Odd Couples

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Published by Duke University Press

Muraco, Anna.
Odd Couples: Friendships at the Intersection of Gender and Sexual Orientation.

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INTRODUCTION

1. The term “intersectional” was introduced by Crenshaw (1989), who discussed how black women’s experience is more than the sum of their race and sex. Collins (1990) uses similar concepts in discussing the matrix of oppression.

2. Other friendship forms, particularly those between bisexual and heterosexual individuals and across the spectrum of sexual-orientation categories, could also be analyzed for the ways they reflect and perhaps shape contemporary social life, but they are not the focus of this book.

3. Warner’s (1991: 3–17) definition of heteronormativity continues that its coherence is always provisional, and its privilege can take several (sometimes contradictory) forms: unmarked as the basic idiom of the personal and the social, marked as a natural state, or projected as an ideal or moral accomplishment. It consists less of norms that can be summarized as a body of doctrine than of a sense of rightness produced in contradictory manifestations—often unconscious, immanent to practice or to institutions. Contexts that have little visible relation to sex practice, such as life narrative and generational identity, can be heteronormative in this sense, while in other contexts, forms of sex between men and women might not be heteronormative. Heteronormativity is thus a concept distinct from heterosexuality. One of the most conspicuous differences is that it has no parallel, unlike heterosexuality, which organizes homosexuality as its opposite. Because homosexuality can never have the invisible, tacit, society-founding rightness that heterosexuality has, it would not be possible to speak of “homonormativity” in the same sense.

4. Throughout the book, I use the terms “straight” and “heterosexual” interchangeably, but in most cases I use “gay” or “lesbian” instead of “homosexual” because of the history of mental-health and medical professions’ pathologizing same-sex desire and identities.

1 YOU’VE GOT TO HAVE FRIENDS

1. As I discuss in the introduction, these assumptions are based on compulsory heterosexuality, or the dominant cultural expectation that women will be innately sexually
attracted to men and men will be attracted to women. This cultural norm is reinforced by socialization practices (Myers and Raymond 2010; Thorne 1986).

2. Fine’s (1986) description of occupation choice is largely based on middle-class (professional) career possibilities.

3. Heterocentrism is implicit in most discussions of same- and cross-sex friendship; discussions of women’s or men’s friendships in prior research generally assume that the friends in the dyad are heterosexual unless they are specifically identified as crossing categories of sexual orientation. The discussion of same-sex friendship here thus engages with prior studies.

4. There is a tendency within gay male and lesbian communities also to expect consistency with respect to the sex of sexual partners (e.g., bisexuality is marginalized). However, the effects are not the same as the process that Ponse (1978) and Tripp (1975) suggest, because in general at least two elements identified in the principle in consistency (gender identity and roles) are afforded a greater level of nonconformity in gay male and lesbian cultures.

2 SNAPSHTS

1. San Francisco, along with New York City and Los Angeles, was one of the areas hardest hit by the AIDS epidemic in the 1980s. As chronicled by Shilts (1987) and others, AIDS disproportionately affected the gay male communities living in urban areas.

2. Research about AIDS and mental health has addressed the phenomenon that many gay men who lived in areas most affected by the AIDS epidemic experienced multiple losses of friends, partners, lovers, and community members (Neugebauer, Rabkin, Williams, Remien, Goetz, and Gorman 1992; Remien and Rabkin 1995).

3. One study of multiple losses related to HIV and AIDS found that in a sample ($n = 141$) of gay and bisexual men in Vancouver, British Columbia, the mean number of people lost in a nearly eight-year period was 19.62, with 53 percent of individuals reporting between one and six losses, 27 percent reporting seven to twenty-four losses, and 20 percent reporting twenty-five to two hundred losses (Oram, Bartholomew, and Landolt 2003). Given that this study took place in a city that was less affected by the AIDS epidemic than San Francisco, where Scott and Ruth were living, we would expect the average losses to have been even greater than the staggering number reported by Oram and colleagues.

4. In this comment, Bruce seems to be using “social capital” as it is defined by Bourdieu (1986: 51): “Social capital is the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition . . . which provides each of its members with the backing of the collectively owned capital, a ‘credential’ which entitles them to credit in the various senses of the word.”

5. These instances are consistent with whiteness being an unmarked social position that endows its member with privilege vis-à-vis people from racial-minority back-
grounds. This dynamic has been the subject of many theorists who discuss race and white privilege, such as Frankenberg (1994) and Collins (1990).

6. The mission of PFLAG is to “[promote] the health and well-being of gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender persons, their families and friends through: support, to cope with an adverse society; education, to enlighten an ill-informed public; and advocacy, to end discrimination and to secure equal civil rights. Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays provides opportunity for dialogue about sexual orientation and gender identity, and acts to create a society that is healthy and respectful of human diversity” (Parents, Families, and Friends of Lesbians and Gays [PFLAG] 2009).

3 WE ARE FAMILY

1. One such example is the federal Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA) of 1996, which allowed states to decide whether or not they would legally sanction same-sex marriages and recognize same-sex marriages that have been legally sanctioned in other states. The DOMA also redefined “spouse” as a husband or wife of the opposite sex. The text of the bill clarifies that the purpose of the DOMA is “to define and protect the institution of marriage.” Many states have passed their own versions of the DOMA since 1996. In addition, in the past decade the parental rights of gay men and lesbians have been fiercely contested politically and legislatively. Currently, many states have laws and pending propositions that limit the parental rights of gay male, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender individuals.

2. Many same-sex identified individuals resist using the term “family” because they view it as reflecting a wholly heterosexist and historically oppressive dimension of relational life that negates homosexuality as a viable identity (Weeks, Heaphy, and Donovan 2001). Yet at the risk of further reifying family as the paragon for all social relationships and thus further reinforcing a heterosexist ideology of relationships, I use the existing terminology regarding family to address the kinship connections within intersectional relationships because this is the only vocabulary available to discuss the connections I describe. Thus, the following discussion draws from Weeks (1991), who acknowledges that the continued use of the term “family” to characterize a multiplicity of relationships underscores the lack of available language to adequately describe significant bonds.

3. It is likely that the easy usage of these terms is related to location effects from sampling in the San Francisco Bay Area. This region is known for its support of gay male and lesbian liberation; the most recent example was the highly publicized 4,100-plus marriage licenses given to same-sex couples in San Francisco in February 2004. Thus, the attitudes and experiences voiced by a population drawn from this region are expected to reflect this unique context.

4. As I noted in the introduction, Warner (1991: 3–17) explains heteronormativity as “the institutions, structures of understanding, and practical orientations that make heterosexuality seem not only coherent—that is, organized as a sexuality—but also privileged.”

5. In 2004, Massachusetts became the first U.S. state to allow same-sex civil marriages.
California and Connecticut followed in 2008, but the right to marry was overturned by California voters by a narrow margin in the 2008 election and is still being contested in court. Currently, Massachusetts, Vermont, New Hampshire, Connecticut, Iowa, New York, and the District of Columbia allow same-sex marriage, while a few others permit civil unions and domestic partnerships. Civil unions and domestic partnerships do not provide same-sex couples with access to federal programs such as Social Security and citizenship. Those same-sex couples who enter legal civil unions are eligible for the same state rights as married couples, but these rights likely are not portable across state lines. Domestic partnerships are valid in the cities and states that offer them and confer various local rights, such as health care for registered partners, but are not portable and do not offer any federal protection (National Gay and Lesbian Taskforce 2011).

6. According to the Human Rights Campaign, as of 2011, gay and lesbian individuals have been granted second-parent adoptions in 16 additional states (Alabama, Alaska, Delaware, Hawaii, Iowa, Louisiana, Maryland, Minnesota, Nevada, New Hampshire, New Mexico, North Carolina, Oregon, Rhode Island, Texas, and Washington) at the trial court level, which means they were approved only in particular counties of the states. In these states, there remains a lack of affirmative case law (Human Rights Campaign [HRC] 2011).

4 GENDER COPS AND ROBBERS

1. As I discuss in the introduction, “queer” is another term that the participants of this project and scholars use to describe identities, theories, and analytical frameworks.

2. The term “sex-positive” refers to a pro-sex form of feminism that arose as an alternative to the anti-pornography stance within feminism. Pro-sex feminism supports sex as a potentially positive force in individual lives and celebrates diversity, differing desires and relationships structures, and individual choices based on consent (Queen and Comella 2008).

3. Unfortunately, Alec could not be interviewed for this study. The material from Charlene’s interview appears in the text only when it supports a theme that also was raised by other participants.

4. Cassandra is referring to her partner’s transition from female to male. When transgender people go through a transition, there is a range of possible changes they may be seeking to experience. For some, the transition is a mental shift from one gender to another. Others physically alter their bodies to resemble the felt identity through sex reassignment, taking hormones, or other changes. For a more in-depth discussion of transgender issues, see Stryker and Whittle (2006).

5 WHAT’S SEX GOT TO DO WITH IT?

1. This is not to deny that bisexuality is a recognized social and sexual identity. However, bisexuality is not free from the socially imposed definitions of identity. Typically, bisexuals are characterized according to binary categories, as well, and their sexual
orientation is regulated depending on the sex of a current romantic interest or partner. In addition, there is a subcultural aspect of same-sex partnerships being compulsory within the context of gay male and lesbian communities so that bisexuality is marginalized (Garber 1996).

6 THE PERSONAL IS POLITICAL

1. The concept of social location can be inferred from Berger and Luckmann (1967), who theorize that all knowledge and understanding emerges from a perception of the social world that originates from a social position. This social position takes into account various elements of an individual’s social identity, as well as the time and place in which she or he lives.

2. As I noted in earlier chapters, Rich (1980) defines compulsory heterosexuality as the dominant cultural expectation that women will be innately sexually attracted to men and men will be attracted to women. The norm of compulsory heterosexuality structures our social perceptions of all social relationships, including friendships.

3. As of 2011, six states and the District of Columbia (in 2010) have enacted marriage equality laws: Connecticut (in 2008), Iowa (in 2009), Massachusetts (in 2004), New Hampshire (in 2010), Vermont (in 2009), and New York (in 2011). In California, Colorado, Connecticut, the District of Columbia, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Maine, Massachusetts, New Jersey, New York, Oregon, Vermont, and Washington, same-sex couples can jointly petition to adopt statewide. A person can petition to adopt the child of her or his partner (called second-parent adoption) in California, Colorado, Connecticut, the District of Columbia, Illinois, Massachusetts, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, and Vermont (HRC 2011). According to the HRC (2011), gay and lesbian individuals have been granted second-parent adoptions in sixteen additional states (Alabama, Alaska, Delaware, Hawaii, Iowa, Louisiana, Maryland, Minnesota, Nevada, New Hampshire, New Mexico, North Carolina, Oregon, Rhode Island, Texas, and Washington) at the trial court level, which means the adoptions were approved only in particular counties of the states.

4. Several aspects of the intersectional friendship context set it apart from intergroup relationships that cross racial categories. First is the issue that homosexuality is not as visually recognizable as race. Hence, some straight people can be mistaken for being gay men or lesbians, whereas most white individuals are not assumed to members of racial-minority groups. Second, and more important for this particular sample of intersectional friends, is that many of the friendships predated an individual’s “coming out” as gay or lesbian. This is the case in nine of the twenty-six dyads included in the study. These cases suggest that an established relationship in some instances may provide a sufficient bond to withstand a shifting understanding of sexual orientation within friendship. In such instances, if the straight individual was truly homophobic, he or she likely would not have sustained a close friendship tie.

5. The sticker Paul referred to is a rainbow flag, a symbol of gay and lesbian pride and liberation.
6. Monique was referring to Matthew Shepard, a young gay man who was killed in a
grisly incident of gay bashing in Laramie, Wyoming, in 1998. The events of his death
and the resulting criminal trial were highly publicized and often controversial and
were dramatized in filmic and theatrical performances of *The Laramie Project*. Monique
also refers to the extreme and overt homophobia demonstrated by the Westboro
Baptist Church, established by Fred Phelps. Members of the church regularly demon-
strate at funerals at which the deceased are gay men. Members of the Westboro
Baptist Church picketed the funeral of Matthew Shepard, carrying signs that read
“God Hates Fags,” as well as other profane statements: see the website at http://

7. These interviews took place before the national focus turned to the struggle for same-
sex marriage rights in the United States. Thus, it was not part of the now rampant
public discourse, and none of the participants spoke about what would become the
major civil-rights push for same-sex marriage that began shortly after the interviews
ended.

8. **swish** defines itself as “the most fabulous gay-straight alliance (for adults) on the
planet!” The organization began as a resource for straight women who support gay
men but has since expanded to include heterosexual male members. The organiza-
tion is active in thirty-two states and four countries, and has over three hundred and
fifty followers on the Facebook social networking site: see the website at http://
www.swishpride.org.

7 FUTURE OF INTERSECTIONAL FRIENDSHIPS

1. Eight states have enacted nondiscrimination in employment acts that specifically
protect sexual orientation, and twelve states and the District of Columbia have en-
acted nondiscrimination in employment acts that specifically protect sexual orienta-
tion and gender identity (HRC 2011). In these states, there remains a lack of affirm-
tive case law. No federal nondiscrimination act has passed to date.

2. Same-sex marriage was made legal in the Netherlands in 2000; in Belgium in 2003;
in Spain and Canada in 2005; in South Africa in 2006; and in Norway and Sweden in

APPENDIX 2

1. Two of the interviewees in Los Angeles were members of a friendship dyad with a San
Francisco Bay Area resident. In addition, in my travels to Los Angeles, I located two
additional dyads that fit the criteria of the study and arranged to interview their
members. In two more cases, the participants had relocated to other parts of the
country, and I was fortunate enough to be able to travel to their new places of
residence to meet with them.

2. As noted, “queer” is a more political and inclusive term for sexual minorities. Of
those interviewees who identified as queer, one was a woman in a romantic relation-
ship with a transsexual man, and three considered more bisexual than lesbian.