***Faking It* in 21st Century IR/Global Politics**

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This is a forum that is a retrospective on, prospective about, and reflection on the continued contributions of Cynthia Weber’s (1999) *Faking It: U. S. Hegemony in a Post-Phallic Era.[[1]](#footnote-1)* A number of timely events, inside the discipline of IR and in global politics, inspired renewed conversation about *Faking It.* In global politics, U.S.-Cuba rapprochement reminded a number of scholars of the powerful account of US-Cuban relations found in *Faking It*, while international debates about gay rights and sexuality have brought discussions like Weber’s about sexuality among states from the margins to the mainstream in the policy world. In disciplinary IR, Quee IR (of which *Faking It* can reasonably be considered the founding work) is experiencing something of a rebirth/resurgence, and scholars have been interested in thinking about the trajectory of queer thinking in IR since the publication of *Faking It*. That, paired with the selection of Weber as the 2016 ISA Feminist Theory and Gender Studies Eminent Scholar and the release in 2016 of her *Queer International Relations: Sovereignty, Sexuality and the Will to Knowledge*, have generated a significant amount of discussion about the utility and continued relevance of *Faking It* – a book which was critically acclaimed but perhaps published before its (disciplinary) time.

*Faking It* is a book about gender and sexuality in global politics. It is also a book about foreign policy and state identity. More than either, though, it is a book that makes a powerful case that the two are intertwined. Weber characterizes US foreign policy as constituted around the symbolism of the US’ search for dominance in the international arena, where that dominance was figured as a straight, male, masculine hegemonic body politic endowed with the phallic power that such an identity garners. In *Faking It*, Weber parallels gender and sexuality with foreign policy and state identity through a careful and painstaking tracing of U.S. Foreign Policy towards Caribbean states from the Cuban revolution and the Bay of Pigs through to the 1990s military interventions in Haiti. Rather than using the Caribbean as an example, Weber (1999, 4) argued that the United States’ “Caribbean compensations go to the ‘root’ of the U.S. identity crisis” since “the Caribbean is the location to which the United States historically has turned to ‘find itself,’” at least since the propagation of the Monroe Doctrine. Using Roland Barthes’ analysis of “Sarrasine” by Honore de Balzac, Weber likens the US relationship to post-revolution Cuba as a failed courtship, rife with misreadings of Cuba, misreadings of national ‘self’ and related missteps.

As such, *Faking It* tells “a story of conquest, loss, and recovery long played out in US foreign policy [that] …reached a critical anticlimax …[when] a masculinized United States ‘lost’ its Caribbean reward for hemispheric valor … the feminized Cuba, its symbolic object of desire.”[[2]](#footnote-2) As Weber recounts, “Cuba was the …certain feminine complement that the United States relied on to forestall any pending midlife/hegemonic/masculine identity crisis,” and its ‘loss’ triggered such a crisis.[[3]](#footnote-3) Therefore, the US continued (unsuccessfully) to pursue Castro’s hypermasculinized Cuba as its feminine object, causing it to confront two less-than-ideal options: “either a symbolic castration – a loss of phallic power coded as an inability to produce meaning that resulted from a lack of a feminine object in which to ‘express’ its masculine identity – or a queering/nonnormalizng of its subjectivity if it retained Cuba …as the object of its desire.”[[4]](#footnote-4) Rejecting both of these realities, *Faking It* suggests that the United States spent most of the Cold War in the Caribbean looking “to stabilize [the Caribbean] by feminizing it so it can act as a tranquil reflective surface or projection screen in/onto which the United States might see its hegemonic masculinity reflected/simulated back to it.”[[5]](#footnote-5)

To flesh out this story, Weber engages in “foregrounding the figural aspects of recent U.S.-Caribbean relations, specifically as they are related to sex, gender, and sexuality.” In so doing, Weber tells a compelling story both of the struggle for stability in the United States’ gender identity and the fluctuations of its Caribbean policies related to the seemingly unconquerable instability of the Caribbean. But *Faking It* is more than a story of the US and the Caribbean – it is a story of US state identity and its influence on US foreign policy that provides an analytical example of relationships between gender and sexuality signification, state identities, and strategic decisions in global politics.

In 1999 when *Faking It* was published, no one had made an argument like this in IR. On the back of the book, Kathy Ferguson calls it “startlingly original.” In hindsight, both words were apt – *Faking It* was *the* original use of queer theorizing in IR, and its original argument was emphatically that *sexuality* as much as gender shapes state identities and foreign policy. It was also original in many other ways: in its use of humor; in its crossing between queer theory, feminist theory, cultural theory, literary theory, and psychoanalysis; and in its deployment of performativity and discourse analysis to understand the practice of foreign policy.[[6]](#footnote-6) But the originality of *Faking It* was also *startling:* it directly intervened in a field of IR still struggling with the simpler intervention that it was important to *locate* women,[[7]](#footnote-7) and with a wounded attachment to the possibility of knowledge independent of any identity position, much less affect and desire. In other words, *Faking It* was not just outside of the comfort zone of IR in 1999 – it was *the abject* of IR’s comfortable position.

What’s different in 2016? Why revive *Faking It* now? Certainly, queer theorizing has not become the disciplinary norm. Nor has it been integrated into/as the mainstream. But *Faking It* specifically, and Queer IR generally, never needed to be at the center of disciplinary IR. All they needed was a group of scholars able to *engage* with Weber’s arguments critically and substantively. In 1999, there was no such IR community to embrace *Faking It.* Today, in contrast, *Faking It* is read by an ever-growing critical mass of aspiring critical IR scholars who situate it *within* a Queer IR literature that argues that sex, gender, and sexuality are key to the constitution of the international arena.[[8]](#footnote-8) Considered in relation to this contemporary Queer IR literature, *Faking It’s* argument that sexual self-perception influences patterns of interstate interaction remains unique today. This suggests that *Faking It* can *and should* be read with IR current literatures – not only about feminist/queer IR questions but also about identity and foreign policy concerns more widely.

This forum draws upon this extensive array of IR literatures to relate *Faking It* to contemporary global debates about state and nation formation. Collectively, the forum contributions argue that *Faking It* not only remains ground-breaking; its relevance is even broader than its author and her audience originally foresaw.

[Author 1]’s “Queering Uncle Sam, the Caribbean, and the Academy” discusses the ways in which *Faking It* taught a generation of IR scholars to question answers rather than answer questions, claiming that *Faking It* continues to shape critical research methodology. It argues that, though underappreciated in its time, *Faking It* is one of the more important IR books that has ever been written. [Author 1]’s argument about the importance of *Faking It* highlights both the political intervention the book made in the field and its *policy relevance*. He characterizes *Faking It* as “weirdly and wildly prescient and strikingly and bizarrely applicable.”

[Author 2]’s piece, “Trans-America,” explores that applicability, extending the argument in *Faking It* to evaluate US-Cuba rapprochement during the Obama administration. [Author 2] argues that both the theoretical framework of *Faking It* and its specific analysis of the relationship between the US and Cuba are borne out in how the US and Cuba interact now. Arguing that the (partial, homonationalist) embrace of US queerness and of Cuba as the subject of US desires continues to characterize US state identity and foreign policy in the second decade of the 21st century. [Author 2] concludes that *Faking It* has a lot to offer contemporary policy analysis.

[Author 3]’s contribution, “A Fake and a Hysteric: The Captain of Team Australia,” sees the struggle with masculinities and sexual identities that Weber describes in the 20th-century United States in current imaginaries of Australia, tracing the similarities and differences of ‘faking it’ a world away. The application of the analysis of *Faking It* to the recent Australian administration brings the book’s analysis to life across borders. In addition to being a critique of the identity of the US and the operation of US foreign policy towards the US’ neighbors, *Faking It* provides an explanatory framework for hegemonic, heterosexist foreign policy-making more generally. [Author 3], in a careful analysis of “The Captain of Team Australia,” suggests that Weber’s analysis can be wielded as a critique of the hypermasculinity of former Australian Prime Minister Tony Abbott’s hyermasculine foreign policy outlook.

[Author 4] draws out *Faking It’s* relevance to policy situations outside of US-Caribbean relations in a different way – by treating the book as crisis analysis. As [Author 4] relates, “Weber structures *Faking It* around reading moments of crisis …, arguing that queer practices tend to be more noticeable during these periods.” [Author 4] then performs a similar analysis of moments of crisis in US-India relations, adapting Weber’s framework about sex, power, statehood, and interstate relations. If Weber’s analysis is about a declining hegemon, Rao demonstrates its applicability to a rising power, both as it relates to the declining hegemon and more generally.

While *Faking It* continues to have relevance as a tool for policy analysis, all of the contributions to this forum also suggest that it has an enduring legacy as instructional for practicing IR research and teaching in global politics. The forum concludes with [Author 5]’s “The Pedagogical Power of the Lavender Dildo,” which engages the utility of *Faking It*’s humor, queer theory, and policy analysis combination for doing radical teaching in IR classrooms. Dunn *describes* *Faking It* as a “provocative, disturbing, accessible, and humorous vehicle” for teaching IR and uses chapters from the bookin his undergraduate IR class as exemplars of both queer and critical approaches to IR. As [Author 5] explains, many students find portability in *Faking It*. It is that portability – in the classroom, in research, in policy, and across the decades – that the contributions to this forum, individually and together, look to highlight and critically engage.

1. Weber, Cynthia. *Faking It: U. S. Hegemony in a Post-Phallic Era.* Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Ibid, p.1. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Ibid., p.2, citing Warner, Michael, ed. *Fear of a queer planet: Queer politics and social theory*. Vol. 6. University of Minnesota Press, 1993. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Ibid., p.7. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. See also Weber, Cynthia. "Performative states." *Millennium-Journal of International Studies* 27.1 (1998): 77-95. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. e.g., J. Ann Tickner, *Gender in International Relations* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992); Cynthia Enloe, *Bananas, Beaches, and Bases: Making Feminist Sense of International Politics* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989). [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. e.g., Cynthia Weber, *Queer International Relations: Sovereignty, Sexuality, and the Will to Knowledge* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016); Cynthia Weber, “Why Is There No Queer International Theory?” *European Journal of International Relations* 21(1) (2015): 27-51; Cynthia Weber, “Queer Intellectual Curiosity as International Relations Method: Developing Queer International Relations Theoretical and Methodological Frameworks,” *International Studies Quarterly* DOI: 10.1111/isqu.12212, 2015); Laura Sjoberg and Cynthia Weber, eds. “Forum: Queer International Relations,” *International Studies Review* 16(4) (2014): 596-622; Laura Sjoberg, “Towards Trans-gendering International Relations?,” *International Political Sociology* 6(4): 337-354; Laura J. Shepherd and Laura Sjoberg, “Trans-Bodies in/of War(s): Cisprivilege and Contemporary Security Strategy,” *Feminist Review* 101: 5-23; Anthony Langlois, “International Relations Theory and Global Sexuality Politics,” *Politics* DOI: 10.1111/1467-9256.12108, 2015); Manuela Picq and Markus Thiel, eds. *Sexualities in World Politics* (New York: Routledge, 2015); V. Spike Peterson, “Political Identities/Nationalism as Heterosexism,” *International Feminist Journal of Politics* 1(1) (1999): 34-65; V. Spike Peterson, “Sex Matters: A Queer History of Hierarchies,” *International Feminist Journal of Politics* 16(3) (2014): 389-409. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)