

BOOK REVIEW

Queering Representation: LGBTQ People and Electoral Politics in Canada edited by Manon Tremblay. Vancouver BC: UBC Press, 2019. \$34.95 U.S., paper. ISBN: 9780774861823. Pages: 1-358.

Reviewed by David Girard¹

The fight for equal rights for LGBTQ communities, while at times slow and exasperating, has evolved significantly over the past fifty years in Canada. *Queering Representation* brings many facets of this fight to light that have shaped both the experiences and perceptions of LGBTQ peoples and concerns. This book is not a history of LGBTQ politics, but an academic endeavour to organize how we should approach political representation of LGBTQ peoples. Manon Tremblay's objective in *Queering Representation* is "to explore the relationship between electoral politics and lesbians, gays, bisexuals, and trans and queer people in Canada" (p.32), and, in so doing, to "substantiate the idea that political representation of LGBTQ people through electoral politics strengthens Canadian democracy" (p.33).

The book is a "compendium" edited by Tremblay, a professor in the School of Political Studies at the University of Ottawa who has published pieces on women, lesbian and gay activism, and politics generally. The compendium includes sixteen other authors as well as a Foreword by Reverend Dr. Cheri DiNovo (the only woman to have signed "We Demand" and the person who performed the first same-sex marriage in Canada). Some of the chapters in *Queering Representation* were discussed at the 2016 Canadian Political Science Association Congress in Calgary but otherwise all of the chapters are original contributions.

Tremblay divides the book into two unequal parts, the first having to do with *voters* and the second having to do with *representatives*. This division highlights the book's emphasis on the practical realities of electoral politics as opposed to political activism. Nevertheless, LGBTQ activism is not ignored in the text but is instead considered in terms of how it impacts political representation. Part 1: LGBTQ Voters comprises four chapters focusing on the LGBTQ electorate and their voting behaviours (Ch.1), the stereotypes that influence (straight) voters' views of LGBTQ politicians (Ch.2), the role of the media in framing perceptions of LGBTQ candidates (Ch.3), and the need for LGBTQ representation as an argument for Proportional Representation (Ch.4).

Part 2: LGBTQ Representatives could itself be divided into separate parts. The three initial chapters concentrate on Canada's major federal parties: the Conservative Party (Ch.5), the Liberal Party (Ch.6), and the NDP (Ch.7). The remaining chapters explore challenges faced by those who seek office and the representational role of out-LGBTQ politicians: Chapter 8 examines why LGBTQ individuals are best suited to represent their own community; Chapters 9 and 10 deal with social and cultural prejudices that still impede the election of LGBTQ representatives even though sexual orientation is not a barrier to entry; Chapter 11 gives a brief

¹ David Girard is a pansexual philosopher and recent (2021) Ph.D graduate from the University of Ottawa. Their dissertation, *The Truth of Skepticism: Philosophy, Tragedy, and Sexual Jealousy*, employs interdisciplinary considerations to bring traditional problems in epistemology, such as skepticism, closer to our everyday lived experiences. Email: dgira084@uottawa.ca

history of Proud Politics; and finally Chapter 12 the authors problematize a range of LGBTQ issues such as balancing short-term economic gains against long-term community goals using the experience of Krystyn Wong-Tam as a case study.

The Afterword by Graeme Truelove gives a brief account of NDP MP Svend Robinson's contributions to the LGBTQ community. What I found amazing about this final addition was not the writing (which was enjoyable) but that I had never heard about Robinson or his exploits. A cursory search would only reveal that he was the first politician to come out as gay and that he was convicted of theft. While Robinson's coming out has political importance, the significance of being "out" almost pales in comparison to everything else he set into motion.

Truelove cites that by 1983 Robinson had raised LGB issues to Parliament more times in a single session than all the sessions of Parliament since 1867 combined (p.314), he proposed an amendment to include sexual orientation to the Charter (defeated by unanimous opposition of the Liberals and Progressive Conservatives (PCs)), and he proposed amendments to the Canadian Human Rights Act to include sexual orientation ('stymied' by Liberals until 1984) before Robinson astonishingly managed to get the PCs to agree to bring the issues to a subcommittee. Robinson flooded the subcommittee with witnesses as one of the first large-scale mobilization of LGBTQ peoples in federal politics. This led the Department of Justice to announce that sexual orientation is a prohibited ground of discrimination. This was all before he came out.

Robinson's story serves as a 'moral' at the end of the compendium, but it would have been more impactful to have the Afterword at the beginning as he is referenced throughout the book. This history could have served as a unifying narrative to make the book more digestible. This is, in part, because the first four chapters are a dry read, concerned primarily with LGBTQ voter statistics. While these initial chapters are important for framing the rest of the book, the findings could be summarized as being roughly in line with expectations but with *nuance*. For example, "LGB citizens are almost twice as likely as others to self-place on the left of the ideological continuum" (74). Yet even if a group is "likely" to have certain dispositions, not all members share the same views. The authors are keen to remind the reader that just because LGBTQ people tend to identify with the political left, this is not something that can be assumed. The middle chapters addressing the three major federal parties highlight this fact, although the way the chapters are framed, as I will explain, come off as a bit misleading.

The chapter on conservatives takes a mostly balanced approach by identifying that there is ample room for someone to be both LGBTQ and conservative despite the LGBTQ community's connections to the left. The other two chapters fail to achieve this balance for different reasons. The chapter on the Liberals focuses solely on the good things the party has done for LGBTQ communities without mention of any criticism. When we turn to the NDP in the following chapter, the main criticism against the NDP is that they should abandon homonational politics in favour of engaging grassroots organizations and activists. Yet, it's unclear how the NDP have failed the LGBTQ community aside from antiquated homophobic comments from individual MPs (of which every party is guilty) and the fact that the party has never held a majority status. When I consider how Robinson was in the NDP and how many times the Liberals prevented or stood in the way of his initiatives I cannot help but notice that

the chapter on the Liberals lacks the nuance – the balance between praise and criticism – that is otherwise so carefully crafted throughout the majority of the book.

This book serves as an entrance to further academic study of LGBTQ issues in Canadian politics and is a decent introduction to these topics for budding scholars. The authors do a great job of maintaining a balanced approach while engaging many seldom-explored issues. They force the reader to abandon their assumptions by examining the data and problematizing the issues raised by LGBTQ voters and representatives without reaching beyond the scope of the book.