Dyke Methods: A Meditation on Queer Studies and the Gay Men Who Hate It

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Abstract: This essay examines critical responses to the author's 2015 book *Not Gay: Sex Between Straight White Men*, with a focus on claims about the illegitimacy of queer and feminist methods. Positing *Not Gay* as evidence of the proliferation of elitist pseudoscience at odds with the lived experiences of the gay general public, critics of *Not Gay* depicted a significant divide between "average gay men" and "Queer Theorists," the latter of whom they named as frivolous and out-of-touch feminists "obsessed with intersectionality." This essay uses these responses to examine white gay men's resistance to queer, feminist methods and to consider what this resistance tells us about the generative possibilities of dyke-centric queer methods.

In the late 2000s, when I was writing *Not Gay: Sex between Straight White Men* (2015), mainstream LGBT political discourse was dominated by aspirations for legal rights and bioevolutionary legitimacy (Duggan 2004; Spade 2015). The political future of lesbian, gay, and bisexual people seemed to hinge on the biological origins of same-sex desire, and considerable excitement was built around research projects that could provide evidence of these origins (Whisman 1995; Jordan-Young 2011; Walters 2014). Queer and feminist scholars were experiencing pressure to redefine interdisciplinarity as a partnership with neuroscientists and others who might deepen our understanding of the hormonal and genetic causes of "same-sex" desire—as if "same-sex" were a transparent concept. It seemed as if no one was paying attention to sociologist Vera Whisman, who, in her prescient 1995 book *Queer by Choice*, made the compelling case that "born this way" arguments typically serve gay men—politically and culturally—

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in ways that they do not serve queer women. And if people *were* thinking about the gendered implications of the sociobiology of sexual orientation, they were listening to evolutionary psychologists like Lisa Diamond, who explained women's sexual fluidity as a congenital condition, an evolutionary adaptation (2008).

It was in this context that I wrote *Not Gay*, a book about sex practices that, to my mind, begged for attention to the constraints of sociobiological accounts. Several sociologists have conducted empirical studies of sexual contact between straight-identified men (Anderson 2008; Anderson 2010; Reynolds 2015; Carrillo and Hoffman 2016; Silva, forthcoming). There was no urgent need for more empirical research on this subject. What had not yet been examined, however, were the cultural narratives circulating around straight white men's homosexual encounters and the rhetorical and material conditions that allowed white men's sex practices to circumvent the pathologizing gaze applied to men of color on the down low (Snorton 2014). Drawing on an eclectic archive of cultural materials and the tools of cultural studies, *Not Gay* investigated the stories people tell about why and how straight white men might behave homosexually. I drew on a broad theoretical and methodological repertoire—a synthesis of queer studies, cultural studies, sociology, and feminist theory. I wrote in a feminist tradition invested in exposing the myth of scientific objectivity by locating myself, and my utopian feminist longings, within the story of the research (Reinharz 1992). I followed the lead of critical race ethnographers by simultaneously studying up, down, and sideways as a white feminist dyke asserting her right to make claims about the meaning of homosexual contact between straight white men (Twine and Warren 2000). The entire book was infused with the queer impulse to forget my disciplinary training (in sociology), to draw on lowbrow and eclectic archives that make new ways of thinking possible, and to see what desire, humor, and rage might yield if allowed to run through my writing, unleashed and directed at straight white men (see Halberstam 2011).

I watched many hours of porn. I spent months trying to acquire the rights to reprint original photos of male sailors eating garbage out of each other's anuses during a navy initiation ceremony. I wrote in cabins in the woods where I laughed and cried at my own excited response to the opportunity to subject straight white men's sexual encounters to a queer, feminist analysis. The book was both a feminist "fuck you" to the persistent normalization and idealization of straight white men's bodies and sex prac-

tices, and an unexpected chamber in which my empathy for straight white men deepened.

Not Gay was read by far more people than I ever anticipated. Due to some savvy marketing on the part of NYU Press and the apparent salaciousness of the subject matter, the book received an unusual amount of media attention, with coverage by *New York* magazine, *Forbes*, *Cosmopolitan*, the *Guardian*, *Newsweek*, the *Huffington Post*, *Vice*, and *Salon*, and a number of reporters in Europe, Latin America, and the Middle East. A *Gawker* reviewer described news of the book's release as having "penetrated the internet" (Juzwiak 2015). The first printing of the book sold out within a few weeks of being published. Exemplifying the power of celebrity and social media, Amazon sales of the book skyrocketed following an Instagram shout-out from the actor James Franco, shown in a photo holding the book in his dressing room.

I was happy with the book's success, but became a bit anxious as I started to read the Internet comments that we are all warned never to read. If one of *Not Gay*'s basic arguments can be summed up in a sentence, it is that sometimes straight people engage in homosexual sex for heterosexual reasons, and therefore it is not especially useful—from a queer political perspective at least—to claim *all* homosexual encounters as signals of a repressed gay or bisexual identity. As I learned from the many hundreds of comments I read online, one particular demographic was especially outraged by this claim: white gay men. Within this avalanche of criticism of *Not Gay*, an unexpected archive of white gay men's reflections on "the broader problem with queer studies" had fallen into my lap. White gay men characterized the book as but the latest example of an alarming trend within queer scholarship. They explained that rather than offering useful, empirical evidence of the legitimacy and fixity of gay identity, *Not Gay* made false claims about male sexual fluidity without actually interviewing men, and in so doing, promulgated dangerous queer ideas vulnerable to cooptation by the religious right. Positing *Not Gay* as evidence of the proliferation of elitist, feminist-inflected, queer pseudoscience at odds with the lived experiences of the gay general public, critics depicted a significant divide between "average gay men" and "Queer Theorists," the latter of whom they named as frivolous and out-of-touch feminists "obsessed with intersectionality."

Here my aim is to use these responses as data, so to speak, to examine white gay men's resistance to queer, feminist methods of inquiry—partic-

ularly work produced from a dyke standpoint—and to consider what this resistance tells us about the generative possibilities of dyke-centric queer methods. But first, what *are* queer methods? While limited sustained attention has been paid to the details of queer research practice, those who have engaged the subject suggest that queer methods are:

1. intersectional (queer projects are designed to investigate the ways that imperialism, settler colonialism, white supremacy, poverty, misogyny, and/or cissexism give shape to queer lives and queer resistance) (Nash and Browne 2010);
2. intimate, reflexive, and/or collaborative, often anchored within the extant subcultural and political affiliations of the researcher (Ward 2008);
3. infused with the erotic, or marked by a conscious recognition of sex practices, bodies, and desires and their place within the presumably asexual realm of research (Newton 2000);
4. interdisciplinary, or comprised of humanistic approaches concerned with the particularities of cultural representation and discourse, social science approaches concerned with behavioral patterns, and hybrid methodologies (Nash and Browne 2010);
5. focused on fluid or "messy" categories, shifting classifications, and people and practices often illegible within prevailing disciplinary schemas (Ahmed 2006).

Queer methods can certainly offer us new research techniques, such as including an expansive list of genders on one's survey questionnaire. But queer methodology is also more than this; it is a praxis aimed at undoing prevailing assumptions about epistemic authority, legitimate knowledge, and the very meaning of research. If queerness is a willful orienting of oneself toward improper objects (Ahmed 2006) and a feeling of being "pulled" toward as yet unknown gendered and sexual possibilities (Muñoz 2009), then queer methods, too, are fluid and evolving, capable of transforming to keep pace with the ever-changing shape of anti-queer epistemic violence.

Hence, to pair the terms "queer" and "methodology"—the former defined by its celebrated failure to adhere to stable classificatory systems or be contained by disciplinary boundaries, and the latter defined by orderly, discipline-specific, and easily reproducible techniques—produces some-

thing of an exciting contradiction, a productive oxymoron. And to place dyke subjectivity at the center of queer studies—a field with many of its early roots in gay men's theorizations of their own history, art forms, and erotic attachments—is to push the queer project even further in the direction of counternormative research practice.

Perhaps it goes without saying that not all lesbian, gay, and bisexual people are excited by the contradictions and subversive possibilities posed by queerness as an intellectual project. A growing number of LGBT people view themselves as respectable citizens who are no different from their straight neighbors and are delighted by the ways that their homo- or bisexuality has become an increasingly normalized and inconsequential feature of their lives (Ghaziani 2011; Walters 2014). Queer studies projects that illuminate and critique LGBT people's investments in white supremacy and other forms of structural violence (Haritaworn, Kuntsman, and Posocco 2014), homonormativity (Duggan 2004), homonationalism (Puar 2007), and misogyny (Ward 2000) pose a direct challenge to the political worldview of many lesbian, gay, and bisexual people, who are likely to feel alienated from, and unrepresented by, the critical methodologies characteristic of queer studies. In this vein, I want to consider the ways that white gay men's alarmed commentary about *Not Gay* might signal not only their dislike of my particular book but also the way that the field of queer studies is viewed—by white gay men in particular—as a rogue discipline helmed by dykes and ruined by intersectionality.

Social Constructionism and Intersectionality: More Dangerous for Gay People than the Religious Right

The week that *Not Gay* was published, a handful of gay critics who had not yet read the book explained that they didn't like its premise. They argued that to allow men who have sex with men (MSMs) to identify as straight (and not gay or bi) is to collude in their internalized homo- or biphobia; it is to fail to recognize the power of the closet. Exemplifying the *I-haven't-read-it-but-I-don't-like-it* response were some remarks made by the popular white gay columnist Dan Savage:

> The men Jane Ward studied might not be gay—gayness could be ruled out in some cases—but straight-identified, married-to-women guys who have sex with other men are likelier to be bisexual, closeted or not,

> than they are to be straight, fluidity or otherwise. I'm going to get the book and read it with an open mind, of course, but the summary pushed out by NYU Press doesn't inspire confidence. (2015)

In interviews with journalists I tried to respond to these concerns by explaining that the book was not about a special subset or subculture of men who have sex with men; it was about the culture of white heterosexual masculinity more broadly, and how it produces a striking number of opportunities for *all* white men to touch each other's anuses and penises and to understand these encounters as nonsexual. I explained that if people *read* the book, they would see that it was not a sexological study of individual men's desires but a cultural studies investigation of the practices of heteromasculine institutions, like college fraternities and the military, that compel and justify intimate bodily contact between men as part of the process of producing heteromasculinity. I explained that I was not so interested in statistics about how many men had sex with men or whether they were (born) gay, bi, or straight. Instead, my book was about the cultural narratives that have been used to justify and dismiss several well-documented cases of sexual contact between straight white men in bathrooms, biker gangs, the military, and fraternities.

The critiques continued to roll in. Hundreds of mostly gay male but also bi-identified online commenters made some version of the same predictable, essentialist claim that any man who has ever made sexual contact with another man—or even has *the capacity* for this kind of contact—needs to be understood as bisexual or gay because "words have meaning" whether or not promoters of poststructuralist, queer, feminist studies are willing to acknowledge reality. Many of the critiques centered squarely on the illegitimacy of queer and feminist methods, which gay men described as "weak" or "flimsy" but also incredibly dangerous. Gay critics described queer methods as damaging to LGBT people, as damaging as the political rhetoric of the religious Right. Here's a sample of readers' comments posted in 2015 from one interview with Graham Gremore, published on the popular gay website *Queerty*:

> Ugh—Jane Ward strikes again with another volume of pop pseudoscience heavily marketed to the press with best click bait titles ever! Unfortunately, most empirical sociologists cringe because she is notorious for employing weak methodology shaped by the most extreme post-structuralist/queer theory. . . . Ward is a hardcore social construc-

> tionist who rejects any biological explanations for human behavior, especially when it comes to gender and sexuality. For her, there is no reality to sexual identities outside of a very extreme anti-capitalist, anti-normative politics, which the vast majority of people, gay and straight, would reject as nonsense. . . . Ward, just like the religious right, is motivated by a kind of faith-based denial of science—her faith being in Queer Theory—and allows her own ideology to trump the lived experiences and narratives of the vast majority of LGBT people.
>
> . . . She keeps chalking this up to a heteronormative culture, but what she really should be talking about is the homophobic culture and how that drives so many bi-oriented men into a life of forced heterosexual behavior. Good lord . . . I'd rather read Rick Santorum's prayer journal than this woman's "research." Pass.
>
> . . . Here's the truth about Queer Theory and everything affiliated with that nonsense: It's all bullshit. Basically, Queer Theorists like this idiot want to impose queerness on everything and anything they can. . . . As per morons like this dumb broad, gayness and bisexuality were created in Germany in the early 1900s, prior to that, there's never been gayness . . . which is bullshit. . . . Here's the question this dumb bitch along with those who think like her fail to answer: If sexuality is as fluid as they claim, then reparation therapy is in fact effective. . . . This is where none of these theorists . . . will go. Because then they have to endorse that Michelle and Marcus Bachmann are in fact correct in their premise and thus endorsed by these academics.

Commenters portrayed a sharp divide between "average gay men" and "Queer Theorists," the latter cast as social constructionist dupes who needed to get out of the ivory tower and interview average gay men about the realities of homosexual sex. Here, implicit charges of queer elitism—in which queer scholars deploy "nonsensical" methods that the gay majority would reject—are expressed in and through misogyny. The ivory tower queer scholar may be part of an intellectual elite, but she is also simply a dumb bitch. Gay male critics posited themselves as simultaneously smarter than the queer theorist, but also oppressed by her, her anticapitalist and antinormative politics understood to be as threatening to the prosperity and assimilation of gay men as the political work of Rick Santorum, Michele Bachmann, and other representatives of the religious Right.

Those of us engaged in queer scholarship might be tempted to imagine that heteronormativity is the major source of resistance to our work. And yet in many cases, queer research—especially when it is substantively intersectional and/or focused on the cultural, ethnoracial, and historical variability of same-sex encounters—finds its fiercest opposition from homonormative corners. While the biological sciences and/or the quantitative social sciences are well positioned to produce clear cut, legitimizing data to be used in support of claims for normalization and equal rights, humanistic and cultural studies methods, by contrast, often produce work that illuminates the mutability of sexual desires and subjectivities. Pushing beyond narratives of congenital homosexuality and singular gay oppression, queer studies projects also examine sexual agency and willful queerness, as well as interrogate the complicity of white, cis gay and lesbian people in the conditions of suffering experienced by people of color, women, bisexuals, and trans people. From the vantage point of white gay men, queer studies *does* share something in common with the political agenda of the religious Right: both projects pose a challenge to the biological essentialism now at the heart of gay rights claims, and both destabilize narratives of gay oppression, albeit with very different political aims. Gay men, it seems, feel attacked from all sides.

Hate Male: Gay Male Panic and the Lesbianification of Queer Studies

I reflected on gay men's sexism almost twenty years ago in my first published essay, "Queer Sexism: Rethinking Gay Men and Masculinity" (2000). I wrote it when I was twenty-four years old and spending a lot of time being called "fish" by gay male friends while we drunkenly danced together in the bars. Fast forward to 2015 and I found myself in receipt of dozens of outraged, mansplaining emails from gay male readers of *Not Gay*, each wanting me to know that I did not and could not understand male homosexuality because I am a woman, a feminist, and a "political lesbian" with a bias against white men. They took issue with my argument in *Not Gay* that straightness is not most productively defined as the absence of homosexual sex but as a fetish for heteronormativity and a deep feeling of being at home within heterosexual culture. They railed against my hardly original suggestion that we understand queerness not as a sexual identity organized around desire for "same-sex" bodies but as a collective, subcultural desire for gender and sexual transgression. And they hated my

method: my choice of white men as the subject of the study, my decision to be a dyke who writes about men, my feminist and critical race theoretical orientation, and my archive itself (cultural case studies instead of interviews with men). One email from a gay man named Adam stated:

> I actually went out of my way to find you on the net, and I've concluded one thing. You are bigoted, ignorant, and self-entitled with no redeeming qualities. Your little vendetta against hetero males of European decent is childish, sexist, and racist. Your left wing radicalism is hardly hidden, and completely nonsensical. . . . And yes, I'm aware you only point out white males in attempt to somehow demonize or defame them, due to your internally racist nature. Oh, and please stop claiming to be a representative for gay males. It's quite embarrassing. My sexuality is not a soapbox for you to preach your idiocy from.

Another email from a gay man named Jonathan read:

> You don't know what you're talking about because you aren't us. Your book is insulting and ignorant. Something Ann Coulter would write. Or at least love. But when you're talking about the men we sleep with, the ones you call straight, we know a bit more than you. Because they are more like us than you. To say that being straight is "wanting to be straight" would apply to most of us gay men. We all wanted that. You are not one of us. Please stop—Signed, All Gay Men

Another email from a gay man named Steve declared:

> It seems to me that the subtitle of your new book perhaps should have been, "Universalizing from my political lesbian subjectivity to little relevant consequence." Sorry, but plenty of us reject the trendy bisexual assault on gay male identity that your book is just a part of. . . . Well, you're entitled to your own subjectivity. Congratulations on your political lesbianism. (Pat on the head.) But you aren't entitled to my subjectivity or any other gay man's. No, sorry, but being gay wasn't a political choice for most of us and the label isn't meaningful only as a political identity, no matter how aggressively you try to erase any consideration of experiences that challenge your self-absorbed ideological imposition to the contrary. Good luck trying to bully gay men into your social constructivist extremism.[1]

Mirroring the comments on *Queerty*, the emails characterized me as a dan-

gerous enemy to all gay men, on par with conservatives like Ann Coulter. Again, it was not just my book that was the problem—it was what my book represented: the "trendy bisexual assault" on gay male identity, proffered by self-absorbed dyke bullies leading the queer charge with their social constructionist extremism. The emails from white gay men also conveyed a sense of white gay male vulnerability and fragility, a feeling of being under attack and in need of closing gay ranks and defending gay territory. *Not Gay*—a book in which I had consciously decentered gay men, even within the book's title—seemed to produce anxiety and outrage in gay men in large part because I had dared to state that the book wasn't about them.

The emails from gay men expressed anger not only that a lesbian had written a book about men's homosexual sex practices, but also that lesbians might have a different (more "political," more "socially constructed") experience of homosexuality, and that this *lesbian* experience was perhaps being privileged within queer studies. The emails held the telltale signs of backlash—not against me, but against the lesbianification of queer studies. Were dykes taking over queer studies? Were they daring to speak not just about themselves but about the meaning of queerness generally? Were feminist dykes trying to force gay men to think differently about the tenuous lines between gay, bi, and straight? Were dykes suddenly licensed to speak in ways that men could not? Perhaps this fear was best expressed by the same *Queerty* reader who referred to me as a "dumb broad" above. He posted another comment in the same thread in which he bemoans, "If a cisgender male were to present [Ward's arguments] as fact, feminists would be neutering him. Except . . . it's not a right wing zealot saying it. . . . She relies on post-structuralist jargon a la Judith Butler for cred. Again I say, dumb broad."

Also telling was Jonathan's email, in which he asserted that "most gay men" want, or have wanted, to be straight (and in which he signs off as "all gay men"). Responses like Jonathan's alluded to the widely popular narrative that no one would ever "choose" to be gay because doing so would mean a life of discrimination, and hence, we must all be born this way. Many gay men's responses to the book seemed to take for granted that being straight is always a better life circumstance than being gay, and from this premise, they argued that to allow straight men to have sexual contact with men and retain their straight status was to unfairly let them have their cake and eat it too. It was to give them a gift—the gift of heteronormativity—that they did not deserve. It was a gift that had not

been made available to gay and bisexual men. The vexed tone of so many of the responses to *Not Gay* seemed detached from an empathic concern for straight-identified men who were perhaps suffering in the closet. Instead, reminiscent of the actress Cynthia Nixon being forced by gay men to revise her statement that she "chose" to be a lesbian (Walters 2014; Ward 2015), I felt the weight of gay men's righteous demand that I identify any and every man engaged in homosexual sex as either bisexual or gay. Otherwise, the critics seemed to be saying, the entire political argument upon which modern gay rights claims are based would crumble. Here again, the absence within gay rights discourse of even a very basic queer and/or feminist understanding was striking. Utterly invisible was the possibility that straightness had been so damaged by sexism and the gender binary that it could be more miserable, especially for women and genderqueer people, than being queer. Queer and feminist ideas and methods may be flourishing within the academy, but responses from the "average gay men" who read *Not Gay* (or read the media coverage) made alarmingly clear that the interventions we are making in the academy have had little impact on gay men more broadly.

Gay male commenters on Amazon and elsewhere warned other gay men not to buy the book, proclaiming that the book's cover—an image depicting two tan, muscular, and shirtless young white male surfers sitting together on top of a truck, their hands almost touching—was bait to attract unsuspecting gay male readers who would encounter my feminism with no forewarning. An Amazon reviewer calling himself "Hu(man)" suggested in 2015 that readers not purchase the book but "borrow [a] library copy to sample how disparagement of white men currently masquerades as research in sociology." There is no doubt that some part of the story of gay men's uptake of *Not Gay* had to do with the book's marketing. University presses are increasingly interested in crossover books that reach both academic and popular audiences, and books about sex are particularly likely to be marketed with this goal in mind. Some of the snarky responses to the book by gay male readers suddenly made more sense to me when I looked up the Kindle edition of *Not Gay* on Amazon and was shown several examples of similar items purchased by people who bought *Not Gay*. All of those "similar items" were gay porn, both videos and novels. The possibility that gay men bought the book imagining that it would be a smutty novel about straight frat boys fucking each other helped to make sense of 2015 Amazon reviews like, "Fun until I hit the academic jargon early in the

first chapter" and "The first two pages were somewhat intriguing. . . . Then it's just a snooze fest."

Similarly, in the first months after *Not Gay* was published, I received calls from a reality TV producer interested in producing a show about straight men who have sex with men, an invitation to appear on the daytime talk show *The Doctors* (so that I could counsel wives about the normalcy of their husbands' homosexual experiences), and a request to help a *Playboy* journalist track down straight men who would be willing to talk about their desire for sex with men. The book had fallen into the hands of many people who had absolutely no interest in the queer, feminist, critical race critique at its heart. And yet, somehow, I sympathized with them. They just wanted to make trashy TV or get off on porn, and each interview with me (in the case of the TV producers) and each effort to actually read the book was a complete buzzkill.

Dumb, Dangerous, and Mentally Ill: Gay Men Diagnose Me

And speaking of buzzkills . . . When I think about gay men's desire to keep lesbian feminism out of gay eroticism, I am reminded of "no open-toed shoes" policies and other ways of denying lesbians (and transwomen) access to gay bars and clubs. The presence of lesbians in the bar was purportedly a palpable turnoff, an erotic buzzkill for gay men cruising one another. Lesbians were and are no strangers to being depicted by gay men as boring, overly serious (i.e., political), nagging, and asexual. While all feminists could be said to be killjoys (see Ahmed 2010), lesbian feminists have arguably perfected the art form. I raise this cultural and political divide to consider its intellectual corollary—to suggest that the more critical, feminist, and intersectional queer studies becomes, the less fun and hot it is for many white gay men (and the hotter it becomes for dykes).

I want to be very clear that *Not Gay* received thoughtful, productive criticism from many quarters, including from brilliant gay male scholars, and I have learned considerably from that feedback. But, by contrast, the *other* criticism—coming largely from disgusted and self-righteous gay men—conveyed an overwhelming lack of understanding of the book's basic theoretical aims and an even more overwhelming knee-jerk resistance to feminist and queer methods. For as much as gay men were put off by my use of (my own) dyke sexuality as a foil to gay male sexuality—a practice feminist scholars call reflexivity and gay male readers referred to as

"unnecessary personal anecdotes"—they were happy to try to imagine the personal reasons that a lesbian feminist like me would write a book about what they understood as their own turf: sexual contact between men. Gay male commenters described me as "someone who wets her panties at the prospect of brojobs" (*Queerty*), "dumb as a doorknob and locked in her tide of intersectionality" (*New York* magazine), and a "ridiculous . . . lesbian women's studies professor trolling man2man sex ads for over a decade. This woman has mental issues" (the *Huffington Post*). A gay man using the name "Lawrence Topping," the author of the following 2015 Amazon review of *Not Gay,* addressed my mental health most directly. His review reads:

> I'm a retired, gay/male clinical therapist, and I read this book. A profile. I believe the author, sometime in her youth, suffered an assault or was a victim of one of the many forms of abuse, at the hands of a straight, white male. I also believe she, subsequently, never effectively resolved this traumatic experience and, as a result, she carries its emotional damage with her wherever she goes, whatever she does. . . . And, now, she's written a book. This emotional disorder (PTSD) is evidenced by her biased outlook on the subject matter and, especially, through her unnecessary personal anecdotes.

Reflecting a long tradition of pathologizing both lesbianism and feminism as dangerous maladaptations to individual trauma, here my research was dismissed by a gay male therapist as the product of emotional damage.

Other gay male critics pointed to my lesbian ignorance of how penises work and my ostensibly blind faith in the possibility that sexual arousal can be shaped by social and cultural circumstances. For instance, a review of *Not Gay* published on *Gawker*, titled "That's Not How Dicks Work" and written by a white gay man (Juzwiak 2015), quoted the following passage from my book: "This investment in heteronormativity is itself a *bodily desire*; in fact, I believe it is *the* embodied heterosexual desire, more powerful than, say, a woman's yearning for male torsos or penises or a man's longing for vaginas or breasts" (Ward 2015, 35; emphasis in original). To this suggestion, the author of the review responded:

> Yeah, but that's not how dicks work. . . . By and large, men are more simple than she describes—I guarantee you that no straight dude has ever identified as someone who enjoys heteronormativity more than pussy

> or tits (that's another example of Ward arbitrarily choosing to impose *what men really mean* over what they project while still taking "straight" for an answer). The reason that many of us feel "born this way" is because your dick gets hard at *what your dick gets hard at*. (Juzwiak 2015; emphasis in original)

There was much I wanted to say in response: that getting off on "pussy and tits" is often the same thing as getting off on heteronormativity; that clits and dicks get hard at what they get hard at but that doesn't mean that bodies, by themselves, are the only stimuli making us hard; and that the popularity of the dismissive claim that "men just aren't that complicated"—most frequently used to silence women who want to hold men accountable for their behavior—is itself very telling. But each individual piece of criticism from gay men, and each reply I might have wished to give in return, was drowned out by the overwhelming chorus of gay male misogyny. It was difficult to take any one critique seriously when each sounded so similar to the others—from the guy who called me a "dumb broad" to the guy who offered "congrats on your political lesbianism" to the guy who informed me "that's not how dicks work." To digest it all, I began reading the hate mail to public audiences while giving lectures at universities and doing readings in bookstores. And I was, of course, met with love and solidarity by many feminist gay men who were as horrified by the responses as I was. "Oh god," they would say. "I'm *so* sorry. What's wrong with gay men?!"

The Urgency of Dyke Methods

What *is* wrong with gay men? While the characterization of queer studies as dangerous, self-absorbed, nonsensical, and frivolous is often presented as a gender-neutral disciplinary critique, the frequency with which it is leveraged by gay men against queer women—e.g., Judith Butler and her minions—tells another story, a story of sexist backlash against queer theorizing that decenters gay men. Consider, for instance, this comment from "Jacob23," published in 2015 on *Queerty* in response to Graham Gremore's interview with me about *Not Gay*:

> 100 years ago, academics in these fields would be dedicated to studying and resolving major social problems afflicting human society. Today, they are writing about how the gendered anus is represented in heter-

> onormative discourse on *Dancing with the Stars*. These people are not only a waste of space, but they draw away talent and energy of people who could actually improve the condition of the world. BTW, here's a sample of some of Jane Ward's other "scholarly works" . . . She seems obsessed with taking down heterosexuality, smearing gays as r@cists, promoting transgenderism, and using children to experiment with queer theory.

While the first part of the comment might be described as an expression of uninformed but reasonable curiosity about the value of examining popular culture, the second half of the comment makes crystal clear the conservative political investments never lurking too far behind these concerns. In this view, research that critically examines heterosexuality and racism, that promotes the rights of trans people, or that advocates for queer approaches to parenting constitutes a trendy obsession, an insult to real science. Again and again, queer intellectual projects are waved away as silliness, feminized through accusations that queer scholars—like uppity women everywhere—are making things too complicated, overly personal and particular. Real men, real gay men, aren't that complicated, their desires and erections are easily explained by straightforward science.

White gay men's response to *Not Gay* also suggests that these sorts of rancorous methodological critiques of queer, feminist work may also be triangulated with psychic impulses—in this case, gay men's thwarted sexual desire for heteromasculinity. *Not Gay* is a book that decenters gay men in its theorization of sexual subjectivity; but perhaps more infuriating for some gay readers, it is a book that describes erotic exchanges between men that are intensely desired by, but ultimately unavailable to, many gay men. The news that straightness desires straightness is indeed bad news for queers who fetishize heterosexual masculinity (and femininity). The virulence running through the above responses to *Not Gay* may, in fact, reflect the ways in which erotic disappointment is routed through various channels, including methodological critique.

As I pat myself on the head and reflect on my status as a stupid bitch with no business writing about gay men, I am reminded that the feature of queer-dyke scholarship most lambasted by gay men is one of its most fundamental contributions: as an antiessentialist and interdisciplinary project, it provides us with the tools to think about queer and hetero sexualities—their boundaries and meaning—without gay men (or any other

essentialized gender category) at the center of our thinking. Dyke methods are not about making a commitment to balanced ideas and crass versions of LGBT inclusivity; they are about investigating—with the Dyke's intersectional and interdisciplinary tools, and through the Dyke's analytic lens—all matters of gender and sexuality, including those that involve dicks.

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Notes

1. All of these emails were sent to me in 2015.

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