

A Look Back to Move Forward: Expanding Queer Potentiality in Family Science

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Abstract

The inclusion of queer theory in family sciences is still a recent phenomenon. In this paper, we situate queer theory's original integration into the field using Oswald, Blume, and Marks' essay on decentering heteronormativity. We offer critiques and challenges to extend beyond the current conceptualization and provide a promise of queer theory in family science that envisions new queer possibilities to emerge. We contend that the queer promise must extend beyond mere LGBT studies and invite family scholars to consider how queer theory can be used to deconstruct and resist a normative frame of family. Specifically, we encourage scholars to examine the utopian demand of reproductive futurity, queer temporalities, and a needed analysis of homonormativity. We conclude with a discussion of barriers to such a queer promise.

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A Look Back to Move Forward: Expanding Queer Potentiality in Family Science

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Keywords: Queer Theory | Family Science | Heteronormativity | Critical Theory | Queer Studies | Queer Family Science

Introduction

Critical social family theorists expose the field of family science for exclusively attending to the lives of white, heterosexual, well educated, middle-class families (Lloyd, Few, & Allen, 2009). These scholars advocate for inclusive research and theorizing practices to understanding families across various contextual factors. As such, critical family scholars shift their focus towards and center the experiences of groups historically marginalized in the United States (e.g., women, people of color, LGBT people, people with disabilities). In line with this goal, family scholars adapt queer theory into their scholarship to decenter heteronormativity and center the lives of LGBT people (Allen & Mendez, 2018; Oswald, Blume, & Marks, 2005). Although centering and honoring LGBT people is an essential project in family science, we argue it is not the only queer project available to family scholars. In this manuscript, we seek to queer how family scholars enact queer theory in the field of family science. We hope that such a critique offers space to expand the potentiality of queer theory in family science. Specifically, our goal is to extend queer theory beyond LGBT inclusivity to transgress discursive practices that relegate normative performative enactments of gender, sexuality, and family.

Resistance and the Family Science

Before situating queer theory in the family sciences, we want to provide a historical backdrop of the field. Providing this contextual information helps position how the political landscape of the field informs family scholars' use and definition of queer theory. The foundations of the family sciences stem from the now quaint discipline of home economics, which emerged in the late 19th

century and early 20th centuries (AAFCS, 2016). With the aid of federal and local government stimulus and the development of the American Home Economics Association (1909), home economics became a discipline that simultaneously advanced women's rights in the workplace and education system and codified ideas of what it means to be a family (Goldstein, 2012). The discipline provided women with a base of information for home improvement, preparing meals, sewing, and decision-making regarding purchases, books to read, and ways to spend leisure time (Goldstein, 2012).

Over time, collaborations between scholars from sociology, couple and family therapy, human development, social work, among other fields affected the transdisciplinary establishment of the field of family science (Burr, Day & Bahr, 1988). The discipline was established to give a home to applied research focused on family life, individual development, and the improvement of the social structures in which families operate (Hamon & Smith, 2017; NCFR, 2019). Family scholars develop new theoretical, methodological, and conceptual models to explain close interpersonal relationships grounded within context, often adapting theories developed in other fields (Hamon & Smith, 2017).

Just as the family sciences continue to evolve and innovate, definitions of the family and family dynamics simultaneously fluctuate. In a field centered around the concept of *family*, trouble emerges when we ask the seemingly simple question- what is a family? Such questions are exceptionally pressing, considering the home economic roots of the family sciences and its foundational interest in supporting the traditional family (AAFCS, 2016). With each cultural and political shift, conceptions of the family, relationships, and health changes. At each turn, there is backlash from the dominant structures that seek to narrowly define families according to ideological belief systems that exclude non-conforming family structures.

Critical family scholars resist traditionalizing family on multiple fronts and utilize decolonizing (Bermúdez, Muruthi & Jordan, 2016), queer (Allan & Mendez, 2018, Boe, Maxey & Bermudez, 2018; Oswald et al., 2005), intersectional (Few-Demo, 2014), social justice (James & McGeorge, 2019), political (Jordan & Seponski, 2018a), and supremacist (Letiecq, 2019) frameworks. Critical scholars problematize the goals of translational research, and confront traditional narratives that suggest quantitative, large data studies are most valid. When approached critically, the goals of translational science are problematized. Critical family scholars question the ability and desirability of scholarship that commutes findings into generalized and broadly applied intervention methods. The suggestion from these debates is that such goals risk the encapsulation of families into one preferred way of being and one particular notion of what constitutes a healthy family (Letiecq, 2019). Finally, critical family scientists resist notions of the *family* embedded in cisnormative, heteronormative, mononormative, racist, patriarchal, ableist, Christian-dominant discourses.

Queer Theory and Family Science

One of the earliest and well-known mergings of queer theory and family science is the work by Oswald et al. (2005) on decentering heteronormativity. Heteronormativity is the ideological structure that positions compulsory heterosexuality and traditional gender identities as the moral standard, reducing non-heterosexual and non-cisgender performances as deviant (Rubin, 2011). The influence of heteronormativity on families is evident through parenting practices (Cowdery & Knudson-Martin, 2005), division of labor (Pollman-Schult, 2015), and sexuality and intimacy (Malpas, 2006). In their revolutionary essay, Oswald et al. (2005) suggest that hegemonic

heteronormativity pervades three discursive binaries: gender, sexuality, and family. For example, the gender binary positions *real* men and women (i.e., cisgender, masculine-presenting men and cisgender, feminine-presenting women) against gender deviants (i.e., cisgender, feminine-presenting men, cisgender, masculine-presenting women, transgender men, transgender women, genderqueer, and nonbinary). The sexuality binary positions heterosexuality against sexual deviants (i.e., gay, lesbian, bisexual, and pansexual). The family binary positions biological and legal families against other families as pseudo (i.e., queer headed households, blended families, and fictive/chosen family). In their model of queer theory, tensions within these binaries exist between queer and heteronormative processes. It is within those moments of tension that queering occurs. Oswald et al. (2005) laid the foundations for queer theory in family science and other scholars have furthered its influence.

Allen and Mendez (2018) extend original conceptions of queer theory in family science by situating new binaries of gender, sexuality, and family. In their analysis of gender, Allen and Mendez produce a binary of cisgender and transgender without naming such binary. They suggest, “trans individuals can shift from the deviant pole of the gender binary to the normative one if they are socially recognized as their gender identity” (p. 75). This statement suggests that the gender binary is not only informed by heteronormativity, but cisnormativity as well. This new binary creates tension between trans people who are socially recognized as man/woman and trans people who may identify as nonbinary. They further extend the sexuality binary through the discourse of hetero/homo binary. From this discursive stance, those who identify as heterosexual, gay, or lesbian are positioned against the “new” deviant sexualities (i.e., bisexual, asexual, pansexual). They present a newly conceptualized family binary that extends out of the previously traditional family structure to include gay and lesbian headed households. As queer politics gain traction, certain queer identities and relationship structures are positioned as more normative than deviant. For example, as governments legalize same-sex marriage, queer people in monogamous and committed relationships become socially acceptable in comparison to other queer relationship structures (Duggan, 2003). Lastly, Allen and Mendez propose the concept of change across time to examine what has and what has yet to change. Although Oswald et al. (2005) and Allen and Mendez seek to integrate queer theory and family science, we want to trouble their conceptualizations.

First, they appear to center their argument using queer (n) theory. When queer reads as a noun, it refers to a theory that honors the experiences and knowledge of queer subjectivities (Greene, 1996). For example, Allen and Mendez’s (2018) response to Oswald et al.’s (2005) framework hinges upon queer subjectivities to further what they name as the new gender, sexuality, and family binaries. Although centering the analysis on queer subjectivity offers scholars with insights to understand the construction of normalcy and deviance (Sullivan, 2003), the queer in queer (n) theory is bound to certain theoretical logics. Such boundaries create implications for the utility of queer. For example, it has become common for family scholars to lean on queer theory when queer subjects are at the center of their research (Boe, 2019). In some ways, such a movement represents the institutionalization of queer theory in the academy, becoming a harmless qualifier that loses its radical potential (Halperin, 2003).

Second, queer theorizing in family science fails to account for colonialism. Allen and Mendez (2018) attempt to account for racialized sexuality by engaging in an intersectional analysis. What is missing from this analysis is the shaping impact colonialism has on gender, sexuality, and families. Attending to colonial power within these binaries is essential for the family sciences. It shifts analysis from heteronormativity as merely a normative discourse to a

system of violent domination over bodies and desires (Lugones, 2007). In addition, it disrupts politics of inclusion and depoliticized discourses of intersectionality (Hunt & Holmes, 2015). Colonialism is present in Allen and Mendez's (2018) conceptualization of the "new" deviant identities. For example, they assert that gay, lesbian, and transgender people who are socially recognized receive acceptance when "doing" heteronormativity. While in some ways this statement may be accurate, making such bold claims is dangerous, delimiting, and dehumanizing. It constructs another binary system of privilege and oppression that reifies colonial power. Without attending to the influence of colonialism, family scholars may unintentionally position and problematize queer identities and desires, which has implications for the current influence of globalization. Although queer identities are becoming more accepted and visible in various countries, queer bodies and desires are still sites of debility (i.e., bodily injury and social exclusion by economic and political factors; Puar, 2017).

Third, we want to tread carefully with our next critique. Although citational practices play a pivotal role in connecting subjectivity to cultural knowledge and authority (Goodman, Tomlinson, & Richland, 2014), without citing prominent queer theorists (i.e., Butler, Halberstam, Edelman), such practice limits the potentiality for queer theorizing in the family sciences. Upon reviewing the reference list for Oswald et al. (2005) and Allen and Mendez (2018), it is found that these theorists are either minimally cited or not cited. As such, the concepts of reproductive futurism (Edelman, 2004), queer time and space (Halberstam, 2005), and performativity (Butler, 1990) are often missing from queer theorizing in family science literature. To further expand queer potentiality in family science, we revisit these concepts in greater depth when presenting our queer promise to the field.

Defining Our Queer Theory

Before presenting our queer promise, we find it imperative we situate our working definition of queer theory; however, we are cautious as we do so. On the one hand, we recognize how the act of defining is one that privileges the academic tradition of thinning down an idea into what something is and what something is not. On the other hand, without a definition, readers are left without a guide in abstract theoretical territory. Butler (1993a) suggests that the term "queer" remains never fully owned, only redeployed, twisted, queered from prior usages. As such, the term "queer" remains elusive and expansive (Sullivan, 2003), yet can become what is urgently necessary for political expansion (Butler, 1993a). From this definition, we can see why queer theory in the family sciences focuses on queer subjectivity. Presently, we are caught in a political discourse of assimilation. However, what happens when we slant from this type of politic? What queer possibilities become reachable (Ahmed, 2006) when queer is not simply akin to subjectivity, but to a position (Butler, 1993b; Halperin, 2003)? From our ontological stance, we embrace queer in the verb tense, or acting on theory. Queer (v) theory challenges theorists to look at theory from different perspectives and highlight taken-for-granted normative assumptions to reveal hidden radical potential (Greene, 1996). In this vein, queer is a resistance of the normal rather than a subjective position (Butler, 1993b; Halperin, 2003), which has great utility for the family sciences. Below, we discuss a few of our guiding assumptions to help further position the reader.

First, we resist the temptation to create a binary of centered and decentered lives. Perceptions of power, privilege, and oppression become disrupted when there is no visible centralized group. We do not suggest that systemic injustices do not have real and material consequences. Rather,

we propose that creating and maintaining a “centered” versus “decentered” binary continues the normativity that produces and reproduces existing power structures. When we build conceptual boundaries of who is in the center and who is not, we contribute to the discourses of belonging. Ideas of the center and the margins neglect the complexities of intersectionality and the many social identities one may have, which simultaneously privileges and oppresses. From a queer theoretical stance, we must engage in a blurring and fringing of the center to adequately respond to the intricacies of identity and context (McDowell, Emerick, & Garcia, 2014).

Second, there are no specific guidelines on how to appropriately or accurately implement queer theory. Scholars often use the term *queering* to refer to acts that resist dominant gender and sexual norms. From our ontological stance, queering is not an intentional act that can be evoked at a given moment. Instead, lived experience consists of inherently transgressive queer moments. In this way, the specter of the queer is omnipresent (Pascoe, 2007). *How* and *if* we orient ourselves towards queer creates moments of previously unseen possibilities (Ahmed, 2006). These queer moments are not and should not be limited to certain bodies. For example, an LGBT person is no more likely to encounter the specter of the queer than a cisgender heterosexual person. In fact, there can be queer straights and straight queers.

Lastly, at play between the family sciences and queer theory is a complex language game. Wittgenstein (1953) first introduced *language games* to attend to how words acquire meaning through their use and their ties to embedded social practices. The current language game for queer theorists in the family sciences is a tension between which terminology is most appropriate: either *doing* or *performative*. For example, many queer-informed family scientists often prefer the term *doing* as opposed to *performative*. There are several reasons as to why this preference may occur. First, the idea of *doing* (West & Zimmerman, 1987) was a radical shift in our understanding of gender and sexuality. The impact of the notion of *doing* has all but positioned Butler’s (1990) idea of *performative* as second-hand among family scholars (Oswald et al., 2005). Second, a historically positivist knowledge base constrains the family sciences. As such, family scholars may resist a performative nature of gender and sexuality, as *performative* evokes ideas that these constructs are not real or objective. We situate our queer theory in the language of performativity.

A Queer Promise in Family Science

Traditionally in academia, the goal is to be taken seriously, which positions people to follow tried and true paths of knowledge production (Halberstam, 2011). In line with Halberstam, we want to take the chance to be “frivolous, promiscuous, and irrelevant” (2011, p. 6). We are not suggesting we do not have anything to offer in terms of queering family science. On the contrary, we have much to say. In fact, the queer promise we envision for our field has the potential to unhinge and disrupt hegemonic normative ideologies of family and development in ways that have not been fully conceptualized. However, few family scholars may agree with our position, and we anticipate and openly invite backlash. At the same time, there is no one queer promise for family science. We present this promise while simultaneously acknowledging and welcoming that the future is unknown (Edelman, 2004).

We conceptualize our queer promise using borderlands theory (Anzaldúa, 1987). Anzaldúa (1987) moves beyond simple divides of *here* or *there*, *us* or *them* to frame borders as psychic, social, and cultural spaces that we inhabit. To illustrate, she offers the metaphor of a river and the two riverbanks. To stand on either bank represents taking a sociocultural ontological stance, and

the river represents the space between stances. Challenging binary views of ontology, we suggest theoretical ontologies are enactments of these riverbanks, and the river represents a fluid, undefined space. At differing times, we may find ourselves standing on either embankments or even the river, though we may not always be sure how we arrived at that location. We conceptualize the river as a possible site of transgressing traditional academic knowledge. For example, the family sciences are often separated into modernist and postmodernist approaches (Emery & Lloyd, 2001). Although scholars often operate from either of these embankments, alternative knowledges are often unreachable and out of sight. To orient themselves to these alternative knowledges, we suggest family scholars embrace the unregulated territories of failure (Halberstam, 2011). Through questioning their position, family scholars may subvert hegemonic normative discourses that we are oriented to and around (Ahmed, 2006). To provide further explanation, we use the constructs of reproductive futurism, queer time and space, and performativity.

Reproductive Futurism

Reproductive futurism is the belief that our motivation for engaging in politics is a belief in and desire for creating a better world for children (Edelman, 2004). It suggests two things: (1) there is a future that we can make better, and (2) the child emblemizes that future (Edelman, 2004). It may seem counterintuitive for family scholars to discuss and problematize the concept of reproductive futurism. Reproductive futurism is foundational for the family sciences. It is evident in our goal as family scientists to improve family life, development, and social structures (Hamon & Smith, 2017; NCFR, 2019). To unsettle its influence on the field produces unforeseeable effects. It requires family scholars to step outside its logic and into a space of refusal and negativity where there is no future (Edelman, 2004). However, reproductive futurism is inextricably linked to heteronormativity and renders any alternatives of communal relations/kinships as unthinkable (Edelman, 2004). In order for family scholars to engage in queer theorizing, we believe it is crucial to willingly enter this space.

We enter this space through an analysis of “the family.” To inherit the family is to be invested in the line of family (Ahmed, 2006). That is, the family itself becomes what we implicitly know and what surrounds us. In addition, an ideology of family pushes queers toward marriage politics and erases other modes of kinship in the process (Halberstam, 2011). Queer interventions into kinship studies take various forms. For instance, some call for new models of family, recognize friendship ties as kinship, or recognize the difference queer subjects make to the meaning of family. However, few scholars call for uprooting the family as “*the* form of social organization” (Halberstam, 2011, p. 72). What implications does such disruption have for family sciences? If we operate from a queer project that de-links the process of genealogy, we enter a different space that dislodges hetero- and homonormativity.

Like Halberstam (2011), we think it may be beneficial for family scholars to forget the family and tradition. This statement may seem controversial; however, operating from a new place that does not engender old ways of doing offers a space to start anew. In this vein, forgetting takes on a different meaning. To forget becomes a way to ask that we start seeing alternatives to seemingly *natural* family models. In fact, this uncultivated space may produce new lines of inquiry that displace hetero- and homonormative assumptions in family sciences. Decentering reproductive futurism requires family scholars to consider queer time and space.

Queer Time and Space

Halberstam (2005) introduces three constructs of time that pertain to the family sciences: (1) time of reproduction, (2) family time, and (3) time of inheritance. Each versions of these times are linked to hetero- and homonormative assumptions of “the family.” Time of reproduction refers to the biological influence of reproduction, that is the biological clock that governs people’s lives, particularly women’s lives. Family time does not necessarily mean time spent as a family. Rather, it refers to the normative day to day scheduling centered upon the imagined set of children’s needs. Lastly, time of inheritance refers to the genealogical process by which values, wealth, goods, and morals are passed through the family. Queer time and space arise, at least in part, in opposition to the institutions of family and hetero- and homonormativity.

Queer time was most notable within the gay community at the end of the 20th century, when the AIDS epidemic diminished gay futurity (Halberstam, 2005). The future was unhinged from bodies inflicted with AIDS, shifting the focus of temporality from the future to the immediate and present. This present-moment focus created a sense of urgency that expanded possible ways of being and doing. Halberstam (2005) clarifies that queer time is not about compression or annihilation. Instead, it is time that accompanies an unscripted life, outside the bounds of the family, inheritance, and child rearing, and holds infinite potentiality. We contend that queer time and space are imperative constructs for family scientists operating from a queer ontology.

Historically, development has been conceptualized as a natural progression across the lifespan. The traditional lifespan development assumes children grow up, partner, and child-rear, typically within the biology of their birth and prescribed gender roles (Letiecq, 2019). This lifespan perspective reinforces hegemonic discourses of hetero- and homonormativity. Without attending to these taken-for-granted practices and assumptions, we limit the potentiality for queer possibilities to emerge. For example, what does an unscripted life mean for the family sciences? How do family scientists account for limited queer futurity? For example, Black transwomen have a life expectancy of 35 years on average (Méndez, 2016). Envisioning a queer promise while neglecting these bodies is an unethical stance that continues to displace black bodies in queer movements. There is no developmental trajectory that can fully encompass the complexity of black transwomen’s lives. Continuing to use traditional developmental theories renders these bodies illegible and insignificant.

Performativity

Earlier, we situated the language game of *doing* versus *performativity* in the family sciences. We align more closely with performativity rather than doing. To suggest we “do families, sexuality, and gender” means we have taken on a role or acting in some way (Butler, 2011). Conversely, for something to be performative means it produces a series of effects (Butler, 1990, 2011). It is through the production and re-production of sexuality, gender, and family that constitutes hegemonic normative ideologies (Butler, 1990). Analyses on performativity reveals the instability of supposed fixed categories and the ways in which simple interactions can uphold or subvert hegemonic normative discourses. Such examinations have implications for the family sciences.

Hetero- and homonormativity surround people’s daily lives in seen and unseen ways. Ahmed (2006) suggests these normative discourses have a “straightening-effect.” For example, Ahmed recounts an experience she has with a neighbor. Although her neighbor seems to ask the simple

question, “Is that your sister or your husband?”, it reveals instances of queer invisibility. While there are implicit “straightening” devices, some are more explicit. For example, it is not uncommon for a child to be discouraged from playing with certain toys that are deemed inappropriate for their gender (Boe & Woods, 2018). These examples may appear benign but reveal just how deeply entrenched normative structures in our lives. In addition, there are “straightening” devices in family science literature.

In the family sciences, these devices open field to research focused on fitting gay and lesbian identified persons into traditionalized gender and family roles lauded in the days of home economics. For example, literature has increased on same-sex stepfamilies (Goldberg & Allen, 2013), relationship education (Whitton & Buzzella, 2012), monogamy (Macedo, 2015), and parenting and adoption (Schumm, 2016). Because of the un/intentional normalization of specific queer desires, marginalization continues to persist for other queer desires. By analyzing performativity, family scholars find other means of resisting normative discursive effects.

Obstacles to Fulfilling the Queer Promise

Obstacles exist that impede the fruition of our queer promise for the family sciences. Family scholars are constrained by the currently accepted performance of science and objective truth. Queer theory problematizes the subject of inquiry, the nature of the inquiry, and the inquirers (Kong, Mahoney, & Plummer, 2001). In the family sciences, queer theory contextualizes LGBT families and individuals and normative ideas of “the family.” Simply applying queer theory is not a queer movement, and facile adaptations of queer theory overlooks the complexity within. Due to constraints of methodology, queer family scholars are partial to qualitative methods which appear better apt to account for and by those living queer experiences (Warner, 2004). At the same time, qualitative methods continue to be questioned and devalued in the family sciences. While scholars have attempted to queer methodology (Fish & Russell, 2018), we do not think it is the appropriate task and is counter to queer theory. Developing a practice of queer methodology would construct ways of performing queer theory that would limit and marginalize other ways of knowing. For example, if there were a scientific method of queer theory, rigid boundaries would be constructed to ensure scholars perform queer science in traditional styles. Scientific discourse limits queer possibilities and these discourses are reflective of larger sociocultural discourses. We find it more appropriate to use queer theory as an analytic tool to examine normative discourses in family theories, research, and interventions.

A second obstacle to fulfilling this queer promise is the current context in which we live and operate. The sociocultural climate necessitates that we acknowledge and privilege certain bodies that have been historically and are continually de-humanized and stripped of their materiality (e.g., Black, LGBT). It would be unethical to ignore the real and material consequences of racism, classism, sexism, cisgenderism, heterosexism, and ableism. Given the current division, systemic social discourses of change are difficult. Moreover, family scholars may want to avoid such a stance because of the inherent political act it would require. It is not uncommon for family scholars to separate their research and themselves from politics and act from an apolitical stance. We argue that family science is a political act (Jordan & Seponski, 2018b; Schneider & Ingram, 1993; Smith, 1993; Twist, 2006). If the goal is to improve the welfare of family life, then political action is necessary to ensure that goal (Bogenschneider, 2014; Jordan & Seponski, 2018a; Letiecq, Anderson, & Joseph, 2013; Walker, 1988). In addition, family scholars are often

able to influence and inform family policies, thus positioning one as apolitical is an ironic movement (Jordan & Seponski, 2018a).

A third obstacle is the ontological language games often positioned in binary oppositions. Family scholars can become entrenched in certain ontological stances, unwilling to shift or take different perspectives. The most common example is the nature versus nurture debate. Is human behavior a result of biological and genetic factors, social factors, or a combination? The current *de facto* stance of family scientists' rests on sexual and gender identity as a result of biologically determined genetics (Kivalanka, Goldberg & Oswald, 2013). Our adoption of biological determinism has occurred as a process of promoting acceptance of queerness, often without a critical engagement with the history and meaning of such ideas. This discourse has a complicated history in the United States and dates to the 19th century (Terry, 1999). What began as a measure to promote the social toleration of the othered category of homosexuality morphed into the rationalization of the violence produced against queer bodies, as seen in Nazi eugenics among other instances. To confront genocidal tendencies associated with biology, research shifted to socially constructed ideas of sexual desire and gender identity. Treatments were promoted and performed which promised to 'cure' queerness in the face of heterosexual hegemony, which were aided by medicalized discourses of deviance and disability (Terry, 1999).

The Christian right utilize the argument of choice in their fight to confront gay liberation and promote a return to the values of the American family. During the 1980s, there was a return to biological determinism as a political stance to confront the institutionalized, medicalized, and sociocultural backlash against queer belonging (Weber, 2012). While this discourse confronts anti-LGBTQ antagonists, to promote acceptance of same-sexualities, it does so through essentializing the complexities of human existence. When rights are predicated upon biological determinism (Duggan, 2003), those who do not ascribe to biologically determined identities are excluded. The risk of the nature versus nurture debate in the family sciences is that we uphold biological determinism to promote the normalcy of queerness, while simultaneously rendering illegitimate the voices and bodies of those whose sexual and gendered identities are not continuous throughout the lifespan (Weber, 2012). The diversity of identity has been reduced to suggest that sexuality and gender are life-long and unchanging – to the exclusion of many in the queer community (Duggan, 2003). It also reduces the idea of queerness to those who identify as non-hetero and non-cisgender, relegating queerness as a fight against what one is not, versus a stance of what one is. To queer our family science, we must be prepared to move out of the language games of nature versus nurture, social construct versus biology, choice versus birth, fluid versus constant to stand in the middle stream. Otherwise, we participate in an essentialism that condenses some identities as acceptable (those who were born this way) versus others as not (those who are fluid).

Conclusion

Over the past decade, family scholars have attempted to integrate queer theory into the family sciences. Most of this work is reflective of LGBT studies (e.g., seeking to understand and affirm; Stacey & Biblarz, 2001) and decentering heteronormativity to allow space at the center for LGBT individuals and families (Oswald et al., 2005). By analyzing how family scholars use queer theory, we construct a queer promise for family science that could further the influence of queer theory. A promise that challenges what a family is and how family is performed deconstructs homonormativity and attends to queer time and the utopian demand of reproductive

futurism. Although queer family theory has sought to challenge the family, few have paid attention to reproductive futurism and queer time. By attending to these constructs, we suggest that queer theory can be used to further transgress current limited queer understandings of family science; however, obstacles exist that impede this process. The performance of science, sociocultural context, and language games create constraints in this queer promise. As such, family scholars must navigate these tensions if we are to truly queer family science.

Author Notes

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