participation, gay and lesbian scholars of religion make a mockery of our own demands for inclusion.

Much of the reluctance to study "outside one's own identity" stems, I suspect, from debates over standpoint theory in the early 1990s. Since religious studies tends, on average, to lag about a decade behind the forerunners of academic innovation, it would be logical for the field to be grappling with an issue that feminist and queer studies addressed about ten years ago. Both Jordan (2000) and Comstock (2001), for instance, express great reluctance to analyze or even write about the experience of Others. In Jordan's case it is a gendered Other–Catholic women–and he chooses to focus his work on those whose identities are (apparently) closer to his. Comstock, however, takes heart from Audre Lorde's admonition not to "hide behind the mockeries of separations that have been imposed upon us" (Lorde, 1984, pp. 43-44; see Comstock, 2001, p. 5). Though he does not go so far as to analyze or even comment at any length upon the interviews in his book, Comstock has at least recognized that focusing on those who are "like us" (in itself a highly problematic assumption) only serves to further the ethnocentrism, sexism, ableism, neocolonialism, and other oppressions of the academy. Those of us who benefit from the social power dynamics of academia need to battle such inequities, not by refusing to discuss the experiences of "Others," but by learning from their experiences and from scholars who write about them, by designing our own studies to look beyond sexual orientation, and by discussing sensitively and with great critical caution those experiences with which we are unfamiliar. I offer this critique not as an accomplished practitioner of radical inclusivity, but as someone who struggles with such issues.

Perfection is out of reach for most of us, but I do believe that it is our responsibility to struggle.

QUEER THEORY AND RELIGION

Current Research: Queer Theory in Religion?

At this point, it is probably clear that I see little of the radical promise of queer theory in the current study of LGBT issues in religion. Then again, some contemporary commentators (and even some early ones; c.f. de Lauretis 1994, p. 297) argue that there is little of that promise in contemporary queer theory, either. However, an increasing number of books in LGBT religious studies have claimed the term queer, and a few of them point to the exciting potential of combining queer theory with religion.

To begin with those that claim the term "queer": in many ways, books such as *Queer Dharma* (Leyland, 1998, 2000), *Queer Jews* (Shneer & Aviv, 2002), *Religion is a Queer Thing* (Stuart, Braunston, Edwards, McMahon, & Morrison, 1997), and *Que(e)rying Religion* (Comstock & Henking, 1997) confirm the anxiety of queer theorists that their radical and amorphously complex term will be/is being appropriated by 'the masses' and stripped of its complex (though generally undefined) meanings. *Queer Dharma* and *Queer Jews* are anthologies composed mostly of personal narratives. Despite its apparently broad title, Stuart's volume is a multi-author work of Christian theology, and Comstock and Henking's book is a reader of previously published works in gay, lesbian, and transgender studies in religion. Only Stuart spends any significant time discussing or defining the word "queer"; the other three make no mention of queer theory and either assume or explicitly state that "queer" means simply lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and transsexual. Whether or not this is a useful application of the term is, I think, open to debate. More problematic, however, are Leyland's volumes, which use the word "queer" for books that are solely about gay men.

Interestingly, it is only in Christian theology and in Jewish cultural studies that scholars have seriously taken up the question of interactions between queer theory and the study of religion. For many Christian theologians, it seems that queer theory is a mixed blessing. In her introduction to *Religion is a Queer Thing*, for example, Stuart offers a

one-paragraph summary of queer theory and then explains its application to Christian theology:

> Recognition of difference in solidarity is central to queer theology. It acknowledges that black, white, disabled, poor, rich, male, female, and transgendered queers are oppressed in very different ways and that some of us are involved in the oppression of our fellow queers. (Stuart et al., 1997, p. 3)

She hastens to add, however, that "this is not to say that anything goes" (Stuart et al., 1997, p. 4). Kathy Rudy agrees, asserting that "although queer theory is a tool for helping us realize the constructed nature of sexual preference and gender identity as well as for helping us move beyond these identifications, it offers us little insight for ethics" (Rudy, 1997, p. 123). She demonstrates her point by quoting Gayle Rubin (!) at length, and summarizes: "In essence, queers hope to make a place for alternative sexual expression that is completely free of the confining strictures of ethics. . . . The agenda they advocate is–on this point– irreconcilable with the Christian tradition" (Rudy, 1997, p. 124). On the other hand, Goss' *Queering Christ* (2002) and Marcella Althaus-Reid's *The Queer God* (2003) may herald a real queering of Christian theology. Althaus-Reid's work, though dense, is especially notable for its efforts to bring queer, feminist, and Latin American liberation theologies into intimate conversation. Interestingly, though, even as queer Christian theologians begin to push the boundaries and borders of Christian inclusion, religious diversity is rarely part of the discussion.

Yet I hardly wish to argue that religious studies and queer theory are irrelevant to each other. Four works from the past decade demonstrate the immense (if insufficiently realized) potential of this combination. The first, in fact, dates from the early years of queer theory itself. In *God's Phallus and Other Problems for Men and Monotheism* (1994), Howard Eilberg-Schwartz asks a deceptively simple question: why does Judaism forbid divine imagery? Noting that the few sightings of God recorded in the Bible make a point of shielding the divine genitals from human observation, he points to a critical tension created by three aspects of ancient Israelite society. Given the understanding of Israel as the bride of God, and the culture's apparent aversion to male homoeroticism, Israelite priests were in a very awkward position as the male representatives of God's "bride." To lessen the homoerotic implications of their relationship with God, Eilberg-Schwartz argues, they studiously avoided any reflection on the body of God.

Also taking what could be identified as a queer approach to Jewish history is Daniel Boyarin's *Unheroic Conduct* (1997). Exploring, as the subtitle indicates, "heterosexuality and the invention of the Jewish man," Boyarin analyzes Jewish understandings of gender in nineteenth-century Europe. He begins with traditional, Eastern European Jewish culture and the religious texts that influenced it; in the second half of the book his analysis shifts to consider the anxieties around gender and identity that were created by Jewish assimilation into mainstream European cultures. Engaging and innovative, Boyarin's book is one of the few works in the growing field of gender studies in Judaism that treats gender and sexuality as intertwined phenomena. (Incidentally, Boyarin is also one of the editors of a new anthology of explicitly queer analyses of Judaism and anti-Semitism [Boyarin, Iskovitz, & Pellegrini, 2003]. If this anthology is any indication of the direction in which queer theory and religion are traveling together, the future of the field is bright indeed.)

Mark Jordan's *The Silence of Sodom* (2000) offers a similarly nuanced and very queer reading of religious tradition in his exploration of male homosexuality in contemporary Catholicism. In addition to the obvious topics–gay Catholics and Vatican edicts–Jordan considers the cultural aspects of Catholicism, asking why gay men are drawn to the faith, why they stay, and what ramifications the presence of so many closeted gay men might have in a homophobic institution. Two of his proposals are particularly captivating. First, Jordan argues that "clerical culture" (the culture of ordained Catholic men) exhibits stunning similarities to "mainstream" (white, Western, middle-class) gay male culture. Second, in a chapter subtitled "the pleasures of obedience," Jordan suggests that gay men stay within the clerical closet because of the "pleasures" of submission to one's elders as a young priest and domination of one's juniors in the latter years of one's career. "Who can be astonished, then," he asks rhetorically, "that sexually active gay clerics and ex-clerics seem so often to prefer the leather or S&M 'subcultures'? Nor is it shocking," he adds, "that priestly cassocks or monastic robes figure so prominently in some S&M rituals" (Jordan, 2000, p. 218). While Jordan, Boyarin, and Eilberg-Schwartz do not refer extensively to queer theory, perhaps pointing out what has been hidden in plain sight within institutions that lay claim to homophobic moral authority is the queerest way of all to approach religion.

Finally, there is reason to see Jakobsen and Pellegrini's recent work, *Love the Sin* (2003), as an application of queer theory to the study of religion. Though, like the other authors discussed in this section, they

rarely reference queer theorists directly, Jakobsen and Pellegrini offer an insightful and important analysis of the roles played by normalizing discourses and discourses of difference in contemporary U.S. politics. Arguing ultimately that "the tolerance of love the sinner, hate the sin is antidemocratic (Jakobsen & Pellegrini, 2003, p. 149), they offer analytical tools for logically dismantling the insidious rhetoric of "tolerance" that reinforces the Othering of queers, ethnic minorities, and other non-dominant groups, closing by advocating instead a radical democracy that values difference and contestation rather than "coercive homogeneity" (p. 149).

These texts offer hope that queer theory can indeed contribute to the study of religion. Does religious studies really need queer theory, though? If queer theory is what its detractors describe–androcentric, ethnocentric, anti-ethical, classist, inaccessible, ignorant of disability theory, Western, and even neocolonial–then religious studies should have nothing to do with it, having its own work to do in those areas. However, as de Lauretis first envisioned it, queer theory has the potential to be far more. With its radical focus on difference and on subverting the "normative," queer theory by definition has the responsibility to question deeply the social power accorded to members of dominant groups–including queer theorists, who have in fact been, to date, predominantly white and middle or upper class, often male, and university-employed (even though that employment has been tenuous for some). If queer theorists have been failing to ask such questions, perhaps instead of giving up on queer theory those left out should be holding such theorists' feet to a queerer flame. In this respect, it is encouraging that some of the authors in Hawley's two volumes (2001a, 2001b) on the intersections of postcolonial and queer theory do in fact claim "queer" for themselves, although it is also understandable that others forcefully reject the term.

What would it mean to "queer" the study of religion, beyond the "add queers and stir" formula that has most frequently been applied to date? It would mean paying close attention to the dynamics of gender and sexuality that religions hide in plain sight, and it would mean examining the roles of religion in both inscribing and challenging heteronormativity and dualistic conceptions of gender. It might also mean queering our concept of what is religious and queering even our methodology–and in this way, queer scholars in religion hold radical potential for change. Both religious studies and queer theory revel (at least theoretically) in their ability to break down methodological and disciplinary boundaries. But do they really do this? Many queer theorists are literary critics; the

American Academy of Religion pigeonholes social science into one session, history into another, literature into a third. But LGBT studies in religion is far too small to fragment in that way; perhaps we can use our methodological diversity to encourage a kind of methodological hybridity. Queering the study of religion thus has the potential to alter religious studies itself.

Future Research: Religion in Queer Theory?

What about the reverse–can the study of religion be of any use to queer theory? Can scholars of religion be queer outlaws too, or only nagging, lesbian and gay in-laws? I suggest that queer theorists would benefit in two ways from greater attention to the study of religion: the first in terms of analytical scope, and the second in terms of methodology.

Upon reflection, it appears quite surprising that queer theory has virtually ignored religion. Indeed, perhaps religious discourse is the secret that queer theory has hidden (in plain sight) from itself. As Jordan has shown (1997), religious discourse played a formative role in the development of the nineteenth-century Western category of the "homosexual." Religion continues to play such roles, and is a powerful force in the creation and perpetuation of hegemonic orders. Thus, even if it were simply an important locus of power and heteronormativity, religion would deserve the attention of queer theorists. However, queer theory must also contend with the important, *positive* roles that religion plays for contemporary LGBT people, and the grassroots sort of queering that religious LGBT people perform on a daily basis. What are the implications, for instance, of a shift from reading Jesus as the son of a divinely-inseminated virgin to reading him as a loving and erotic figure, displayed temptingly in almost full nakedness (and perhaps as a bottom) to the queer, male-attracted (top?) Catholic? Or, as Pattanaik implies in his introduction (2002), we might consider what the ramifications would be of refusing to read gender-crossing and same-sex eroticism in Hindu sacred stories as metaphorical and unrelated to human identities. If queer theory is defined in part by radical inclusivity, then perhaps to include religious queers would be to *queer* queer theory itself.

Furthermore, there is much food for thought in the use of religious symbols in queer cultures. To take but one example: what are we to make of the Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence, groups made up mostly of gay men who appear at benefits, in Pride parades, and in performance art wearing wimples, whiteface, and drag? The Sisters' heretical adop-

tion of Catholic monastic practices goes far beyond the wimple; not only does one take on a formal name upon taking full vows, but an aspiring member must undergo a period of observance, a postulancy, and a novitiate. Surely there is more here than an elaborate mockery of the Catholic church, especially given that, as my own forthcoming research indicates, some Sisters may see their involvement in the organization as a form of spiritual (though probably not Catholic) practice. Unpacking these dynamics in a fully nuanced manner will require the tools of both queer theory and religious studies, and there are other phenomena as well that would benefit from a similar approach.

Also worth noting, especially for those with an interest in literature, narrative, and the cultural inscription of identity, is the curious structural parallel between the standard "coming-out" narrative and the historic and prevalent "conversion narrative" in Christianity. While one analyst has noticed this connection (Cuthbertson, 1996), the topic has yet to be explored in the depth it deserves.

Finally, the field of religious studies has a great deal to offer queer theory in terms of methodology. Perhaps most relevant here is religious studies' understanding of the power of sacred narrative. History of religions scholar Bruce Lincoln (1989) points to a number of ways in which myth, ritual, and classification–all important aspects of religion–can serve to construct, maintain, and deconstruct the social order. Religion, as liberation theologians have known all along, is an important source of both hegemony and counter-hegemony; it is a major conduit of power that offers numerous sites of resistance as well as oppression.

Along these activist lines, it is also interesting to note that the sociology of religion has been interested recently in the construction of religious identities, especially those outside the bounds of the "normative" (c.f. Dufour, 2000). Increasingly, it seems, religious identities are becoming sites of negotiation, fragmentation, and intentional construction. Dufour calls such construction "sifting," explaining that the Jewish feminists in her study maintained their ties to both Judaism and feminism by "sifting out" those aspects of Jewish tradition that were not in accord with their feminist beliefs. Such findings offer an interesting perspective on queer theory's puzzle over the tension between the theoretical force of constructivist theory and the ongoing insistence of the more mainstream activists on essentialism. Non-Christian religious groups are able to agitate for their rights without taking an essentialist perspective on their religious identities; perhaps it would be fruitful for queer theorists to ponder how the acceptance of the constructed nature of religious identities could be applied to new, queer activist strategies.

Indeed, at least two analysts of religion (Hammond, 1998; Jakobsen & Pellegrini, 2003) have already suggested that the relationship between freedom of religion and sexual freedom in the United States may be much closer than is generally thought. Far from being in-laws, then, it just may turn out that LGBT studies, queer theory, and religious studies have the potential to be valuable partners in the land of academic outlaws.

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