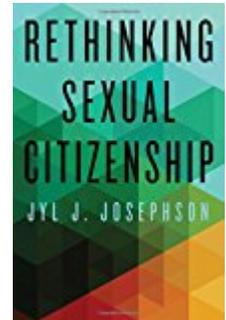


Jyl J. Josephson. *Rethinking Sexual Citizenship*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2016. 242 pp. \$24.95, paper, ISBN 978-1-4384-6048-2.



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Since it was introduced in the 1990s, scholars of sexual intimacy and LGBT studies have found the concept of sexual citizenship to be a useful analytic tool for challenging the artificial divide of public and private which has mediated society's governance of sexuality.[1] Within this literature, British sociologists and cultural geographers have been the most active in expanding sexual citizenship's analytic scope. While their studies have produced contextualized accounts of sexual governance in Britain,[2] sexual citizenship is less widely and consistently deployed as an analytic framework to articulate political life and the regulation of sexuality in other national contexts. *Rethinking Sexual Citizenship* is a timely reflection on such existing accounts, and Jyl J. Josephson effectively argues for the revitalization of the concept. Focusing on the intersection of economic and intimate lives in contemporary American gender relations and sexual politics, this five-chapter monograph contextualizes the racial and class dynamics at play in the construction of dif-

ferent sexual citizens, and the role played by policymaking in shaping the production of "sexual deviants, sexual strangers, as well as hegemonic normative sexuality" (p. 157).

Josephson first charts out critical genealogies of feminists' critiques of the state and the works that articulate the economic aspects of intimate life, before making an ambitious attempt to unpack the "hierarchy of resources based on sexual citizenship" (p. 12) that imposes second-class identities in three transformative public policies put forth by the conservative coalition in the United States. Chapters 2-4 focus on, respectively, three aforementioned policies: welfare reform after the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA), abstinence-only sex education, and the two-decade mobilization leading to the overturn of the Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA). Highlighting the significance of her analytic methods, Josephson sets her work apart from the existing literature in two ways. First, she suggests that the lack of focus on public

policy in the recent developments of “feminist, queer, and to a lesser extent critical race theory” and identifies this lack as a blind spot in intersectional analysis’s conceptualization of state power. As she points out, a few feminist scholars have moreover “questioned whether focusing political contestation on public policy made by the state is counterproductive for political change” (p. 2).[3] Second, rather than focusing on marginalized groups as the subjects of analysis, this book turns to the political elites and examines how they secure “their hegemonic position in heteronormative citizenship” by “creating and reinforcing ... deviant identities” (p. 3) through public policies. It is crucial, Josephson argues, to look at the political elites who benefit from, as much as the regulated subjects of, public policy. In doing so, the book is committed to scrutinizing the regulatory mechanism that upholds the “discourse of the hegemonic white heteronormative family” as the standard “which everyone--“deviant” or “normative”--must respond” (p. 158).

In analyzing how public policy constructs second-class citizens whose subordination in the state is tied to the distribution of resources, the book has contributed two critical insights that are particularly worthy of attention. First, it formulates empirically informed critiques to explain how political parties deploy “sexual normativity as a policy tool to accomplish their larger political goals” (p. 157). For example, the figure of the “welfare queen” exposes the connections between the neoliberalizing economy and the policy regulation of family life; Josephson observes that the ideology of dependency is utilized to construct sexual deviancy at the present time when social responsibility is increasingly privatized and individualized. “The decline of redistributive assistance for families,” she argues, “is justified through the notion that families are obligated to be self-sufficient, and the sexually deviant are by definition not self-sufficient” (p. 157). Indeed, echoing other feminists scholars’ accounts, this analysis demonstrates that, unlike the logic of queer shaming,

welfare reform has created a distinctive trajectory that shames low-income women as “failed heterosexuals” and excludes them from living a political life as deserving citizens.[4]

The second astute observation contributes to the ongoing debate on same-sex marriage, which has continuously informed the agendas of LGBT movements and queer politics over the last two decades. Josephson argues that the declaration of DOMA as unconstitutional “is an important victory for political inclusion” and “democracy” (p. 150). She explicitly argues that reclaiming same-sex marriage is a political act that challenges hegemonic heteronormativity. Her position on same-sex marriage departs from queer radical critiques of neoliberalism and the state, which, in her opinion, represent a politics that is slow to materialize and overlooks public policy as a regime of sexual regulation.[5] In defense of the so-called mainstream LGBT movement for effectively “bringing about substantial changes in public policy and law as well as public opinion in a relatively brief period of time” (p. 153), she puts it bluntly: “Just because we can we can imagine a different kind of politics--a politics that is inclusive of trans women of color, or people who receive TANF benefits--does not mean we can bring it about” (p. 152). Anchored in well-informed analysis of public policy, the way Josephson poses challenges to queer politics’ dismissal of mainstream LGBT movements is indeed an original contribution to the current debate on same-sex marriage.

In analyzing the policy development that has led to the overturning of DOMA, Josephson argues that the rapid shift in the legal status of and public opinion toward same-sex marriage “has been the result of a carefully planned litigation strategy by LGBT legal advocacy organizations as well as some serendipity” (p. 150). As the book progressively unearths DOMA as a site of contestations between the antigay groups and LGBT activists over sexual citizenship, it highlights the inge-

nious, and often long-term, tactics of both sides in preventing and making legal and political changes. For example, while the introduction of the federal DOMA and state-level DOMAS in the 1990s, Josephson observes, “provided clear examples of moral entrepreneurs advocating for and reinforcing the stereotypes of an already denigrated group in order to bring about policy change” (p. 124), she argues that their success is predicated on the framing of same-sex marriage as “an issue from equality or civil rights to morality” (p. 121). By perpetuating the assumption that homosexuality is incompatible to national identity in policymaking, defenders of DOMA “uphold heterosexual marriage as the standard for relationships worthy of public recognition” (p. 119) and, in turn, separate their opposition to same-sex marriage from being named as a matter of discrimination.

Although “all effort to overturn the federal DOMA law through legislation and through litigation were unsuccessful” (p. 130) before 2010, mainstream LGBT activists, Josephson observes, have exhibited flexible adaptation to the transformation of public opinion. Indeed, conscious of the fact that “whenever there is a pro-gay political mobilization, and in particular when there is policy success, there will also be antigay political backlash” (p. 122), these activists have unceasingly calculated the costs of antigay countermobilizations and developed pragmatic strategies in achieving sexual citizenship. Johnson shows us that when confronting the negative public attitudes toward same-sex marriage while productively cultivating spaces of mobilizations in the 1990s when “many more people favor employment protection than favor same-sex marriage,” these LGBT activists have instead focused on advocating employment nondiscrimination law as “a means to appeal a broad public constituency in opposing all forms of LGBT rights” (p. 125). While Josephson’s analysis has cast doubt on the subversive potentials of queer politics, it falls short in questioning the success of homonormative mobi-

lization in terms of its implications for other marginalized sexual subjects: Will the future development of mainstream LGBT movements bring about “genuine” sexual liberation for other marginalized subjects (i.e., the “welfare queens”)? Or will it would perpetuate the existing model of sexual citizenship which conforms to, rather than challenges, the operations of race and class? This book could have better support its argument by addressing these questions.

Although *Rethinking Sexual Citizenship* is a rigorously theorized and historically informed analysis whose contribution to the fields of sexuality studies and American politics is both thrilling and timely, there is, nevertheless, room for further reflection on its scholarly positionality in relation to the existing literature. While Josephson has made clear her ambitious motivation to reintegrate the “material reality” of gender relations and sexual politics into contemporary activist discourses and defend the usefulness of policy analysis in accomplishing such a task, it is perhaps not hard for readers to notice her unyielding—almost intolerant—position in distinguishing her approach of political economy and policymaking from the works by feminist, queer, and critical race scholars “whose background and orientation is more toward the humanities and cultural theory” (p. 25). Perhaps it is the result of such unambiguous rejection of “cultural theory,” that, while her critical stance is effectively delivered as a political statement to the current production of activist knowledge, it somehow lacks clear recommendations as to how policy analysis, as a form of critical intervention, could effectively engage with, as well as transform, the humanities-dominated field of inquiry. More specific details would strengthen the book’s argument and make its critique more persuasive. Despite this minor shortcoming, this book is nevertheless an original study in its own right.

Notes

[1]. David T. Evans, *Sexual Citizenship: The Material Construction of Sexualities* (New York: Routledge, 1993).

[2]. For a few examples, see David Bell, "Pleasure and Danger: The Paradoxical Spaces of Sexual Citizenship," *Political Geography* 14, no. 2 (1995): 139-153; David Bell and Jon Binnie, *The Sexual Citizen: Queer Theory and Beyond* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2000); Diane Richardson, "Sexuality and Citizenship," *Sociology* 32, no. 1 (1998): 83-100; Diane Richardson, "Constructing Sexual Citizenship: Theorizing Sexual Rights," *Critical Social Policy* 20, no. 1 (2000): 105-135; and Jeffrey Weeks, "The Sexual Citizen," *Theory, Culture & Society* 15, no. 3 (1998): 35-52.

[3]. For example, see Wendy Brown, *State of Injury: Power and Freedom in Late Modernity* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995); Susan J. Hekman, *Private Selves, Public Identities: Reconsidering Identity Politics* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2004).

[4]. For example, see Cathy J. Cohen, "Black Sexuality, Indigenous Moral Panics, and Respectability," in *Moral Panics, Sex Panics: Fear and the Fight over Sexual Rights*, ed. Gilbert Herdt (New York: New York University Press, 2009), 104-129; Cathy J. Cohen, "Punks, Bulldaggers, and Welfare Queens: The Radical Potential of Queer Politics?," *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 3, no. 4 (1997): 437-65; Susan D. Greenbaum, *Blaming the Poor: The Long Shadow of the Moynihan Report on Cruel Images about Poverty* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2015); Ange-Marie Hancock, *The Politics of Disgust: The Public Identity of the Welfare Queen* (New York: New York University Press, 2004); Eithne Luibhéid, "Heteronormativity, Responsibility, and Neo-liberal Governance in U.S. Immigration Control," in *Passing Lines: Sexuality and Immigration*, ed. Bradley Epps, Keja Valens, and Bill Johnson (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005), 69-101; and Anna Marie Smith, *Wel-*

fare Reform and Sexual Regulation (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

[5]. For some of these radical queer critiques, see Nancy D. Polikoff, *Beyond Straight and Gay Marriage: Valuing All Families under the Law* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2008); Dean Spade, *Normal Life: Administrative Violence, Critical Trans Politics, and The Limits of Law* (Brooklyn, NY: South End Press, 2011); Urvashi Vaid, *Irresistible Revolution: Confronting Race, Class and the Assumptions of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Politics* (New York: Magnus Books, 2012).

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