Part 6

PART 6

To love. To be loved . . .
Never get used to the disparity

To love. To be loved . . . To never get used to the unspeakable violence and the vulgar disparity of life around you. To see joy in the saddest places. To pursue beauty to its lair. To never simplify what is complicated or complicate what is simple. To respect strength, never power. Above all, to watch. To try and understand.

—Arundhati Roy

What will become of your life?

by Isabel Souza-Rodriguez

I always hated concrete. Sure, I have benefitted from and appreciated the many structures in my life that utilized concrete to offer me support, an even path, or even shelter. Mostly, I grew up hating the way that concrete made my surroundings hard, impenetrable, and unresponsive. I can't run my fingers through concrete. I can't put my ear against it and hear beautiful messages of a live world. The most it ever did was to echo the beatings of my own heart. I still remember what it felt like having my ear against the concrete wall of my parent's bedroom, those nights that my sisters ran and crawled into my bed. I remember hearing the deepness of my father's voice through that wall—how it made the wall shake, especially with the sudden thud of my mother's body slamming against it. I remember not being able, against my better wishes, to will that wall into softening before her impact. There is a crisp finality in impacting concrete. A deep silence always follows for a few moments as the compounds consume every last thread of the momentum that just came upon it. Surviving it always creates the void of that unavoidable question, "What will become of your life . . . now?"

I heard this question again in December of 2011. I had been drinking excessively, and the series of events that followed led to my confrontation with this question as I felt the weight of two bodies pressing down against my back. A broad hand cupped my skull and pressed my face down against the pavement. I realized, beyond the sound of this question, that my hands were pinned tightly against my back. Two officers were restraining me, protecting me . . . from myself. Not 60 seconds earlier I had struck, with the full force of my body, the love of my life. I didn't even see him until his body was already ahead of my fist, flying backward with all of my energy, and slamming into the side of a moving SUV that was passing right behind him on the street in that instant. As the concrete printed itself onto my cheek, I could hear the officers screaming to me, "We're taking you to jail" and my love screaming somewhere behind them, "Please don't take him! Please don't take him! Please!!!"

Sometime after the initial shock of her captivity wore off, my mom started meditating and praying Psalms 23. "Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I will fear no evil for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me." Miraculously, she started to become more patient, more peaceful, believing that God's will would be done. The hope of returning home, she said, began to grow.

Weeks passed by and few notices came from the status of the mission, as they used to call it. My dad tried to sell some properties, but he couldn't raise enough of the ransom demand, and ended up mortgaging every property he had. Once he gathered the money and gave it to them, she was guided outside the woods.

My mom explained, "We walked for hours until we made it to a small village. There, one of my captors told me: 'Don't say a word to anybody. If they ask something, you are my wife, and we're just waiting for the bus that will take us to the nearest place.'"

After they arrived in the closest city to the border between Colombia and Venezuela, her captor said: "I am sorry, Ms, but this is the job I chose." With those words, he went his way. My mom was free.

It took her almost a day to get to Rubio, my mom's hometown. I can't forget her words about the return: "When I was in a corner of the street, at about 500 feet away from home, I stopped walking and broke down crying. I hadn't cried until I finally realized it was over."

Neither my little sister nor I knew about her kidnapping during that month and a half. I was told she was in a spiritual retreat. She was, indeed. I might say, one that changed our entire lives forever. Nowadays, I thank God for bringing back my family, for giving me the understanding that life might last years or can easily be gone in a second. Money, properties, material things don't matter when you're losing your loved ones. Then you get to admit that love, honor, and gratitude cannot be taken for granted.

There are a lot of stories that root who I am today, but my parent's bravery and sign of true love is, perhaps, a special seed inside of my heart. Their story has strengthened me and filled me with courage to never give up on anything, even when it's hard to see the light, to look first at the need of others before being selfish and egocentric; to care about what I have and not complain about what I do not have; to honor and appreciate my family and surroundings; to respect others; to give without expecting anything in return—"What you sow, you shall reap."

I would love to say that everything was perfect after we were all reunited as a family, but though one chapter may end in joy, another kind may quickly begin. The first month after our ordeal, my dad didn't want to go out of our

apartment. He struggled to overcome the fear of being abducted again. His and my mom's fears dominated how they raised us thereafter. Their fears and insecurity became ours. I struggled to liberate myself from fear.

With time, our lives improved, but our hearts needed healing. Two years later, because of a new threat, my family had to flee to Miami, a city where many seem to be pursuing a second chance; where many seem to be running away from a conflict, trying to save their lives. As I write these words, I know that my family's journey is not finished. We are slowly remaking our lives, embracing change, and rooting ourselves once again in another place and time.

My great grandmother's battle

by Monica Penichet

Pulling up to my great grandmothers house I was a little scared and nervous. It was the first time I had gone to see her and the same day she had chemotherapy. I didn't know what to expect. Was she going to look different? Was she going to act different?

As soon as my great grandfather opened the door to their house I automatically smelled the familiar aroma of Cuban spices and the greasy smell of plantains. I walked into her kitchen and there she was stirring a pig pot of Arroz con pollo. "Abuela what are you doing?" I asked her.

> "I'm cooking your favorite meal, why do you ask?" she said.
> "You should be resting not cooking; you just got home from four hours of chemotherapy."

To all of us standing around her, she said "I'm not dying, so stop treating me like a baby, I am going to continue to live my life the same way I always did. So, Monica and Jonathan, go set the table."

At the dinner table, no one really wanted to speak about the whole cancer thing but I did. I was 11 years old at the time and I was curious. I waited until the whole table got quiet, stuffing their faces with food.

I started off with a compliment "Abuela this Arroz con pollo is amazing!" With a typical sarcastic remark, She replied: "What do you think, just because I have breast cancer, it will be bad?" My brother laughed at that, then, my mom hit him upside the head; and I laughed at that.

Her remark gave me the perfect opportunity to ask about the chemotherapy. "It was actually really uncomfortable and tiring, for four hours you are hooked up to machines and an IV stuck in your skin." Because of my horrible Spanish skills, my mom translated most of my questions.

"Are there any side effects after the chemotherapy?"

"I will eventually lose my hair, I will throw up occasionally; there will be days I won't want to get up from the bed. But through all the side effects, I will continue my daily routine because if I give up I am not teaching you and your brother the right lesson."

After eating and washing dishes, we were sitting in the living room. As always I was right next to her. Everyone was talking amongst themselves, and I turned to her, "Abuela, why are you being so strong?" and for a second she didn't say anything just looked at me; the whole room got quiet in seconds. My great grandmother grabbed my hand and said "I am strong for you and for the rest of this family; I will not let a little disease ruin me and each and every one of you. When something terrible in your life occurs you can't let it affect the way you live and that is why I will continue to invite the whole family for pool parties, and I will continue to cook everyone's favorite meal."

Finding out she had breast cancer was not easy for me. I was probably the one who took it the hardest. I broke down crying right on her lap because I automatically thought I was going to lose her. People told me to be strong and to have faith, but at 11 years old I didn't know how to be strong for something like cancer.

That day that she cooked us all my favorite meal "Arroz con Pollo" I understood what people meant to be strong. I started researching everything that had to do with Breast Cancer to get a better understanding of what she was going through. I found out she had to remove her breast; and I was so shocked that I asked her "Abuela can you live without a breast?"

"Yes, of course, but I don't think your great grandfather will be too happy about it being removed." She continued to make jokes in the midst of the ensuing disease.

She continued to live her life as though she had never been diagnosed with breast cancer; but when she started to lose her hair and went bald, her suffering became even more real to me. For the longest time after her hair fell out, she didn't want to leave her house; but if she had no other choice, she would wear a scarf wrapped around her head and forge on.

My great grandmother is what some call a high-maintenance old woman. She weekly went to the salon to do her hair and nails. She also loved to be the center of attention; if you didn't call her even one day out of the seven days in the week, you would end up on her "bad" list. It was understandable, though, because she did so much for me and my family that the least we can do is call her every day.

While growing up, from my great grandmother, I learned not only life lessons, but how to cook, how to speak Spanish, and how to treat guests when they visit. She never really said "Hey, Monica, let's go teach you some things." Rather, being at her house every other day, I just watched her and listened to her and observed the way she carried herself.

I am always amazed by her strength through her fight with breast cancer. Seeing her go through it for so many years, I believe, helped me develop strength. People every day are struggling with new problems, illnesses, financial situations, work, school, family problems, and social injustices. Fortunately, for me, my great grandmother demonstrates how to remain strong in the midst of pain, disappointment, and suffering. Her "toughness" reminds me that when fighting for justice, I must stay true to who I am, keep maintaining my daily routine and responsibilities, while trying to help others "fight the good fight."

Recently I lost my grandmother, daughter of my great grandmother, and I stayed strong.

History lessons learned and paid forward

by Ruba Monem

Teaching history is important, and, sometimes, reminders of its importance are found in the least expected places. Many years ago, I attended a Native American festival. Before going, I anticipated it becoming a valuable cultural experience, yet I underestimated the impact it would have on my role as a history teacher. The festival itself was quite an education. I remember being captivated by the artifacts and visual depictions of Native American culture and spirituality. I moved from exhibit to exhibit and tried to take in the flood of information. I listened to folktales and watched mesmerizing dances performed by Native men and women dressed in full regalia. After one of the performances, I made my way to one of the female Native performers to let her know how much I enjoyed the production. Both polite and gracious, she started to make small talk with me. Being the history enthusiast that I am, I proceeded to ask her several questions about her tribal ancestry and customs. She did not seem to mind answering my many questions. In fact, she told me that she enjoyed my genuine interest in her culture. At that point, I told her I was a history teacher. I remember that she smiled and told me that teaching was a special gift.

We spent about 45 minutes discussing various aspects of the festival and Native Peoples' contributions to the Americas. During the conversation, she asked me questions about Native American history. As a history teacher, I was a little embarrassed that I could not answer some of her questions. This eye-opening encounter with my ignorance forced me to examine my dearth of knowledge about a crucial national narrative. I admitted to her that I needed to brush up on the history of North American indigenous communities. She encouraged me to look for sources of factual information developed by various tribes of the Americas, and not to rely solely on mass market American history textbooks. She believed that most history books failed to provide an accurate portrayal of Native American historical record nor

adequately described the injustices and cruelty inflicted upon Natives by a hegemonic, Eurocentric society. My new friend gave me the names of a few authors and asked me to promise her that I would learn more about the saga of Native peoples in this country and pass that along to my students.

Later, I asked her what the most important message was that I should take back to my students. She answered me with two words, "The truth." Of course, I knew enough to know that I did not know "the truth" of the Cherokee, the Iroquois, the Lakhota, the Navajo, the Miccosukee, the Seminole, and hundreds of other First Nations communities. But, she told me that her concerns revolved around the lack of awareness about the brutal treatment of Native tribes as well as their fallacious depiction in popular media. She believed it was important to dispel Native American stereotypes and gross distortions of facts. She wanted me to separate the fact from the fiction. I promised her I would do my best to honor her wishes. We continued to discuss the particulars of her tribe and my new friend left me with the question, "If the children are not taught, how will they know?"

After the festival, I spent countless hours researching Native American history. I knew that I had a responsibility to share a part of our country's history that is largely ignored or totally bypassed in many American history classrooms. All too often, the presence of Native Americans in texts is relegated to being the backdrop to the events experienced by White Americans. Based on the limited pages in textbooks and the limited class time devoted to First Nation's history in K-12 social studies pacing guides, the public falsely assumes that the history of Europeans in the Americas is far more important than that of the 12,000 year old Native American civilization. I soon learned exactly what my new friend meant when she referred to Native Americans as the "invisible voice."

The relationship between Whites, Native Americans, and other minorities is complex, and that complexity must be discussed and acknowledged. I knew I would be doing a great disservice to my new friend, my profession, and my students if I failed to address this issue. I knew it would not be easy. Injustice? Rape? Murder? Racism? Social dominance? These issues are all sensitive subjects to broach with adolescents; therefore, I carefully considered how I would go about presenting the information. I knew that if I engaged my students in an honest unraveling of these concepts, my students were capable of analyzing the information and making the necessary connections. I asked my students, in collaborative groups, to investigate the definitions and examples of the concepts of injustice, rape, murder, and racism. Due to their living in a large urban city, these ideas were familiar to my students. But, introducing the concept of social dominance was a bit more challenging. I had to provide them with several examples in order for them to recognize social dominance

and be able to provide me with examples of their own. Once they understand the concept, however, they started to piece together the social, economic, and political consequences of dominance on society. This type of gradual release required encouragement and patience on my part as a teacher and our joint willingness to learn on the part of my students. Once this exchange took place, my students were ready to process the information on their own and draw parallels between the past and the present.

Adolescents are amazing individuals and their willingness to learn about the past is boundless. Their passion for justice is even more admirable. Far too often, teachers underestimate their students' ability and desire to learn. Once this desire to learn is unleashed, there is no containing it. I set out to promote a dialogue about Native Americans that extended beyond folktales, spirit guides, and rituals. Based on responses, I have received from my students, I believe that I have started to achieve this goal. For example, during one classroom discussion, a student pointed out that Native Americans living on reservations is a form of segregation. While discussing the issue with his peers in class, he concluded that this was unfair and illegal, and that it was not a decision made by Natives. Rather, he insisted, it was a decision forced on the Natives by a more dominant group in society. My students recognized that a race-based hierarchy was established hundreds of years ago and continues to be maintained generation after generation. These adolescents began to understand that skin color continues to be used as a means by which hegemony (dominance) is forced on American institutional systems. And they now insisted that, yes, American cultural hegemony manifests itself in the form of segregation of Native Americans from Non-Native Americans; Whites from non-Whites; etc. Further, when we discussed the murder of millions of Native Americans beginning with the arrival of the Europeans, my students drew comparisons between the genocide of the Natives and the genocide of other ethnic groups in history—indeed, powerful connections made by adolescents.

Because of my serendipitous conversation years ago with the Native American woman at the festival, which led me to further research, I somehow influenced my students as well as myself to think about history on a deeper level and to respect all of the inhabitants of the earth, past, present, and future, regardless of skin color or ethnicity. Certainly, I learned from my adolescents that they are capable of drawing parallels between hegemony and racism. Adolescents are capable of questioning why some groups are singled out while others are forgotten. And adolescents care more about social issues than we may think.

Perhaps, if we open up a dialogue with our students about social dominance, they will lead the way in advocating for positive changes that benefit all

groups. Adolescents are smarter than most adults give them credit. They critically seek truth and possess the voices and passion to become change agents. Lighting the spark that motivates them to seek and share the truth about marginalized populations and the reasons for their marginalization seems a privilege for me.

I have spent countless hours teaching American history to nearly a thousand students. I have often asked myself if I'm honoring the promise I made to the Native American friend I made many years ago. I do not need to look further than my students, though, to assume that I am.

One of my favorite student-posed questions continues to be, "Why don't people know about this?" I tell them some people know about it and choose not to share the information. But now that they themselves know the information, they are responsible for sharing it with others. After all, if the story is not shared, then the story ceases to exist. I know my students are sharing these stories because I often teach history to their younger siblings or family members who recount these stories to me. The adolescents that I am grateful to teach understand that the group with the loudest voices is the group who probably will be remembered. I believe these adolescents can break the sound barrier.

Books that are a must read for teachers:

Campbell, J. H. (1998). *Bloodlines: Odyssey of a Native daughter*. Tucson, AZ: University of Arizona Press.

Deloria, J. V. (1988). *Custer died for your sins: An Indian manifesto*. Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press.

Dunbar-Ortiz, R. (2014). *An indigenous peoples' history of the United States*. Boston: Beacon Press.

Eagle, A. F. (2010). *Pipestone: My life in an Indian boarding school*. Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press.

Eastman, C. A. (2003). *The soul of the Indian*. Mineola, NY: Dover Publications.

LaDuke, W. (1999). *All our relations: Native struggles for land and life*. Cambridge, MA: South End Press.

Thinking outside the binary box: Queer(ing) research and practice

by Danny Glassman

Biology is destiny, or at least that is what our society would want us to believe. From the moment we are born, we are inducted into a gender system of identity that labels us either male or female. Being labeled male or female comes with a long list of expected behaviors, traits, and aptitudes that we must adhere to in order to be accepted in society. If we do not meet up to the high standards our society places on our gender identity, then we fear being and are often labeled an outsider. Few of us, if any, actually meet the super macho or super femme gender types, however. From the colors of the clothes that society tells us we are "supposed" to wear to the expected sexual partners we are "meant" to have—we are the result of society's lens of what "should" be our gender and sexual identities.

Early in life, I learned what price I had to pay for both my sex and gender. I was in the sixth grade. I had learned plenty about my sex and gender by this point, but this was the first time I began to understand how both constructs drew boundaries around me, even if I was not fully aware of what those boundaries were at the time. I had always been the type of child who tumbled around on the floor and did cartwheels around my family. Sensing I might have a little too much energy for my own good, when I was younger my mother took me to the doctor to see if maybe I was hyperactive. As it turned out, the doctor told my mother I was actually not hyperactive, but what he called overactive instead. I simply did not have an outlet to make good use of all my energy. He recommended to her that she get me involved in something to take out my energy. This began my parent's search to find something for me to do—baseball, basketball, Boys Scouts, you name it. My parents pretty much gave me the opportunity to see what might be the right outlet for all my energy. Obviously, these were all activities that would be typical and acceptable for my gender as a boy. Unfortunately, however, all those activities I was either not interested in or simply not good at. I had a different

idea in mind. I wanted to learn more gymnastics, since by this time, I had already mastered a back handspring with no formal training. However, the only other people I knew who took gymnastics in my school were cheerleaders. The only next logical step, then, was for me to become a cheerleader!

Certainly, I was capable of becoming a cheerleader, but there was one thing I was not: female! It was unheard of in the small, rural town in Arkansas I grew up in for a guy to be a cheerleader, not to mention the stereotypes that went along with being that. I did not want to be called a sissy or even worse names for being in a "girls" activity. If I tried out, I would basically be breaking a rigid social norm and risked being socially ostracized. Somehow, maybe against my mother's and my better judgment, I mustered the courage and went ahead and tried out despite the consequences. After tryouts, when the list was announced for my school's seventh-grade cheerleading squad, I made school history by being the first male ever to not only try out, but to make the cheerleading team! Since it was such big news in my little town, I was even interviewed for our local newspaper and an article was published entitled, "Busy Seventh Grader Tumbles over Gender Barriers." Barriers? I just wanted to tumble and, at the time, I did not realize there was something I needed to tumble over! It was a bittersweet victory, for sure. As I basked in the glory of finally finding a place where I could hone my gymnastics abilities, my triumph was darkened by ridicule and taunting from other students for challenging established gender expectations and roles.

At such a young age, I learned a vital lesson that our current gender system taught me through my place in cheerleading: some activities are for males and others are for females. According to our cultural norms, you do not mix the two. I would later learn that we should not mix a lot of different aspects of our lives either: from marrying outside of our race to having sexual relations with our own sex. "We have become," as queer theorist Michael Foucault writes, "a society of normalization" (1985, p. 8). What Foucault was referring to is our sex and gender system, which advocates that in order to be "normal" one must be either male or female, which means accepting the many social norms of what being either means. If someone stands outside of either box, they are seen as the "Other" and, usually, either changed to become "normal" or oppressed for remaining different. This experience of gender, as well as many others throughout my life, has opened my mind and heart to seeing gender, sexuality, and other social constructs of identity through less binary, strict, and rigid thinking. It was not until later in life that I would discover a theory that helped further my own understanding of sex and gender and help me put words to what I had seen throughout my life. It was when I discovered queer theory that I was truly freed to see outside of binaries of sex and gender to something more fluid, open, and real.

I am unsure of how I even missed being "touched" by queer theory before I was a doctoral student, but it was not until then that queer theory found me. I am surprised because my personal and professional background should have led me to queer theory sooner than it did. As a White, gay-identified man who grew up lower middle-class in rural Arkansas, I might have learned about queer theory in my own lived experience, whether in conversations or research about gay identity when I was coming out as a teenager or later as an undergraduate studying gender and sexuality, but somehow I never did. As an educational administrator who took graduate courses in psychosocial and identity development, I might have heard the concept referenced in course discussions or content, but somehow it never came up. It was not until I was taking a doctoral-level qualitative research methods course that queer theory finally reached me. In that class, we were required to consider each of our epistemological and theoretical frameworks that guided our research and practice.

If it took me as long as it did to be exposed to queer theory, I suspect it might take even longer for other educators to learn about and, more importantly, to use queer theory. A paradox in education settings, specifically postsecondary, is: "Although colleges and universities are the source of much queer theory, they have remained substantially untouched by the queer agenda" (Renn, 2010, p. 132). In hopes of welcoming more educators to the use of queer theory that my own life has shown validity for, this piece serves as an introduction to the historical development, key tenets, and uses of queer theory in educational research and practice for the purposes of creating more inclusive educational settings, where students in K-16 can find a place to "belong" in schools as I so longed for when I was growing up.

Historical development of queer theory

Queer theory is based upon the work of poststructural theorists Foucault (1976/1978), Derrida (1967/1978), and Lyotard (1984) and more recently, Butler (1990) and Sedgwick (1990). These queer theorists deconstructed and challenged the validity of heteronormative discourses and practices of gender and sexuality that promote heterosexuality as the normal and preferred sexual orientation. In the 1990s, when gay and lesbian studies proliferated at many universities, the phrase *queer theory* emerged as a result of dissatisfaction with the slow response given to the AIDS epidemic by state agencies and politicians (Morris, 2000). The purpose of queer theory was as "a reaction and resistance to this cold eye of do-nothing, see-nothing, hear-nothing" public policies and philosophy (Morris, 2000, p. 16). Queer theory was the response to society's lack of acknowledgment and acceptance of gender and sexual identities that

did not fit nicely into the boxes of male, female, or heterosexual. Queer theory criticizes and critiques mainstream ideas of what gender and sex are and pushes for a broader perspective of gender and sexual identities.

The term *queer theory* was first invoked by Teresa de Lauretis (1991) in the introduction of an issue of the journal *differences*, entitled "Queer Theory: Lesbian and Gay Sexualities," as a means of asking the questions that might strip the myths away from the mainstream concepts of sexual and gender identities as binary, fixed, and static. At its core, queer theory resists and challenges mainstream and dominant discourses of sexual and gender identities and normative practices that marginalize, oppress, and silence the queer community (Plummer, 2005). It suggests that biology and humans are not encased in only two forms of male and female; rather nature and evolution have created more freedom in expression of the form a human takes, and not just humans, but many other species. Furthermore, "queer research invites discourse that challenges heteronormativity as well as binaries related to gender, sexual orientation, [and] religion . . . ." (Levy & Johnson, 2011, p. 6). As I reflect on my own experience growing up gay in the South, had I known about queer theory then, it may have offered me the opportunity to see past the rigid expectations of masculinity and sexuality placed on me at that time. My decision to join my school's cheerleading team, and later the marching band's color guard, might have been much easier and safer had tenants of queer theory been known to my family, my school administrators, my teachers, and me.

Key tenants of queer theory

Three concepts of queer theory are important to consider in relation to educational research and practice with lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) students, which are heteronormativity, performativity, and liminality. Taken together, these three tenets of queer theory provide a useful framework for educators' understanding of behavior, performance, and resistance of heteronormativity. First, *heteronormativity* challenges the use of heterosexuality as the norm to understand gender and sexuality (Warner, 1991) and calls for greater emphasis on gender and sexual fluidity. For example, heteronormativity categorizes sexuality and gender into two distinct groups, heterosexual/homosexual and male/female, and positions these two sexualities and genders as opposite and different from one another. Queer theory argues against demanding that sexuality or gender must be two distinct and fixed categories. The theory counters the argument that all humans must either exist as men or women with no latitude for multiple variations. Foucault challenges conventional assumption theories because he insists that identities consist of multiple components that are in constant flux (1991).

Second, queer theory contends that sexual and gender identities are socially constructed and that the expression or performance of identity is unstable and ever changing (Butler, 1990). Queer theory focuses more on incongruence, than congruence, between sex, gender, and desire (Jagose, 1996) and works to "disrupt discourses that enclose selves, pin down desires" (Morris, 2000, p. 23). According to Foucault (1976/1978), normative discourses of identities are used to maintain heteronormativity through regulatory spaces in which identities are formed, reinforced, and reproduced. Butler (1990) contends that individuals construct their sexual and gender identities through everyday behaviors or performatives (Butler, 1990) that are dependent upon "the time and place in which they exist and the individuals who enact them" (Abes & Kasch, 2007, p. 621). Morris (2000) explained, "Ultimately, queer identities are performances . . . and these performances are radically unstable since the queer self is not bound by any particular label or desire" (p. 21). There is a distinction between performance and performativity: performance presupposes a preexisting subject, whereas performativity contests the very notion of the subject (Osborne & Segal, 1994). Gender and sexual expression are changed both at the individual and societal level, and a person's gender and sexuality are influenced both within and outside of oneself. Therefore, sexual and gender identities are always being created and changed through individual actions, rather than actions representing an already determined or static identity (Butler, 1990). Since actions are never repeated in exactly the same fashion, individual identity is always shifting because of how identity is uniquely expressed. Built upon the identity formation theories of Foucault and Butler, queer theory counters the normative discourse of fixed, stable identities and articulates a view that identity based on categorizes is meaningless since identities are fluid and always in flux. If this idea of queer theory had been embraced in my childhood, I would have been freer to express and enjoy all of my interests and identities.

Lastly, the concept of liminality is useful in understanding binaries between sexuality, gender, and space and forms of resistance. Liminality was first discussed by Arnold van Gennep (1909/1960) and later further explored by Victor Turner (1967) in characterizing rites of passage in various cultures. Liminality comes from the Latin word *limen*, meaning "threshold," which implies a transitional state or space between two distinct and stable states or spaces (Abes & Kasch, 2007). In terms of heteronormativity, "liminality is a resistance strategy in which elements of heterosexuality and nonheterosexuality are incorporated into one identity that rejects normalized definitions of either heterosexuality or nonheterosexuality" (Abes & Kasch, 2007, p. 621). Therefore, within an individual state or space, persons can perform their sexuality or gender in combination or in contradictory ways to heteronormativity. These strategies of resistance are related to the opposition of power

structures (Foucault, 1976/1978; Torres et al., 2009) that work to maintain heteronormativity. Taking me as an example, my expression of my interest in gymnastics and cheerleading were in defiance of traditional and heteronormative expressions of male identity in sport that is often maintained through power structures, such as male dominance and patriarchy.

Queer theory in educational settings

My own personal journey and professional experience as a higher education administrator validates my belief that the use of queer theory in educational research and practice as a critical theoretical lens helps challenge the complexities and fluidity of how gender and sexual identity are expressed by LGBTQ students. According to Ruffolo (2006), "the use of queer theory as a critical research lens" can help us as teachers and students resist society's demand that we all conform to someone else's view of what is normal. He indicates that understanding queer theory might help us reject all efforts to make us feel forced to assimilate into the power structure's boxes of culture, class, race, behavior, belief systems, etc. This rejection, Ruffolo believes can "bring about an equitable and democratic society where binary discourses are reworked" (p. 4).

Tenets of queer theory, specifically heteronormativity, performativity, and liminality, provide a framework for educators to understand and deconstruct conventional notions and discussions, ones distorted by the power structure, about male/female being the only "normal" categorizing of humans around sexual and gender identities. The concept of heteronormativity is useful in acknowledging the fluidity and multiplicity of LGBTQ students' identities and normative discourses that resist or reinforce dominant forms of sexual and gender identities within educational contexts. Performativity is also helpful in understanding how sexual and gender identities are uniquely expressed through actions within educational settings. Lastly, liminality provides a critical means of recognizing how these notions about what is normal are both maintained and resisted through power structures (Foucault, 1976/1978), sometimes at the same time, in educational research and practice.

Recommendations for queer(ing) educational research and practice

Using queer theory in educational research and practice is useful for researchers and practitioners in a number of ways. First, queer theory can be a useful tool to help educators understand students (Abes & Kasch, 2007), as well as

teach their students about the complexities of identities (Morris, 2000). Using queer theory assists educators to "move outside of linear models to consider the influence that students are having on their environment to reshape their contexts" (Abes & Kasch, 2007, p. 633). For me, this creates a lens to see and recognize students outside of their sex, gender, or other social identities as more whole and ever changing people with multiple and sometimes conflicting identities. Queer theory's emphasis on identity fluidity and complexity is helpful in considering against linear models of sexual identity development (Cass, 1979, 1996; McCarn & Fassinger, 1996). Although it might be easier to think of students' personal development as a straight line, queer theory helps us see that identity development is never straight or linear, but rather multifaceted and, sometimes, like the universe, seemingly messy in how it develops.

The emphasis of queer theory on identity performance and movement can be beneficial for educators who fight against the labeling of students' identity. Often, labeling of identity has been done in damaging ways and "queer theory teaches that naming kills" (Morris, 2000, p. 27). Instead of labeling particular identities or gendering certain activities, educators can use queer theory to give voice in research and practice to the multiplicity of evolving and shifting identities and expressions. Unlike many stage and lifespan student development theories (Cass, 1979; D'Augelli, 1994; McCarn & Fassinger, 1996; Rhoads, 1997; Stevens, 2004), queer theory articulates a very different view of development as always evolving and never "arriving" at a stage of development (Abes & Kasch, 2007). From a queer theory perspective, students are not in a linear trajectory of developing, they are always in a state of constantly becoming (Turner, 1967). The focus of queer theory on performativity (Butler, 1990) and movement (Morris, 2000) can also be helpful in educational research and practice to resist labeling static identity, rather than celebrating fluid subjectivities. Whether in research or practice, classifying students into identity categories risks silencing their multiple and shifting subjectivities.

Conclusion

In order to solve the paradox of educational settings being sources of just queer theory, but not being queered themselves, not being liberated as institutions from neatly categorizing our students as an either/or, educational research and practice must increase the use of queer theory to further scholarship and policies that challenge rather than maintain dominant discourses and labels of sexual and gender identities and, indeed, all identities. Teachers and schools are challenged to think critically about how research and practice are inclusive of all our students, including those who identify as LGBTQ, and should work toward rather than against social justice. It is

hoped that this chapter has served as your introduction to queer theory and that moving forward, you will queer educational research and practice in your schools and communities so that what is normal becomes more like a rainbow of acceptance where not only gender bias, but classism, racism, sexism, ableism, and all the other "isms" can be eradicated as we move toward making democratic schools more of a reality than a myth. If what is "queer" is looked at through a multifaceted lens, maybe then, our institutions will become safer and more inclusive of everyone's evolving identities, where being different might be the norm.

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