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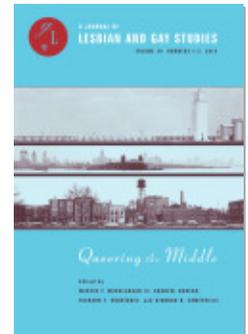
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## The Easy Way Out: Gays and Lesbians in Academia

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GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies, Volume 8, Number 1-2,  
2002, pp. 227-240 (Article)

Published by Duke University Press



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## THE EASY WAY OUT

### Gays and Lesbians in Academia

**John Champagne**

*Academic Outlaws: Queer Theory and Cultural Studies in the Academy*

William G. Tierney

Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage, 1997. xxiii + 186 pp. \$64.95 cloth,  
\$32.95 paper

*Poisoned Ivy: Lesbian and Gay Academics Confronting Homophobia*

Toni A. H. McNaron

Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1997. xiv + 234 pp. \$54.95  
cloth, \$19.95 paper

*Lesbians in Academia: Degrees of Freedom*

Beth Mintz and Esther Rothblum, eds.

New York: Routledge, 1997. 298 pp. \$78.99 cloth, \$24.95 paper

In his deservedly lauded book, *The University in Ruins*, Bill Readings asks a particularly challenging question of gay and lesbian academics: how has our “success” been made possible by the crisis of the postnational university?<sup>1</sup> According to Readings, when the processes of economic globalization render the nation-state no longer the primary site at which capital reproduces itself, the university no longer needs to fulfill the role of producing subjects for that nation-state. It thus opens its doors to new kinds of subjects, including so-called cultural minorities, and plays a role in their continuing formation. The three books under review are symptomatic of this shift in the university’s role in that their theme is a subject—the self-identified nonheterosexual academic—that might be said not even to have existed forty years ago.

*GLQ* 8:1–2

pp. 227–240

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As its title suggests, William G. Tierney's book brings together a discussion of queer theory and cultural studies to develop strategies for changing life in the academy for gays and lesbians. Apparently responding to charges often leveled at literary and cultural theory by its detractors—that it is unnecessarily obtuse, that it does not provide blueprints for change, that it is disconnected from real-world politics—Tierney attempts to use insights gained from what he terms post-modernism to read his experience as an out queer academic. He then presents ways to change the institutional culture of today's university. One of the goals of his book is “to outline how the lives we live and the matter of with whom we live help determine what counts for knowledge, which in turn becomes tied to institutional policies and framed as parameters of power” (xviii).

Tierney is trained in administration and policy analysis, and much of his book is devoted to strategizing ways to make the university a more gay- and lesbian-friendly place. In pursuing this goal, however, he criticizes what he terms the “assimilationist” perspective of writers such as Bruce Bawer and Andrew Sullivan. This perspective suggests that homosexuals are no different from heterosexuals and that “the way to convince heterosexuals that we are similar is to minimize differences and accentuate similarities with the mainstream” (48). While Tierney is “well aware of the cultural and political capital necessary to advance a particular cause” (he reassures us that he wears his Armani suit when he meets with his university's president), ultimately, he considers the assimilationist stance flawed (51).

According to Tierney, the problem with this stance is that it ratifies rather than disrupts repressive cultural norms. For Tierney, “the work of cultural studies is to investigate the mediating aspects of culture, to interrogate its grammar and decenter its norms” (53). Heterosexist norms necessarily silence gay and lesbian individuals and make invisible the unique talents they bring to the university (5).

Central to Tierney's strategy for disrupting heterosexist cultural norms is agape, “the Greek word referred to in the New Testament and used by philosophers to speak of a specific form of love.” Agape involves the search for community, a “fundamental value that speaks to the worth and importance of every individual.” For Tierney, then, the use to which queer theory and cultural studies ought to be put is “the advancement of democracy” in general and the making of the university into a more democratic place for sexual minorities in particular (175). One of the reviewers quoted on the book's dust jacket suggests that “every heterosexual person should read this book. It could be one small step in making for a more peaceful, happier world.”

The first part of *Academic Outlaws* presents reflections on queer theory and

cultural studies. The second part relies unproblematically on interviews with academics who self-identify as closeted. After invoking an anthropological model early in the book, Tierney apparently forgets the interrogation of method that is one of the hallmarks of contemporary anthropology and instead sets down the words of his subjects as if they were simply truthful, unmediated accounts of life in the academy for closeted queers. This part of the book is followed by an amateurish piece of “ethnographic fiction” that, once again, seems ignorant of the postmodern critique of realism and of that critique’s questioning of the “cultural politics” (one of Tierney’s favorite phrases) of realism’s erasure of the traces of a tale’s enunciation. Having invoked anthropology, Tierney might be expected to reflect on the position from which the anthropologist narrates. Instead, Tierney’s story stands without comment on its narrative structure, voice, and so forth. Perhaps this performance is intended to evoke in the reader a postmodern sense of schizophrenia. Such incoherence is rampant in this text. For example, Tierney explicitly states that he does not believe that identity is “fixed and determined” (54), yet three pages later he wonders “what percentage of the population is queer but is unable to acknowledge this fact even to themselves” (57).

The final section of the book offers strategies for “queering the academy” and, in the process, for “decentering norms.” These strategies, however, are primarily a matter of extending to gays and lesbians privileges already granted to straight members of the university community—domestic partner benefits, for example. While one would be hard-pressed to argue against such strategies, they hardly seem a sufficient response to Tierney’s call to “dediscipline knowledge.” Apparently, to be an “academic outlaw” means to demand your place at the table, despite Tierney’s claims to the contrary.

This section of the book might be helpful to liberal academics, students, and administrators who want to make their institutions more gay- and lesbian-, and not necessarily queer-, friendly. The advice Tierney provides, however, amounts to such commonsense dicta as “Know your own institutional culture” and “Welcome the support of straight allies.” Most tellingly, it avoids some of the complicated theoretical questions that queer theory raises, such as how nondiscrimination clauses that include sexual orientation might reinscribe the very categories of identity that queer theory seeks to displace and how the struggle for domestic partner benefits deflects attention from the more general problem of adequate compensation for one’s work. These questions are not merely theoretical; if taken seriously, they can inform decisions about appropriate strategies for change. For example, a program of “cafeteria-style” health care benefits designed to respond to the varied needs of all employees might both provide more equitable compen-

sation for one's work and evade the homophobic wrath of careerist state politicians, who threaten to cut an institution's funding any time it acts publicly in the interests of its queer community. Sadly, the most interesting assertion in this section of the book—that queer theory ought not yield to the temptation of disciplinary legitimation—is underdeveloped.

Despite its claims to the contrary, *Academic Outlaws* is symptomatic of the postnational university. It appears to have been cobbled together more to beef up a *vita* than to alter the terms of knowledge production in the university; its proposals are largely in keeping with the university's financially driven need to be "inclusive"; and in its recourse to experience, it perfectly suits liberal U.S. intellectual culture's insistent refusal to take seriously the poststructuralist critique of the subject.<sup>2</sup>

*Academic Outlaws* claims to be a "reframing of the university" that offers a program to change the social order (xviii). Unfortunately, it does not meet this admittedly daunting challenge. It is not intellectually rigorous, and its conclusions are often obvious. In its use of many sources not drawn from queer theory or cultural studies, it leaves the false impression that it is in some sense groundbreaking, as if the questions it raises had not already been asked, and in a more complex manner, elsewhere.<sup>3</sup>

Early in the book Tierney absolves himself of having to demonstrate any particular knowledge of queer theory or cultural studies in the academy. A watered-down version of the poststructuralist critique of disciplinarity is deployed to avoid the rigors of scholarship. For example, the demand that a book advance knowledge is dismissed as a holdover from modernism, as betraying a naive belief in knowledge as progress; in other words, a "postmodern" sleight of hand equates the requirement that academic work challenge established ways of knowing with the naive assumption that knowledge is accretionary (xix). The use of citations to demonstrate one's knowledge of what has been written on one's topic of research is dismissed as a flashing of intellectual credentials. Tierney's familiar call for academics to "move beyond the narrow confines of their discipline or institution and out into the public to engage the citizenry in specific ideas, knowledge, or debate" (18) willfully ignores that many scholars have problematized such concepts as community, the public, and the citizen.<sup>4</sup>

Apparently, what establishes Tierney's authority to speak on his chosen topics is his experience as a self-identified "academic outlaw." Here we have an excellent example of the *Oprah Winfrey Show* mentality, increasingly characteristic of the postnational university, whereby the sacrosanct nature of experience shores up one's authority so that one does not have to defend one's ideas rigorously

but can simply rewrite Descartes's famous dictum as "I experienced it; therefore I understand it."

Symptomatic of this faith in the authority of experience is Tierney's frequent recourse to personal narrative, as if queer theory and cultural studies had not already raised complicated questions about the category of experience and its constructed nature. Over the course of the book we become well acquainted with the life of Tierney and his partner, Barry—the circumstances of their meeting, their Thanksgiving dinners, trips to West Hollywood, hikes in the woods, and visits to the movies. (Apparently, Tierney is also not familiar with queer theory's critique of the heteronormative couple, a cultural and societal norm Tierney seems content to leave unquestioned.)<sup>5</sup>

One of the most interesting elisions in Tierney's text any discussion of the material construction of sexuality.<sup>6</sup> In his introduction Tierney tells us that he will not discuss "the economics of privilege" and issues of class. Yet he refers frequently to such terms as political economy, hegemony, ideology, production, and consumption as if these concepts could be understood apart from class-based analysis.

When academics bemoan such things as the difficulty of academic prose, as Tierney himself does when he demands that "our vernacular . . . be stripped down and [made] usable by the public and for an engagement that is usually absent in the academy" (18), they rely on naive, perhaps even dangerous assumptions: that there is some form of language whose meaning is transparent to all; that complicated concepts can be translated into vernacular language with no risk of altering their meanings; that all knowledge should be instrumental; that there is little value in difficulty—all "commonsense" positions that the university ought to challenge.

In a typical move, Tierney claims to second someone else's idea that "scholars and the general public as well far too often appropriate terminology when they have no theoretical or epistemological understanding of the terms or no investment in the theory" (27).<sup>7</sup> Ironically, this charge can be leveled at Tierney himself. Despite its alleged recourse to postmodern theory (a phrase Tierney tells us it is not his purpose to define), *Academic Outlaws* seems unaware of such familiar themes as the critique of the intentional subject, Derrida's deconstruction of the metaphysics of presence (a metaphysics Tierney symptomatically reproduces in his repeated call for oppressed peoples to find their "voice"), and Foucauldian and feminist critiques of visibility. Its claim—again borrowed from someone else—that cultural studies has not reflected on "the nature of pedagogy or the structure of academe" (15) is startlingly ignorant.<sup>8</sup>

In his account of identity formation Tierney warns against “the dour straightjacket of orthodox Marxism or Freudianism that believes individuals or groups have little possibility for controlling their lives” (24). It is difficult to know how to respond to such a gross overstatement. Neither Marx nor Freud ever made any such claim. Both proletarian revolution and the talking cure assume some degree of agency. One can only wonder if Tierney has actually read Marx and Freud or is instead relying, as he often does in *Academic Outlaws*, on secondary sources like his own.

Who is the audience for this book? Clearly, it is not anyone already familiar with queer theory and cultural studies. The book reads as either a textbook for undergraduates deemed incapable of reading primary sources or as a primer for on-the-go liberal administrators interested in increasing their fluency in the latest academic issues so that they can demonstrate their commitment to the university in its present, postnational guise.

Like Tierney’s study, Toni A. H. McNaron’s *Poisoned Ivy* combines autobiographical reflection with analysis of material culled from interviews. Rather than focus on closeted academics, however, McNaron sought out information from 304 lesbians and gays who had worked for fifteen years or more at a North American college or university. Unlike Tierney, McNaron includes appendixes detailing how she collected and organized her data. Obviously, this courtesy makes it easier for readers to evaluate the scope and method of her study. She also quotes at length from her respondents, enabling readers to propose alternative interpretations of the data. More modest in its aspirations than *Academic Outlaws*, *Poisoned Ivy* presents a somewhat more nuanced, less self-aggrandizing portrait of the gay or lesbian academic.

McNaron’s project is to develop a portrait of life in the academy for self-identified gays and lesbians, out and closeted. She organizes her study around three aspects of academic life: teaching, relationships with colleagues, and research. While some readers might find the work intellectually “thin” and undertheorized, and the conditions she describes unremarkable, McNaron makes it clear from the outset that her intended audience is broad, including not only heterosexual, lesbian, and gay faculty but “department chairs or heads, collegiate deans, vice presidents and presidents, governing boards, legislative bodies, and alumni” (7). An unabashed liberal humanist calling for a celebration of sexual orientation, McNaron seems to have little desire to alter the university beyond making it a more welcoming place for gays and lesbians. Her study is even more overtly autobiographical than Tierney’s, though less cloying, perhaps because her tone is far less self-satisfied.

Admittedly, one might feel empathy for the many self-identified lesbian and gay academics in McNaron's study who have had to struggle to maintain their careers while being true to their sexual identities. Reading the hefty citations McNaron provides from her subjects—largely horror stories from the bad old days of unrepentant academic homophobia—even gives the reader a voyeuristic pleasure similar to that evoked in the sharing of academic gossip. Readers who self-identify as queer, however, will find her unreflective commitment to identity politics and her simplification of issues of identity vexing. McNaron, a teacher of English and American literature, informs us that she eagerly integrates her “lesbian perspective” into her pedagogy (33). For example, she tells her students the “truth” of the homosexuality of certain canonical writers (34). Queer theory has rendered problematic both the stable sense of identity on which a “lesbian perspective” presumably depends and the easy equating of homosexual behavior with a contemporary gay or lesbian identity. Writers such as Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick have provided remarkably nuanced explorations of figures like Walt Whitman that make it virtually impossible to assert without caveat that the poet “was gay.”<sup>9</sup>

What it might mean to be out in one's classroom is treated by McNaron as if the answer were self-evident: apparently, being out means declaring one's current sexual orientation to the class. As a teacher of reading and writing whose primary goal is to complicate students' initial interpretations of the texts they read, I have difficulty imagining an instance in which it would be pedagogically appropriate to say something like “From my perspective as a gay man, I . . .”—the kind of locution McNaron frequently endorses. First, I tend not to make my interpretation of a text the focus of class, so the revelation of my reading is less pedagogically urgent than that of my students; second, I do not equate “being” with “knowing”; third, I believe that identity itself is produced discursively, contingently, contradictorily, and through historically specific processes of interpellation and subject formation such that it is difficult to say “I am” anything; fourth, I recognize that there can be discontinuity between the ways I self-identify (even contingently) and the ways I am identified by others. Reading *Poisoned Ivy*, I am left wondering if in fact I am out as McNaron defines it, and if it really matters one way or the other. Clearly, being out matters to the personal happiness of some of the academics McNaron interviews. But, like *Academic Outlaws*, *Poisoned Ivy* is sometimes too steeped in the language of the self-help movement to analyze critically the information it has gathered.

Symptomatic of this investment in self-help culture is McNaron's failure to interrogate the terms of autobiography. Like Tierney's book, *Poisoned Ivy* ignores feminist work on the constructed nature of experience and the presentation of

experience through personal narrative.<sup>10</sup> It is surprising that someone trained as a literary scholar should be inattentive to matters such as the rhetorical figures deployed in narratives of oppression. Like Tierney's, McNaron's work is made possible by an untheorized faith in the power of "voice"—this time, in the guise of memory—to liberate gays and lesbians from the constraints of heteronormativity. As a work of scholarship, then, McNaron's text is only slightly more intellectually convincing than Tierney's. For queers in particular, it seems to offer little new knowledge.

Unlike *Academic Outlaws* and *Poisoned Ivy*, Beth Mintz and Esther Rothblum's *Lesbians in Academia* provides both personal narrative and engaging analysis. Mintz and Rothblum begin their book with goals similar to those of Tierney and McNaron: "We wanted to provide a variety of accounts of academic life, lesbian style. We were interested in what it means to be a lesbian in a college or university setting. How being closeted or out affected the personal and professional lives of academic lesbians" (3). Interestingly, however, they do not assume that what it means to be lesbian in the academy is self-evident to the twenty-nine women, working in disciplines ranging from nursing to communications to religious studies, from whom they solicited narratives for their anthology. Following these narratives, then, the editors provide eight essays—written by women working in a variety of disciplines—that analyze them. This allows *Lesbians in Academia* to raise questions, not taken up by the other two books, about race, age, class, and the challenge queer theory might pose to lesbian identity. As a result, it has an intellectual richness that the other two books lack (not to mention a first-rate index that suggests this richness).

The sometimes deeply personal narratives have been crafted by their authors into brief, self-contained essays that, despite the constraints of the genre of memoir, are often witty, well written, and sophisticated. As a whole, the essays convincingly portray working conditions in the academy today. Much of what the writers describe will be dishearteningly familiar to anyone, gay or straight, who inhabits the university. However, out academics do face certain particular idiosyncrasies: colleagues who tell homophobic jokes; mentors who discourage junior faculty from publishing in queer studies; straight students who think any queer text on a syllabus is one too many or who expect everything that comes out of a teacher's mouth to be from her "lesbian perspective" (55); gay and lesbian students who demand an inappropriate level of mentoring or who "think that their personal experiences are universal and general to queer people" (49). While many of these experiences will be familiar to out academics, many of the essays are so

elegantly written that reading them is a pleasure, and the sophistication with which they take up the issues that confront lesbians in the academy make the anthology one that I might recommend to straight colleagues interested in some of the labor conditions that queer professors face.

So engaging are many of these narratives that it is difficult to single out particularly compelling ones. Nancy Goldstein's essay is both theoretically sophisticated and accessible, not to mention laugh-out-loud funny. It should be required reading for all graduate students, and its coda about whether or not to come out in class is savvy in a way that most discussions of this question are not. Goldstein warns that the gesture of coming out can appear "confessional rather than assertive" and can reinforce students' deeply held beliefs that everyone is either straight or gay (87–88). Sally O'Driscoll's piece suggests that the institutionalization of women's studies has not always been accompanied by greater acceptance of lesbian scholars. Jennifer Rycenga's contribution is unique in that it treats the personal essay not as autobiography but as an opportunity to elaborate lovingly her erotic attachment to women intellectual figures such as Antigone and Rosa Luxemburg. Stacy Wolf and Jill Dolan offer a smart analysis of the problems caused by institutional policies that proscribe lesbian student-teacher partnerships. These essays show academic memoir at its best because they use personal experience to persuade us to reexamine our ideas about life in the academy.

The eight essays that discuss the personal narratives are wildly uneven. While they claim to be analytic, several are primarily uninteresting descriptive summaries of the narratives. Perhaps most disappointing is the essay "Lesbians, Class, and Academia." After noting the personal narratives' relative silence on issues of class, and offering the important caveat that "if unchallenged, heterosexual practices" such as the faculty-wife syndrome "will simply be transferred to lesbian relationships," the writers do little more than call for academics from working-class backgrounds to come out as working-class. Committed to a politics of visibility and voice, the writers call for class analysis without specifying what it might entail. They seem especially uninterested in Marxism and unaware of attempts to theorize the class valences of contemporary forms of gay and lesbian identity.

However, this section of the book does contain two remarkable essays that critique aspects of the personal narratives. Marcia C. Gonzales notes that "there is some very strong evidence within this collection of writings that lesbians are being coopted into the academy. Their work in queer theory and gay and lesbian studies is not filtering broadly into the curriculum but [is being] ghettoized and tokenized

into marginal spaces” (235). Noting that the obsession with coming out distracts lesbian academics from the work of teaching about difference, Gonzales calls for broad curricular change that both questions “how sexual difference interacts with diverse cultural signals and norms” and analyzes how homosexuality is conceived of and assigned meaning in diverse communities (239). For Gonzales, “the legitimation of sexuality is paramount to challenging homophobia” (238). She suggests that if queer theory is to call into question existing structures of knowledge, it should not simply be treated as subject matter in individual courses or ghettoized in a minor, major, or certificate program; rather, every course should be queered. Given the way academic disciplines regulate the production of knowledge, we cannot have it both ways; one path works to foreclose the possibility of the other.

Roxanne Lin’s essay also offers a rigorous critique of the anthology, working to make available for discussion, for example, how the genre of personal narrative limits what can and cannot be written about lesbians in the academy. Unlike Tierney, Lin has a finely tuned sense of the poststructuralist critique of the intentional subject. She is interested in exploring how a location such as the academy produces particular kinds of subjects. She asks us to take seriously the possibility that the academy hinders one from being queer: “If these narratives suggest that in order to survive within academia one’s intellectual commitments must keep the prevailing beat rather than shift the accent to hear another combination, then what purpose is served by supposedly different [queer] embodiments?” (247). Lin does not reiterate the tired call to abandon intellectual work for direct political action. She does, however, problematize the suggestion that all we need to do as queers is to become more visible and vocal in the academy. Her analysis implies that we must be vigilant in our attempts to interrogate how the institutional context in which we operate circumscribes what can be said and done. This project once went by the name of deconstruction. Far too many gay and lesbian academics seem to take the easy way out of the challenge posed by critical theory, allegedly disrupting academic discourse with personal narratives—of coming out, for example—that are easily co-opted by the postnational university and its hunger for new kinds of subjects.

*Lesbians in Academia* ends with two essays that explore the impact of queer studies on lesbian studies. One is positive in its appraisal of queer theory; the other, negative. Referencing a poststructuralist critique of “narrative, experience, and the unified authenticity of the subject” (264), Lynda Goldstein uses queer theory to suggest that “to the extent that the lesbian polis, were there such a thing, constructs lesbian, it also polices its borders, maintaining what is/isn’t subsumed under the category. It sets up defenses. It seethes with righteous indignation.”

tion when . . . gay male theorists seem to ignore or erase it” (266). For Goldstein, *queer* is—or ought to be—a verb that seeks to “cut across all [this] nonsense of identities as valuable (and reliable) conveyors of whatever sexual practices, affectional relations, or living arrangements we might make with others” (267).

Sheila Jeffreys’s defensively reductive critique of queer theory symptomatically reproduces the version of lesbian studies Goldstein so cogently interrogates. It is a distressingly familiar attempt to separate the real lesbians from the fashionable ones, the true feminists from the sexual liberals, the healthy homosexuals from the gender fetishists, the authentic lesbian body from the postmodern cyberqueer. According to Jeffreys, lesbians have a set of interests, culture, and history of their own that must not be confused with those of gay men. In what might be construed as a felicitous typographical error, a reminder of the phony lesbians lurking among us, a Freudian slip, or a vigilant act of unmasking, Jeffreys even refers to lesbian theorist Kate Davy as “he” (274).

Jeffreys’s essay replicates all of the maneuvers of the lesbian sex wars of the 1980s, queer theory now standing in for anticensorship feminism. Poor Gayle Rubin is doubly damned, as she is apparently both an unrepentant queer theorist and a traditional sexual liberal (277). Is it worthwhile at this late date to point out that Jeffreys’s argument is illogical? If, as she argues, there is such a thing as lesbian specificity, then lesbians cannot possibly be subsumed “into a variety of gay men” (277).

Interestingly, Jeffreys does not—perhaps because she cannot—define that lesbian specificity. For Jeffreys, “lesbian feminism starts with the understanding that the interests of lesbians and gay men are different in many respects because lesbians are members of the political class of women” (269). Leaving aside an interrogation of the inexact use to which the terms *interest*, *political*, and *class* are put here, one might still notice that Jeffreys’s starting point is not lesbian specificity but the specificity of women. Apparently against her own stated intentions, Jeffreys makes lesbians disappear into the category of women at the very moment when she insists that they constitute a group with a distinct—presumably, distinct from some other women’s—culture and history.

In contradistinction to Tierney’s and McNaron’s accounts, the best essays in *Lesbians in Academia* invite us to recall Readings’s warning that many universities are highly “interested” in gays and lesbians today and that we need to examine that interest critically. Given that all three works present personal narratives, I will close with a tale of my own. I recently attended a queer studies conference during which a participant from an Ivy League university complained repeatedly about being “exploited” by his institution because he had to do too much for the queer

cause. I confess that I have little patience with queer, gay, and lesbian academics who refuse to examine the relatively privileged positions they often occupy, both inside and outside the academy. If being exploited means having a one-two teaching load and offering queered courses on a repeated basis, I say, "Exploit me, please!"

Many scholars working in queer theory today will never have the opportunity to offer such courses, to teach and advise graduate students, or to develop colleagues with whom to share their work. All three of these books speak of the personal isolation that gay and lesbian academics sometimes feel when, say, colleagues refuse to acknowledge their partners. Almost no one writes with any passion, however, about the debilitating effects of the intellectual isolation that often accompanies being the only queer scholar on campus. These writers seem to make the rhetorical choice to present themselves as gay or lesbian first and intellectuals second. Given the general anti-intellectualism of life in the United States and elsewhere—an anti-intellectualism that flourishes both inside and outside the university—this failure to discuss in detail the conditions that impact one's scholarly work is disturbing. What remains underexplored in these studies are the ways in which the university's willingness to allow queers to inhabit token positions has tamed and contained our work—not by making us conform to so-called academic discourse, which these days is flexible enough to allow for a variety of personal musings, but by ghettoizing us such that we have no colleagues who can challenge us to examine the limitations of our critical positions.

"There are times in life," Foucault writes, "when the question of knowing if one can think differently than one thinks, and perceive differently than one sees, is absolutely necessary if one is to go on looking and reflecting at all."<sup>11</sup> There may be no better way for the university to rid us of the urge to challenge the current conditions of knowledge production than by welcoming us to come out but failing to supply us with the resources—teaching opportunities, books and journals, colleagues willing to respond to our work with care—to go on reflecting queerly. For example, one contributor to *Lesbians in Academia* tells us that "the course in which to come out was logically my critical theory course, because positioning oneself in relation to texts is essential to my critical stance and my pedagogy" (102). For this writer, however, this kind of "situating the subject" means simply announcing a string of identities, such as "I am a white, middle-class lesbian." Here we again see the tiresome equating of being with knowing—and in the name of queer critical theory! Such a hat trick is maddeningly and familiarly reductive in its conflation of subjectivity and identity, in its equating of specifying an identity with historicizing that identity, and in its blindness to the fact that under-

standing one's positioning involves a complicated and rigorous attempt to calculate and make visible the interests that speak through the subject as she is situated.<sup>12</sup>

Perhaps what we need most urgently from studies of the queer academy today is an analysis of how our alleged acceptance might lead us merely to replicate symptomatically some of the very policies, hierarchies, and structures of knowledge that we claim to critique. Offering personal narratives of our exploitation or "suffering" is not sufficient.<sup>13</sup> As the burgeoning market for "scholarly" memoir proves, the postnational university is eager to let us trade the psychiatrist's couch for the pages of a tell-all book. What kind of gain this represents, and for whom, remains to be articulated.

### Notes

1. Bill Readings, *The University in Ruins* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1996).
2. Tierney's use of the term *subject* will be jarring to anyone even vaguely familiar with critical theory; for example, the clause "as subjects, groups define their own reality" (76) is utterly at odds with any version of queer theory with which I am familiar.
3. See, to cite just two works on queer theory in the academy, John D'Emilio, *Making Trouble: Essays on Gay History, Politics, and the University* (New York: Routledge, 1992); and George E. Haggerty and Bonnie Zimmerman, eds., *Professions of Desire: Lesbian and Gay Studies in Literature* (New York: Modern Language Association of America, 1995). For an excellent series of essays on queers in the academy that were published the same year as Tierney's book, see Thomas Foster, Carol Siegel, and Ellen E. Berry, eds., *The Gay '90s: Disciplinary and Interdisciplinary Formations in Queer Studies* (New York: New York University Press, 1997).
4. See Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, 2d ed. (London: Verso, 1991); and Craig Calhoun, ed., *Habermas and the Public Sphere* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1992).
5. For a critique of the figure of the couple see Leo Bersani, "Is the Rectum a Grave?" in *AIDS: Cultural Analysis, Cultural Activism*, ed. Douglas Crimp (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1988), 197–222.
6. See David T. Evans, *Sexual Citizenship: The Material Construction of Sexualities* (London: Routledge, 1993).
7. Tierney cites here Ben Agger, *Cultural Studies As Critical Theory* (London: Falmer, 1992).
8. Tierney cites here Henry Giroux, "Doing Cultural Studies: Youth and the Challenge of Pedagogy," *Harvard Educational Review* 64 (1994): 278–308. For cultural studies analyses that examine the structure of the academy see Bruce Robbins, ed., *Intellec-*

- tuals: Aesthetics, Politics, and Academics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1990).
9. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985).
  10. See Joan W. Scott, "Experience," in *Feminists Theorize the Political*, ed. Judith Butler and Joan W. Scott (New York: Routledge, 1992), 22–40; Adrienne Rich, *Arts of the Possible: Essays and Conversations* (New York: Norton, 2001), esp. 106–14, originally published in 1996; and Biddy Martin, "Lesbian Identity and Autobiographical Difference(s)," in *Life/Lines: Theorizing Women's Autobiography*, ed. Bella Brodzki and Celeste Schenck (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988), 77–103.
  11. Michel Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Pantheon, 1985), 8.
  12. On this tendency in certain feminist circles to equate specifying with historicizing see Christina Crosby, "Dealing with Differences," in Butler and Scott, *Feminists Theorize the Political*, 137.
  13. I do not deny that some queer academics labor under less-than-ideal conditions or that institutional homophobia can be both personally and professionally disabling. Obviously, however, there is suffering, and there is suffering. We need to analyze critically why, for example, all three of these books were published in the same year. What might this fact suggest about the position of the gay, lesbian, or queer academic today?