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From the *Encyclopedia of Social Problems*
Jen Giesecking

Queer Theory

"Queer" is often used as an umbrella term by and for persons who identify as gay, lesbian, bisexual, intersex, and/or transgender, or by and for individuals who use the term as an alternative to LGBTI labels. Some find the term derogatory depending upon their race, class, personal experience, and also their generation. Recently, heterosexuals whose gender or sexuality does not conform to popular expectations have used the term "queer" to define themselves. Thus, queer theory is a framework of ideas that suggests identities are not stable or deterministic, particularly in regard to an individual's gender, sex, and/or sexuality. Queer theory is committed to critiquing and problematizing previous ways of theorizing identity. While heteronormativity assumes that heterosexuality and the relations of the binary masculine and feminine genders expected within it are secure and constant, queer theory is a discourse model that destabilizes the assumptions and privileges of secure heteronormative models of study and everyday life and politicizes and acknowledges the fluidity and instability of identities.

Queer theory is a part of the field of queer studies whose roots can be found in women's studies, feminist theory, and gay and lesbian studies, as well as postmodern and poststructuralist theories. In 1991, Teresa de Lauretis used the words "queer theory" to describe a way of thinking that did not use heterosexuality or binary gender constructs as its starting point, but instead argued for a more fluid concept of identity. The works of Michel Foucault and Judith Butler are often considered the founding texts of queer theory. Lauren

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Berlant, Michael Warner, and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick are also major early writers in defining queer theory.

Proponents of queer theory argue that it prompts the acceptance and understanding of a more complex reality in which we live. Queer theory provides scholars, activists, and others ways of thinking and talking about identity beyond simple binaries especially in fighting homophobia and transphobia, which are unreasoned fear and hatred towards homosexuals and homosexuality, and transsexuals, transsexuality, and transgender people, respectively. For example, when doctors perform surgery on intersex infants to select their gender, and GLBTIQ people are the targets of violence. Queer theory has often been used to study transvestitism, drag performance, the disparity between desire and gender, hermaphroditism, and gender identity disorder and gender corrective surgery. However, queer theory can be also be used beyond the realm of gender of sexuality; in particular when studying the politics of racial, ethnic, or class identities, scholars may wish to "queer the subject" by writing about these identities as fluid rather than as rigid or binary subjects.

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See also

Gender, Sex, Sexual Orientation

References

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