Queer Political Representation: A phenomenological approach

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Introduction

In this chapter I propose a new way to study political representation by drawing in phenomenology and queer theory. How do experience and orientation(s) shape the work of a political representative? I draw primarily from the work of Sara Ahmed, Iris Marion Young, and Simone de Beauvoir ((Ahmed 2006; de Beauvoir 2011; Kruks 2008; Young 1990)) to develop a phenomenological methodology to explore the process of representation in greater detail. My project bridges together functionalist perspectives of feminist institutionalism and phenomenology of affective political theory: how do participants experience democratic representation? In what ways are they oriented towards specific policy issues and frameworks, barred from traveling down certain representative paths, and given space in the political institution to create change? In this dissertation I seek to explore the ways that institutional changes aren't sufficient for a "politics of disorientation". In order to bring about "world-building representation", I argue that we must account for the ways that heteronormativity functions in politics.

I argue that phenomenology provides more analytically sound ways to grapple with the role of experience and embodiment within politics. I use the first section of the chapter to explore the ways that phenomenology can be used to study political representation. In the second section, I draw from specific examples in LGBTQ politics in the United Kingdom to present several ways one can use a queer phenomenological approach to study LGBTQ representation. In particular, I study the ways MPs articulate their experiences in maiden speeches and other public statements in parliament. In the final section of the chapter, I make a case for "world-building representation", which draws on feminist and queer theories of imagination and a critical posture towards politics in order to create a world free of sexism, racism, homophobia, and transphobia.

This chapter, and the larger dissertation, directed at anyone who studies political representation. A phenomenological approach, even a queer one, can be applied beyond queer politics to study other marginalized groups. Additionally, the emphasis on experience and

embodiment necessary for a phenomenological methodology gives researchers better purchase on the slippery and complex questions about current crises in democratic institutions and legitimacy. Scholars familiar with the logic and methods of feminist institutionalism will find that phenomenology is not much of a stretch as the two approaches share some intuitions. For those scholars, it may be helpful to think of the broader dissertation as a study of institutions, with a focus on representation.

Queer Phenomenology and Political Representation

My dissertation begins with the assumption that systems of political representation are embedded within the broader social and state context—in particular, I am arguing that representations are influenced and guided by shared values or norms around gender, sex, and sexuality. The experience of being a political representative cannot be disconnected from the experience *outside* of political institutions. In an effort to hold these many places and norms together, I use phenomenology to study the experiences of political representation for LGBTQ people. In this section I outline the basic framework of queer phenomenology.

Hanna Pitkin's work, *The Concept of Representation*, has served as the foundational text for empirical studies of political representation for the past five decades (Pitkin 1967). In it she offers a seemingly simple definition of representation: making present that which is, in some way, not present. From this definition we can infer that representation is about objects, seen and unseen, and the practices which induce their visibility to a broader audience. We can also infer that there may be multiple audiences: perhaps the originators of whatever is being re-presented and those who are witnessing the re-presentation. Finally, Pitkin's study of representation implies a temporality which is neither linear nor unidirectional. A critical reading of her work demonstrates that representation requires the pre-existence of the object to be re-presented and the time necessary for that re-presentation to circle back, and inform, the original object.

Rather than turning to Pitkin's work to attempt to re-theorize it, a task already undertaken by other scholars, I draw inspiration from Pitkin's mentions of time, presentation, objects, audiences, and intentionality to connect the theory of political representation to the philosophy

of phenomenology. In particular, I analyze representation as a process of interactions with objects, time, and space. I also draw from other feminist phenomenologists and queer theorists to support my claims. Phenomenology is a theory of how our consciousness perceives and interacts with the lived-world (Merleau-Ponty 1956) but it can also be adapted as a method of perceiving and studying the political world. I draw out this methodology from Ahmed's work and apply it to political representation.

Originally developed by Husserl in the early 1900s, phenomenology has grown to become its own area of philosophic inquiry. Phenomenologists stress the connection between our consciousness and our experiences with the lived-world. Issues of psychology, embodiment, and transcendence were variously important to different phenomenologists over time and the method has been used to study many aspects of the human experience. Unlike other branches of philosophy, phenomenology refutes the assertion that there is an ideal form, or essence, lurking behind our perceptions of the world. Rather, a phenomenologist argues that it is our perception which makes the object into itself—in other words, the act of "appearing" in order to be perceived is the *essence*.

In *The Second Sex*, Beauvoir offers her own version of phenomenology which emphasizes embodiment and power. Beauvoir studies the ways that being engendered as a "woman" creates a unique and restricted sense of self, and the world. She argues that the immanence of the woman's body prevents her from transcendence—this is not a shortcoming of the female sex (the Other) but rather an outcome of the sex-gender system. The first half of the book is spent describing in great detail the manufactured nature of this system and the ways that it places women in subordinate positions to men.

Her chapter "The Lesbian" is particularly useful for illustrating phenomenology as a method for studying the relationality implicated in Western sex-gender systems (2011, 417–36). Beauvoir describes a variety of ways that lesbians understand themselves and the objects of their desire—but in each description, the subject in question is confronted by the *limits on subjectivity and agency* which are enforced by sex-gender systems, what Butler has called the heterosexual matrix (Butler 2006). Lesbians were forced into categories derivative of maleness

(the invert, the true homosexual) because the world interacted with them as objects, but they could not engage with the world in a meaningful or change-making way. And so, we are left with cultural narratives of lesbians wanting to "be men" or being confused, when in reality, it is society which prevents the lesbian from existing freely on her/their/his own terms.

I adopt a queer feminist phenomenological frame in my own work to ask how political representatives are limited in their own subjectivity and agency by the very system of political representation in which they operate. In what ways do our shared cultural ideas and understandings of *politics* and *representation* shape how representatives choose to act? My dissertation uses queer theory to take a unique perspective on political representation: emphasizing the temporality of politics and using queer theory to critique linear, progressive modes of marginalized group participation in democracy.

One key analytic concept in phenomenological analysis is that of time and/or history. Queer feminist theories underscore the particular type of futurism in heteronormative societies. Some call it reprofuturity or chrononormativity (Freeman 2010; Mason 2018). Both concepts describe the emphasis on heterosexual, biological reproduction as the desirable end-point for our lives. Freeman's concept of chrononormativity further situates the problem in the context of capitalism, arguing that systems of power structure lives to be "most productive"—she identifies quotidian objects like calendars, clocks, schedules, time zones, etc as forces which become "somatic facts". In other words, we begin to experience *time* as part of our embodiment (4-10).

Chromonormativity shows how gender, sex, and sexuality are all functions of time, as well as reinforcing the institution of "time". Gender in a heteronormative world doesn't exist independent of time—becoming a woman or a man is marked by how the individual relates to time passing, and how they mark their own time. This was a key point to Beauvoir's ideas of women's embodiment.

In today's world, professional women may receive comments from family and friends that her "biological clock" is ticking—in this context the woman's body literally comes to represent the passage of time and if she wants to be a good woman (e.g. become a mother) she must accept

time as a fact preserved in her body and respond appropriately. Queer people may be told that they will never find fulfilling relationships, or that they need to "grow up", which are both coded language for the need to straighten out their lives.

How does time connect with political representation? The core argument in my dissertation is that substantive representation is impossible, and undesirable, for LGBTQ groups in existing democratic systems. Marginalized groups do not experience state-time in the same way as dominant groups and the definition of substantive representation, acting *for* a constituency or group, emphasizes a one-time event. By contrast, world-building representation moves beyond the framework of problem-solving, rights-based approaches, and emphasizes imagination and creativity as tools of the representative.

In addition to time, and the norms around how our lives should be paced, space matters for political representation. A spatial analysis of experience can be as broad or narrow as serves the researcher. In Queer Phenomenology, Ahmed explores the space of the family home as it constructs queer subjects. In her discussion of race, she focuses on broader examples of geography and cartography, starting with the term "Orient" as a marker of the far-away East that Westerners have oriented themselves towards and away from. For both the queer and the racialized subject, these orientations and lines represent an inaccessibility of space *and* time.

In phenomenology the world is "already given" and the goal of the philosopher is to explore how our perceptions of this "given" world create meaning and guide us in our lives. Merleau-Ponty describes phenomenology as "…an account of space, time, and the world as "lived"." (1956, 59). This seems to me a perfect framework for studying political representation which adjudicates between experiences and gives meaning to space and time.

In Ahmed's book, she asks what it would mean to have a different orientation in phenomenology and she proposes we incorporate viewpoints that are slanted or oblique—the queers. Feminists have taken up phenomenology to study the present in order to generate a more just future. These spatial and temporal ruptures make phenomenology a versatile tool in developing justice-oriented modes of political representation.

Ahmed argues that the moments of disorientation shatter our world which means that disorientation can knock us out of place, or even shift the world we stand on/in (2006, 158). She does not suggest that we go about knocking the world upside down, instead, she suggests that, "Disorientation, then, would not be a politics of the will but an effect of how we do politics, which in turn is shaped by the prior matter of simply how we live" (2006, 177). In this quote, Ahmed is completely upending much of the assimilation/liberation debate in LGBT politics and queer studies. We cannot simply will the world into disorientation but we can respond to politics with disorientation. She gives an example of this a few paragraphs later when she describes a queer dinner party as a moment of supporting those who are "oblique" to the world. In the book, Ahmed invites people to her dinner table and through this process, is engaging in community building and support of those who are excluded from other (straight) dinner tables. Put differently, responding to politics from a place of disorientation means that we are refusing to be "straightened" (2006, 167, 169).

A phenomenological account of gender and sexuality emphasizes the role of normative orientations in guiding individuals towards approved genders and orientations. It is not debatable that we live in a heteronormative, cisnormative world (Ingraham 1994). As such, any LGBT/Q person will experience disorientation throughout their lives as they come into contact with straight orientations that they cannot follow. Any sexuality or gender is relational—it is formed in response to existing gender and sexuality narratives (Rubin 2007, 2011; Scott 1986). Ahmed says this clearly: "..queer does not have a relation of exteriority to that with which it comes into contact" (2006, 4). Queerness, according to this definition, will *always* exist.

If gender and sexuality are only a matter of orientation, then why wouldn't marginalized queers simply re-orient to straightness and save themselves the trouble? Phenomenology is built around the role of perception and consciousness. In other words, a variety of perceptions and subsequent interpretations exist for every object and the individual subject's consciousness plays a part in perceiving those objects. This is not to suggest that being queer is all in someone's head—but it is to suggest that there is an intrinsic queerness in some subjects and it manifests as "queer" to the way that our world is structured.

As an example, many lesbians grow up being directed towards men as their eventual romantic and sexual partners. The directions come in various forms, spoken by parents and teachers, visualized by movies, narrativized in books and songs. Imagine this lesbian's shock when she admits that she isn't oriented towards men, and only receives firmer directions to re-orient herself. In a heteronormative world, the lesbian exists because of the way that objects and orientations are aligned (Wittig 1993). Her body and its orientations are quite literally shaped by the space that she inhabits.

To make sense of phenomenology and political representation, we must outline some new assumptions. First, we must realize that we but are given directions which keep us on a straight line so that we may make it from point A to point B (Ahmed 2006, 16). Along that line or path, we come into contact with objects and those objects represent choices and/or new directions. We interact with them (following or rejecting them) and through those interactions we reinvest in the path or divest from it entirely. Ahmed calls moments of reinvestment/repetition social investments (17) and because of those investments we become committed to certain life paths and goals.

Secondly, representative institutions are not neutral directors and so the lines that lead a representative to that institution must require certain social investments, certain ways of living, that may constrain our ability to see other, more distant, objects. I have drawn on the example of gender and sexuality, to demonstrate how some lines can be disorienting for those who are not cisgender and heterosexual. I have also demonstrated how categories of gender and sexuality result in the foreclosure of space to some bodies.

The repetition of movement (taking specific lines or touching the same objects repeatedly) "shapes" our bodies (2006, 15-17) in both the external and internal sense because the consciousness of the subject is not omnipotent or ephemeral. Instead, consciousness must be directed towards something; this is what phenomenology means by the statement that "consciousness is intentional". Gathering around the same table each day with your family, hiding in your room while doing drag, going to the same dyke bar to meet your lover are all the types of repetitious movements that shape our bodies.

The repeated movement of queer bodies shapes both their internal and external selves (perceiving selves versus lived-world). In the language of feminist and queer studies, this is the experience of embodiment and the lessons we draw from those experiences. In the case of political representation, researchers need to ask how representatives experience space and time, what are their repeated patterns, and which lines or orientations do they follow?

Stoller describes phenomenology as a "philosophy of experience" (2009, 707) and other feminists have long theorized the importance of lived experience and embodiment and their effect on efforts at political representation (Brown 2014; Phillips 1995). In *Feminist Phenomenology Futures*, Fielding connects phenomenology and feminism precisely through this shared focus on experience, coalition, and futurity: "We are claiming that feminist phenomenology emerges from an interrelational ontology, that not only does it offer the account of embodied experience for which it is usually recognized, but also that embodied perception underlies the production of knowledge and grounds politics" (Fielding 2017, ix).

This feminist spin on phenomenology removes it from its non-generative origins which were built largely by white European men reflecting on their own personal life experiences (Hurssel; Heideger; Merleau-Ponty; Sartre). For feminist phenomenologists, "experience" is an overlap of points of view and not a solo, navel-gazing practice. Fielding clarifies the implications of this conceptualization; "These multiple points of view do not result in relativism, however. On the contrary, because they are spatially and temporally intertwined, they overlap and encroach upon one another" (ibid). In her understanding, agency is that unpredictable movement whose results also remain unknowable when agency is exercised. Experience, viewpoint, and agency are the foundations of studying political representation and action. If we cannot directly or concretely *know* the future, then why would we engage in action? If agency is truly limited or constrained as many scholars have shown, then why bother?

The answer, I believe, is that we must be motivated by and attuned to imaginative, world-building political action. Imagination is an important process in many feminist texts, just as it is for phenomenology. In phenomenology, our imaginations are a product of the interactions we have with objects, space, and time. Imagination is shaped by the lived world. This specific origin

point for imagination means that any moments of "world-building" in political representation must be seen as direct confrontations with or challenges to the existing understandings of the world, space, and time.

Since imagination is part of the process of perception and interaction, I argue that it is one way we can begin to theorize subject formation—what makes me, "me" and you, "you". In drawing on the idea of imagination as subject formation, I am turning away from the purely disciplinary notions of postmodern power (Foucault 1990, 1991) and attempting to merge several ways of understanding politics using feminist, queer, and lesbian scholarship.

The tool for imagination in phenomenology is the step of "bracketing" (). Bracketing is the process of holding the object of study at arms-length, and perceiving it through a critical and curious gaze. Ahmed explains it as, "apprehending the object as if it were unfamiliar" (37). In phenomenology as it was traditionally developed, this step enabled the thinker to follow the object's point and history of origination, and to analyze the experience of perceiving the object in order to come to a fuller understanding of the object as phenomena. In my dissertation, bracketing public statements, policy decisions, and (most importantly) the concept of representation is the necessary step for developing a concept of world-building representation.

In short, the phenomenological approach to political representation is seeking out the traces (evidence) of disorientations in political institutions. If parliaments are a specific space, which house specific objects, then what happens when an object that does not belong is brought forward? Other scholars have demonstrated the ways that marginalized groups are these out-of-place objects (Puwar 2004) and my dissertation tries to explain what people learn to do or are forced to do, when they are in a space that is not wholly hospitable. In the language of Sarah Ahmed, what is the experience of being oblique to parliament or of seeing parliamentary events from a slanted perspective?

"Out and Legislating": How LGBTQ representatives experience their role

I have written elsewhere about the development of representational studies for marginalized groups more broadly (Norris 2022/under review). In the case of LGBTQ representation, early scholarship focused on policy changes at the state and local level in single-

country case studies (Haider-Markel 1999; Haider-Markel and Meier 2003; Soland 1998; Taylor et al. 2012). In the United States, scholars found that levels of Christian religiosity, presence of LGBTQ people in office, as well as education and urbanism all strongly influenced the likelihood of success for a range of policies. In other national contexts, scholars emphasized the role of advocacy groups and political party support for LGBTQ policies. By the early 2000's, scholars were taking note of the wave of LGBTQ policies sweeping the world. In particular, same-sex marriage policies were diffusing rapidly (Kollman 2013) and transnational advocacy networks were developing between countries (Ayoub 2013; Friedman 2012).

Building on existing literature on gender and race representation, LGBTQ representation scholars stressed the importance of descriptive representation, that is, the presence of out LGBTQ community members in office. Reynolds (2013) found that the presence of just one LGBTQ MP had a more significant, positive, effect on potential policy change than any other variable. His later qualitative work on key policy makers around the world supported this finding by showing the ways that LGBTQ MPs introduced and managed policy debates on same-sex marriage (Reynolds 2019).

LGBTQ policy scholarship has studied the role of courts, public opinion, and transnational systems as agents of change, but little work was done on the act of politically representing these interests. This was due, in part, to the low numbers of 'out' politicians around the world. The LGBTQ Rights and Representation Project, part of the Queer Politics research group, began tracking the number of out LGBTQ parliamentarians holding national-level office and has identified 437 out LGBTQ MPs from 1976-2020 (LGBT Representation and Right Research Initiative).

Research into the experience and perspectives of out LGBTQ officials is a small, but growing, area of study. In one study of out-gay men running for office, Kluttz (2014) found that many of them experienced homophobia from prospective voters during public appearances. The interactions were not about stopping the candidate from running, but the casual uses of the word "faggot" or statements on being shocked to be voting for a gay man still had a negative effect on the candidate. In an earlier study of state legislators, Herrick (2009) found that LGB

candidates did not always include LGB equality issues in their campaign platforms, but that they took up these issues consistently once elected. Herrick also found that when compared to straight legislators of a similar age and the same party, LGB legislators were much more likely to champion LGB equality.

In a series of interviews with Canadian politicians, Tremblay (2019) found that several of them felt they were bringing the full community into parliament simply by being in the room. Her interview subjects also expressed a sense of holding the government accountable simply though their presence in office. In addition, out LGB politicians felt that their visibility made them the responsible party, to the benefit of their straight colleagues who did not have to take up these issues.

The interviews also highlighted a tension *between* LGBTQ politicians—those who are out, and those who aren't. One of the politicians from Canada expressed frustration at those who choose to remain in the closet, arguing that they should come out to serve as a role model for younger LGBTQ people, but also demonstrating the importance of living authentically (230). One politician suggested that this lack of authenticity may "poison the mandate of representation" (230), in other words, hiding that you're gay means that you are not being fully honest with your constituents. The implication here is that representation requires constant transparency and vulnerability.

Interestingly, Tremblay finds that though the majority of the interviewees acknowledge their important role as a symbolic figure or role model, only five of the 20 "consider this an opportunity to change society" (231). It is risky to generalize from interviews of a marginalized group in one context, but if only a fifth of the out LGB representatives in Canada see their position as a world-building one, then researchers need to be turning attention to the institutional limitations imposed on LGB political imagination.

In another piece on LGBTQ representation, Tremblay argues that:

> "…only out (and proud) lesbian and gay politicians can descriptively and symbolically represent LGBTQ people, and in terms of substantive representation, only they have the

> legitimacy to perform a politics of emotion with regard to LGBTQ representation" (2020, 221).

Her chapter goes on to evaluate the function of emotions in the "representative performance" of LGBTQ people (2020). I do agree with Tremblay's point that a politics of emotion is most likely limited to LGBTQ people, but it is crucial to draw attention to the language being used in this quote. First, there are relatively few out transgender representatives (exact numbers from Reynolds) and yet we (LGBTQ politics scholars) often presume that lesbians and gays are capable of representing transgender interests, even as we assert a boundary between heterosexuals and gays.

Tremblay articulates the need for out and proud representation using the classic representation framework and situating her work within the scholarship on women's representation—a move that many LGBTQ scholars make to justify their research. However, that approach is, in my view, fenced in by the conceptualizations of political representation and emphasizes the *outcome* of policy change rather than the process of being a representative.

Bringing queer theory into the mix allows me to move beyond binaries of represented/not-represented. I am also using queer theory to move beyond the over-determined conversation on assimilation/liberation in political representation. From my perspective, there is little benefit in analyzing whether any policy is assimilationist or not—just by nature of being passed through a majority heterosexual institution the policy will be focused on assimilating to cis- and hetero ideals. Tremblay concurs that representation is elitist and further marginalizing for certain members of LGBTQ groups (2020, 234).

In *The Children of Harvey Milk*, Reynolds travels around the world to interview LGBTQ politicians on their role in passing important LGBTQ equality policy. The first chapter opens with a story from New Zealand and MP Louisa Wall who had twice submitted a same-sex marriage bill for consideration. When the votes were counted and the bill passed, the gallery broke into song: a Maori love song. MP Henare from the National Party presented flowers to all of the gay MPs in the chamber. Wall, who is also Maori, was embraced by other Maori MPs from various parties after the success of the vote (Reynolds 2019, 1-5).

In this story, we can briefly see what it *feels* like to be a representative—in the interview with Reynolds, Wall stated "There was so much love in the room…" (5). During the debate and vote, MPs spoke of their decades long periods of waiting with their partners to have the option to marry. The success of this day was due to the lesbian and gay MPs and to the honesty of LGBTQ constituents who shared their intimate stories and deepest fears with representatives in an effort to sway the representatives to vote 'yes'.

In his profile of British Conservative MP Crispin Blunt, Reynolds states that "For thirteen years, Blunt played the role of good Tory back-bencher, voting against almost every gay rights measure that came to Parliament" (2019, 224). Blunt first ran for office in 1997, but did not stand for election as an out gay man until 2015. Today, Blunt is an outspoken gay advocate and has admitted that this is, "Penance for how I behaved before" (225). In a 2016 debate on recreational drugs, Blunt stood up and announced "I use poppers. I out myself as a user of poppers" (227). Poppers are an extremely popular party drug amongst the gay community.

It is not terribly shocking to learn that prior to the late 1990s, most LGBTQ candidates did not come out while on the campaign trail or in office—during the global HIV/AIDS crisis and ensuing stigmatization of gays and lesbians, not to mention the fact that many places did not have equal ages of consent or prevented LGBTQ people from living openly, being gay in public was a challenge that many politicians were not equipped to handle. Since the 2000s, however, LGBTQ political rights have become slightly more acceptable, and desirable, in democracies. There is now a sense that staying in the closet during a campaign is disingenuous to voters—and could be a hinderance for winning the election.

Sadly, these stories also show the harsh limitations that LGBTQ representative face within an institution where they are seen as responsible for LGBTQ issues, and where it is there job to convince others to see them with dignity, to accept LGBTQ people as part of the national community. This is the darker side of Tremblay's point that only LGBTQ people have the legitimacy for a politics of emotion on LGBTQ issues: the reality is that LGBTQ political imagination is burdened by this responsibility and the limitations of cisgender and heterosexual political priorities.

My dissertation, rather than seeking to explain the causes of policy formation tries to identify moments of world-building potential: when were LGBTQ representatives *able* to fully be as queer as they wanted? When does the institution force them back on a straight line? Using queer phenomenology allows me to account for time, space, and experience as important forces in representational politics. In the next section I present some brief anecdotes from my data collection to further explore my research questions.

Experiences in Westminster

The interviews with British LGB MPs that I have conducted offer important insight into the context of LGBTQ political imagination. All of the subjects I have spoken with thus far have emphasized the importance of allies in the struggle for LGBTQ equality. One MP in particular said, "you don't need to be gay to get it" (Interview 1.1 2021) referring to the fact that discrimination and oppression of LGBTQ people is unacceptable.

In one instance, an MP acknowledged that serving in Parliament has helped to educate them more broadly on LGBTQ issues. All of the MPs I spoke with view the All Party Parliamentary Group on Global LGBT Rights as a positive, coalitional space. In addition to the APPG, Labour party members have an internal LGBT+ Labour Group that they are able to participate in—this was described as collegial and very communicative. When asked about the rise in transphobia across the UK, including the divisions within the Labour party, both MPs stated that any disagreements are raised tactfully because there is a "sense that we have to make our case to the party, country, and world" (Interview 1.1 2021).

These brief anecdotes highlight the limitations that LGBTQ people experience in politics. On the one hand, there is the need to maintain alliances with heterosexual colleagues. While no one spoke of feeling pressured to do so, I believe that there is a sense of propriety or professionalism that keeps LGBTQ people in a state of "playing nice" with others. Secondly, the description of internal divisions within the Labour party demonstrates that LGBTQ people must organize around the 'lowest common denominator' of LGBTQ representation in order to be united and numerous enough for heterosexuals to take them seriously.

The need for this allyship extends to other members of the LGBTQ community, however. There are no transgender MPs in Westminster, and one interviewee said that transgender people need representation now, and that as a gay man it was his responsibility to work on behalf of that part of the community. In the MPs words, "we can't afford to wait" (Interview 2.1).

If we take this MPs experiences seriously then we must also acknowledge that rights-based policies are not enough. How can we reshape what political representation means, using actual experiences of marginal group representatives, to show us opportunities for change?

World-Building, rather than substantive, representation

Research on marginal group representation has emphasized the need for substantive representation, defined as bringing the interests of the group forward and successfully earning moments of representation(Celis 2009; Chaney 2012, 2013, 2015; Childs and Krook 2009; Hansen and Treul 2015; Minta 2012; Pitkin 1967). I propose that this understanding of representation is inaccurate and offers us very little traction to think about marginal groups and their participation in democracies. This may, at first glance, appear counter-intuitive to projects of equality and liberation since it is important to have empirical understandings of marginalized lives and because governments do have the resources to improve those lives through legislation. I am not denying that power systems need to be altered in order for a variety of marginalized groups to live safely and well.

I am, however, arguing that brief and isolated moments of policy change do not sufficiently improve political, economic, social, and cultural outcomes for marginalized groups. Additionally, substantive representative claims made by marginalized groups are often rejected by other political actors for being subjective or particular—that is, not universal—and the public sphere in most western democracies is still dominated by understandings of rights-based universalism. Utilizing the traditional conception of substantive representation sets marginal groups and their advocates up for failure and distracts justice-oriented researchers from a more far-reaching goal: world-building.

In my dissertation, I re-conceptualize substantive representation using queer theory and feminist democratic theory to argue that substantive representations are moments of "world-

building" or "world-opening" (Warner 1993; Zerilli 2005). World-building is an active practice of imagining how we might "expand our notion of what counts as a good life" (Ahmed 2006, 21). Currently, the "good lives" are defined as, "those who return the debt …by taking on the direction promised as a social good" (ibid). Good lives might look like participating without complaint in capitalist work-systems, marrying a single person and producing children with them, or more generally following the social norms to main order and normalness within the democratic polity.

Why has world-building become necessary to incorporate into studies on political representation? Firstly, I would argue that for marginalized groups this type of imaginative practice has always been necessary as a motivator and guide for political action.[1] Secondly, because contemporary democracies have failed at providing safety for those who live in the "oblique" spaces (Ahmed 2006, 179) and so feminist and queer scholars must turn their attentions to world-building practices if we hope to save democracy from its own failures.[2]

Zerilli, in her development of a concept/practice of feminist critical judgments, argues that, "Opening up the world in a political sense requires a public space defined by equality." (2005, 145). Such a space is patently impossible based on the current designs of most democratic institutions and our understanding of politics as a fight for control of resources. Here are three examples of the inequality of democratic publics: ongoing discrimination and violence against marginalized representatives (VAWIP, racism, homophobia, transphobia), institutional designs that create vast power differentials by political party/group, and, finally, certain geographic constituencies which seen as are more financially or culturally important to the polity; a judgment that creates a power-imbalance between representatives on an individual level.

Searching for moments of "world-building" will likely turn up fewer examples than previous research has found for policy changes. This is because not all policy changes are "world-building" but are instead I am calling "world-affirming" because they do not *change* or *imagine* ways of being beyond the white heteropatriarchal society. In my dissertation I study moments

[1] Deviance as resistance
[2] Pitkin 2004

of political representation for one type of marginalized group, Lesbians, Gays, Bisexuals, Transgender people, and Queers, and use the judgement of them as "world-building" or "world-affirming" to push our understanding of political representation beyond existing boundaries.

Michael Warner summarizes queer politics as "…no longer content to carve out a buffer zone for a minoritized and protected subculture…to challenge the pervasive and often invisible heteronormativity of modern societies" (1991, 3). In my dissertation I look at the representations of all LGBT/Q people and policies, but I am most interested in exploring when, where, and how queer orientations pop up in representative institutions. Ahmed defines a queer orientation as one that is oblique to the "good" line. She draws on two examples to discuss what it means for a body to be out of line, off the path, and queer.

A crucial point for Ahmed is that there is no queer line to follow. To create, or demand, a particular line be "queer" would be to impose queerness, not generate a politics of queerness. Warner says something similar: "The tactical necessities of queer politics means that not every question facing us will be of such a global scale. Many will be embedded in too many contradictions to admit a programmatic theoretical rationalization" (1991, 7). If there is no queer line at the local level and no queer program to follow at the global level—then what is "queer politics"?

At its most basic level, queer politics is one that refuses the "tolerance" of straights and also one that refuses the fetishization of queer people and lives. In Ahmed's language, fetishization means perceiving the object as an identifiable and separate thing--and it is only in those moments of fetishizing, I argue, that the normative body can feel at home in the unfamiliar. When they inhabit this space, they are perceiving the object in a specific way, using the guide-lines established in other contexts, to structure their perception. As such, their perceptions fill the space and "simply do not leave room for others." (11).

Contemporary pushes for tolerance of LGBT/Q people, exemplified in most rights-based policies, are not going to change heteronormativity. Despite what critics of same-sex marriage suggested, queer marriages have not destroyed the institution for heterosexuals, nor have the

queer marriages destroyed the state's ability to categorize and reward certain types of inter-personal relationships. Tolerance and fetishization go hand in hand and they must both be avoided at all costs if the actor is engaged in queer politics. In other words, "…heteronormativity can be overcome only by actively imagining a necessarily and desirably queer world" (Warner 1993, xvi).

Conclusion: Outlining the Dissertation

In the next chapter I present the details of the British case and the current state of affairs for LGBTQ politicians around the world. This chapter serves to ground the reader for the rest of the dissertation. The dissertation is structured so that we begin with the representative and slowly move outwards until the entire institution comes into view—a strategy intended to mimic the process of applying phenomenology to politics. The first substantive chapter analyzes interview data collected between July 2021-January 2022. These interviews were all conducted virtually via zoom due to the COVID-19 global pandemic.

In the next chapter I analyze the ways that members of parliament speak once they are in the institution by looking at their Maiden Speeches. These first two chapters show the contrast between what it *feels like* to be a representative and what it *looks like* to serve your constituency. In the final two substantive chapters, I put my methodology to the test using discourse analysis on the bread-and-butter of representation studies: Early Day Motions and parliamentary bill debates.

The final substantive chapter looks at four key policy changes between 2000-2015: civil partnership, gender recognition, equality act, and same-sex marriage. I focus my analysis on the debate process for these bills and highlight the statements from MPs that reflect on their experience of living a queer life, or serving as a queer politicians. The final chapter offers conclusions and directions for future research, the foundations of which I sketch out below.

Michael Warner opens *Fear of a Queer Planet* with a disorienting question: "What do queers want?" (1993, vii).. He, along with the other authors in that volume, assert that the next

starting point for radically imaginative social theory should be the sexual order, or, lesbian and gay politics. The work of queer theorists challenges ideas of sexuality as pathological, consistent facts about an individual. Further, they argue that lesbian and gay people have interests as a social group that go beyond anti-discrimination (xi). According to Warner, "Queers do a kind of practical social reflection just in finding ways of being queer" (xii). Queer politics is about challenging the institutional structures—the very systems—that marginalize queer people.

Feminist scholars have already laid the groundwork for rethinking our ideas of space, time, objects, and orientations in politics. I see my project as building on these existing ideas and incorporating them back into more general discussion of political representation and action. One example is Cathy Cohen's work on marginalized politics in Black communities. Her work offers another framework or way in to study disorientations and queer orientations to society (Cohen 1997, 2004). She charges queer theory with expanding its object of study beyond the hetero-homo divide and points to the potential political coalitions available between all "queers"—those who live marginalized lives due to race, gender, class, and/or sexuality. Her article is a specific call to both Queer studies and Black Politics to integrate frameworks so that we as researchers can pursue radical political action and research.

She also lays out a strong case for using tools of critical judgment when we study deviants. In her words, not all deviants are resisting the structures that oppress them. In fact, many deviant people are trying to survive and the researcher's desire to label them as resistant removes the agency from a deviant person to determine their own political action. This is highly similar to Ahmed's insistence that not all queers do, or must, practice a politics of disorientation. Both scholars charge the non-deviants, non-queers, to begin developing their own politics of disorientation.

Taken as a whole, my dissertation demonstrates the continued importance of devising new tools and methods for approaching studies of politics and democratic institutions. I also argue for a closer alliance between feminist and queer scholars so that we may trade knowledge and secrets to achieve a more just world.

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