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Queer anthropology

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Once a slur, the term ‘queer’ now is used to critique restrictive, dominant norms of respectable conduct and to recast sexual and gender variations in positive terms. With roots in twentieth-century anthropological studies of sex and gender, queer anthropology is also part of interdisciplinary scholarship on queer existence that defines sex and gender as key axes for the distribution of status, resources, membership, and value in a society. The aim is not to describe gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender (LGBTQ) life in universal terms. Rather, ethnographies emphasise the different forms that queer existence takes. Queer anthropology explains the conditions that shape queer life, such as cultural understandings of sexuality, legacies of colonial regimes, or global flows of popular culture. This entry explores four foci that characterise queer anthropology: language, especially categories of identity; varying forms of transgender roles; a geographic emphasis on the United States; and the relation of local sex/gender diversity to the global expanse of Western forms of lesbian and gay identity.

Introduction

Queer anthropology studies variations in the expression of sexuality and gender, and the ways that societies treat such differences. Queer anthropology adopts an anti-homophobic approach predicated on critiquing the denigration of sex/gender variation and empathising with the subjects of that denigration; that is, those we call queer.

Twentieth-century anthropology publicised the existence of accepted homosexual behaviour and integrated transgender people in societies around the world. From earlier anthropological work, we are now aware that societies’ varying codes for sexuality and gender relate to their overall value systems, and that such codes deeply socialise how people evaluate their experiences and express their desires (see, for example, Mead 1935; Vance 1991). Queer anthropology takes this already-familiar anthropological sensibility in a new direction by identifying social-cultural forces as forms of power that distribute rewards and punishments in unequal ways. It is based on the insight that, as an axis for organising social life, sexuality is not a separate domain but is always intertwined with systems of meaning and structures of relations among people.

This entry first considers what twentieth-century anthropology said about sexuality and gender variance, a legacy that was explicitly rejected, subtly continued, and largely ignored in the new school of queer anthropology. It then discusses what queer anthropology (including lesbian and gay anthropology) tells us about this sex/gender variation, particularly about categories and forms of identities, with special focus on

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two areas rich in queer ethnographic research: Southeast Asia and the United States. Although it is ahistorical to do so, the term ‘queer anthropology’ will here serve as a convenient umbrella term for other incarnations of the anthropology of homosexuality, lesbian and gay (LGBTQ) anthropology, or transgender anthropology.

History

During its expansion around the world, Europe’s colonial agents, missionaries, and explorers encountered what they considered shocking sexual attitudes elsewhere in the world: peoples that accepted open sex play among children, pre-marital sex, sex between men, acknowledgement of masturbation, and more. In some societies, Europeans saw people with anatomically male bodies living out women’s roles, who were not only tolerated, but in some places valorised, such as in some Native American tribes (those with female bodies living as men were rarer, but also noted). In other words, Europeans confronted an embrace of sexual conduct or gender expression that their own societies rejected. They used such deviance from their norms to rationalise colonial domination, in a logic that continues to echo today (Morgensen 2011).

This entry focuses on anthropology’s intellectual accounting for diversity, rather than the ways that ethnographic knowledge played into colonial or white supremacist rule. What were the rubrics for making sense of this difference? The Christian world evaluated sexuality through its theology of sin, which underwrote the long-lasting criminalization of certain sex or gender conduct – as in the form of sodomy laws – in Europe and its colonies. In the nineteenth century, following Charles Darwin’s theory of evolution, an alternative explanation for social differences around sexuality came to the fore. The discipline of anthropology emerged by providing a scientific, rather than religious, explanation for different social practices and cultural forms. Sexuality was important to this emergence of anthropological thought — so much so that anthropology became associated with photographs of bare-breasted women and titillating details about other cultures’ sexual habits (Lyons & Lyons 2004) — the erotic equivalent to the ‘flora and fauna’ accounts of natural history (Weston 1993) — to the embarrassment of the discipline’s leaders.

Darwin’s evolutionary theories identified sexual reproduction as crucial to species evolution and survival. Much about maleness, femaleness, and sexuality then, was attributed to nature. Anthropologists described people as ‘man’ or ‘woman’ according to binary categories of sex differences based on anatomy, even when the society in question gave reality to alternate gender identities. Until very recently, ethnographies referred to someone living out a feminine role but with a body considered male with the masculine pronoun ‘he’. The earlier literature referred to them as ‘effeminate men’, ‘homosexuals’, ‘transvestites’, or other terms. Western researchers typically conflated phenomena that we now, in the twenty-first century, separate: same-sex sexual encounters or desires, named sexual identity, intersexuality, gender norms, gender expression, and psychic gender identity (to be fair, many of the societies studied also conflated anatomical sex with sexuality and gender identity). Homosexuality was viewed as gender crossing because

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a homosexual had the sexual orientation that properly belonged to the opposite sex.

In the wake of Darwin, the first wave of anthropology proposed a model for the evolution of human institutions that emulated the natural evolution of species. Nineteenth-century scholars studying reports of other cultures concluded that different forms of marriage, kinship, and sexual behaviour must reflect different stages in the evolution of human society. In this imagined evolution, humans began in an animal-like phase of 'promiscuous hordes' mating indiscriminately. We then evolved family systems, progressing from lower to higher forms of barbarism and savagery (including a debated matriarchal period) until culminating in civilization's most evolved stage, that of the paternally-led nuclear family. Societies that did not centre on the nuclear family were assumed to belong to more primitive stages of human development, savagery or barbarianism. As the pinnacle of human development, white Christians were justified — even obligated! — to attempt to force couples to adopt appropriate sexual relations – hence the 'missionary position' – and the civilised form of the family organised around the heterosexual conjugal pair.

Entering the twentieth century, anthropologists radically changed their interpretation of cross-cultural variations in sexual codes. This new anthropology no longer described family systems as more or less primitive: evolutionary ranking was rejected. Instead, anthropologists asked why expressions considered deviant according to Western norms — homosexuality, pre-marital sex, or transgender identities — were accepted in other societies. The 1920s to 1930s were a heyday of anthropological research on sexuality and sex, or what we now call gender. One example is William Willard Hill's 'The status of the hermaphrodite and transvestite in Navaho culture'. Hill's title used the English words of the period for intersex and transgender to translate the Navajo term *nádleehi* (also *nadle*[iii]). Navajo society, Hill found, treated the *nádleehi* differently from the way US society treated comparable people. A Navajo family who had an intersex baby or a transgender youth 'was considered by themselves and everyone else as very fortunate':

> The success and wealth of such a family was believed to be assured. Special care was taken in the raising of such children and they were afforded favoritism not shown to other children of the family. As they grew older and assumed the character of nadle, this solicitude and respect increased, not only on the part of their families but from the community as a whole (Hill 1935: 274).

Hill bracketed his social schema in order to explicate the logic of the Navajo: the Navajo valued people (and animals) who did not fit into binary categories of male/female. His discussion of the *nádleehi* shows how a culture's category for sex/gender identity connects to broader cultural values, concerning binaries, nature, resources, and kinship. By developing this kind of analysis, that interprets codes for sex or gender as a piece of the larger social system, anthropology developed both its intellectual method (cultural relativism) and its concept of culture (as holistic, integrated assemblage of values and habits). Sex/gender norms that diverged from Western orthodoxy offered key opportunities for illustrating this method and analysis.

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Even as they were developing cultural relativist approaches to sex/gender variations, modern anthropologists fumbled for words that could translate specific cultural categories into a universal vocabulary of science, in ways that reproduced their own cultural attitudes. Not sounding particularly objective, Edward Westermarck wrote that in some societies, '[t]he gratification of the sexual instinct assumes forms which fall out the ordinary pale of nature' (Westermarck 1926: 456).[2] The main form that concerned him was men's sex with other men, probably anal sex. Sex that was not undertaken by a heterosexual pair, hence not connected to reproduction, was beyond 'the pale of nature'. Given the importance of reproduction to the species and the family, why would any society allow it? To answer this Darwinian puzzle of non-heterosexual sex, anthropologists turned mainly to psychological or functionalist frameworks. Functionalism said that cultural practices that seemed odd to the Western observer, as the acceptance of non-heterosexual sexuality, in fact serve a rational, if not conscious, purpose by handling basic challenges that confront human societies in ways that mesh with their overall social system. Psychoanalytic diagnoses of homosexuality as perversion, inversion, or neuroses provided a persuasive expert theory for interpreting, say, men's sex with men or females wearing male clothing. These psychological terms were clinical yet not neutral, as the following example reveals.

Shamanism in Korea, Siberia, Southeast Asia, and other locations offered Western readers exotic examples of cross-dressing, transvestitism, the third-gender, or transgender expression. When shamans are possessed by a spirit that is not of their own birth-sex, they don the clothes and behaviours of the spirit's sex. Here is how an anthropologist, Melvin Spiro, described Burmese female shamans in 1967:

> [M]any are highly masculine in manner, and many others are married to weak, inconsequential males. If the female shaman does in fact have homosexual needs, they may be satisfied by identification with her nat [spirit] husband… At the very least, therefore, the shamanistic role enables a latent lesbian, one with a strong masculine component, to act out her masculine impulses (1967: 220).

Spiro analysed Burmese society through a psychoanalytical framework that considered sexual orientation to be related to gender identity — attraction to women was masculine, and vice versa — and to be a deeply seated, core element of a person. Psychoanalytical categories — 'latent' lesbian or homosexual men — placed the cross-dressing shaman into a presumed universal framework. Judging the husbands of 'highly masculine' women as 'weak' and 'inconsequential',[3] Spiro's reveals his society's attitudes about proper heterosexual arrangements, rather than 1960s Burmese categories. At the time, such judgmental language passed as social science.

Like many anthropologists discussing sexuality, Spiro also drew on a functionalist interpretation. In works such as *Sex and repression in savage society* (1927), Bronislaw Malinowski put forth one of the best-known

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formulations of functionalism.[a] It says that social arrangements manage basic human needs in ways that prevent dangerous disruptions, thereby allowing social forms to endure. Societies provided outlets for problematic queer desires; for example, through constructive roles for those who expressed alternative genders and sexualities, like shamanism. For the Navajo, Hill similarly explained the social valorization of intersex/transgender members as a way to 'capitalize on an irregularity' (1935: 273) — it made an aberration socially meaningful.

Margaret Mead's pathbreaking book, *Sex and temperament in three primitive societies* (1935), deeply transformed thinking about sex roles. It challenged the idea that biological sex caused male and female personality differences. Socialization, Mead insisted, not biology, caused personality traits: it was cultures that linked qualities like aggression or nurturance to sex. Mead's argument that societies shaped temperaments anticipated the later differentiation between biological sex and gender. (Gender is a relatively new term that became common from its use in sexology and 1970s feminism.) Mead was especially influential because she brought these ideas to a wide audience. As one sign of her significance, one of the anthropologists who launched queer anthropology, Esther Newton, titled her memoir, *Margaret Mead made me gay* (Newton 2000).

Twentieth-century anthropology shaped how we think about queer life today. It explained the power of norms and the social mechanisms that created men and women in their image while also demonstrating that some societies, like the Navajo or Burmese, did not reject, but positively valued people who Westerners considered psychologically abnormal. The fact that some societies integrated sex/gender variance showed that there were alternatives to enduring punitive Victorian codes governing women's sexual behaviour, homosexuality, masturbation, or gender non-conformity. These cross-cultural examples were eagerly taken up by Euro-American efforts to make life more hospitable for those who did not conform to these strict norms of personal life.

Queer anthropology

In the 1960s and 1970s, a few bold anthropologists asked for more attention to homosexuality, which had been neglected for decades after the 1930s (Sonenschein 1966; Fitzgerald 1977). This led to a small subfield of the anthropology of homosexuality, which begat lesbian and gay anthropology, which later emerged as queer and transgender anthropology. This scholarship both extended and departed from earlier twentieth century scholarship on sex. Anthropologists used old-school ethnography to understand lifeways that defied sex/gender, albeit in novel sites, like lesbian bars or drag shows. Yet this new lesbian and gay anthropology also articulated distinct views of non-heterosexual sexuality.

Seismic changes from new social movements led scholars to examine conflict and inequality more than they had. Lesbian and gay anthropologists were explicitly committed to an anti-homophobic approach. In 1972,

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Esther Newton's prescient study of drag queens, street faeries, and camp sensibility showed how this queer US world disaggregated elements of gender, how they were internally differentiated, and how they understood relations to dominant homophobic society; for example, through the wry stylistic of camp (Newton 1972). Gayle Rubin created a cultural map of US sexual norms as a concentric set of circles around a 'charmed circle' of the most valued mode of sexuality (married, heterosexual, 'vanilla') to outer rings of increasing stigmatization. Rubin, in particular, helped anthropologists to see sexuality as a 'vector of oppression' in societies (Rubin 1975). Their work, often ignored in mainstream anthropology, helped launch what became Queer Anthropology.

In the Anglophone world, older gays and lesbians painfully recall 'queer' as a hostile epithet that crystallised the alienation of being treated as abnormal. At the same time, communities excluded from mainstream society often use humour as a survival strategy, and many queers also used 'queer' sardonically in an insider way. Come the late 1980s, a younger generation reclaimed the epithet queer as a way to embrace, rather than suffer, this outsider status. They embraced violating sexual and gender norms: 'We're here, we're queer, get used to it!' went the chant. This appropriation of the slur turned 'queer' into a critique of normativity that showed how norms excluded people from resources, valorization, and social belonging while also targeting them for violence and harassment. Politically, taking up 'queer' defies the logic that only those who are 'normal' are entitled to the full expression of humanity (Rubin 1984). The categories of 'gay' and 'lesbian' came to be seen by some as too restrictive to capture the scope of (consensual) erotic experiences that mainstream desire considered perverse. Instead of continuing to represent different identity categories in an expanding LGBTQ acronym, many adopted queer as an encompassing shorthand. The radical turn to queer also reflected concern that gays and lesbians were assimilating into mainstream society.[5] As some gays and lesbians became seen as 'normal', their membership in mainstream society could now reinforce the very boundaries that had kept them out, and that still excluded other sorts of queer sexuality, particularly those in Black, immigrant, poor, or transgender communities.

Queer theory is an academic response to this activism. Coined in 1989, queer theory is less focused on naming identities than identifying a political relationship of subjects to dominant modes of power, usually understood as resistance, whether intentional or not. One major queer theorist described queer capaciously as resistance 'to regimes of the normal' (Warner 1993: xxvi). The Western regime of the normal posits a biological sex binary, male and female, that shapes masculine or feminine gender identity and results in heterosexual sexual orientation and nominally monogamous relationships. These norms extend beyond evaluating individuals, because the heterosexual pair is viewed as the hub of the family, above other forms of intimate relationships, especially sex between men, women, and trans people. Queer theory shows how those whose sexuality and gender are considered deviant can be seen as freaks or monsters — not fully human(Weiss 2016a). To demonstrate that norms are forms of ideology, rather than natural or

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universal, Queer scholars highlight phenomena that show 'mismatches between sex, gender and desire' (Jagose 2002: 3).

Anthropologists draw selectively on strands of queer theory; for example, referring to normative discourses instead of a general concept of culture. In anthropology, Weston proposes that queer 'defines itself by its difference from hegemonic ideologies of gender and sexuality' (Weston 1993: 348). The European Network for Queer Anthropology (ENQA)[6] adopts this meaning by situating itself against 'the continued marginalization of sexuality and gender perspectives beyond those that are embedded in conjugal reproductive heterosexuality in contemporary anthropology'. The anthropologist Margot Weiss, who has written a great deal about what queer anthropology means, says that queer is meant to 'signify transgression of, resistance to, or exclusion from normativity, especially but not exclusively heteronormativity' (Weiss 2016a).[7] With the phrase 'not exclusively', Weiss stresses the intersectional nature of queer perspectives, meaning that prevailing sex/gender norms are not isolated axes of social systems, but intertwine with class dynamics and histories of colonization and slavery.

Anthropologists draw on queer theory's concept of gender as performative (which itself derives from linguistics), seeing, for example, femininity as created continually through people's conduct and speech, rather than resulting from biological female sex (Morris 1993). Based in the humanities, and rooted in critical theory or continental philosophy, queer theoretical writing relies mainly on the analysis of texts, mostly from European or US sources. Queer anthropology adds ethnographic methods that place sexuality in richer contexts beyond simply discourse, showing how, for example, capitalism (Rofel 2007; Weiss 2011b; Wilson 2004), religious meanings (Ramberg 2014; Allen 2011), or immigrant status (Manalansan 2003) contour people's expression of sexual desires or self-definitions. A number of review essays provide different takes on anthropology's relations to queer theory.[8] This brief entry emphasises queer anthropological studies of sexuality and gender in relation to classic disciplinary concerns with social classifications and social and geographic contexts as well as anthropology's more recent attention to global dynamics.

From homosexual to Tom: language, categories, meanings

By the 1980s, most anthropologists avoided using the word 'homosexual' to describe persons. Gay and lesbian activists had rejected an externally imposed, clinical label that linked non-heterosexual orientations with pathology (Tuvin 1991; Weston 1993; Rubin 1997). Moreover, defining people, rather than sexual acts, as homosexual, heterosexual, or bisexual relies on a particular psychological model of selfhood in which some enduring, core essence of a person's inner being is determined by whether their desired sexual partners are of the same or opposite sex.

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Queer anthropology often studies sexual expressions that differ from prevailing Euro-American notions of homosexuality, biological sex, or are subject to different social judgements. Feminist anthropologists, for example, recognised that Western vocabulary, like the term 'lesbian', did not adequately translate the self-concepts and cultural connotations of women's erotic relations with other females. The newly-reclaimed Western term 'lesbian' was not even shared by communities of women in same-sex relations within the West, such as urban American working-class women who organised their self-concept around an erotically gendered persona, as 'butch' or 'femme', rather than emphasising the sameness in same-sex desire (Kennedy & Davis 1993). Yet specific gendered vocabulary for what we could call female masculinity – butch lesbian, gender non-conforming female, or trans man – is common in other parts of the world. In the twenty-first century Persian Gulf, *boya* (plural *boyāt*)[91] refers to a female with masculine appearance. *Boyāt*'s short hair and male clothing become visible when they are not wearing the abaya, meaning in women-only spaces in malls, girls' schools, or women's beaches (Le Renard 2014; Nigst & Garcia 2010). As the Arabic *boya* represents a borrowing from the English word 'boy', Asian societies use *tomboy* or such derivatives as *Tom*,*T*, or *Tibo* (Blackwood 2010; Newton 2016). We still do not know how or when the word *tomboy* entered Asian lexicons.

Queer theory has argued for analysing sexuality as autonomous from gender (Rubin 1985). Yet anthropologists mostly find that sexuality is deeply embedded in gender schema. For example, males are often accorded different mobility in public spaces and standards for sexual activity from girls and women (Blackwood 2010). Femininity and masculinity are also commonly associated with particular sexual roles (Padilla 2008; Sinnott 2004). *Tomboy* or *boya* are gender terms, not necessarily equivalent to transgender, that suggest a more or less implicit sexuality. That is, in many sex/gender lexicons, labels for non-normative gender expression also codes same-sex sexuality. In my research in Thailand, I found that many women through the 1990s rejected the word 'lesbian' because of its overt sexual meanings, enhanced by the use of the word in heterosexual pornography and sex-shows for foreign men. Identifications that merge sexuality with a gendered term seem to be common. Bailey too finds that the participants in Black American drag balls use gendered terms, such as 'butch queen up in drag', 'femme queen', or 'women' (Bailey 2013; see also Johnson 2011).

Societies outside of the West also draw on the more sexual word 'lesbian'. Nais Dave (2012) found rural Indian women outside of major cities described themselves as lesbians, to the surprise of urban organisers. Some language communities use diminutives of lesbian such as *lesbi* (Indonesia), *les* (Vietnam [Newton 2016]), or *la-la* (Greater China). Even when the term is derived from the English, it is conceptually inflected with local meanings. Writing about Indonesia, for example, anthropologists show how terms like *lesbi* (Blackwood 2010) or gay (Boellstorff 2005) function as Indonesian words, rather than being entirely commensurate with English meanings.

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Communities of gay men, men who have sex with men (MSM), and trans women often develop their own community slang, or argot (Boellstorff 2005; Leap & Boellstorff 2004). E. Patrick Johnson provides a glossary for US Black queer slang in his book *Sweet tea: black gay men of the South*. There is a name for the argot of queers in the Philippines and its diaspora: Swardspeak, derived from a Cebuano word for the pejorative term, 'sissy'. Swardspeak mixes dominant Filipino, American, and Spanish codes in a constantly evolving slang that unmistakably marks the speaker as *bakla*, a queer man or trans woman of the Philippines (Manalansan 2003: 46-7).

The point of this documentation of indigenous terminology for queer life is not to chronicle gay life around the world, but to alter conventional thinking about gender and sexuality. The variety of modes of queer existence belies the idea that sexuality takes the universal forms of heterosexuality and homosexuality. It shows that the connection between sexual activity to identity takes culturally specific forms that are inflected by sex, gender, class, race, and other social markers. The terms a person uses to describe herself are also situational, and change in different contexts (Valentine 2007; Gray 2009).[iii] Not all queer terms describe individuals, either. In mainland China, *la-la* was first used as an adjective for sites associated with what we name lesbian and queer women rather than as a noun naming a person's identity (Engebretsen 2013). Gloria Wekker (2007) explains that in Suriname, the understanding of female same-sex erotic relations, called *matiwroko* (*mati* work or 'friends' work'), differs from the concept of lesbian. The Surinamese understand these sexual relations as activity rather than identity: a woman often would be heterosexually partnered and engage in *mati* work without contradiction. Non-Western queer life can involve radically different conceptions of the self. Being a *bakla*, Manalansan tells us, 'is seen to be not a product of something inside of person, but rather as a product of an outside force or forces' (Manalansan 2003: 43). Queerness in various societies is seen as divine fate, as akin to possession, or as the result of karma (Boellstorff 2005; Manalansan 2003; Sinnott 2004).

Queer anthropology has shown that applying Western categories for sexuality universally across cultural contexts limits our understanding of people's self-concepts, and in turn, their motivations, choices, and behaviours. For one concrete illustration, in the context of the HIV/AIDS epidemic: because conventional epidemiological methods did not provide an understanding of gay men's sexual cultures, medical researchers did not understand the patterns of HIV transmission. Ethnographic work explained the contexts for plural sex partners in this community. It also explained that health programs relying on the word 'gay' were failing to reach the many men who may on occasion enjoy intercourse with another male but do not feel gay, but as 'normal' (Boellstorff 2011; Vance 1991). 'Using bisexual as a noun' for men who have sex with men in Mexico, Carrier says, 'obscures the diversity of their lifestyles, motivations, and sexual behaviors' (Carrier 1995: 199). 'Normal', married men routinely having sex with male-bodied people challenges normative Western beliefs that having sex with a body with a penis establishes a man as homosexual, not heterosexual: more generally, that the sex of a partner defines one's core sexual

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orientation and, hence, identity.

The transgender turn

As the work of Hill on the Navajo or Spiro on Burmese shamans noted above suggests, the discipline of anthropology described transgender lives as part of its analysis of cultural patterns and social function. These accounts displayed deeply ethnocentric judgements that changed as a response to transsexual and transgender advocacy. Taking hold in the US through the 1990s, the concept of 'transgender', coined by transgender people themselves, more or less supplanted the words 'transsexual' and 'transvestite', for similar reasons to the move away from 'homosexual'. (Some people still identify in English as 'cross-dressers' or 'transsexuals' and comparable terms in other languages.) Language has been one of the most vital arenas for transgender struggles (Zimman 2017). Trans advocacy defines gender according to individual subjective experience — how people identify their gender — rather than according to legal identity, psychiatric diagnosis, social perception, or sex assigned at birth.[11] Their political efforts have transformed language adopted in scholarship, medical literature, psychological care, and by international networks, such as non-governmental organizations (NGOs).[12] While queer and transgender anthropology follows these recommendations, they also have alternative cross-cultural versions of transgender identity (Dutta & Roy 2014) and are equally exploring the historically specific construction of the American, and globalising, trans identity (Plemmons 2017; Zimman 2017).

The revealing subtitle of David Valentine's *Imagining transgender* is 'an ethnography of a category', which flags his approach to the (then) new category of transgender as a cultural classification; in this case, in the context of gender-non-conforming communities in New York City (Valentine 2007). As with the Detroit drag ball participants (Bailey 2013), these queer New Yorkers described themselves with an array of terms, including 'gay'. Cross-cultural terms often conceptualise personhood and gender according to different logics from the Western sense of the autonomous, interior self. For example, a Filipina *baklais* called 'doll of god', suggesting that the physical self is the plaything of the divine (Manalansan 2013). Sahar Sadjadi (2019) notices that the concept of the self from her cultural background differs from that expressed in US trans medicine. She explains that 'my ethnographic gaze originates from a context where narratives of the self are not anchored in a deep inner core but are relational and situational' (Sadjadi 2019: 104). Discussions in a paediatric trans clinic revealed 'the hegemony of the interior origins of authentic self and identity and the rejection of possible external, including social, origins of identity' (Sadjadi 2019: 104). Lal Zimman's (2017) linguistic analysis of US trans discourse finds a similar emphasis on individual autonomy in trans emphasis on self-identification, which meshes with a US political economic context stressing individualism (neoliberalism). Despite their political emphasis on self-definition, Zimman notes, trans people are nonetheless conscious that gender identity is very much established dialogically: that is, in relation to others.

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Queer, American style

In India, the *hijra* is a well-known figure: born as males, living a feminine identity in community with other *hijras*, they have attracted the attention of many scholars and are a staple of anthropological discussions of gender.[13] Southeast Asian trans feminine identities (Thai *kathoey*, Filipino *bakla*, Indonesian *waria*) are also well known to tourists and researchers, as are South America's *travesti*. Yet the queer life that anthropologists know the most about is in the United States. From the 1960s and 1970s, anthropologists have conducted participant observation within queer American subcultures, such as drag queens (Newton 1973), working class lesbian life (Kennedy & Davis 1993), or BDSM communities (Weiss 2011b). They show that queer communities, like others, are structured by shared codes, patterned behaviour, and the effects of urban policies, capitalist markets, and other encompassing systems.

We are most familiar with queer life in cities: New York, San Francisco, Los Angeles. Generally, the American countryside is considered harsh, if not impossible, for lesbian, gay, or transgender living. Mary L. Gray's ethnography *Out in the country* (2009) and E. Patrick Johnson's *Sweet tea* (2011) provide close portraits of queer US Southerners, showing how they form their identity and sustain lives in the absence of metropolitan resources. Johnson's personal narratives show how in Black Southern communities, queer life is simultaneously above and below the radar, as well as the centrality of both the church and drag to many Black gay men's experience. Both white and Black Southerners face a different prospect of being out in their small communities (Gray2009).[14]

The anthropology of queer American life counters the codified images of married white gays and lesbians or the staple images of American gay life found in TV shows like *Modern family* or *The L-word*. Those who fall outside the charmed circle of sex/gender norms, despite being subject to violence and poverty, build sustaining social lives – vibrant communities, with their own argot and symbolism – and create possibilities for pleasure, sexual and otherwise, which is part of survival and resistance (Bailey 2013; Gray 2009; Johnson 2011; Kennedy and Davis 1993; Manalansan 2003). Having long been excluded from full inclusion into kinship organised around conjugal heterosexuality, queer people established their own bonds of kinship, such as chosen families or houses (Bailey 2013; Lewin 2009; Weston 1997). They draw on, yet reformulate, heterosexual customs of family, weddings, marriage, child-rearing.

Studying a country shaped by the decimation of Indigenous peoples, chattel slavery of Africans, imperialism in Latin America, and racism towards non-white immigrants, Americanist Queer Anthropology has confronted these legacies for sexuality and gender. Their intersectional analysis sees sexuality as an axis of social differentiation that is interwoven with the residual structures of colonial and plantation societies (Morgensen 2011).

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Is gay global?

Queer life is affected by social contexts that scale from the family to the transnational. In the 1990s, Dennis Altman argued that 'gay' was becoming a globalised identity, erupting in the Global South along paths of capitalist development (Altman 1996). He pointed to the way that gay bars, rainbow flags, and clothing styles could look so alike in cities like Rio, Bangkok, or Berlin as the manifestation of this global gay culture. Altman was not celebrating this development or arguing that there is a universal, essentialist gay identity. Altman proposed that this merging international gay culture resulted from global capitalism. His analysis raised important questions about how gay, queer, and trans life in the Global South or non-West, including post-Socialist settings created after the breakup of the Soviet Union, relate to gay cultures of the Global North. Are gay, lesbian, queer, and transgender identities elsewhere part of the West's expanse across the world? Is queer life in the non-West a derivative of Western forms, a borrowing from New York, San Francisco, or Sydney gay life?

Queer anthropology does not view transnational queer culture as a wholesale export of modern Western culture to the rest of the world. It also does not position the West as 'ahead' or more enlightened about LGBTQ rights than other regions: doing so would replicate the old evolutionary, civilizational claims used to rationalise colonialism. Instead, anthropologists of queer life tend to recast the nexus of West/global and non-West/local in three general ways. First, they show how local communities integrate transnational phenomena, often resulting in hybrid or syncretistic forms, such as the Filipino argot, Swardspeak. Second, they see where transnational dynamics are affecting queer life; for example, through geopolitics, communication technologies, or tourism. Third, queer anthropology identifies alternate geographic forms of queer life than the West-to-non-West flow.

Societies do not generally import sex/gender schema wholesale: local versions mix with the international circulation of gay, lesbian, and trans culture, in varying ways. Tom Boellstorff (2005) proposes that the Indonesian gay identity is one of the few truly national identities in a country shaped by insular cultural distinctions. When conservative voices in former colonies in the Global South decry homosexuality as foreign to their 'tradition', that tradition is often an outgrowth of imperialism.

Queer life anywhere is affected by intensifying flows of people, culture, and capital across national borders, or globalization. The concepts of gay, lesbian, and transgender are now global, transmitted through the communication technologies, NGOs, migration, and tourism. Gay male tourists have brought their concept of gay identity and its associated styles to sites considered appealing to gay men (Mitchell 2015; Padilla 2008; Stout 2014). In the twenty-first century, the Internet, social media, and digital applications (apps) are stages for sexual encounters as well as resources for information about marginalized identities. (Boellstorff 2010, 2014; McGlotten 2013). Information about hormones, surgery, and other modifications also travel (Ochoa 2014; Plemmons 2017; Zimman 2017). To a marked degree, transgender people are forming their

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self-understanding through digital communities formed on the Internet. These mediated dialogues have produced new, shared vocabulary for body zones, such as trans men's replacement of the word vagina with 'front hole' or 'boy cunt' (Zimman 2017). Thais who formerly identified as *kathoey* and *ladyboy* (to foreigners) now also describe themselves as 'transwomen' in online communities like dating apps (Käng 2012).

Institutions of international civil society, notably NGOs, have also been a conduit for concepts around sexuality and gender (Gray 2009) as well as providing spaces for homosocial encounters (Wilson 2010). HIV/AIDS projects became sites for the gathering of men and trans women who have sex with men. These organizations dispersed authorised vocabularies about sexuality. At the time of Valentine's research, those New Yorkers most connected with non-profit organizations were also most likely to name themselves as transgender (Valentine 2007). How does the term transgender relate to local concepts?

Many queers are influenced by flows within their region. In Asia, Korean cultural forms, like K-pop or bodily aesthetics (facial surgeries), are taken up by queer cultures elsewhere in the region (Käng 2014). Chinese language (Sinophone) queer materials flow between China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, and Singapore, and across the Chinese-speaking diaspora. In Hong Kong, people repurposed the word 'comrade', *tongzhi*, to describe queer solidarity or LGBTQ identities, a historically resonant usage that then spread to Mainland China. Queer community extends transnationally along migrant routes, for example, from the US to Latin America, or from the Philippines, which has one of the highest rates of emigration. Filipina/o queer men and trans women, while establishing connections to American gay worlds and navigating obligations to family and Filipino Catholicism, look to Manila to stay up to date on additions to Swardspeak (Manalansan 2003).

Geopolitical changes affect possibilities for queer community and LGBTQ rights. In the former Soviet Union, for example, rising authoritarian nationalism casts LGBTQ people as symbols of social decline (Renkin 2009; Shirinian 2018). In Latin America, queer communities under post-dictatorship governments find openings for more visibility and queer-friendly policies while also facing intensified stratification resulting from neoliberal economic policies (Amar 2013; Ochoa 2014; Stout 2014). Lesbians and gays in the hemisphere have also faced contradictory struggles for rights under socialist governments, such as in post-revolutionary Nicaragua (Babb 2003; Howe 2013), or under new capitalist developments in Cuba (Allen 2011; Stout 2013).

Conclusion

Anthropology transformed Western understandings of sexuality and gender from evaluations based on sin, racial evolution, or psychopathology to understandings that cultural values varied and that societies shaped the sex and gender expressions within them. Queer anthropology shows that societies makes sexual,

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gendered people and organizes their relationships, in varying ways. In turn, the plethora of gender expressions and sexual cultures that exist around the world reveals binary formulations like heterosexual and homosexual or male and female to be a culturally specific logic rather than universal reality. Being queer is a profoundly social position, inescapably embedded within a larger, often oppressive, culture, and also producing shared worlds inhabited by a society's divergent subjects.

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[1] For more information on this term, see: Epple, C. 1998. Coming to terms with Navajo ‘nádleehí’: a critique of ‘berdache’, ‘Gay,’ ‘Alternate Gender,’ and ‘Two-Spirit’. *American Ethnologist* **25**(2), 267-90.

[2] In his chapter on ‘Homosexual love’ in his 1926 book, *The origin and development of the moral ideas*, Westermarck works hard to prove that homophobic disgust is universal. His own evidence challenged the conclusion he desired.

[3] Strong women paired with weak men was a trope of mid-century, Cold War discourse. Powerful wives and mothers were deemed to cause less-manly husbands and homosexual men: in general, men not powerful enough to fight against communism.

[4] Malinowski intended functionalism to be an alternative theory of sexuality to psychoanalysis, which he criticized.

[5] American lesbian and gays were achieving fuller membership in society through markers of normativity: marriage, advertising images, military service. Such membership decentered a gay male culture that enabled sex with multiple partners, at

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times in public spaces.

[6] European Network for Queer Anthropology (available on-line: https://www.easaonline.org/networks/enqa/). Accessed 5 February 2018.

[7] Those considered outside a 'charmed circle' of sexuality (Rubin 1984) include sex between men and women (technically speaking, heterosexual), such as female sex workers or kink practices, like BDSM (Weiss 2011b).

[8] Review essays explaining the queer dimension of Queer Anthropology include Allen 2013; Boellstorff 2005; Boellstorff & Dave 2015; Boyce, Engebretsen & Possoco 2018; Graham et al.2016; Weiss 2016a, 2016b.

[9] Le Renard (2014) spells this as 'buya'.

[10] In the US, where anthropological linguistics is its own subfield, gay, lesbian, transgender and queer language research sustains a regular conference called Lavender Languages, which beganin 1993. For more information, visit: https://lavenderlanguages.wordpress.com/information-about-lavender-languages-and-linguistics/

[11] Other US terms affiliated with transgender are 'gender non-binary' and 'gender non-conforming'. A person's earliest biographical information is conveyed by describing them as 'assigned female/male at birth', or 'AFAB', 'AMAB' for short. The term 'cis', an antonym to trans in chemistry, is used to refer to those who live out the gender connected with their assigned sex, e.g., men who identify as male.

[12] Transgender nomenclature is in flux. The shortened version 'trans*', which adopted the asterisk from the late 20th -century database search code to produce inclusive results, is less commonly used. Some replace the asterisk with a hyphen, as in, 'Trans-'. Many now just use 'Trans'. Phrases preferred by advocates have evolved so rapidly that words used commonly a decade ago (or less) – like 'transgendered', 'transgenderism', 'male-bodied', 'born-female' – are now subject to critique.This makes older works, including path-breaking studies in Queer Anthropology (e.g., Newton 1973), feel outdated, and, therefore, politically problematic.

[13] Queer scholarship on *hijra* includes Boyce 2007; Cohen 1995; Reddy 2005; Dutta & Roy 2014.

[14] The prevalent model of LGBT rights relies on the ocular trope of coming out and promoting visibility. In addition to the anthropologies of the US South, other anthropologists have argued that this mode of politics is not feasible or salient for some queer communities, such as immigrants (particularly undocumented) and poor queers of color.

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