Welcoming Comments

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According to Pinar, “Queer has become the chosen term for many who have come to be dissatisfied with what they perceive to be the assimilationist politics associated with the terms gay and lesbian” (Pinar, 1998, 3). Although queer is sometimes used as a type of negotiated shorthand for lesbian, gay-bisexual-transgender-questioning—intersex—transitioning, this negotiated position limits the queer in queer theory. According to Rodriguez, one of the keynote speakers at the “Establishing Identity: LGBT Studies and Music Education,” in relation to LGBT or Gender Studies, queer theory casts a wider net through its postmodern, post-structural questioning of the very nature of gender, power, and identity (sexual or otherwise) (Rodriguez, 2007; Meyer 2007). By doing so, queer theory turns away from LGBT studies’ interest in “coming out,” pride in community, and most distinguishing—its efficacy in political arenas.

Both queer theory and LGBT studies examine “non-normative subject positions,” particularly with regard to gender (Jagose 1996, 101). In the academy, the first wave of LGBT studies was “strongly located within the fields of social history, sociology or politics, while [its expansion of the late 1990s] developed out of literary criticism cultural studies, and psychoanalysis” (Edwards 1998, 474). As terms of identity, the usefulness of lesbian and gay has been criticized for having a perceived attachment to classism, racism, and Euro centrism (Pinar, 1998; Richardson and Seidman, 2002). Nevertheless, LGBT seems to operate well within political arenas; whereas queer theory is more functional as a cultural text.

For over a decade, Queer Theory’s limitation as a force for political change has been called into question. Much to the benefit of those in academic circles—the dialectic between queer theory and LGBT studies continues to generate considerable scholarship, as we learn from Nelson Rodriguez’s paper. Engaging within and about this space will be something to watch if music education scholarship acts on its emerging interest in these related, yet distinct, theoretical positions.
Queer theorists do point to the limitations of examining gender without consideration of sexuality. However, as Adam (2002) points out, “[A]lthough deconstruction of heterosexuality is clearly a primary endeavor of queer scholarship, ...it is gay and lesbian identities [italic in original] that are far more vulnerable to attack.” (19).

Indeed, when the conception of sexuality is no longer exclusively heterosexual, Zita (1994, location 1720) and other feminist scholars argue that the suppression of gender comes at the expense of women. One needs look back no further than to the women’s liberation and gay liberation movements for evidence: when women-who-love-women were tossed under the political bus for the sake of either movement’s more primary goals of assimilation and of liberation from oppression (Engle, 2002).

Should music education expand on scholarly and practical perspectives that include LGBT and queer theory, the place of gender, women, and—what should be of great concern—any placing of women warrant our collective vigilance. I hope that by coming late to the LGBT-Queer party, we heed the missteps of those who are already in the room, particularly with regard to gender and feminisms.

From LGBT Studies to Queer—or not

In the field of general education, is has been the work of scholars, particularly feminist scholars, whose work on social justice, gender studies, and gender inequities that has meaningfully etched the LGBT landscape. Certainly the same can be said for music education, where, the work of self-described feminist scholars has established a solid beachhead for our—and their—profession. The group Gender Research in Music Education (GRIME), founded 20 years ago in 1991, includes in its research agenda two items related to LGBT and queer issues:¹

- To offer critique and philosophies based on queer theory (adding to and drawing on the body of literature that exists in musicology.²
- What it means to be queer and in music education, both as instructors and participants.

Indeed, this is research topic addressed by many of the papers presented at the Symposium.

¹ http://post.queensu.ca/%7Egrime/researchagenda.html

² A major contributor to this line of scholarship is Nadine Hubbs, author of one of the keynote addresses at the Symposium.
Beyond and within GRIME, the work of Roberta Lamb and Julia Koza removed the veil of silence concerning issues of sexual orientation and music education. Similarly, it was Patricia O’Toole who, in Elliott’s reader on praxial music education, flagged the omission of sexuality as a context for musicing’s ability to “create, explore, and affirm” identities as missing from those offered a decade earlier by Elliott (1995). In short, until O’Toole: G-A-Y as M-I-A in the scholarship of and related to praxial music education philosophies.

Elizabeth Gould, whose paper opened the symposium, has offered numerous articles concerning gender and sexuality in the context of feminisms and materialist post structural theory. One would certainly have to consider Gould one of the leading voices in this line of inquiry within music education. We were honored by her contribution to this event.

What now?

When it comes to sexual identities, I wonder if music education will have to retrace the seemingly basic work that has been accomplished in general education around curricular visibility and the creation of professional space for scholarly efforts. However, first and foremost we need to work to ensure the career-emotional-and-even-physical safety of our profession’s members and students. I say this for a trio of reasons. The recent rash of suicides by teens and young adults related to harassment and the homophobia expressed by public and religious figures unfortunately, makes too clear the climate in which LGBT citizens grow, live, and love.

Looking in just our profession, I can attest that in my regular experience teaching music to children and adolescents, I frequently find myself in careful internal negotiation within a sphere of sexuality that encompasses not only who I am, but, the content I am teaching, who I am teaching, and geographically where I am teaching. Finally, Bruce Carter, the co-director of the Symposium, and I still have too many conversations and interactions with closeted colleagues that are reminiscent of the coded conversations and cues between gay men and women of early 20th century New York (Chauncey, 1994). In some cases Bruce and I know that it is only in their professional world in which these individuals are still closeted. Given the inclusion of a connection between musicality and homosexuality in public discourse for more than 100 years (Brett, Wood, & Thomas, 2006), this may indicate much about which set of social values and expectations—artistic or educational—yield the greater influence on music education.
Most recently, Lamb (2010) observed, "...even though research from and about LGBT perspectives has been significant in historical musicology and ethnomusicology since the 1990s, it is still difficult to find published studies that focus on LGBT sexual orientations in music education (24)." The design and scholarly products of this conference, offers moments of intersection among Feminism, LGBT studies, Queer Theory, and the new musicology. With respect for those in education, music, and music education who have offered supporting and initial scholarship, and with the print edition and the web resources of The Bulletin of the Council of Research in Music Education, I hope those here involved have helped establish an identity for LGBT/Queer Studies within the profession and scholarship of music education.
References


